



**INSTITUTE
FOR
REGIONAL
FUTURES**

Towards 5000: Gilgandra Youth Strategy and Action Plan
Community Engagement (Consultation) Report

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Document preparation

This report was prepared on Awabakal and Worimi Land, for Gilgandra Shire Council, by the Institute for Regional Futures: Dr Jennifer Thompson, Dr. Caitlin Mollica, Myles Egan and student researchers Joel Mackaway and Ellen Dungavell.

The University of Newcastle acknowledges the Wiradjuri, Kamilaroi and Wailwan Nations as the traditional custodians of the lands of Gilgandra Shire. We pay respect to the wisdom of our Elders past, present and emerging.

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1 Executive Summary

As part of the *Towards 5000* Strategic Initiative, Gilgandra Shire Council commissioned research consultants from the University of Newcastle's Institute of Regional Futures (IRF) to develop a *Youth Strategy and Action Plan*, in collaboration with the local community.

The consultants engaged with the Gilgandra community via a variety of engagement methods, to produce a strategy that would be both responsive to and inclusive of young people's needs and interests. Between August 2024-March 2025 diverse engagement methods, including surveys, focus group discussions and word-clouding, were used to gain insights from young people and those who interact with and care for them.

This Community Engagement (Consultation) Report provides a detailed overview of the engagement process and interprets and discusses its findings. The conversations with community and community surveys have enabled the researchers to identify five key themes to inform the development of the Youth Strategy and Action Plan: Voice; Belonging; Connection and Identity; Opportunity; and Wellbeing.

2 Overview

2.1 BACKGROUND –THE *TOWARDS 5000 YOUTH STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN*

Gilgandra Shire Council (Council) appointed the University of Newcastle (the University) to co-design a Youth Strategy and four-year Action Plan (Strategy and Action Plan) for the local government area. The aim of the Strategy and Action Plan is to make tangible Council's commitment to the future and to provide a framework that will guide service planning and delivery, infrastructure development and advocacy across the Gilgandra Local Government Area (LGA) and with other key stakeholders including private organisations and different levels of government.

This is Gilgandra's first Youth Strategy. It builds on the Gilgandra Community Strategic Plan and is an addition to the suite of *Towards 5000* strategic initiatives. Council's commitment to a youth strategy that is designed in consultation with young people, demonstrates the value placed on current and future generations by the Gilgandra community. By prioritising planning for services for its future citizens and community leaders Gilgandra Shire Council has demonstrated a commitment to nurture and grow a thriving and civically engaged community.

The *Gilgandra Youth Strategy and Action Plan*, and the consultation program outlined in this report complement and build upon Council's previous strategic planning, including the *Towards 5000 Community Childcare Strategy*, and the *Towards 5000 Gilgandra Green Space Strategy*. Acknowledging the importance of a whole-of-community approach to service provision and policy development, Council's commitment to developing a suite of strategy initiatives, that includes one focused specifically on young people, highlights the importance of the youth demographic to achieving the *Towards 5000* mission.

Further, it demonstrates the importance of developing clear, feasible, and consistent aims and actions for efficient and effective investment of Council's resources. Most importantly, Council's commitment to developing a strategy that is underpinned by comprehensive consultation with young people and those who interact most closely with them, highlights its dedication to becoming a place that is inclusive of young people and enhances the reputation of the Shire as an attractive place for young people and families to live and thrive.

Part of Gilgandra Council's commitment to the *Towards 5000* strategic plan includes developing a vision for and with the young people of Gilgandra that will underpin a responsive and coherent Youth Strategy. In articulating its vision for young people, Gilgandra Shire Council has committed to being a place that children and young people want to call home.

Specifically, Council aspires to create a community where young people (including individuals and those with families) live and thrive today and in the future – a place where young people feel connected and valued and where they are encouraged and motivated to actively contribute to their community.

2.2 BACKGROUND –THE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT REPORT

This Community Engagement Report, along with the research findings of the Discovery Report, provides the foundation for the Gilgandra Youth Strategy. This Report captures the key themes and insights that have emerged during consultation with community, stakeholders and Council. Analysis of these findings was utilised to guide the identification of priority areas and development of the Youth Strategy and Action Plan.

For the purposes of this Engagement (Consultation) Report and in alignment with the definition of young people outlined in the Commonwealth Youth Strategy: Engage!¹, we define young people as individuals between the ages of 12-25 years old. Recognising Council's commitment to creating an inclusive and wide-reaching strategy for future and current generations, our approach to community engagement also sought to capture the needs and interests of children. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child defines children as individuals under the age of 18 years of age.²

Community and stakeholder consultation for this project was designed within the framework of the Gilgandra Region Community Engagement Strategy and its model for community participation (figure 1: below). Within the scope of the model, community consultation activities that enable Council to 'Inform,' 'Consult,' 'Involve' and 'Empower' the local community were conducted. A key consideration for the engagement was to hear from young people and to enable their voices. The strategies utilised therefore aimed to maximise the opportunities for young people to have a say on the issues that most impact them within the Gilgandra community.

Communities that are good for children and young people are good for everyone. By ensuring a place for future generations, and by nurturing wellbeing, connection and resilience, communities are better able to invest in a liveable present and a sustainable future. It is therefore not surprising that governments of all levels are keen to create strategic and policy frameworks and to develop and deliver infrastructure, services and programs to enable children and young people to live their best lives. Among the core concerns for this Engagement Report is to develop an understanding of what children, young people and families need to maintain their connection to the community, and to consider what can be done to ensure that Gilgandra is a place where people feel welcomed and want to return to raise a family.

¹ Australian Government Office for Youth, *Engage: A Strategy to include young people in the decisions we make*, <https://www.youth.gov.au/office-youth/engage-strategy>, March 2024.

² *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989) Treaty no. 27531. United Nations

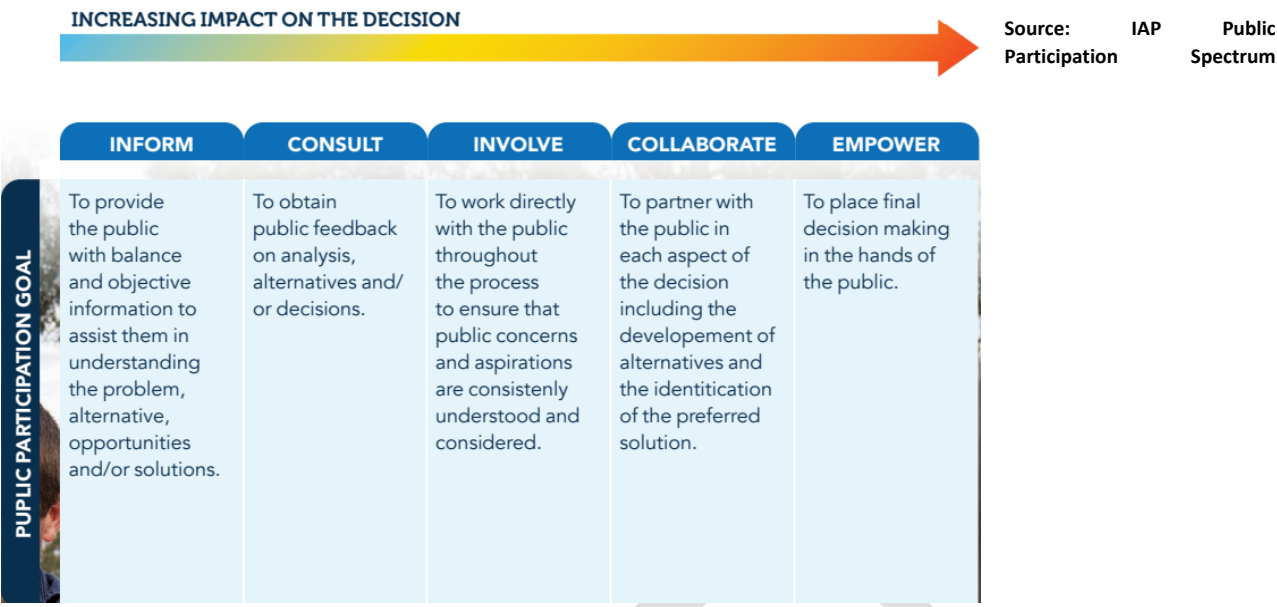


Figure 1: Gilgandra Region Model for Community Participation

(www.iap.org.au/resource/spectrum) Source: IAP Public Participation Spectrum (www.iap.org.au/resource/spectrum)

3 Purpose and context for consultation

3.1 DEMOGRAPHIC OVERVIEW

Gilgandra's cohort of young people represents a significant portion of the community, with persons aged 0-25 making up 28.8% of the population. Breaking down these demographics further we find that 7.08% are aged 0-5, 9.78% are aged 6-12, 6.47% are aged 13-18, and 5.45% are aged 19-25%.³

At the 2021 Census, the Gilgandra LGA recorded a population of 4,295 people, living across an area of 4,831 square kilometres, giving it a population density of close to one person per square kilometre. By 2023 the LGA's population was estimated to have increased slightly to 4,309. However, this trend is not expected to continue longer term with Gilgandra Shire projected to have a notably reduced population of 3,353 residents by 2041.

While young people in Gilgandra do make up significant numbers, there is also evidence of population ageing. Reflecting a trend seen across many rural and regional parts of NSW, Gilgandra Shire has a median age of 46 years and 38% of residents are aged over 55 years. Projections also suggest that by 2041 the number of children and young people aged 0-25 years is anticipated to decline, highlighting the importance of developing a strategy that looks to retain young people within the community and attract families and younger residents.

3.2 OBJECTIVES OF THE CONSULTATION PROGRAM

The aim of the consultation program for the Gilgandra Towards 5000 Youth Strategy and Action Plan was to gather information from internal stakeholders, external stakeholder groups and the broader Gilgandra community, which would be used to inform the development of the Strategy. The consultation approach was intended to:

- Enable opportunities for young people, as well as a cross-section of community members, to have their say and to contribute to the development of the Strategy
- Raise awareness of Gilgandra Council's aspirations for children and young people generally and of Council's commitment to creating a community where young people thrive
- Support the development of a Youth Strategy that is reflective of the strengths of the community, the resilience of young people and the opportunities for Council and community to work together to enhance future outcomes for young people.

3.3 GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The consultation plan was framed by the following guiding principles:

- Designing an approach that complemented Gilgandra Shire Council's strategies, policies and methods of community engagement.
- Designing an approach that heard directly from young people, as well as from families and community members, about their experiences of living in Gilgandra and what is important for their wellbeing now and into the future

³ University of Newcastle, Institute for Regional Futures, *Towards 5000: Gilgandra Region Youth Strategy 2024: Discovery Report*, 18.11.2024.

- Ensuring the community – and young people in particular - were aware that their voices were heard and taken into consideration in developing the Strategy
- Acknowledging that community and Council views and perceptions may differ, as may views within the community – for example differences in experiences of what it means to be young, between people of different ages
- Recognising the significance of First Nations culture within Gilgandra Shire
- Appreciating the independence of the consultation process, to arrive at a frank and fearless understanding of community views, based on a transparent consultation process
- Facilitating internal collaboration and coordination across Council departments

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4 Engagement Methodology

4.1 OVERVIEW

The consultation and engagement phase of the Strategy project was devised to take place over an extended period, between August 2024 and March 2025. This was partly the result of seasonal factors, such as the December/January vacation period and Gilgandra's harvest season in October/November, and partly the result of the University's ethics approval process and the due diligence required to ensure that the research for the Strategy was being undertaken in an ethically sound manner.⁴

Information about the project and the opportunity for the community to engage was provided via flyers distributed at key Council and community outlets, messages on Council's website and Facebook page and a 'Tik Tok' message targeted at young people. Invitations to specific engagement sessions were issued via emails to key community leaders and community networks, with the support of the Gilgandra Council community services team.

The methodology for consultation comprised:

- a two-stage engagement phase, where children, young people, their carers and members of the broader community were involved in 5 focus group discussions, and 10 one on one interviews and workshops
- an engagement workshop with First Nations' community representatives
- 'word-clouding' activities, over three days, at the Youth Centre and Library to gather comments, ideas and drawings from children and young people in response to questions such as, "What do you like to do after school?" and "Draw your perfect town"
- focus group discussions with year 5 and 6 students at St. Joseph's primary school
- focus group discussion with teachers at St Joseph's primary school
- a questionnaire sent to the presidents of the four Gilgandra schools' Parents and Citizens committees
- an online 'Youth Survey' – with printed copies also available at the Youth Centre and Library, which were subsequently entered online
- the inclusion of two questions specific to young people and their life experiences, within the broader, bi-annual Gilgandra Community Insights Survey
- engaging with representatives of local stakeholder organisations, the general community and young people at a 'Youth Summit' workshop
- consulting local community sector organisations at a meeting of Gilgandra Council's Interagency committee

During the project several engagement sessions were also conducted with internal stakeholders. These were designed to both provide internal stakeholders with information about the progress of the project and to hear from them in the data collection process. These sessions comprised:

- 2 briefings with Gilgandra Shire Councillors and the Executive Leadership Team (November 2024 and March 2025)
- 1 presentation to the 'T3' Gilgandra Council Leadership Team
- 1 presentation to Gilgandra Council's community services and recreation staff whose work portfolios related to children and young people

⁴ University of Newcastle Ethics Approval Number H-2024-0275

- an Action Planning Workshop with staff from Gilgandra Council’s community services and recreation sections, at which key focus areas, goals and actions for the Strategy were formulated.

Consultation Method	Number of People
2 Questions in Community Survey	134 responses
Youth Survey	42 responses
Word clouds - Library and Youth Centre	30 responses
Community Consultations October 2024 (Small Groups and One-On-One Discussions)	34
Youth Summit	27
Interagency Committee Meeting	19
First Nations Community Organisations Workshop	10
St Joseph’s Primary School - students	12
St Joseph’s Primary School - staff	7
Parents and Citizens Questionnaire	2 responses

Table 1: Summary of Consultation Methods and Number of Participants

4.2 THE YOUTH SURVEY

The Youth Survey (‘Survey’) was designed to be completed by people of all ages, following agreement that an initial plan of creating 2 separate surveys (one for those over 25 years of age and one for those under 25 years of age) was cumbersome and potentially confusing. The Survey was created collaboratively, by the Institute and the Gilgandra Council Youth Services team, as an online instrument, to facilitate efficient data collection and analysis. However, ‘hard’ copies of the survey were also printed by the Youth Services team and made available at the Youth Centre, Library Hub and Council’s Customer Service centre and the results entered by the Gilgandra Council team. A copy of the Survey is available at Appendix A.

The survey was designed using QuestionPro software and hosted on Gilgandra Shire Council’s “Have Your Say” website. It was available for completion from 9.00am Monday, 23 September 2024 to Friday, 28 February 2025. Extended availability was provided in view of the coincidence of the engagement period with Gilgandra’s harvest time (October/November), which was followed by the Christmas/New Year holiday period. Responses to the survey followed a pattern of an initial ‘flurry’ of responses over the first two weeks of its life, followed by a lull in response over the harvest/Christmas/New Year period and then renewed interest over the last two weeks of availability.

All members of the Gilgandra community *“with an interest in the future of our children and young people”* were invited to have their say via the survey. Participation was incentivised with a prize draw for two ‘Cooee’ gift cards of \$200 which took place in March 2025, at the conclusion of the ‘open’ period.

In total:

- 381 people viewed the survey online
- 91 started the survey
- 42 completed the survey

The completion rate of 46.2%, was slightly higher than the ‘typical’ online survey response rate of 44.1% reported by Wu et al (2022) in their review of 8,672 studies and 1,071 online survey response rates in education-related research.

The Survey comprised 31 questions: 21 multiple choice items and 6 items that required an open-ended response of an unlimited number of words/characters, that related directly to the experiences of children, young people and their families. Four final questions asked respondents to indicate their interest in: entry into the prize draw; participating in focus group engagement sessions for the Strategy; and/or providing contact details for receipt of a copy of the Strategy, once finalized. All responses to survey questions were treated as confidential and the information provided by respondents was aggregated and so that survey respondents could not be identified.

Data was organised and analysed by the Institute team, in the case of multiple-choice responses via a report provided by QuestionPro and in the case of open-ended items via coding of responses into categories. Outlying short-answer responses were also reported.

A copy of a data report from the Youth Survey is at Appendix B.

4.3 THE COMMUNITY INSIGHTS SURVEY

Coinciding with the period of the Youth Survey, Gilgandra Council conducted its bi-annual 'Community Insights Survey', which seeks community views on the range of Council activities and community satisfaction with Council's performance, services and facilities. This online survey was hosted on Council's "Have Your Say" website and was open for response from 11 November 2024 to 10 February 2025.

Council's corporate strategy team, which is responsible for the Community Insights Survey agreed to incorporate two questions from the Youth Survey, with the intention of gathering data from a larger cross-section of the community than might be interested in completing a designated Youth Survey. The two questions required an open-ended response of an unlimited number of words/characters:

- **Q16 (of 21)** What do you think makes Gilgandra a great place for children and young people to live?
- **Q17 (of 21)** What are the most important issues or challenges that children and young people are facing? (Include up to 3 issues)

In total, 134 of the 212 survey respondents answered Q16, while 135 provided data in response to Q17, a relatively high completion rate for these two questions of approximately 63%.

Data was shared with the Institute team via an Excel spreadsheet and coded into categories for reporting.

4.4 INTERNAL – COUNCIL - CONSULTATION

Internal stakeholders were engaged through:

- Discussions with executive, managers and staff delivering youth services during the initial stage of the project
- Monthly meetings with the project delivery team for the life of the project
- An 'action planning' workshop, to turnkey strategic objectives into tangible and 'do-able' actions during the later stages of the project

Meetings and Discussions

Council executive, managers and youth services staff were consulted during one of their regular meetings, in recognition of their busy schedules and the difficulties of aligning available times. Invitations were issued by Council on behalf of the University. The interview questions used for each internal stakeholder consultation session were provided to Council one week prior to the first interview. The interview questions are at Appendix C.

Focus Group	Date Consulted
GSC Executive	4 July 2024
GSC T3 Senior Managers	8 August 2024
GSC Youth Services staff	21 August 2024

Table 2: Internal Consultation Focus Groups and Date of Consultation

Members of Council's Youth Strategy project team sat in on these interviews and contributed substantively to the discussion. This provided important insights as the members of this team are front-line, and have expert, insider knowledge on the needs and experiences of young people. This expertise was also leveraged in the final stages of the consultation via an action planning workshop. During this workshop the draft strategy was presented to these stakeholders who were given an opportunity to work together to provide recommendations on the validity of the options proposed. Many of the actions and key focus areas proposed by the University were endorsed at this action planning workshop with several adjustments made to ensure that the strategy was targeted to the needs and the resource capabilities of the community and the service providers.

Interestingly, these internal consultations also performed a useful check and balance function, which supported alignment between the community perceptions reflected in the survey and external consultation responses, and the reality of community engagement. The most noticeable example of this was a disconnect between perceptions about the public pool. While many survey responses and much of the community consultation requested longer operating hours, it was noted by staff that the pool was often underutilised and outside of school events and early morning lap-swimmers it experiences minimum traffic. This would suggest that any strategy involving the pool needs to consider how it is used by the community, not just 'when' as was indicated in survey and consultation responses.

Action Planning Workshop

A half-day, face to face workshop with internal stakeholders (to include staff from the Youth Strategy project team, youth services and others from the broader Council team) was delivered in March 2025, following preparation of the DRAFT Youth Strategy.

The workshop unpacked, explored and confirmed the key themes, focus areas, goals and actions for the Strategy. This ensured that the Strategy and Action Plan was realistic and achievable and, more importantly, was 'owned' and supported by the team that will be accountable for its implementation.

4.5 EXTERNAL – COMMUNITY - CONSULTATION

As outlined in the table in Section 4.1 of this report, external consultations included face to face engagement with 109 individuals and written and survey responses from a further 208, including 30 responses to the 'word clouding' activity described below. The approach to this consultation evolved in response to community feedback received during the first site visits in October 2024. Initially the approach to consultation included four 1 x hour formal focus groups. However, it quickly became clear that a more informal approach would provide greater opportunities to discuss the issues facing Gilgandra's young people. Specifically, the drop-in conversational approach utilised (outlined further below) elicited longer discussions with a greater number of individuals participating than originally projected. The renewed approach also enabled participation from a more diverse cross section of the community with several families driving-in from their rural properties.

While the approach to consultation evolved, the questions utilised during these conversations did not change from the initial plan, which was endorsed by Council representatives. These questions are provided in Appendix C.

Face to Face Consultation

Young people were key participants in these consultations as demonstrated by the age breakdown in the table below. However, recognising that young people’s experiences in Gilgandra are informed by their interactions with adults consultation also sought to engage widely with parents, carers and service providers who interact with young people. In consultation with Council, it was determined that children under 10 would not participate in consultation first-hand. Instead, these children were given the opportunity to have a say through a word clouding activity (discussed further below). This strategy aligned with the university ethics approval, which aims to protect the wellbeing of potentially vulnerable communities. To ensure that the needs and interests of these children were captured, parents and carers with children under 9 were invited to participate in consultations. As illustrated in table 1, Section 3.1 consultations took place at multiple locations, during a diverse series of events. These included the October 2024 Youth Centre discussions; the Youth Summit with community stakeholders (service providers) online in November 2024; group discussions at St Joseph’s Primary School with Year 5 and 6 Students and Staff, March 2025 (Archdiocese Approved); a First Nations workshop (March 2025).

Age Range	Number of Participants
10-11	5
12-13	7
14-15	4
16-17	5
18-19	5
20-21	3
21-24	2

Table 3: Age Distribution Face-to-Face Consultation

External consultation took place in small group, one-on-one, and in a large group over snacks, provided by the youth centre. Researchers, including two students from the University of Newcastle conducted the first round of discussion in October 2024. A drop-in approach was adopted for these discussions with young people and their guardians, with researchers available at the youth centre (between 12-9pm – DAY ONE) and in Hunter Park (10:30am-12pm- DAY TWO) during the school holidays. Drawing on a peer-to-peer research approach, the student researchers were responsible for leading the discussions with individuals between the ages of 10-24.

In March 2025, researchers from the University of Newcastle returned to conduct further consultation, using the small group and workshop formats to facilitate these conversations. This second round of consultation provided opportunities for new insights. Most notably, young people provided important information about the importance of community, and their “dream” community events (examples included below: Figures 6-9). It also enabled researchers to get first-hand feedback on the actions and themes that had been developed for the Strategy.

The conversational approach, and the use of one-on-one conversations when requested, facilitated a more inclusive method of participation. This significantly benefited young people experiencing shyness or anxiety. By creating a flexible framework for dialogue, the consultation process created space for these young people, particularly those aged 14-16 years, to communicate their needs and issues transparently. In contrast, the larger group discussions – which were primarily conducted with the older age groups (individuals aged 19-24) and with the young cohort (individuals aged 10-14) empowered participants, as they provided opportunities for conferral, debate, deliberation and the creation of consensus. Overall, it is evident that the larger groups were particularly useful for revealing shared experiences; workshopping strategies that might address the perceived needs of young people; and in helping to explore topics that were not revealed during the discovery desk research phase.

As previously indicated, alongside consultation with young people parents and carers for all ages groups were also prioritized as participants. These intergenerational voices recognise the importance of multigenerational interaction in the lives of young people and to their wellbeing. To that end, consultation engaged with adult individuals across diverse demographics, including single parents, parents new to Gilgandra, carers of children and youth, and parents with children living with disability. These perspectives were important as carers, teachers, parents, and support workers play a critical role in the lives of young people, supporting them in their development, providing essential services and encouraging their pursuit of productive goals and futures.

Engaging with the guardians and community stakeholders who provide services for youth was integral for the development of a Youth Strategy that included responsive actions and targeted key focus areas. By gathering insights from adult stakeholders, the consultation process captured the experiences of individuals who inform and shape the behaviours and values of young people in the community. In addition, consultations with service providers and teachers also provided significant insights into the services and programs already available to young people. Engagement with the adult-carer cohort therefore provided an opportunity to construct a future-focused Youth Strategy. By engaging widely in consultations, the research team was able to deliver a diverse strategy with grounded actions that can support Council's interests in building a community where "families can grow and are sustained."

For those under the age of 18 verbal and/or written consent to participate was provided by guardians, and affirming consent was also sought from the young people themselves. Individuals over 18 provided verbal consent at the beginning of consultations. During all consultations strategies were used to create a flexible and relaxed environment, including mind-mapping, and word association. The format of these consultations, and the strategies used by the researchers produced comprehensive and frank discussions with many exceeding the hour initially designated. Finally, to ensure candidness and transparency all responses contained in this report have been anonymised and synthesised, so the location and exact timing of the conversation remains confidential. Where appropriate and important to contextualizing the discussion, information has been provided about the age, declared gender and date of the discussion.

In consultation with Council, and to ensure that a wide range of views were captured the engagement strategy also sought written responses to short questionnaires from stakeholders, notably local P&C Committees. To facilitate this approach, questions were provided through Council representatives to the P&C presidents (see Table 1 for details) and responses were sent to the research team via email. This strategy increased the reach of the consultation and enhanced its flexibility as stakeholders could provide insights and reflections in their own time and construct a collective response.

The external face-to-face consultations aimed to engage widely with diverse stakeholders to better understand the experiences of young people growing up in Gilgandra. Participants were asked to reflect on the challenges and opportunities that impact how children and young people live, study, work, and play in

Gilgandra. They were also asked to reflect on patterns of outmigration, particularly among older cohorts of youth, and to share insights about the conditions that encourage young families to settle in Gilgandra either for the first-time or returning following a period out-of-community for work or study. Discussions focused on the themes of civic participation, services, infrastructure and welfare. At the request of Council, questions were also designed to facilitate discussions that would identify tangible opportunities for improvement, and responsive community-devised recommendations. All participants were asked two core questions:

- 1) What actions or activities would you like to see included in a youth strategy by Council?
- 2) What actions or activities should not be included in a youth strategy by Council?

By asking direct, focused questions about practical actions researchers were able to create a targeted and responsive strategy using the insights of those individuals most impacted by it. During the consultation program outlined above, the research team also sought to direct discussions in ways that would connect the issues, challenges and opportunities identified directly with community suggestions for practical action.

During the consultation process first-hand engagement provided critical insights concerning the needs of young people, as well as their perceptions of Council's responsibility for addressing these needs. The wide cross-section of age ranges represented in the discussion and engagement with community stakeholders who fulfil diverse and essential functions for young people, allowed researchers to capture diverse representations and to achieve response saturation, where themes and concepts repeatedly emerged in the data. Speaking with young people across the targeted age range (as evidenced in the table above) enabled the development of a wide range of key focus areas and actions, while also ensuring that the strategy acknowledges that young people's experiences and issues are not homogeneous. Further evidence of the validity of the consultation responses was their alignment with the survey findings (as illustrated below).

The outcomes of community consultation demonstrated significant diversity with respect to needs and interests across the age demographics. This trend is consistent with broader political sentiment throughout Australia⁵ and justified the widespread first-hand engagement approach that was adopted for discussions with Gilgandra's young people.

Discussions with guardians and community stakeholders revealed a diverse range of perceptions regarding the needs, interests and services required to ensure young people thrive in Gilgandra. These perceptions often varied significantly from the identified program and service requirements of young people themselves, a trend that is widely echoed throughout Australia, and has been noted in multiple empirical studies.⁶ As such, in Gilgandra, consultation revealed a consensus between young people and adults about their experiences, yet some contrasts in the services and support needed to secure their futures and connections to the community. Put simply, while there is widespread agreement about the challenges and opportunities faces by Gilgandra's young people, there is significant divergence about the best way/s to resolve and implement strategies to address them

Word-clouding

Recognising that the Youth Strategy aims to address the interests of individuals 0-25 years old, researchers developed an approach to include the voices of children, while also speaking with their guardians. A non-direct, participatory method was used to facilitate this process. Word-clouding is an effective strategy for eliciting participation from children between the ages of 5-10 as it draws on creativity and imagination, while

⁵ Vromen, A., & Collin, P. (2010). Everyday youth participation? Contrasting views from Australian policymakers and young people. *Young*, 18(1), 97-112.

⁶ Fyfe, I. (2009). Researching youth political participation in Australia: Arguments for an expanded focus. *Youth Studies Australia*, 28(1), 37-45; Chou, M., Gagnon, J. P., Hartung, C., & Pruitt, L. J. (2017). *Young people, citizenship and political participation: Combating civic deficit*. Rowman & Littlefield.

also giving children the space to control when they participate. This approach is widely used when conducting research with children as it balances the welfare of younger children, with the importance of capturing their perspectives. Beginning in October 2024, researchers, in collaboration with library and youth centre staff, set-up “word-clouding” boards. Word-clouding is a low cost, flexible technique that provides individuals with the opportunity to contribute independent, informal and anonymous input.

To complete the word-clouding activity posterboards were utilised to display questions in the library and youth centre. The two [locations](#) for the word-clouding activity were decided on in consultation with Council, as it was noted that both spaces offer services that young people use regularly. Over multiple days, members of the community were asked questions, which rotated daily:

- 1) What do you do after school?
- 2) What do you like about your town?
- 3) What activities would you like to do in Gilgandra that are not available?
- 4) Draw your perfect town

To complete the word-cloud, the community were provided with post-it notes and pens and asked to respond at their convenience. Target groups, specifically individuals between the ages of 5-10, were directly invited by Youth Centre and Library staff to write or draw their thoughts, and experiences (see for example figures 2 and 3 below).

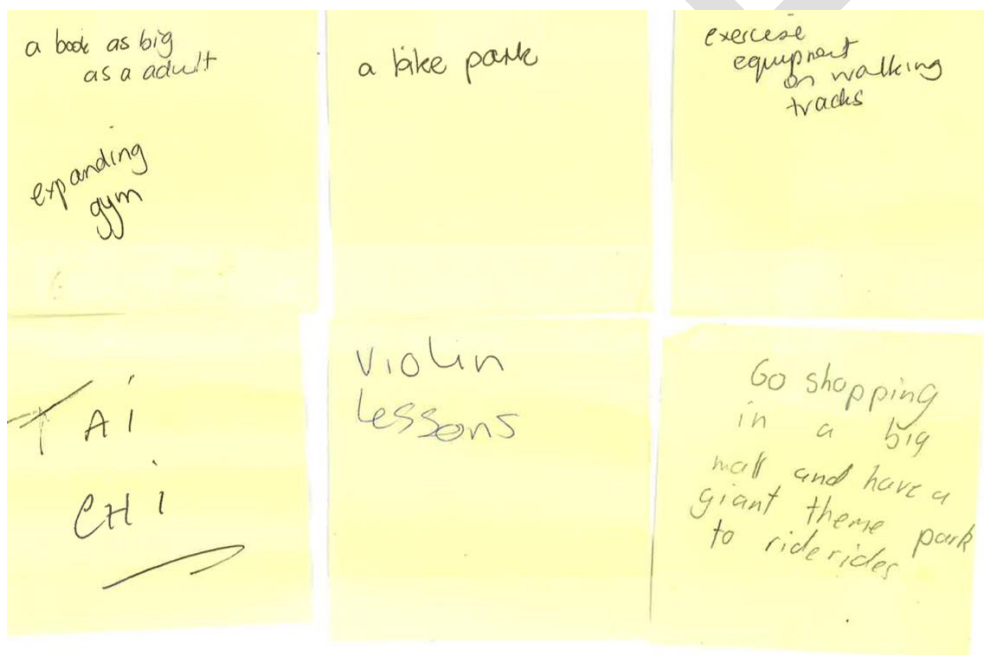


Figure 2: Word Cloud - What activities would you like to do in Gilgandra that are not available?

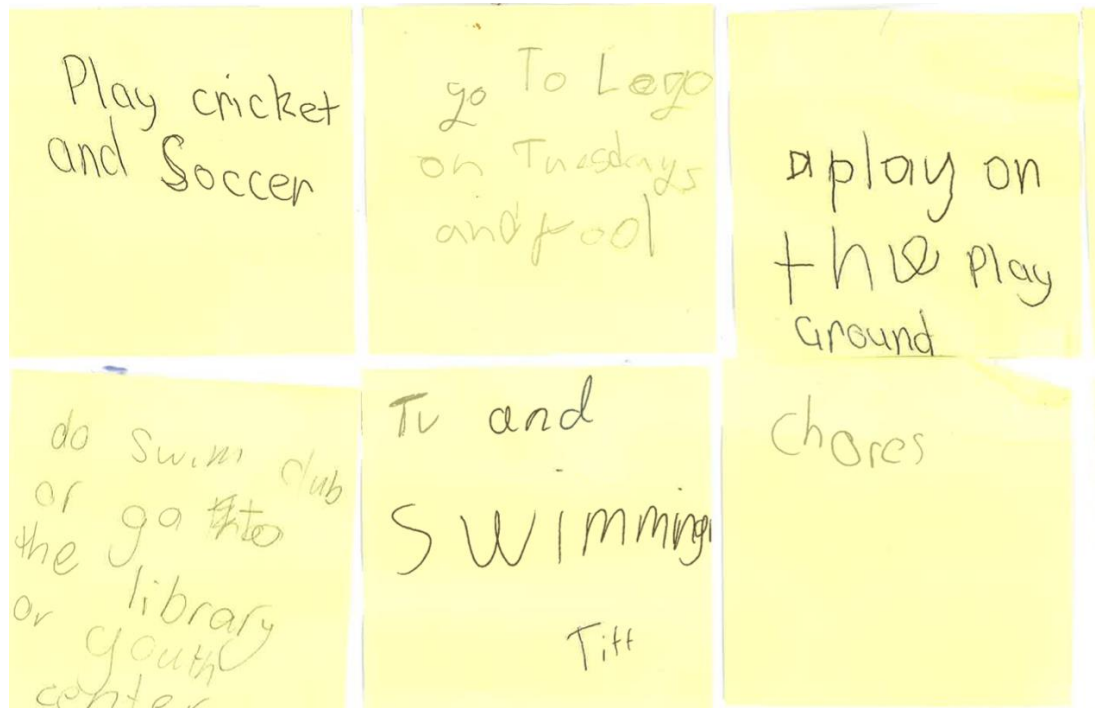


Figure 3: Word Cloud - What do you do after school?



Figure 4: Word Cloud - What do you like about your town?

Engagement with the First Nations Community

A workshop with Aboriginal people from organisations that work with young people in Gilgandra was scheduled during a field visit to Gilgandra, Sunday 16 March to Tuesday 18 March 2025.

Invitations to participate in the workshop were emailed to 10 potential participants, whose details had been provided by staff of Gilgandra Council. One person sent her apologies and three of the people invited via email attended. One of those who had been invited, Lois Towney (who had previously participated in the Youth Summit consultation session in December 2024) sent on the invitation to other people she knew who were working in the region to seek their participation.

In the final analysis, 10 people attended the workshop, from the following organisations:

- Aboriginal Affairs
- Bila Muuji (3 people)
- GLAMS
- TAFE
- 3 Rivers Regional Assembly (2 people)
- Yindamurra Women's Group (also member of 3 Rivers Assembly)
- Jack Towney Hostel (also volunteer at Gilgandra Youth Centre)

Ms Towney is keen to form an Aboriginal Working Party for the Gilgandra region, to provide a voice for local people and to work collaboratively to develop and deliver programs and events, such as NAIDOC Week celebrations. She used the opportunity to meet at the Youth Centre with this group of representatives prior to the workshop commencing, to discuss this proposition and the steps they will take to progress formation of the working party.

The workshop was held in a very informal way, after the prior meeting had concluded. It was conducted as an ongoing conversation led by Dr Jenny Thompson, rather than relying on the Discussion Guide and workshop protocol that had been developed. This was deemed to be a more appropriate way to engage with participants and to collect data on their views and experiences. Tea, coffee and snacks (sandwiches, cakes, fruit) were provided and participants encouraged to snack as they wished during the workshop.

5 Key Themes from Consultation Activities

In this section of the report, the perspectives of the participants involved in consultation activities are analysed to determine the needs and interests of Gilgandra's young people and their allies. Generally, a broad consensus exists across the data regarding the issues that are most important, and the strategies needed to ensure that Gilgandra is a welcoming place for young people, children and families.

Consultation revealed that young people enjoy growing up in Gilgandra due to its safety and strong sense of community. The popularity of community events, such as *Under the Gums*, and *Winter Wonderland*, indicate that there is potential to build on young peoples' interest in participating in events run or supported by Council. In addition, the importance of the current Youth Centre for the welfare and engagement of young people was evident in the findings from both internal and external consultation. This existing infrastructure provides unique opportunities to continue to invest in future generations and to build and strengthen the relationship between Gilgandra Shire Council and its young citizens.

External consultation with young people, particularly individuals aged 10-12 and 13-15, revealed that growing up in Gilgandra is a source of significant pride. This cohort of young people in Gilgandra loves and appreciates the unique, rural and sport-focused community and recognizes the opportunities available to them. Existing relationships and infrastructure are central to the community's capacity to nurture an environment that builds upon this enthusiasm, to encourage greater civic participation among young people.

The key factors highlighted by the young people consulted for the Strategy, that demonstrate Gilgandra's 'enabling' environment, include: supportive and closely connected multigenerational relationships; a wide-range of sports; a safe environment; well-developed infrastructure (including a skate-park, accessible playground, high quality public library).⁷ An enabling environment enhances skills and motivation to invest in interpersonal connections with friends and family for the long-term.⁸ The importance of familial-ties to the Gilgandra community that emerged during consultation indicates the existence of a resilient, multilayered support network, capable of assisting young people to navigate the transitions from childhood-to-youth and to adulthood.⁹

Ultimately, while there are many 'pull' factors present in Gilgandra, that make it a supportive place for young people and demonstrate its potential; significant 'push' factors also exist that contribute to out-migration. Among the older cohorts of youth (individuals 15-25) barriers to diverse opportunity and the absences of a thriving/resilient peer community enhances the desire to leave. As discussed in more detail below, the core 'push' factors that echoed across consultation activities include declining and narrow employment opportunities; an absence of educational diversity; an absence of opportunities for civic engagement and meaningful participation; and finally, a lack of diverse, fit-for-purpose infrastructure.

These push factors, reflect broader trends in regional and rural communities around Australia, indicating that broader structural issues exist, creating 'wicked problems' for Gilgandra Shire Council to resolve. These complex issues require buy-in from multiple levels of government if they are to be successfully ameliorated. Thus, advocacy by Gilgandra Council is critical to future-proof the community for young people. Given the complexities revealed through consultations, the Youth Strategy that has been developed adopts a holistic,

⁷ Consultation, 9 October 2024; see also: University of Newcastle, Institute for Regional Futures, *Towards 5000: Gilgandra Regional Youth Strategy 2024*, Discovery Report, 18.11.2024

⁸ Robson, E., Bell, S., & Klocker, N. (2007). Conceptualizing agency in the lives and actions of rural young people. In *Global perspectives on rural childhood and youth* (pp. 152-165). Routledge.

⁹ Kirkpatrick Johnson, M., Elder Jr, G. H., & Stern, M. (2005). Attachments to family and community and the young adult transition of rural youth. *Journal of research on adolescence*, 15(1), 99-125.

long-term, incremental approach where key focus areas are directly tied to staged actions to be implemented by Council with support and participation from the local community.

Overall, when asked to describe the Gilgandra community, there were many positives, with young people highlighting the wide-open spaces, the sporting culture, safety and the feeling of belonging, as core reasons why they love Gilgandra. These values-based 'pull' factors were particularly prominent among individuals 10-14 years old. This indicates that there is significant potential within the adolescent community to nurture, grow and retain civic participation and representation for this demographic. Further discussion of what community means to these individuals is reflected in the word-cloud below.



Figure 5: Representation of the key findings of the word clouding and mind map activities completed during consultations

5.1 THE YOUTH SURVEY

Survey Demographics

The Youth Survey was completed in almost equal numbers by respondents replying, 'for myself' (52.5%) and by adults speaking 'in consultation with' (15.0%) or 'on behalf of' (32.5%) a child. When considered in conjunction with the results for the 'age of respondents' item (53.7% were aged over 25 years and 19.5% were aged 19-21 years) it appears that only around one quarter of survey responses was provided by younger aged children and/or young people.

A majority (a little more than one in four) of responses indicated that survey respondents were residents of Gilgandra Shire, while a significant proportion also reported using Council and/or non-Council facilities (20.1%) and/or working (16.7%) in Gilgandra Shire.

Most survey respondents identified as non-Aboriginal. However, the 15% of respondents who identified as Aboriginal is consistent with the representation of Aboriginal people in Gilgandra's population.

Survey Findings

When asked **what makes Gilgandra a great place to live for children and young people**, most responses referred to the smaller size of the population and less traffic (17.8%). The quality of the natural environment (16.6%) and the relaxed lifestyle of the region (16.0%) were close runners-up as the second and third most common responses, while ‘good support networks’ (presumably family and friendship networks) was fourth.

In the light of other, corroborative data gathered for the Gilgandra Youth Strategy project, via interviews, focus groups, the Youth Summit and the Community Insights Survey, the low level of response to the proposition that Gilgandra is great because it offers ‘good study’ (3.6%) and ‘good work/future work’ (4.1%) opportunities for young people, is worth noting.

Considering data gathered through a variety of methods throughout the project, the consistent pinpointing of these issues highlights the importance of including goals and actions that address education and employment, in the Youth Strategy.

Responses to the question of **which of Gilgandra’s characteristics detract from it being a great place for children and young people to live** were consistent with the commentary from focus group discussions and interviews, as well as from the (unsolicited) responses to the 2 questions re children and young people that were included in the Gilgandra Community Insights Survey.

The greatest number of responses was focused on the limited range of things for children and young people to do, while the need for improvements to Council infrastructure was also cited. Although coded as a separate category of response to suggestions regarding generic ‘infrastructure’, a number of respondents suggested enhancements to the local swimming pool, which is of relevance to the recreation needs of children and young people. A slightly smaller, but significant number of respondents cited limited employment opportunities as having a negative impact for young people.

Shops (14.8%) and cafes (13.0%) were the most frequently selected **places and/or facilities visited** by survey respondents. The next most frequented places were Council-owned facilities – the swimming pool (11.6%), sports fields (9.7%), Youth Club (8.3%) and playgrounds (8.3%). The river (8.3%) was an equally popular destination for respondents.

Of those respondents who use **Youth Centre services**, the majority reported taking part in general ‘activities’ (25.0%) and ‘school holiday activities’ (19.4%). Other engagement activities undertaken for the Youth Strategy project also generated data highlighting the impact of the Youth Centre and the popularity and importance of Council’s Youth Club / Library School Holiday programs.

At the same time, survey respondents identified a variety of **changes to the services offered by the Youth Centre** that they would like to see. This feedback was consistent with the commentary from focus group discussions and interviews, as well as from the (unsolicited) responses to the 2 questions re children and young people that were included in the Gilgandra Community Satisfaction Survey.

“The school holiday program has significantly improved over the past few holidays, and we would like to see more activities and we have capacity and are willing to pay for these. The kids love them.”

“Some activities that include younger people - I understand the centre is meant for older children however our young children miss out of lots of the fun activities that I’m sure they would love to be involved in.”

Respondents expressed a desire for the Youth Centre to open on the weekend and for services to be extended to meet the needs of older (and younger) age cohorts. There were also suggestions for a greater number and diversity of activities to be offered, ranging from pizza and movie nights, through more excursions and sports/recreation activities, to the introduction of arts, craft and cultural activities.

When asked about their **use of library services**, a little over one quarter (27/6%) of survey respondents indicated that they do not use the library, perhaps indicating fertile ground for future investigation. At the same time, the variety of library services used by survey respondents is testament to the importance of this resource to the Gilgandra community and to young people.

Around one in five (17.1%) visits to the library were to borrow books and other items, while library school holiday programs were the next most frequently used service (14.5%), followed by regular activities (13.2%) and use of technologies (10.5%).

With respect to **suggested changes to library services and activities**, around one third of respondents indicated that extending the range and diversity of programs offered for children and young people would be beneficial. Several respondents promoted the opening of the new library, while others took the opportunity to state that the service was not relevant to them and to question Council's investment in the new Library Hub. There were some innovative suggestions, such as a review of after school programs to include activities that are focused on the interests of young women and girls.

"The library does a great job, a broader range of activities would be great, a solid after school offering targeted to girls (some girls think lego and science is more for the boys) would be nice!"

"Having a variety of things on offer for our community such as computers and reading books and quiet places for people to utilise when studying or reading."

"Some activities different from story time for younger children (preschool age) my children enjoy it however they would thrive with something a little more stimulating such as Lego."

Survey respondents indicated that swimming is the **activity pursued most frequently by children and young people locally**, with a little under 10% of responses for that item.

Skateboarding/scooter and basketball were the next most frequently cited pastimes, each recording around 7% of responses. Rugby league, fishing, cricket and netball also recorded around 6% of responses. The popularity of fishing – a relatively self-directed, low-resource intensive recreation – is worth noting.

Perhaps reflecting the limited availability of these activities locally (as has emerged in other data collected for this study) lower scores were achieved for tutoring, craft, art and martial arts. The response rates for these items were also low for the subsequent question, which asked about activities undertaken outside of the Gilgandra LGA. Hockey scored the lowest response, with just one response for this activity, again possibly reflecting the lack of local options to pursue this sport.

Netball emerged as the most frequent activity that **children/young people from Gilgandra leave the shire to participate in**, attracting just over 8% of responses. Rugby league was the next most frequently cited activity that requires travel for participation.

Soccer, motor sports (4WD, motocross and dirt bike riding) and dance also attracted scores in the 6% to 7% range.

Not surprisingly, people regularly leave the shire for camping trips and to attend school, with each recording over 5% of responses.

Scooter/skateboarding was the lowest scoring item, possibly indicating the relatively low number of young people involved in this activity or, alternatively, that the Gilgandra skate park is meeting the needs of the community.

Archery and Rugby Union were activities that were not included in the multiple-choice item but were identified by respondents as requiring travel out of the Shire.

When asked about their **participation in community events**, survey respondents indicated that the most attended event is the Gilgandra Show, with a little over one in five people (20.9%) reporting their attendance, while sporting events such as Gala Days and seasonal community events (both 18.6%) also appeared to be popular. Film festivals and workshops attracted the lowest response rate, possibly reflecting the limited frequency with which these types of events are staged locally.

The limited number of people locally to make some activities viable was the most frequently cited of the **barriers to participation**, with just over 14% of participant responses citing this factor.

Transport barriers, making it impossible to get to where activities are taking place was the next most cited barrier (12.7%), which, when considered with the response 'location, too far away' (8.6%) indicates the need for improved transport options. Cost and lack of information about what events are going on were also reported as barriers to participation, in 11-12% of responses.

Heat, lack of shelter/shade and clashes with work commitments had not been included in the survey but were additional 'other' barriers identified by respondents.

When asked about the **sorts of activities that should be available for children and/or young people** to do in Gilgandra, more than half (56.1%) of all survey respondents felt that the same activities as are currently available should be on offer going forward.

Suggested new/additional activities included recreational opportunities such as a splash park, BMX track, outdoor movie nights and gymnastics. The theme of a splash park, contemporary 'water sport' offer at the local pool has emerged through a variety of data collection processes and surveys.

The key themes that emerged from the suggestions from respondents regarding the **'key issues or challenges' faced by children and young people** were consistent with those generated in the 2 questions that were included in the Community Satisfaction Survey and with data from focus group discussions and interviews with individuals.

The lack of activities, recreational opportunities and local resources for children and young people (mentioned 27 times) and limited opportunities for employment and careers (mentioned 11 times) were among the top three most frequently cited challenges. The issue of parental care, family environment and supervision also emerged as a key theme (mentioned 13 times), though while some respondents linked this to creating a lack of respect for authority others saw it as a factor in preventing children and young people from thriving.

“A varied amount of activities need to be available. Not all children like to play sport. Art and cultural opportunities are needed, maybe in the form of workshops, art exhibitions where they can display their work.”

“The pool and youth facilities are falling behind the stand[ard of] other communities in the region, these are spaces for causal [sic] and organised activities and there has not been a significant investment in these facilities for over 50 years.... obviously money has been spent....but essentially they are the same as when they were originally constructed....”

“The ability to stay in Gilgandra to complete high school and then any further post-school education. The ability to participate in sporting, arts, cultural and community activities locally. The ability to access mental health support and services.”

Over half (56.1%) of all survey respondents stated that they **expected to be living in Gilgandra in five years' time**. However, more than one quarter of respondents (29.3%) were unsure if they will continue to live in the shire and just under 15% indicated that they do not expect to be living in Gilgandra in five years' time.

Reasons provided for staying in Gilgandra related to family connections (5 responses); employment commitments (4 responses); sustaining a farm (3 responses); schooling (1) and home ownership (1). Two respondents stated that they were going to stay in Gilgandra because they liked living here.

Reasons provided for “no” responses largely related to the limitations survey respondents felt exist around access to work/career/wages (5 responses) and educational opportunity (2 responses); and the lack of services such as health/medical (1 response) and childcare (1 response).

4 Respondents described a level of ambivalence about whether to stay or leave Gilgandra, citing uncertainty about future life directions.

“Generationally will be here, we farm here. We will stay because of that. Trying to work on the other elements to make is [sic] easier/better to stay.”

“Will be leaving as unfortunately this town is a retirement village, to make anything of yourself you need to change locations.”

“Depends on if there is employment when I finish School. Depends on if University studies can be done online or in Dubbo.”

“Our work but our kids will not go to high school here. That means as active community members our involvement will diminish as we got [sic] involved in activities where they go to school.”

“Gilgandra has a lot to offer in businesses in the town. When you compare our town to Warren and Coonamble our town is improving, and we need to continue that.”

“I would like to see more investment in some of our facilities by local and state govt eg the pool, as I think sometimes our proximity to a major centre in Dubbo means that the assumption is we can just go there, but that is not the case for everyone. This is also applicable for medical and health services. The concern is that a lot of services and facilities will shift to the main centres.”

“Maintain the services and good business mix. Whilst I have pointed out some short comings in the pool facility and youth centre space, Gilgandra has a strong business and service mix and losing that would create a whole other set of issues. We would be talking about the need for essential services not just a new pool.”

Responses concerning the **things that survey participants would like to see for Gilgandra’s future** included: Population, business and industry growth (including capitalising on its geographic location); improved local infrastructure, particularly the Youth Centre, pool (including development of a splash park), and basketball facilities; more things for children and young people to do (including more arts/culture activities); improved child care options; more affordable housing; more shade trees; and a more inclusive community that cares for those in social need.

Communication with Council

All survey respondents (100%) reported that they had **access to the internet at home**, however it is worth noting possible bias afforded by this survey being completed online by most respondents.

Despite this high level of internet connectivity, friends were most frequently cited by survey respondents (just over 14% of responses), as their **key source of information about what is happening locally**, with Facebook (just under 14%) and family (just over 13% of responses) a close second and third. Workplaces (9%) were, perhaps surprisingly, a relatively common source of information about what is happening in the community.

While Instagram (6.3%) was the most popular choice of social media channel, it’s use was not high and other social media sources that are often linked to younger people (Snapchat, Tik Tok) were also less frequently cited. This may reflect the age range and circumstances (child completing with an adult) of survey completion.

Many respondents indicated that they knew either ‘a lot’ (17.5%) or, at least, had a basic understanding (45.0%) of **the role and activities of Gilgandra Council**. At the same time, 37.5% of respondents suggested they knew ‘very little’ or ‘nothing’ about Council.

While a significant minority of respondents indicated they knew little or nothing about the role of Council, the potential bias of the survey methodology (available online, via the Council website) towards respondents who were at the very least aware of, interested in and capable of visiting the Council website should be noted.

Council’s work in providing sporting and recreation facilities (14.2%) and delivering festivals, events, programs and activities (13.1%) were the most frequently recognised **Council functions that contribute to making Gilgandra a great place for children and young people to live**. These were followed by the provision of library services and the Youth Centre, which each achieved a score of 12.5%. Management of local infrastructure was also clustered with these areas of higher awareness (11.9%).

Council's role as an enabler – linking and supporting local organisations and acting as advocate for the community – was recognised by some survey respondents, while its role in providing early childhood services was the least reported service area.

Perhaps not surprisingly, given that respondents were completing an online survey, just over 20% of responses (21.9%) suggested a preference for **communicating with Council** to provide opinions via online surveys.

Interestingly, attending 'in person' workshops around youth issues was the second most common response (12.5%) which indicates possible future interest in participating in a Youth Council, committees and working groups.

Participating in social media polls (11.7%), responding to surveys 'in person' at events (9.4%) and providing feedback anonymously via a 'feedback box' in public spaces (9.4%) were also relatively frequent responses.

An interesting 'other' response was the suggestion that: *I wouldn't do it face to face it has to be anonymously otherwise repercussions and punishment.*

While almost 75% of respondents indicated an interest in participating in Council-related activities, a quarter of responses (24.7%) indicated no interest.

Notably, most responses (30%) indicated interest in participation (online or in-person) in relation to specific issues of importance to the respondent, rather than in participation generally.

Encouragingly, 11% of responses indicated an interest in attending 'in person' community forums, while almost 18% of responses showed interest in being part of a Youth Council or a youth representative on Council committees. This level of involvement was reflected in responses to the question about wishing to engage in consultation for the Youth Strategy, where just over 30% of respondents expressed an interest and just under 70% said they were not keen to be involved.

While there was undeniable community interest in participating in Council engagement activities, in contrast, **interaction with local Councillors** was not strongly reported.

Almost two thirds of respondents (63.4%) reported minimal, if any, contact with Councillors in recent months, while 12.2% reported regular contact, more than 6 times per year.

5.2 THE COMMUNITY INSIGHTS SURVEY

As noted above, the Community Insights Survey, which was conducted in parallel with the Youth Survey, was completed by people of all ages across the community. A table of coded results is available at Appendix C.

When asked about **what makes Gilgandra a great place for children and young people** to grow up, the most common response (25%) cited the strong community spirit and sense of connection and belonging of those who live there. The next most frequently reported characteristics related to the community feeling safe (13%), having access to quality Council services and facilities (12%) and quality schools and education (12%) and, the final characteristic in that cluster, living in a quality natural, rural environment (11.4%).

Interestingly, some respondents cited characteristics – such as 'good (affordable, accessible, variety, quality) services and activities' – that had not emerged as key assets in the Youth Survey, while others that might have seemed obvious – such as 'housing affordability' – were rarely cited (0.1%). On the other hand, consistent with results from other engagement methods, relatively few respondents (0.3%) noted that Gilgandra offered 'opportunities' and even fewer (0.1%) saw 'medical services' as a strength.

Survey respondents' concerns about **the most important issues or challenges faced by children and young people** locally, ranged from concerns about limited education (10%) and employment (15%) opportunities to problems with interpersonal relationships, bullying and peer pressure (7%).

As with other sources of data for the Youth Strategy, the lack of things to do for children and young people was the most frequently cited concern (22.3%), followed by limited employment opportunities, limited and poor quality physical and social infrastructure (11%), limited educational options and problems in the family environment (7.8%) that ranged from lack of parental interest and supervision, through to domestic violence and family breakdown.

A full listing of coded responses is available at Appendix C.

5.3 FINDINGS FROM THE SURVEYS

Despite relatively high completion rates for each survey, the response rates (42 respondents or approximately 1% of the population) for the Youth Survey and (134 / 135 respondents or approximately 3% of the population) for the 2 questions in the Community Insights Survey, are too low for these surveys to provide data from a statistically representative sample of Gilgandra's population. However, as 2 data sets to be considered in association with other data gathered for the Youth Strategy in both the Discovery Report research and subsequently via focus groups, interviews, workshops and (in the case of P&C committees) questionnaire, the results of the surveys contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the strengths, needs and aspirations of the Gilgandra community.

While survey respondents noted many positive attributes that make Gilgandra a desirable place to live, they also identified several challenges, issues and opportunities for improvement. It is important to note that, while some of these opportunities fall within Council's areas of control or influence (eg: improvements to the Youth Centre's physical environment and capacity), there are others whose achievement relies on the efforts of other levels of government or private and commercial business forces (e.g.: improved internet access; more extensive retail offer).

Positive aspects of life in Gilgandra, that emerged from the survey data included:

- smaller size of the town and its population, which facilitate social networks and a sense of community, as well as safety
- beautiful, relaxing natural environment and 'rural lifestyle', including connections to the land
- connections to family and friends
- many opportunities for young people to participate in sporting and recreational pursuits, including fishing, which emerged as a popular pastime
- high levels of participation in annual, community events, such as the Gilgandra Show and Under the Gums festival
- good housing affordability
- good, if basic (and in some instances dated) physical social infrastructure provided by Council -the swimming pool, Youth Centre, basketball courts, sports fields, skate park, etc

At the same time, the survey data also indicated several areas for focus and improvement, if Gilgandra is to be regarded by the local community as a great place for children, young people and their families to live. The table below provides a summary of these areas and suggested responses for incorporation into the Youth Strategy.

5.4 COMMUNITY CONSULTATION INTEGRATED DISCUSSION

As previously highlighted, consultations revealed that adolescents (individuals 10-14 years old) have a largely positive view of growing up in Gilgandra. These positive experiences relied on their ability to participate in and connect with each other and mentors in public spaces, with many noting that more opportunities for ‘places to go’ would deepen their participation in the Gilgandra community via interpersonal engagement.¹⁰ They identified sporting competitions, community events, and the youth club, as key entry points for positive civic participation. Notably, the recent *Under the Gums* event organised by Council, was universally recognised by the young people consulted in this cohort as a ‘positive’ experience. Overwhelmingly young people suggested that community activities such as *Under the Gums*, and *the Winter Wonderland* were important for their sense of belonging. They also suggested that these were the types of activities they would like to be “more involved in organising in the future” to ensure that “the activities available continue to meet their interests.”¹¹ The preference to positively engage with Council activities from the planning stage represents a significant opportunity for the Gilgandra Shire Council. When young people are empowered as decision-makers they are more likely to buy-in and invest in their community long-term.¹²

“I would like to participate in the process of deciding what activities are run in our community... we have a lot of fun when we participate but we also have ideas”

“I would like to see a fishing festival... or something around dirt-biking anything where I get to be outdoors”

“We need more diverse activities. The youth club is great, and the sport is great, but what about the non-sporty kids”

“Activities like chess club, drama, and more opportunities for dance and art in Gilgandra”

“If I want to dance, I have to go to Dubbo, it would be fun to do this closer to home”

Consultation also revealed that favourable perceptions of community and home declined as adolescents transitioned to the older youth cohort (15-25). This raises important questions about the resources needed to support and engage with this diverse demographic. Furthermore, the diversity in sentiment across the demographic, highlights the need for a flexible and holistic strategy to capture the multiple experiences of young people.

The older youth cohort shared a perception that “there’s not much done for youth” by Council, as they have been focused on “older generations and young families.”¹³ Indeed, there was a consensus that because they are in a “weird age gap. There’s not much to do with us, or for us.”¹⁴ These consultations revealed the importance of connection and identity. They highlighted young people’s interest in connecting with the work of Gilgandra Council, and their desire for representation. Yet they also indicated that the approach to engagement requires review to ensure that it is meaningful and conducted via the forums where young people are meeting and engaging.

In addition, it is important to separate out discussions of young families to discussions of young people more broadly. There was frustration among 16-24 year olds that young families are well supported in the community, particularly by the *Childcare Strategy*, which received widespread community support, but that this does not include options to meet their needs. Specifically, those consulted explained that the focus on

¹⁰ Focus group, 9 October 2024; Focus Group March 17, 2025

¹¹ Focus Group, 9 October 2024

¹² Trivelli, C., & Morel, J. (2021). Rural youth inclusion, empowerment, and participation. *The Journal of Development Studies*, 57(4), 635-649.

¹³ Interview, 9 October 2024

¹⁴ Focus Group, 9 October 2024; Focus Group 17 March 2025.

early childhood care, while necessary, had detracted from considering the needs of young people without families. Diversifying opportunities for participation and representation in public life was revealed as a key priority for younger members of the community.

Individuals 14-25 years revealed a strong desire for representation at the Council level. When asked if there was anything they would like Council to know one youth noted that:

“They should find someone who’s young, local and engaged in the community to represent us... the younger community. Yeah, I guess instead of just having 40- and 50-year-old people sitting in the room.”¹⁵

Another young person during the discussion suggested that:

“[we] should have a representative on the Committees, they have a heap of committees, but I literally only know one person my age who’s on the business committee. But other than that, ... I don’t think there’s any other young people.”¹⁶

The sentiment that young people are ‘left behind’ or invisible to Council, is not unique to Gilgandra but rather a trend echoed throughout Australia among the youth demographic. Specifically, the desire to have their opinions “valued” by Council aligns with broader youth perspectives outlined in the Commonwealth *Youth Engage* report. This report noted that “young people want the government to value their views,” “to be taken-seriously when it comes to decision-making” and to “see their views reflected in policies and programs, particularly on issues important to them.”¹⁷ As the consultation themes outlined below demonstrate, similar responses were provided to the University researchers.

Taken together, these consultations reveal the importance of collaboration for future proofing civic participation in Council activities. By engaging young people meaningfully in decision-making and investing in them by prioritising the creation of co-designed services and programs, Council can build resilience across the youth cohort and empower potential future Council leaders, thus creating a productive and stable governance pathway into future generations.

“I guess it is like the context of what you are meeting about, because a lot of the time their opinion call outs are like, not concerning us, so we’re not going to be engaged in it”

“We want to do it [to talk to Council] but also something needs to incentivize it, because [kids] are not going to do it voluntarily. There are too many other things going on”

“You need to get the schools involved to get the young people... get the schools to ask the kids what they want from their community, and they can hand that to council “

Creating an enabling environment for the participation and leadership of future generations is possible due to the enthusiasm for civic engagement revealed during consultations, particularly among young people aged 10-14 years old. Among those consulted across the two engagement sessions in October 2024 and

¹⁵ Focus Group 17 March 2025

¹⁶ Focus Group, 9 October 2024

¹⁷ Australian Government Office for Youth, *Engage: A Strategy to include young people in the decisions we make*, <https://www.youth.gov.au/office-youth/engage-strategy>, March 2024.

March 2025, the majority indicated that building more productive relationships would be possible if “there was more of them in there working with Council.”¹⁸ Overwhelmingly there was a consensus among young people and adults that “more diverse opportunities, would make [young people] more interested in participating.”¹⁹ As five young people spoken with explained “if you are not into the outdoors or trades it is hard to see what opportunities there are for you here, both in work and for fun.”²⁰ Similarly, among adults in the community who interact with young people there was a general sentiment that there should be closer links between the Council and local schools.

Creating a productive working relationship between Council, and education institutions, most notably, Gilgandra High School, would heighten civic knowledge and enhance values-based participation. Increased familiarity with the activities of Council would also create greater awareness among young people about the role of Gilgandra Council in shaping their environment.

“We’ve just got so many different ranges of talent and then also a lot of different, possible vocations that kids can’t really see in Gilgandra... access to, helping with things for the Shire, fit out their new builds or what have you”

On projects with Council.

“Whatever [the young person’s] gift is, [they can] display that gift”. They now also have something for their CVs, and you know that confidence that you get when you have something displayed”

Furthermore, by productively engaging young people in the work of Council it is possible to increase the sense of ownership they feel towards their community. This sense of belonging is important to reduce patterns of out-migration. It would also strengthen connection and identity, so that young people, if they do leave to pursue work and employment opportunities, remain motivated to return due to their investment in the community. The mutual benefits of diversifying opportunities for young people to engage with Council members and their work are supported by empirical academic research. Specifically, fostering an engaged and informed youth demographic has been shown to positively impact youth’s productivity, and their civic mindedness.²¹

In addition, communities with a highly engaged youth demographic are empirically more likely to be economically and socially productive. Among the most important considerations here is to ensure that engagement, “meets youth where they are.”²² As such, by creating stronger, consistent, practical relationships between Gilgandra High School and Council there is the potential for greater strategic buy-in for key projects, while also ensuring capacity building and upskilling for young people. Yet, building these relationships between Council and schools should not be limited to high-school aged young people. Given the positive sentiments about the Gilgandra Community from 10-12 years (see above Figure 5) it is critical that programs and opportunities be provided that nurture the enthusiasm of the youth cohort.

“Having a purposeful project to work on along with my students would be amazing because you know they’re not only studying the curriculum, but it’s meaningful for them and for the town”

“I’m sure that Gilgandra Council does a lot, but I just don’t see it... It is all the same people on Council all the time and when I look at Council, I can’t see myself”

¹⁸ Focus

¹⁹ Focus

²⁰ Focus

²¹ Chou, M., Gagnon, J.P., Hartung, C. and Pruitt, L.J., 2017. *Young people, citizenship and political participation: Combating civic deficit?* Rowman & Littlefield; Loader, B.D., Vromen, A. and Xenos, M.A., 2014. Introduction: The networked young citizen: social media, political participation and civic engagement. In *The networked young citizen* (pp. 1-13). Routledge.

²² Australian Government Office for Youth, *Engage: A Strategy to include young people in the decisions we make*, <https://www.youth.gov.au/office-youth/engage-strategy>, March 2024.

Broadly, the responses of individuals between the ages of 15-24 reflected the 'pull' of out-migration driven by limited opportunities for employment and/or career advancement, limited educational infrastructure at a tertiary level and limited population diversity (for example, for people who are LGBTQIA+).

Consultation reflected a tension within the cohort between a desire for places to belong and build a peer community within Gilgandra and a recognition that a "ceiling" exists, possibly due to Gilgandra's small population size and close proximity to Dubbo. As one young person noted: "a lot of stuff is geared towards young families, not young people. So that kind of misses the mark for you if you don't have kids."²³ When asked directly what the biggest challenge facing young people in Gilgandra is, overwhelmingly and consistently, jobs and fun/leisure time services were mentioned. The overarching sentiment, is reflected in the response from one young participant (aged 17) who explained:

"Keeping youth here, or like changing their minds to stay here... it all comes back to jobs, jobs, jobs, jobs, because they've grown up in their homes where they don't push to reach for like, those big opportunities they just don't bother anymore."²⁴

The desire for more diverse opportunities also intersected with the sporting culture that is deeply entrenched among Gilgandra youth. Specifically, as one young male explained "you'll see as kids grow up, a lot of them will rather go to Dubbo to play footy because it is a bigger, more strong competition. Yeah, you see the ones that have more talent, do that. Same with school."²⁵

Given this, investing in young people by prioritising services and programs that they identify as being necessary for the attainment of their employment goals, recreation and developmental milestones is critical to nurturing a productive future generation. Opportunity and the centrality of services and programs that promote life and work readiness is central to collaborative future proofing and the fulfilment of aims to support individual growth. A focus on opportunities will ensure that outmigration is managed, yet it requires the creation of diverse, and innovative pathways that leverage young people's technological capabilities in the areas of work and employment.

Among those considering the possibility of moving to a larger town, many expressed a conditional desire to remain in or return to Gilgandra. Yet they stressed the need for accessible and affordable services that would enable movement between neighbouring communities. As one young person explained:

"When I moved back, I really noticed not many people socialise, like in their early, mid 20s at the pubs, like there's barely any young people like before there would be a lot of young people going out... I don't know if it is like post COVID... and it's always hard when you don't have public transport because so many people live out of town"²⁶

²³ Focus group, 9 October 2024.

²⁴ Focus groups 9 October 2024.

²⁵ Consultation, 9 October 2024, Female aged 19.

²⁶ Consultation, 9-10 October 2024, Female aged 22.

As reflected in the above quote and the responses below, happiness and productivity for young people in Gilgandra is linked to work, school and life readiness. While infrastructure such as community transport exists, its presence, and the process for utilising the service are not visible to the youth cohort.

Similarly, while resourcing capacity and volume of uptake (ie: enrolment numbers) impacts the potential diversity of offerings at both the TAFE (see appendix D for survey of TAFE offerings) and the High School, leading to out migration, there is a desire among 17-24 years old to see more spaces within Gilgandra where they can build peer-community, while still engaging with TAFE and other vocational education opportunities online.

As one young male aged 19 explained, “I have to do TAFE online if I want to stay in Gil, there aren’t other options here, it would be nice to be online but with people.”²⁷

Where the youth demographic is concerned, the challenges of balancing opportunity with connection and identity are not unique to Gilgandra. Patterns of youth out-migration are increasingly common in regional towns and have been shown to lead to a loss of community renewal and vitality.²⁸ Broadly speaking, when young people were motivated by the promise of more diverse opportunities to build their livelihoods beyond Gilgandra, the desire to remain was diminished. Consultation revealed *ease of mobility* was a key interest for the youth cohort.

“We have a great youth centre...and the youth workers do a fabulous job. [We need] to [try] to have more initiatives that target teen youth”

“The TAFE is not functioning as it should be, and they don’t have anything to do with engineering or farming. Nothing. So, TAFE has to change. Council has to push for change, to get them to step up”

“Young people don’t have anywhere to meet”

“We need some sort of nightlife” or a “place to meet”

Existing Opportunities and Benefits for Young People in Gilgandra

Creating a thriving youth community in Gilgandra that will encourage growth and inspire a next generation of community leaders requires that preexisting infrastructure and services are leveraged and refined. It is also imperative, as revealed by consultation that this renewal occurs in consultation with young people, to facilitate wider and more consistent use.

²⁷ Consultation, 9-10 October 2024, Male aged 19.

²⁸ Abbott-Chapman, J. Martin, K. Ollington, N. Venn, A. Dwyer, T. & Gall, S. 2014. The longitudinal association of childhood school engagement with adult educational and occupational achievement: Findings from an Australian national study. *British Educational Research Journal* 40(1):102-120; Abbott-Chapman, J. Johnston, R. & Jetson, T. 2014. Rural belonging, place attachment and youth educational mobility: Rural parents’ views. *Rural Society*, 23(3): 296-310; Dufty-Jones, R. 2014. Rural economies in the ‘age of migration’: perspectives from OECD countries. *Geography Compass* 8(6): 368-380; Connell, J. & Dufty-Jones, R. (Eds.). 2014. *Rural change in Australia: population, economy, environment*. Ashgate Publishing, Ltd.

Discussions illustrated that Gilgandra Council already hosts numerous opportunities for specific cohorts of young people and offers positive experiences which support their growth. These services and the other identified strengths of the community, outlined below in table 4, were found to be exceptionally popular and prominent with young people and their caregivers. Indeed, the consensus among those surveyed was that any Youth Strategy created should invest in actions that continue and strengthen these services and promote the sporting culture, while also aligning with and complementing the work previously done for the Childcare Strategy.²⁹ Many noted that there was a need to diversify the range of services within the already existing infrastructure so that young people with interests beyond sport could be better engaged. There was a high degree of support for the introduction of study support services and intellectual activities such as chess.

Similarly, there was a consensus within the community, that a Youth Strategy should focus on leveraging and repurposing existing programs to enhance their impact. At the centre of this discussion was the overwhelming perception, that the “fantastic and important work of the Youth Centre” could be reinforced by investing in a facility that is more “fit-for-purpose” and that provides space for young people to interact with the wider community.³⁰ Consultations revealed a high degree of support for a relocation of the Youth Centre to the centre of town, and for the potential opportunities that are now available for young people due to Council’s investment in the new Library precinct. This suggests that Council’s proposed plan for a new Youth Centre within the Hunter Park Sports and Recreation Precinct is well aligned with the interests of the community.

Opportunity and Strength	Connectedness to Community through the library	Youth Centre	Sporting Culture	Links to Childcare Strategy
Core Demographic	0-25	10-15	3-25	0-6
What people said	<p>“Provides a strong connection to the town”</p> <p>“There is a sense of inclusivity with the activities they provide”</p> <p>“Provide a place to learn and have fun – with Lego, and to connect with technology”</p>	<p>“A great service for younger kids, providing breakfast, holiday activities.”</p> <p>“A place to go where I can be with my friends”</p>	<p>“Connection to the community”</p> <p>“An opportunity to be part of a team”</p> <p>“I can be fit and healthy and enjoy the outdoors”</p>	<p>“Encourages accessible and reliable childcare services in Gilgandra”</p> <p>“Looking forward to the implementation”</p>

Table 4: Community perceptions of existing infrastructure and services

The value of the Youth Centre, and its programmed activities, particularly during school holidays, was a core focus of discussions. While many emphasized its importance, they also noted that its location, and size created logistical challenges for wide-spread accessibility and inclusion.³¹ As one young person explained ‘I

²⁹ Gilgandra Shire Council, *Towards 5000 Community Childcare Strategy*, 2024

³⁰ Consultation 9-10 October 2024, Parent, Female.

³¹ Consultation 9-10 October 2024.

love the Youth Centre, but it becomes overcrowded and very loud at times.’³² Similarly, as one parent highlighted ‘[the Youth Centre] is set back off the main street, it’s away from the main activity in our community.’³³

In addition, while the Youth Centre was identified as a core community strength, older youth expressed a desire for a designated space and longer opening hours. Many also explained that they would like to see more “productive, accessible, public spaces” for youth within the community to encourage their positive participation. As one young male aged 12 explained “I’d like a space to ride my dirt bike” and “to race with my friends.... we have all this open space in Gil, we should use it.”³⁴

Similarly, many young people aged 12-16 years old identified the Castlereagh River as a site of underutilised potential. Specifically, as one explained “we, me and my friend go to the river to fish all the time it would be so cool if there was a Jetty to use down there.”³⁵ In addition, another noted that “the river should be a place to be... we could have festivals and competitions there... my friends and I would like that.”³⁶ These selected quotes from the consultation process reflect the general sentiment of what researchers heard when speaking to young people in Gilgandra.

Taken together, responses demonstrate the importance of creating visible spaces and places for young people to interact with their peers. The importance of harnessing existing opportunities to grow community is widely supported by previous research in rural Australia, which highlights the importance of investing in and resourcing youth programs to fostering belonging among young people.³⁷ Most notably, this research illustrates that established hubs are critical as they encourage young people to occupy an ‘active role’ in community and to take ownership for the care and maintenance of spaces as responsible citizens.³⁸

Opportunities for Investment based on identified needs

As previously indicated above, consultation with young people revealed several areas, where an investment in resources, and the leveraging of existing infrastructure would yield significant outcomes. Consensus among young people and adults was that the capacity of young people to fulfil their potential and to engage in civic participation is limited by six main factors. These include:

- Limited targeted, youth-centred avenues to have a voice in the decisions made by Council
- Lack of diverse employment, higher and secondary education opportunities for youth
- Rising pressures in cost of living and competing demands on time make it difficult to find spaces to volunteer and participate substantially in community events
- Limited public transportation options restricting travel between neighbouring towns
- Older youth having limited opportunities for building networks, and leisure time
- Fitness and health services are hard to access, and/or information about what is available is limited.

What is evident from the factors identified above is that external pressures, often outside the direct control of Council have significant impact on the wellbeing of young people. Moreover, these factors contribute substantially to the pattern of out-migration noted earlier. Given this, the Youth Strategy that is developed

³² Consultations 9-10 October 2024; Consultation 17 March 2025

³³ Consultations 9-10 October 2024.

³⁴ Consultation 17 March 2025, Male Aged 12

³⁵ Consultation 17 March 2025, Male Aged 11

³⁶ Consultation 17 March 2025, Male Aged 12

³⁷ Ellem, K., Baidawi, S., Dowse, L. and Smith, L., 2019. Services to young people with complex support needs in rural and regional Australia: Beyond a metro-centric response. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 99, pp.97-106; Stokes, H. and Wyn, J., 1998. Community Strategies: Addressing the Challenges for Young People Living in Rural Australia.

³⁸ Pruitt, L. 2017. Youth, politics, and participation in a changing world. *Journal of sociology* 53(2): 515

must acknowledge the need for whole-of-community, and multiple stakeholder investment to build a resilient community for current and future generations. In addition, the Youth Strategy should reflect general community sentiment regarding Council’s role in advocating for greater investment by State and Commonwealth Governments. Throughout consultation it was widely agreed, that although significant environmental, and structural factors exist, which create challenges for young people in Gilgandra, Council plays an important role in addressing and seeking to mitigate the negative impacts of these. In the following section of the report, the key themes that were used to guide the development of the Youth Strategy are presented.

5.5 KEY THEMES FROM INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL CONSULTATION

Voice, Meaningful Community Engagement and the External Environment

The consultation process revealed comprehensive and consistent links between young people’s preferred methods of engagement and the issues they wish to engage on. Specifically, there was a high degree of interest in participating more actively in decision-making regarding the organisation of activities and events within the community. There was also consensus among young people that greater efforts were needed by Council to create space for more representation of young people within Council’s decision-making structures and processes, most notably Council’s Committees. The enhanced visibility of young people in civic spaces, was noted as critical for renewed political buy in of the youth demographic in community life. Young people who participated in the consultation process voiced frustration at the lack of youth specific participation in Council decision-making processes. They perceived that this produces feelings of disempowerment and contributes to a sense of distrust in Council’s capacity to promote and implement youth-responsive policies.

“The rising cost and unavailability of affordable rentals for families is an ongoing issue. Given that many families are on minimum wage or unemployed building or buying property is not a viable issue”

“It is always the same people out but no one, not even young people take up the opportunities”

“Young people don’t see their parents doing it, so they don’t think it is important”

This reflects the findings of other research, which suggests that in many ways young people interact differently to older generations in terms of how they prefer to participate and the political issues they care about. Specifically, young people engage in non-traditional participatory pathways, such as opting for online communication rather than local community discussion.³⁹ It is important, therefore, to provide diverse avenues for consultation with young people, as this will ensure their voices are heard, and taken seriously in the community.⁴⁰ When asked about how they would like to have their say, the young people that participated in focus groups and interviews expressed an interest in regular, online “town hall” style events, that are “open to all” and that “address a wide-range of issues”.⁴¹

³⁹ Chou, M. Gagnon, J. P. Hartung, C. & Pruitt, L. J. 2017. *Young people deficit?* Rowman & Littlefield; Arklay, T. & Mollica, C. 2019. *Engaging* Available at: <https://apo.org.au/node/316086>

⁴⁰ Wood, B. E. (2017). Youth studies, citizenship and transitions: Toward a new paradigm. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 20(11), 1176-1190; Vromen, A. Xenos, M. A. & Loader, B. D. 2017. *The Networked Citizen: Permanently Connected* (pp. 208-219). Routledge; Loader, B. D. Vromen, A. & Xenos, M. A. 2016. Performing for the young, networked citizen? Celebrity politics, social networking and the political engagement of young people. *Media, culture & society* 38(3): 400-419.

⁴¹ Consultation, October 2024; Consultation, 17 March 2025.

“It’s hard to find people, even to run the school canteens and when we do it is always the same people”

“A lot of our activities and services for young people are run by the same people”

“Rising costs of living and limited family incomes have strained resources, leaving families with fewer opportunities to provide young people with extracurricular and enriching activities”

Generally, while consultation was important to young people, there was an acknowledgement that “other things like cost of living and house prices” occupy their time and “make it difficult to participate” or to want to “commit time to volunteering” and participation.⁴² Among the young people aged 15-24 consulted “long commutes” to school and “the need to work on the weekends” left little time for participation in other community centred activities.

“Like all the committees they have, like, they have heaps of committees, but I literally only know one person my age who's on

“I feel like they need a young person in there to, like contribute to the younger crowds, not just like the older people”

Both internal and external consultation highlighted the importance of volunteering and concern regarding the decline in volunteer participation within the community in recent years. There was widespread community consensus that the desire to have a voice came with a responsibility to engage in community activities and that volunteerism was essential for Gilgandra to function, particularly when it comes to young people and their activities.

“I tried to find information about the sports that were on offer and there were three different Facebook pages. It is hard to know what information is correct”

“There's just not a lot of things for young people to do around here”

“I'd like to have a say, but I want to do it in a way that makes me feel confident”

At the same time, it was noted that external pressures were creating significant barriers to the realisation of the aspirations of many in the community to contribute more. Gilgandra like many regional and rural communities has experienced a significant decline in active community participation.⁴³ The reasons for this decline, namely environmental and economic factors, echo broader trends throughout Australia particularly in rural and regional communities.

Employment and Education Investment

Consultation revealed that the management of outmigration requires creative thinking about how best to invest in young people. Indeed, creating diverse pathways to the future, and their aspirations was noted to be a defining characteristic of opportunity for Gilgandra's young people.

⁴² Consultation, 9-10 October 2024.

⁴³ Innes, P.A., Jefferies, G. and Gates, T.G., 2024. Volunteering behavioural declines amid personal and organizational upheaval: Recruitment, retention, and barriers in Australia. *Journal of Human Behaviour in the Social Environment*, pp.1-21.

Conversations also highlighted an important connection between values and opportunity. Many of those participating in the conversation indicated that the promotion of shared-community values is essential to the development of life ready, work ready young people. As outlined above, the search for greater education and employment opportunities is a key driver of out-migration for young people in Gilgandra.

Both face to face consultation and the survey data indicate that, particularly among parents with high-school aged children, there is a perception that the public high school “isn’t a viable option” and therefore they choose to “send the youth away to boarding schools” or “have them travel to Dubbo every day.”⁴⁴ Without action to further investigate and address perceptions regarding the high school and to enhance employment pathways within the community this trend may well continue and grow.

Among those consulted there was a consensus that the public high school has not, in recent years lived up to its potential. During consultation sessions community members, including young people, expressed concerns that “declining enrolments [have] affect[ed] the school’s reputation, staffing and student engagement.”⁴⁵ This concern about declining student enrolments at Gilgandra High School is also reflected in the school’s publicly available 2023 Annual Report, which shows a gradual decrease since 2020. As of 2023, the public high school had a total enrolment of 188 students, with a relatively even split between genders.⁴⁶

Internal and external consultation suggested several reasons for the decline in enrolments. These include the relative proximity of Dubbo, which facilitates external, diverse educational options. In addition, during consultation with young people, the issues of “teacher retention” and a “reliance on casuals” were highlighted as making it difficult to maintain the positive culture of the school.⁴⁷ They noted that “the absence of a “person who can help you with career pathways and options” was a key area of concern.”⁴⁸ This concern was expressed by older students, who are completing their final years of schooling and was also identified as one of the key challenges to education in Gilgandra by young people who had graduated in the last three years.

Most notably, all young people consulted identified COVID and the “instability of online learning” as factors that the high school has yet to overcome. While there was some concern expressed among the youth consulted that “behavioural issues” and “disruptive classmates” were a challenge for the public high school, overwhelmingly the key constraint identified was the “small network” and “limited subject variety.”⁴⁹ Among parents and key youth services stakeholders, there was a strong perception that more advocacy by Council with the NSW government is needed to work collaboratively and “regionally” on improving education opportunities for youth.

In a similar vein, participants suggested that the local TAFE campus offered limited “choice”, and that renewal is needed to ensure that the courses and qualification choices available are responsive and targeted to the career aspirations and interests of young people. The potential mismatch between TAFE offerings and students’ educational needs was highlighted during the First Nations consultation, where it was noted that a targeted Community Services course did not generate enough enrolments to run.⁵⁰

“A lot of young people work at the same spots, and it fills up the rosters... not an awful lot [of jobs] unless you know somebody”

“We need to work towards enticing better secondary education to the region”

“A total overhaul of Gilgandra high school is needed”

⁴⁴ Consultation, 9-10 October 2024.

⁴⁵ Consultation, 9-10 October 2024, Male Aged 17.

⁴⁶ Consultations, 9-10 October 2024, youth participants.

⁴⁷ First Nations Consultation, 17 March 2025

A regional, collective approach to education advocacy between Council, the Department of Education and neighbouring local governments, provides a unique opportunity to think creatively about how all towns in the region can support young people to thrive academically and socially.

In addition, both young people and parents expressed concern at the lack of visible employment opportunities. Parents who participated in consultations suggested that an absence of casual employment, long-term careers, and higher education diversity are leading to a lack of drive to succeed and feelings of hopelessness among young people. There is a role for Council in supporting young people's career aspirations and success. By advocating for more targeted State government investment, and by investing in work experience, volunteering opportunities for higher education students within the Gilgandra community Council can fulfil its aim of nurturing current generations.

"I choose to do TAFE online because there wasn't the option. Not many options here"

"The number of volunteers is a lot less than it used to be"

"There is not a central hub consistently used to communicate what Council is doing, and what services are available"

Exploring transportation options that will increase ease of movement to pursue out of town education and employment opportunities proved particularly salient among those consulted as there is a perceived risk that those who go away for high school "very rarely return to Gilgandra afterwards."⁵¹

The data highlights the importance of a strategy which enables Council to further explore opportunities that support mobility, and which will allow youth to live in Gilgandra *and* travel to attain diverse opportunities⁵². If Gilgandra becomes a more enabling environment for commuting, this "may in turn lead to retention of local youth and attraction of others to the region."⁵³

Council therefore has an important role to play in advocating for the diversification of offerings at the local high school and through the TAFE. They are also an integral stakeholder in advocating for and supplementing transportation options.

Social Connection and Information Sharing

Consultation sessions revealed that successful engagement with young people requires a communication strategy which speaks to their interests, needs and experiences. Evidence gathered during consultation for the Commonwealth Youth Strategy suggests that "meeting youth where they are" promotes engagement and civic participation. Discussions with young people demonstrated that they have an interest in connecting more consistently with the work of Gilgandra Council using the forums where they are already interacting, specifically online. In addition, there was also a consensus among young people that diversifying opportunities for participation in public life, will heighten civic knowledge and participation. As such, there

⁵¹ Community Consultation, 9-10 October 2024, Adult participants.

⁵² Gabriel, Michelle, 'Youth Migration and Social Advancement: How Young People Manage Emerging Differences between Themselves and Their Hometown' (2006) 9(1) Journal of Youth Studies 33

⁵³ Focus Group Consultation October 2024; Staff Consultation St Joesph's March 2025; P&C Consultation 2025

is an opportunity for Council to take steps to ensure that young people who live in Gilgandra, particularly the older-aged cohort (18-25 years), are invested in the community. Notions of what constitutes community should also be broadened to ensure that Council and other local institutions meet young people where they are connected and comfortable, rather than expecting that young people will come to them. This includes creating networks with young people in the local community, online community, and in neighbouring communities such as Dubbo. During consultation, youth expressed concerns that restrictions, such as lack of transport and poor internet quality, limited their connection to online and neighbouring communities. Making it easier for youth to engage with communities beyond Gilgandra will ensure broader support networks and, potentially, reduce the desire for in-person, full time migration to those communities.⁵⁴

“it's always hard when you don't have public transport to, like, take you home”

The results of both surveys and the face-to-face consultation indicated that communications from Council about what is happening for young people is often hard to find. Consultation participants suggested that “there is not a central hub consistently used to communicate what Council is doing, and what services are available for youth.”⁵⁵ There was a consensus that a “more streamlined communication process that was regularly updated” would assist young people and their families to engage with Council and to have a voice about issues that affected them. For many of the young people consulted, while they felt a deep “connection to Gilgandra through family and friends,” they felt disconnected from the actions of Council.⁵⁶ Implementing regular, informal and anonymous consultation will contribute to the development of trust relationships between Council and young people. This will further contribute to improved processes for decision-making, where events and services are inclusive and supportive of their needs.

At the same time, young people reported feeling disconnected from the work of Council. This was evident in the results of the Youth Survey, the inability of focus group participants to describe how Council contributes to their lives and in their expressed disappointment that Council was not engaging with the issues most important to them.⁵⁷ This disconnect between Council and the youth population, is reflective of broader social trends in Australia that can be particularly exacerbated in regional and rural communities. More consistent communication by Council is required on platforms such as Instagram and TikTok to increase the visibility of Council’s messages and achievements for young people.

Places of Belonging

Consultation with young people revealed the importance of safe and inclusive spaces for their wellbeing and the nurturing of positive community interactions. There was significant interest in more consistent interactions with peers and the broader community revealed during consultation. However, many, particularly those 16-24 expressed a “shyness” to engage due to an absence of dedicated spaces.⁵⁸ Consultations revealed that adolescents and youth in Gilgandra are searching for public places to build and maintain their peer community. Participants in consultation revealed that recent community events, such as *Winter Wonderland*, and *Under the Gums*, were popular due to the opportunities they created for young people to interact with the wider community. Fostering intergenerational engagement through public spaces encourages a sense of pride and community identity. However, while many viewed these as positive

⁵⁴ Wiborg, 2004 - Place, Nature and Migration: Students attachment to their rural home place

⁵⁵ Consultation 9-10 November 2024, adult participant

⁵⁶ Consultations 9-10 October, Aged 18.

⁵⁷ Consultation 9-10 November 2024, Aged 16.

⁵⁸ Community Consultation, 9-10 November

“[Youth Centre] gets a bit overcrowded sometimes.”

“There’s nowhere to go for enjoyment, no jobs, even... they want to go out, to go where

events, there was a consensus that older cohorts of young people, were typically not attracted to the programming. As one young person explained “the Gums... I can see what they were trying to do but it was for little kids. There wasn’t much for me and my friends.”⁵⁹ Similarly, another young person reflecting on these events suggested “it would be cool for them to ask young people what they want to see... what bands, what games.”⁶⁰

“[School] is basically the only place I can hang out with my friends.”

As highlighted earlier, empirical research in regional communities throughout Australia demonstrates that out-migration occurs when young people believe that there is a lack of activities and spaces for the pursuit of their interests.⁶¹ As such, by extending its offerings in relation to youth events and spaces, and by opening up spaces for young people to consult on these events, there are opportunities to incentivize greater youth investment in the Community.

“It is important that we are supported to stay if [we] want to because of family, or to come back if [we] want to”

“It would be good to have a place where its more attractive to older young people”

Nurturing a sense of belonging within the young people of Gilgandra will have positive impacts for the future of Gilgandra broadly. Empirical research on young people in rural and regional communities illustrates that fostering greater connection between young people and the wider community, in public spaces and via public events, enhances productivity, economic outcomes and social connections.⁶² The consultation process reveal that while Council spaces and places cater well to adolescents and children, physical and social infrastructure fails to adequately address the needs and interests of the older youth demographic. Reflections by young people on their dream town reveal as desire for more diverse infrastructure, services and recreational activity.

As the images below demonstrate, places to belong often constitute spaces where youth can gather with peers, or where they see and know that opportunities for employment exist. Among young people, there was also a strong desire for greater service convenience, with one young person explaining “people say Dubbo is close, but really it’s not that close and it takes a lot to get there.”⁶³ Similarly, when asked to describe why they had included Woolworth and Subway in their “dream town” one young person explained, “if we had more places to get food, we would also have more jobs, people wouldn’t feel like they have to leave.”⁶⁴ While providing convenience infrastructure falls outside the responsibility of Council, the responses by young people highlight the significant pull factors that motivate outmigration, lending support for the inclusion of resource advocacy in the youth strategy. Specifically, investing in young people requires a commitment to advocating and collaborating with private and government stakeholders for the introduction of services and resources that will empower young people to achieve their self-identified employment, and recreational needs and interests.

⁵⁹ Community Consultation, 9-10 November 2024, Aged 17

⁶⁰ Community Consultation, 9-10 November 2024, Aged 17

⁶¹ Wiborg, 2004 – Place, Nature and Migration: Students attachment to their rural home place

⁶² Riethmuller et. Al. – Going Rural: Qualitative perspectives on the role of place attachment in young people’s intentions to return to the country

⁶³ Community Consultation, 17 March 2025, Aged 11

⁶⁴ Community Consultation, 17 March 2025, Aged 12

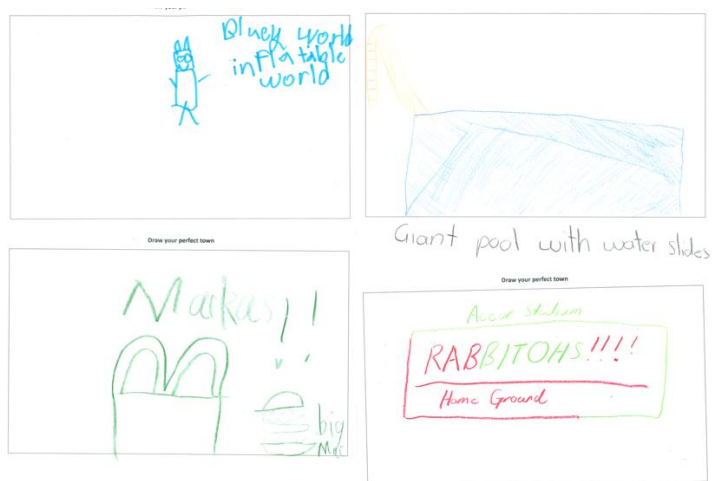


Figure 6 November 2024 Word Cloud - Draw your dream town

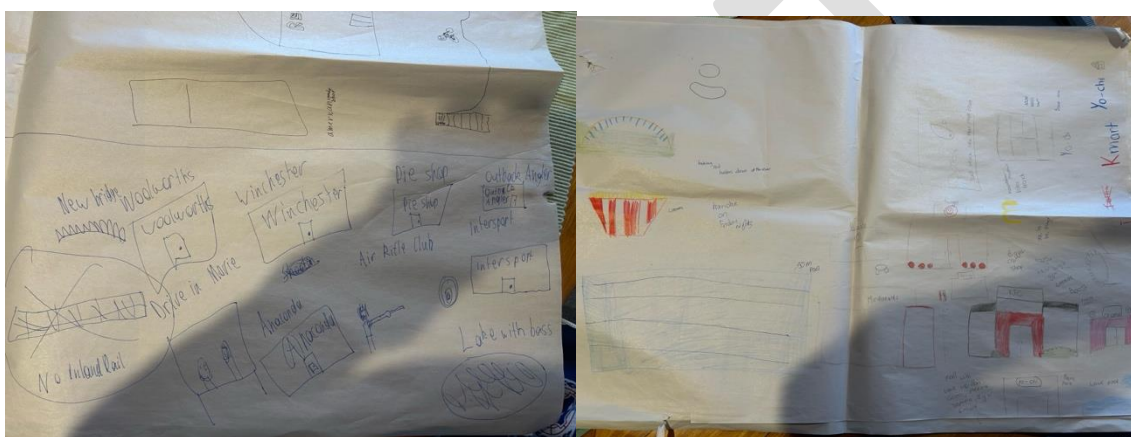


Figure 7: March 17 Consultations - Draw your dream town

It is evident that young people in Gilgandra are searching for public places to build and maintain their peer community. Notably, as the images of the dream towns indicate, diversifying opportunities for recreation will have a positive impact on young people's sense of belonging and ownership. Further, consultations also indicated that young people in Gilgandra, particularly those in the older cohort 17-24 years old are searching for an environment where they can return, particularly when they are looking to raise a family.



Figure 8: March 2025 Consultation - Draw your dream town



Figure 9: November 2024 Word Cloud - Draw your dream town

Wellbeing

Continued investment in the infrastructure and programs that will support the physical, and mental wellbeing of young people is vital to fulfilling Gilgandra's towards 5000 strategies. During consultations, the positive potential of Gilgandra was revealed as many community stakeholders noted the towns prospective capacity to support the welfare of young people and growing families through advocacy. Gilgandra is a community defined by its sporting culture, with many noting it as a source of great pride for the community. Among those consulted there was also a consensus that sport and outdoor activity could be better leveraged by Council to unite young people and older community members. As one young people explained, "sport, we all love sport, it is something that we have in common, but there is a lot of difference between adult sport and kids' activities."⁶⁵ Throughout the community engagement process, the role of sport in fostering intergenerational unity and community emerged as one of the most prominent themes, highlighting its significance to the Gilgandra community. Sport and community activity has been demonstrated to support intergenerational relationship building, thus supporting values within the Gilgandra youth strategy.⁶⁶ Yet, consultations also revealed a significant degree of anxiety regarding the capacity of the community to sustain this sporting culture. Many expressed concerns about its continued feasibility, due to cost, availability of resources, and the inconsistency of volunteers. These concerns are reflected in the quotes below, which highlight the relationship between cost of living, community capacity and declines in sporting availability. This declining trend was perhaps best demonstrated in discussions with individuals aged 16-24 who reflected extensively on the changes that have occurred within the community since the peak of COVID-19 in 2020-2021. For example, one male aged 19 explained "I know in the last few years Gil has started to [have] trouble finding refs and stuff. But when I was growing up, it was heaps, everyone was getting into it, but things have definitely changed."⁶⁷ Given the importance of this sporting culture to the community, an investment in young people's wellbeing through fitness and sport programs is critical.

"The cost of fees for sports and the gym means I have to choose what I participate in"

"I'm lucky in that I did get myself into the medical centre here"

With the cost of sports and Registration fees, I would never have

"It's definitely hard with medical services, with doctors always leaving"

⁶⁵ Community Consultation, 9-10 October 2024, Aged 17.

⁶⁶ Di Martino, G., Della Valle, C., Centorbi, M., Buonsenso, A., Fiorilli, G., Crova, C., di Cagno, A., Calcagno, G. and Iuliano, E., 2024. Bridging Generations Through Movement: "How and Why" Intergenerational Programs Operate—A Systematic and Narrative Review. *Geriatrics*, 9(6), p.139.

⁶⁷ Community Consultation, 9-10 October 2024, Aged 19.

Alongside the decline in capacities associated with sport and fitness, there are a range of allied health services not provided in Gilgandra which significantly impacts the wellbeing of young people. Among the greatest concerns expressed during consultation was the “time investment” associated with having to travel to Dubbo to access medical care. This concern was particularly acute regarding specialist care, such as mental health, and physiotherapy. Among those consulted there was an acknowledgement that programs do exist and are supported within Gilgandra. Yet many also expressed difficulties associated with “finding out about”⁶⁸ exactly what services are available, as well as the longevity of the service within the community. As one young person concluded “the services, they come and go, but they never last, so it makes it hard to be consistent with care.”⁶⁹ While health service provision remains outside the direct responsibilities of Council, community consultation revealed a strong desire for greater advocacy by Council to service providers and the NSW government. Investing in wellbeing, via the promotion of accessible and age-appropriate fitness and recreational opportunities, and advocacy for increased access to allied health services will signal Gilgandra’s capacity to build an enabling environment for young people and their families.

“Without the NSW health kids’ sports vouchers, I can’t actually afford for my kids to do everything, so if they choose one soccer, there might not be enough kids for basketball”

“It’s all the same people all the time, volunteering, and the last few seasons we haven’t been able to find coaches, or people to run the canteen”

Taken together, community consultations around the theme of wellbeing highlighted the importance of providing programs and services that will promote a thriving, safe, secure and sustainable environment for young people. At its core this requires that investments are made in accessible, consistent and timely services. In addition, consideration should be given to how Council can support young people to address the financial barriers that have become increasingly prominent post-COVID.

6. Implications for the Strategy and Action Plan

Issue / Challenge / Opportunity	Youth Strategy Directions / Scope
Limited educational provision – concerns with public high school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with Gilgandra High School to identify issues and opportunities for Council to support student participation, retention and success • Establish a ‘Study Hub’ at Gilgandra Library • Provide opportunities for young people and families to learn about diverse cultures, abilities and experiences through a ‘Living Library’ program
Limited educational provision – limited TAFE NSW offer at local campus, need to travel to Dubbo and beyond to access TAFE / University qualifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocate with other levels of government and educational institutions to uplift the post-secondary education offer to facilitate study and work opportunities in Gilgandra and assist with post high school retention in the shire

⁶⁸ Community Consultation, 9-10 October 2024, Aged 21.

⁶⁹ Community Consultation, 9-10 October 2024, Aged 20.

Limited employment or career development opportunities locally	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocate and work with local businesses to promote employment and career development opportunities for young people within the Shire • Review and diversify Council's traineeship and apprenticeship program • Develop opportunities for 'whole person' and 'whole of life' skills development by young people – eg: volunteering programs
Lack of variety of things to do for children and young people, beyond sports – lack of opportunities to engage in cultural activities (music, art, craft, dance, theatre)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convene annual 'Youth Forum' to review outcomes of the Youth Strategy, discuss newly identified needs and responses • Liaise between Youth Centre, Library and local schools to develop and/or promote an annual program of local youth-friendly events on Council website • Involve young people to plan, deliver and/or participate in key community events • Identify places and spaces that could be used as temporary / 'pop up' exhibition spaces for young creatives • Curate temporary / 'pop up' exhibitions for young creatives • Explore opportunities to involve children and young people in Connection to Country – cultural walks and talks programs delivered by local First Nations organisations
Need to travel to Dubbo for some sports for training and competitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocate for more frequent and timely bus service between Gilgandra and Dubbo • Continue to deliver and maintain skate parks, pools, sports fields and other fitness infrastructure • Develop relationships with peak sports, recreation, fitness bodies and associations & institutions to enhance local delivery and promote sports, recreation
Limited social and recreational offer for young adults – 19-25 years of age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide opportunities for young people to co-design and deliver community activities, programs, and events - both youth and 'all ages' events • Provide imagery on Council website, social media platforms and collateral that represents the diversity of the population, including children and young people
Aged infrastructure at the local swimming pool – calls for pool upgrade and the introduction of a splash park	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Progress planning and development of the proposed Hunter Park Sports and Recreation Precinct, including the design and development of a splash park • Review opening hours for the Gilgandra Pool and timing of Gilgandra Leisure Centre fitness programs

Aged and crowded Youth Centre – calls for upgrade to purpose-designed/built facility that will cater to demand and contemporary programming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Progress planning and development of new Youth Centre as part of the proposed Hunter Park Sports and Recreation Precinct, including detailed design and identification / pursuit of funding opportunities from NSW and Commonwealth
Calls for extension of Youth Centre capacity - size, opening hours, staffing and range of programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review Youth Centre opening hours – eg: pilot weekend programs Design/deliver programs and strategies to include children/ young people who are currently under-represented as participants in Youth Centre programs Plan and deliver occasional 'outreach' programs to outlying townships from Gilgandra youth services Review staffing levels and capacity required to enhance Youth Centre outcomes, including creation and recruitment of a designated position for a young person on the Youth Centre team (eg: traineeship)
Calls for extension of Library Hub capacity – enhance diversity of programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide Council places and spaces that are accessible, and 'child and youth-friendly' Include a dedicated 'youth space' and youth focused programs in the Gilgandra Library that are inclusive of children /young people with diverse needs
Poor public transport between township and villages and between Gilgandra and Dubbo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advocate for more frequent and timely bus service between Gilgandra and Dubbo Investigate options for youth-specific community transport – including use of Council's existing 'Youth Bus' to transport children from Tooraweenah to activities at Gilgandra Youth Centre
Lack of childhood care and education places – both early childhood and out of school hours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leverage goals and actions of Gilgandra Towards 5000 Community Child Care Strategy
Poor internet connectivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advocate with telecommunication networks for better internet services in Gilgandra
Limited health and well-being resources and services for children and young people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement the Towards 5000: Health Vision strategy actions that relate to children and young people Advocate for allied health services (speech therapy, psychology, physiotherapy, paediatrics, optometry) to deliver fortnightly/monthly clinical outreach in Gilgandra Collaborate with local health services, including the Gilgandra Local Aboriginal Medical Service, to link vulnerable young parents with services Work with local health services to convene an annual Community Mental Health forum

	to provide information to young people and families about mental health and wellbeing
Limited support for families raising children and young people – financial support and social support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote affordable housing options, such as the 'Aeropark Estate' housing development, as key options for families to remain or return to Gilgandra • Implement the Gilgandra Housing Strategy 2022 • Design a program in consultation with local childcare providers and Cooee Lodge to bring children and older members of the community together
Limited engagement of the community generally and young people, in civic life and policymaking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage, develop and support civic participation and leadership of young people – eg: Youth Council, youth representation on Committees • Convene annual 'Youth Forum' to review outcomes of the Youth Strategy, discuss newly identified needs and responses • Integrate planning for and promotion of well-being of children and young people with disabilities, into Council's strategic processes

Table 5: Opportunities and Directions for the Gilgandra Youth Strategy and Action Plan

6.1 CONCLUSION

The discussion outlined above reflects the needs, interests' opportunities and challenges experienced by young people in Gilgandra. The consultation process revealed the aspirations of Gilgandra for its current and future generations of young people. Taken together, the discussions reflect important insights about the resources, programs and strategies needed to future proof Gilgandra in collaboration with its current youth cohort.

The Gilgandra Youth Survey and questions included in the Gilgandra Community Insights Survey yielded rich data for analysis that will inform development of the Gilgandra Youth Strategy and Action Plan. While not large enough to provide statistically valid findings, survey outcomes are consistent with data gathered via other methods during the research phase for the Youth Strategy, including qualitative data gathered via engagement/consultation activities and the findings of the desk research and SWOT analysis that informed the Discovery Report. As such, the project team is confident that survey findings reflect the experiences, needs and aspirations of the Gilgandra community. They contribute to a comprehensive data base that provides clear direction and scope for development of key focus areas, goals and actions for the Gilgandra Youth Strategy and Action Plan.

Internal and External Stakeholder engagement reinforced the findings from the survey and provided a rich dataset of youth centred response. These have been utilised to inform the development of the key focus areas for the youth strategy and action plan. Given the replication of responses across the multiple data collection sites, the project team has determined that the thematic findings and analysis reflect the beliefs, perceptions and desires of the community.

Appendix A



1.



**INSTITUTE
FOR
REGIONAL
FUTURES**

Gilgandra Shire – Towards 5000 Youth Strategy Have Your Say All Ages Survey

About this survey

Gilgandra Shire Council (GSC) is developing a Youth Strategy to guide planning and delivery of local services and engagement with children and young people. Working with young people and those closest to them, we will develop a roadmap to assist them to meet their goals now and into the future. The Youth Strategy is being developed with the assistance of an expert team from the University of Newcastle.

How you can have your say

We are inviting all members of our community with an interest in the future of our children and young people to have your say by completing this survey. We want to hear from children and young people, as well as parents/caregivers and interested members of the Gilgandra community.

The survey has **31 multiple choice questions** and will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete.

Click the link below to Have Your Say!

<https://uninewcastle.questionpro.com.au/t/ARn4MZRY9C>

Or complete this paper copy of the survey and return it to Gilgandra Youth Services, Gilgandra Shire Council offices or Gilgandra Shire Library.

The survey closes on 28 February 2025.

You may win a prize!

If you complete the survey, you will be eligible to go into a draw to win one of two, \$200 Cooee Cards (one for people under 25 years and one for people 26 years and older), that can be used at any local retailer. For this reason you can only complete one survey per person.

Terms & Conditions for the Prize Draw

The prize draw is open to Gilgandra Shire residents, from 9.00am Monday 23 September 2024.

Completed surveys must be submitted online, or handed into Gilgandra Youth Services, Gilgandra Shire Council offices or Gilgandra Shire Library by 5.00pm on 28 February, 2025.

You are only permitted one survey submission and must answer ALL questions, to be considered for the prize draw.

The winners of the prize draw will be contacted by direct phone call and/or email by Gilgandra Youth Services.

The two (2) winners of the \$200 Cooee Cash Card prize (one under 25 years of age and the other 26 years and older) will be announced in March 2025.

You may be invited to attend a focus group consultation

The last section of the survey asks you to provide contact details **if you wish to “opt-in” to participate in focus group discussions**, which are also part of the research for the Youth Strategy.

Focus groups will be conducted by a team of researchers from the University of Newcastle, who will ask you for your opinion on what should be included in the Youth Strategy.

If you choose to provide your contact details, you will be contacted directly by a member of the University of Newcastle’s research team.

Confidentiality and Voluntary Participation

All responses to survey questions will be treated as confidential and we will ensure that the information you provide cannot be identified or linked to you.

You do not have to take part in the survey if you don’t want to and you are completely free to change your mind part way through. To opt out, just close the browser window.

The last section of the survey will ask you to provide contact details if you wish to “opt-in” to participating in focus group discussions, which are also part of the research for the Youth Strategy.

If you have any questions about the survey or the Youth Strategy, please contact Jenny Thompson at the University of Newcastle: jenny.thompson@newcastle.edu.au

Survey Questions

Please tick or cross the box ☐ next to each answer that is right for you

1. I am completing this survey:

- ☐ For myself
- ☐ On behalf of a child or young person / people that I care for
- ☐ In consultation with a child or young person / people that I care for

2. How old are you?

- ☐ 0-5
- ☐ 6-11
- ☐ 12-15
- ☐ 16-18
- ☐ 19-21
- ☐ 22-25
- ☐ Over 25 years of age

3. Are you (choose all that apply)

- ☐ Aboriginal
- ☐ Torres Strait Islander
- ☐ Non-Indigenous
- ☐ Rather not say

4. Do you: (choose as many as you want)

- ☐ Live in Gilgandra Shire
- ☐ Go to school in Gilgandra Shire
- ☐ Go to TAFE/University in Gilgandra Shire
- ☐ Work in Gilgandra Shire
- ☐ Volunteer in Gilgandra Shire
- ☐ Participate in groups and services in Gilgandra Shire (such as a youth service, sports club, cultural/faith group)
- ☐ Use facilities in Gilgandra Shire (such as libraries, sport facilities, ovals, parks, shops, cafes/restaurants)
- ☐ Parent or care for children and/or young people in Gilgandra Shire
- ☐ Teach or coach children and/or young people in Gilgandra Shire

5. What do you think makes Gilgandra a great place for children and young people to live? (choose as many as you want)

- ☐ Great weather
- ☐ Less people and less traffic than bigger towns
- ☐ Great natural environment – rivers, creeks, bush, farmlands
- ☐ Relaxed lifestyle
- ☐

Safe and secure environment

☐

Opportunities for 'whole of family' activities

☐

Good support networks – family and friends

☐

Good services and amenities for children, young people and families

☐

Good study opportunities – schools, TAFE, other

☐

Good opportunities for work / future work

☐

Other - please describe what it is _____

6. Are there things that make Gilgandra NOT a great place for children and young people to live? Please list/describe what they are

7. What places/facilities do you use in Gilgandra? (*choose as many as you want*)

☐

Skate park

☐

Youth Club - Gilgandra Youth Services

☐

Swimming Pool

☐

Playgrounds

☐

Shops

Library

☐

On country

☐

Cafes

☐

Sports fields

☐

Sports clubs

☐ The river

☐ Other (please specify) _____

8. If you use the Youth Club, which services do you currently use? (*choose as many as you want*)

☐ Youth Club activities

☐ Breakfast Club

☐ Youth Club after school drop in

☐ Youth Club school holiday activities

9. What changes would you like to see in the services or activities offered by the Youth Club?

10. If you use the Gilgandra Library, which services do you currently use? (*choose as many as you want*)

☐ Library programs, events or activities for children and young people 6-25 years of age

☐ Library programs, events or activities for adults (people over 25 years of age)

☐ Borrow books and other items from the Library

☐ Use library technology – computers, internet, wifi

☐ Library Storytime, Rhymetime, etc for parents and children 0-5

☐

Library after school activities

☐

Library school holiday activities

11. What changes would you like to see in the services or activities offered by the Library?

12. What activities do children and young people do in Gilgandra Shire? (choose as many as you want)

Tick this box for Gil

13. What activities do children/young people have to travel out of Gilgandra Shire (eg: to Dubbo) to do? (choose as many as you want)

Tick this box for out of Gil

		Attend school	
4WD driving		4WD driving	
Motocross / dirt bike riding		Motocross / dirt bike riding	
Skateboarding / Scootering		Skateboarding / Scootering	
Camping		Camping	
Fishing		Fishing	
Swimming		Swimming	
Basketball		Basketball	
Soccer		Soccer	
Rugby League		Rugby League	
Netball		Netball	
Hockey		Hockey	
Cricket		Cricket	
Athletics		Athletics	
Walking trails		Walking trails	

Golf		Golf	
Pony Club / horse riding		Pony Club / horse riding	
Martial Arts		Martial Arts	
Dance		Dance	
Art		Art	
Music		Music	
Craft		Craft	
Online gaming		Online gaming	
Tutoring		Tutoring	
Other (please specify)		Other (please specify)	

14. What community events do children and young people attend in Gilgandra?
(choose as many as you want)

- ☐ Markets
- ☐ Sporting events (eg: gala days)
- ☐ Workshops
- ☐ School or work-based activities, programs or events
- ☐ Live music / music festivals
- ☐ Gilgandra Show
- ☐ Film festivals

☐

Community events such as the *Goin' to Gil Weekend / Under the Gums* or *Christmas Wonderland* or *Australia Day*

☐ Other (please specify) _____

15. Are there any barriers that prevent children and young people or families in Gilgandra from attending /enjoying activities, places, or events? (choose as many as you want)

- ☐ Cost (too expensive)
- ☐ Location (too far away)
- ☐ Transport (can't get there)
- ☐ Safety (don't feel safe)
- ☐ Limited numbers for some activities
- ☐ Don't feel welcome
- ☐ Don't know what activities/events are happening
- ☐ Age (children too young or old)
- ☐ Not physically accessible
- ☐ Unsuitable day/time
- ☐ Times that venues (eg the Youth Club) are open
- ☐ Space/ activity is shared by various age groups - would prefer not to share with younger or older people
- ☐ Other (please specify) _____

16. What sorts of activities do you think should be available for child/ren and/or young people to do in Gilgandra in the future?

☐ The same as are available in Gilgandra now

☐ Other (please describe) _____

17. What do you think are the top three (3) most important issues or challenges that children and young people are facing? (*please select 3*)

1. _____

2. _____

18. Do you expect to be living in Gilgandra in 5 years' time?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Unsure

19. Tell us more about your response to Question 17. If you answered **Yes**, what do you think will make you stay? If you answered **No**, why do you think you will leave?

20. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your experiences of living in Gilgandra now, or about what you hope Gilgandra will be like in 10 years' time?

21. Do you have access to the internet via any device at home?

Yes

☐

No

22. How do you find out about what is happening in your local area? (*choose as many as you want*)

☐

Family

☐

Friends

☐

Facebook

☐

Instagram

☐

Snapchat

☐

TikTok

☐

YouTube

☐

Radio/TV

☐

Google search (or other search engine)

☐

Workplace

☐

School or TAFE

☐

Services (i.e. sport club, youth organisation)

☐

Posters/flyers

☐

Local newspapers

☐

Shire website

☐

Community events and markets

☐

Nowhere

☐☐

Other (please specify) _____

23. How much do you know about the role and activities of your local Council (Gilgandra Shire Council)?

- ☐ I know a lot
- ☐ I have a basic understanding
- ☐ I know very little
- ☐ I know nothing

24. What role does Council play in making Gilgandra a great place for children and young people to live:

- ☐ I don't know
- ☐ Provides sporting and recreation facilities
- ☐ Provides library services and programs
- ☐ Provides early childhood services, such as childcare and early literacy
- ☐ Provides services through the Youth Centre
- ☐ Manages local infrastructure (roads, waste, environment, etc) sustainably and efficiently
- ☐ Delivers festivals, events, programs and activities
- ☐ Advocates for the community
- ☐ Links local organisations together to enable collective action on common issues
- ☐ Supports local non-government organisations that deliver services to children and young people (eg: grants programs, affordable venues, business advice)
- ☐ Council does not play a role in making Gilgandra a great place for children and young people to live

25. How would you like Gilgandra Shire Council to get your opinion on things going on in your local area? (*choose as many as you want*)

- ☐ Surveys (online)
- ☐ Surveys (in person, i.e. at events)
- ☐ Youth workshops or forums (online)
- ☐ Youth workshops (in person)
- ☐ Providing feedback at school/TAFE
- ☐ SMS questions you respond to on your phone
- ☐ Email questions you respond to via email
- ☐ Social media polls
- ☐ Gilgandra Council website
- ☐ Anonymous feedback box (i.e. in the library, at the shops)
- ☐ Other (please specify) _____

26. Would you be interested in doing any of the following Council-related activities? (*choose as many as you want*)

- ☐ Attend Council meetings
- ☐ Listen to audio of Council meetings or read Council meeting minutes
- ☐ Attend community forums (eg: 'town hall' meetings)
- ☐ Participate in consultation sessions about issues that are important to me – in person
- ☐ Participate in consultation sessions about issues that are important to me – online
- ☐ Become a member of a Youth Council

Become a member of a Youth Advisory Committee or other Council committee

I'm not interested in participating in any of these activities

☐

27. In the last six months how many interactions would you say you have had with your local Councillors?

☐

0-1

☐

2-4

☐

4-6

☐

More than 6

28. Do you want to have your say about the Youth Strategy in a focus group consultation with University of Newcastle's peer researchers?

☐

Yes

☐

No

29. Do you want to go in the draw to win one of two \$200 'Cooee' gift cards that will be given to two lucky people (one person aged under 25 years and the other person aged 26 years and above) who complete our survey?

☐

Yes

☐

No

30. Do you want to be sent a copy of the *Youth Strategy* once it is complete?

☐

Yes

☐

No

31. If you answered yes to any of these questions (Q28, Q29, Q30) please enter your contact details below:

E-mail: _____

Phone number: _____

THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING THIS SURVEY

DRAFT

Appendix B

GILGANDRA YOUTH STRATEGY

COMMUNITY SURVEY – CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

At 1/3/25:

381 Viewed
91 Started
42 Completed
46.15% completion rate

The Survey was completed:

For myself	52.5%
By an adult, in consultation with a child / y.p.	15.0%
By an adult, on behalf of a child	32.5%

Age of person completing:

A majority of respondents (53.7%) was aged over 25 years. This reflects the age of respondents who completed the questions relating to the Youth Strategy that were included in Council's 2025 Community Insights Survey.

Of those under 25 years, the next largest cohort (19.5%) was aged 19-21 years.

Age Cohort	Number	%
0-5	0	0.00%
6-11	2	4.9%
12-15	3	7.3%
16-18	3	7.3%
19-21	8	19.5%
22-25	3	7.3%
Over 25 years of age	22	53.7%
Total	41	

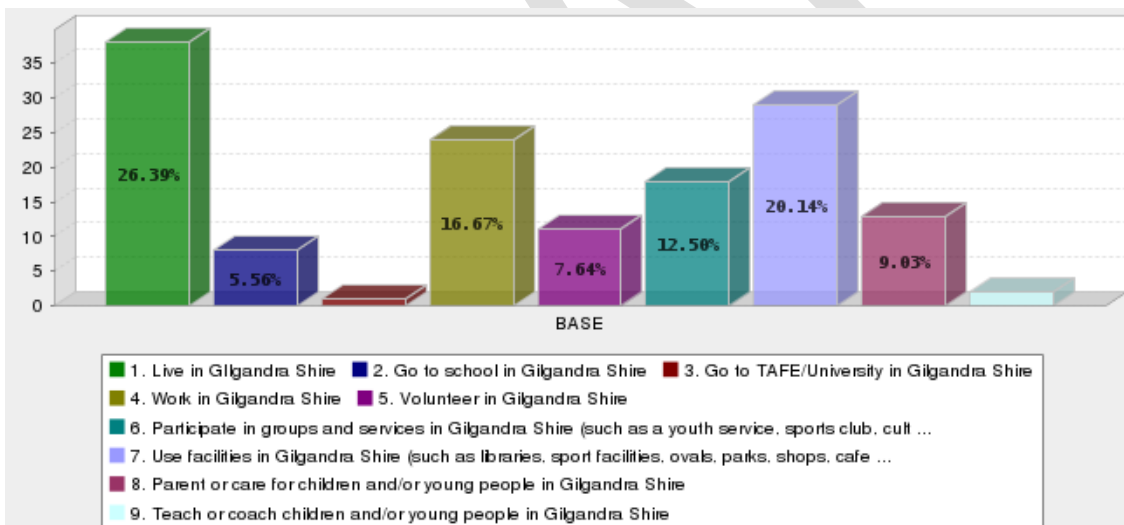
Identification by survey respondents as Aboriginal / Non-Aboriginal:

A majority of survey respondents identified as non-Aboriginal. However the 15% of respondents who identified as Aboriginal is consistent with the representation of Aboriginal people in Gilgandra's population.

Status	Number	%
Aboriginal	6	15.0%
Torres Strait Islander	0	0.0%
Non-Indigenous	27	67.5%
Rather not say	7	17.5%
Total	40	

Relationship to Gilgandra Shire

A majority (a little more than one in four) of responses indicated that survey respondents live in Gilgandra Shire. A significant proportion also use Council and/or non-Council facilities (20.1%) and/or work (16.7%) in Gilgandra Shire



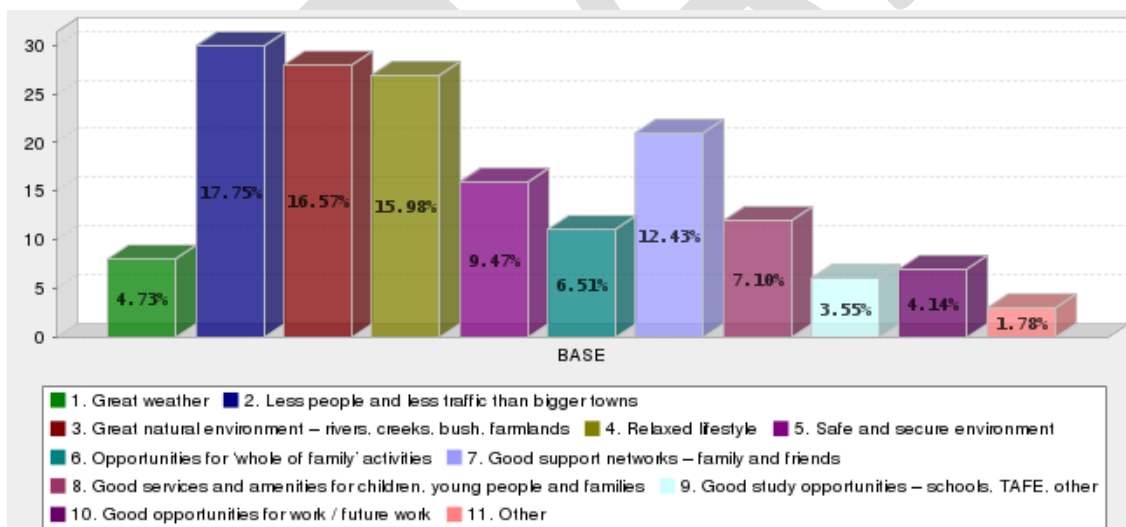
Do you: (choose all that apply)	Number	%
Live in Gilgandra Shire	38	26.4%
Go to school in Gilgandra Shire	8	5.6%
Go to TAFE/University in Gilgandra Shire	1	0.7%
Work in Gilgandra Shire	24	16.7%

Volunteer in Gilgandra Shire	11	7.6%
Participate in groups and services in Gilgandra Shire (such as a youth service, sports club, cultural/faith group)	18	12.5%
Use facilities in Gilgandra Shire (such as libraries, sport facilities, ovals, parks, shops, cafes/restaurants)	29	20.1%
Parent or care for children and/or young people in Gilgandra Shire	13	9.0%
Teach or coach children and/or young people in Gilgandra Shire	2	1.4%
Total	144	

What Makes Gilgandra a Great Place for Children and Young People?

The most popular response related to the smaller size of the population and less traffic as 'great' characteristics of the town (17.8%). Natural environment (16.6%) and relaxed lifestyle (16.0%) were close runners-up at second and third, while 'good support networks' was the fourth most common response.

The low % of responses for 'good study' and 'good work/future work' opportunities items is notable.



Characteristic	Number	%
Great weather	8	4.7%
Less people and less traffic than bigger towns	30	17.8%
Great natural environment – rivers, creeks, bush, farmlands	28	16.6%

Relaxed lifestyle	27	16.0%
Safe and secure environment	16	9.5%
Opportunities for 'whole of family' activities	11	6.5%
Good support networks – family and friends	21	12.4%
Good services and amenities for children, young people and families	12	7.1%
Good study opportunities – schools, TAFE, other	6	3.6%
Good opportunities for work / future work	7	4.1%
Other	3	1.8%
Total	169	

Are there things that make Gilgandra NOT a great place for children and young people to live? (Please list/describe these)

Responses were consistent with the commentary from focus group discussions and interviews, as well as from the (unsolicited) responses to the 2 questions re children and young people that were included in the Gilgandra Community Satisfaction Survey.

The greatest number of responses was focused on the limited range of things for children and young people to do. Limited employment opportunities were also identified by a larger number of respondents as having a negative impact for young people.

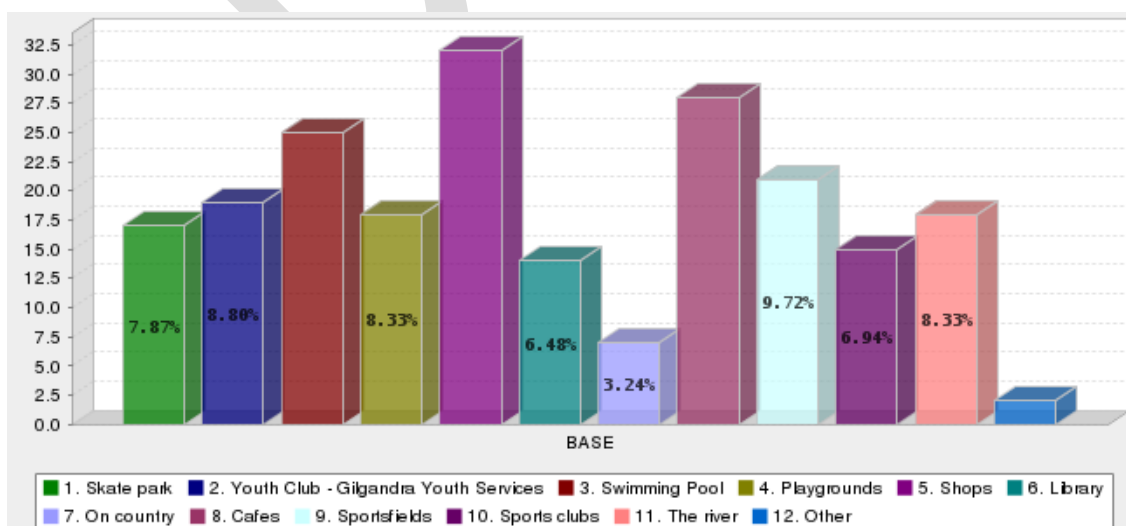
As sometimes happens in local government surveys, respondents took an opportunity to give feedback on unrelated matters, such as their views on Council infrastructure generally. However, commentary on opportunities to enhance the offer of the local swimming pool (whether infrastructure or services) is relevant to the recreation needs of children and young people.

Things that make Gilgandra NOT a great place for children and young people to live	No. of times mentioned
Lack of 'things to do' (services, facilities, sport/recreation, events) – age relevant	15
Council services/infrastructure not adequate (aged, maintenance, connectivity)	8
Limited employment opportunities	8
Pool needs to be upgraded, open longer, splash park	6
Limited access to health and wellbeing services for young people	4

Need to travel to Dubbo for sports, cultural, medical services/activities	4
Crime, lack of police presence	4
Lack of affordable housing	3
Lack of early childhood education and care options / out of school hours care	3
Concerns about local secondary education options	3
Lack of suitable/varied shopping and fast food	2
Lack of supervision / supervised care for young people	2
<i>Peer Pressure</i>	1
<i>Friends going to Dubbo for School</i>	1
<i>Need public transport</i>	1
<i>Parenting classes</i>	1
<i>Better links between family, school and services to stop kids falling through the cracks</i>	1
Total	67

What places and/or facilities do you use in Gilgandra? (choose as many as you want)

Shops and cafes were the most frequently selected places visited by survey respondents. The next most frequented places were Council-owned facilities – the swimming pool, sports fields, Youth Club and playgrounds. The river was also a popular destination for respondents.



Place / Facility	Number	%
Shops	32	14.8%
Cafes	28	13.0%
Swimming Pool	25	11.6%
Sports fields	21	9.7%
Youth Club - Gilgandra Youth Services	19	8.8%
The river	18	8.3%
Playgrounds	18	8.3%
Skate park	17	7.8%
Sports clubs	15	6.9%
Library	14	6.5%
On country	7	3.2%
Other	2	0.9%
Total	216	

Services used at the Youth Centre

A slight majority of survey respondents do not use the Youth Centre services, which is not surprising, given the spread of survey demographics. However, of those activities selected by respondents, the general 'activities' item and 'school holiday activities' were the most frequently chosen.

If you use the Youth Club, which services do you use?	Number	%
I don't use the youth club	20	27.8%
Youth Club activities	18	25.0%
Youth Club school holiday activities	14	19.4%
Youth Club after school drop in	11	15.3%
Breakfast Club	9	12.5%

Total	72	
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What changes would you like to see in the services or activities offered by the Youth Club?

Responses were consistent with the commentary from focus group discussions and interviews, as well as from the (unsolicited) responses to the 2 questions re children and young people that were included in the Gilgandra Community Satisfaction Survey.

The desire for the Youth Centre to open on the weekend and for services to be extended to meet the needs of older (and younger) age cohorts emerged as key themes. There were also suggestions for more and more diverse activities while the Council's youth service, in general received kudos.

Suggested Changes	No. of times mentioned
Open on the weekend	10
Cater to the older cohort of young people	8
Cater to younger aged children	6
More 'special' activities – trips away, pizza, movies	4
More school holiday activities	4
Cater for arts, crafts, cultural activities	3
Open longer hours – later on weekdays	3
Provide more sports activities – comments about the pool, etc	3
Offer more excursions	2
Endorsement of Youth Centre staff, services	2
Activities to be delivered in Tooraweenah	1
Update the Youth Centre and relocate to more central location	1
Increase Youth Centre staffing	1
Improvements to Youth Centre service – healthier food, education on healthy living	1
Improvements to Youth Centre service – better internet	1

Improvements to Youth Centre service – staff respect towards children on excursions	1
Total	51

Quotes:

The school holiday program has significantly improved over the past few holidays, and we would like to see more activities and we have capacity and are willing to pay for these. The kids love them.

Some activities that include younger people - I understand the centre is meant for older children however our young children miss out of lots of the fun activities that I'm sure they would love to be involved in.

The youth club is doing a great job with the resources it has available.

Gilgandra Library – Services Used

A little over one quarter of survey responses indicated that respondents do not use library services, indicating a need for further investigation. At the same time, the variety of services used by survey respondents is testament to the importance of the library to the Gilgandra community and to young people.

Around one in five visits to the library were to borrow books and other items, while library school holiday programs were the next most frequently used service, followed by regular activities and use of technologies.

If you use the Gilgandra library, which services do you currently use?	Number	%
I do not use the library services	21	27.6%
Borrow books and other items from the Library	13	17.1%
Library school holiday activities	11	14.5%
Library programs, events or activities for children over 6 years of age	10	13.2%
Use library technology – computers, internet, wiifi	8	10.5%
Library Storytime, Rhymetime, etc for parents and children 0-5	5	6.6%
Library after school activities	5	6.6%
Library programs, events or activities for adults (people over 25 years of age)	3	4.0%
Total	76	

What changes would you like to see in the services or activities offered by the library?

Most respondents suggested extending the range and diversity of programs offered for children and young people. A number of respondents prompted the opening of the new library, while others took the opportunity to criticise the service. There were some interesting suggestions, such as a review of after school programs to include activities that are focused on the interests of young women and girls.

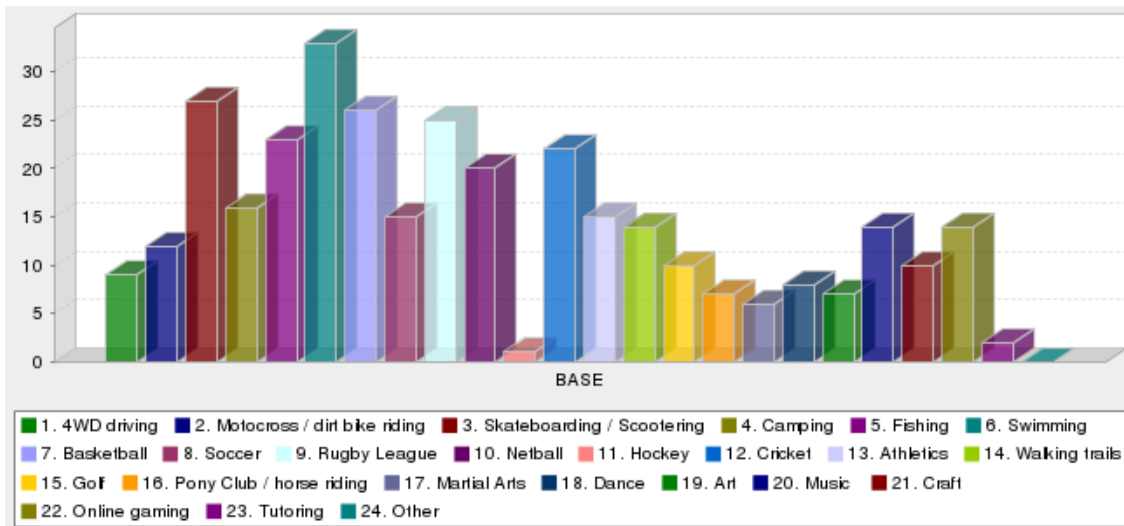
Suggested Changes	No. of times mentioned
More diverse / 'exciting' programs for children and young people – robotics, use new technologies (eg: podcasts), art/craft, programs for children 12+, dedicated programs for girls, programs for pre-schoolers (aside from early literacy)	8
Open the new library hub	6
Do not / would not use the library	4
More programs for adults – social interaction, skills, business support – use the talents of locals to deliver programs	2
Improve accessibility – staff create vibrant place where all feel welcome	3
Offer computers, books and quiet places for study/reading	1
Increase capacity for events so can take larger number of participants	1
Total	25

What activities do children and young people do in Gilgandra shire?

Responses indicate that swimming is the activity pursued most frequently, locally, with a little under 10% of responses for that item.

Skateboarding/scootering and basketball were the next most frequently cited pastimes, each recording around 7% of responses. Rugby league, fishing, cricket and netball also recorded around 6% of responses.

Perhaps reflecting the limited availability of these activities locally (that has been reported in other data collection for this study) lower scores were also achieved for tutoring, craft, art and martial arts. The response rates for these items were also low for the subsequent question, which asked about activities undertaken outside of the Gilgandra LGA. Hockey scored the lowest response, with just one response for this activity, again possibly reflecting the lack of local options to pursue this sport.



Activity	Number	%
Swimming	<u>25</u>	10.0%
Skateboarding / Scootering	<u>19</u>	7.6%
Basketball	<u>19</u>	7.6%
Rugby League	<u>17</u>	6.8%
Fishing	<u>17</u>	6.6%
Cricket	<u>16</u>	6.4%
Netball	<u>15</u>	6.0%
Camping	<u>14</u>	5.6%
Athletics	<u>12</u>	4.8%
Soccer	<u>12</u>	4.8%
Online gaming	<u>11</u>	4.4%
Music	<u>10</u>	4.0%
Motocross / dirt bike riding	<u>9</u>	3.6%
Walking trails	<u>9</u>	3.6%
4WD driving	<u>8</u>	3.2%
Golf	<u>7</u>	2.8%
Pony Club / horse riding	<u>7</u>	2.8%

Dance	<u>6</u>	2.4%
Art	<u>5</u>	2.0%
Craft	<u>5</u>	2.0%
Martial Arts	<u>5</u>	2.0%
Tutoring	<u>2</u>	0.8%
Hockey	<u>1</u>	0.4%
Other	0	0%
Total	251	

What activities do children/young people have to travel out of Gilgandra Shire (eg: to Dubbo) to do?

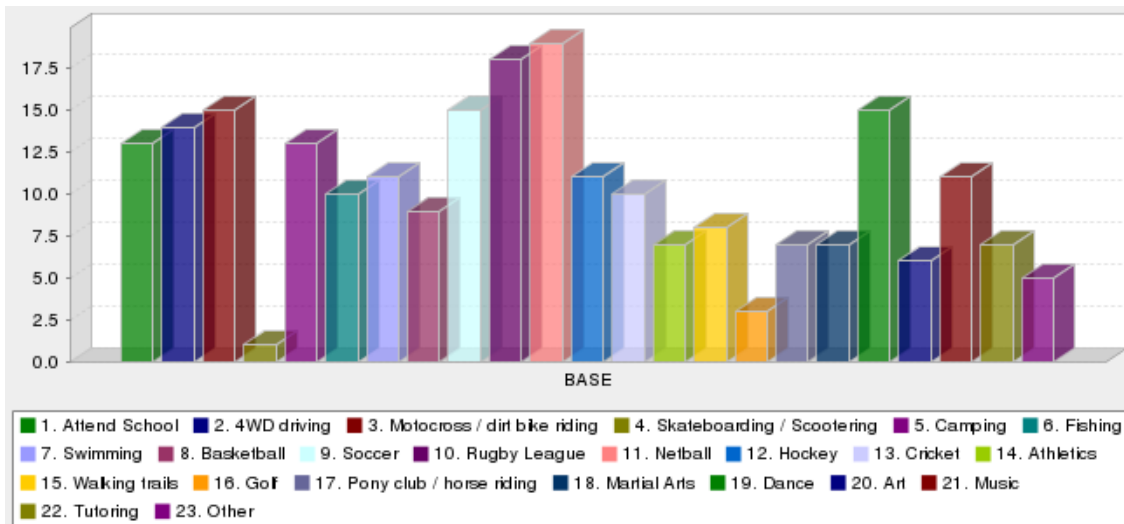
Netball emerged as the most frequent activity that people from Gilgandra leave the shire to participate in, with just over 8% of responses. Rugby league was the next most frequently cited activity.

Soccer, motor sports (4WD, motocross and dirt bike riding) and dance also attracted higher scores, in the 6% to 7% range.

Not surprisingly, camping and attending school were also activities that people regularly leave the shire to pursue, with each recording over 5% of responses.

Scootering/skateboarding was the lowest scoring item, possibly indicating the relatively low number of young people involved in this activity or, more likely, that the Gilgandra skate park is meeting the needs of the community.

Archery and Rugby Union were activities that were not included in the multiple choice item but were identified by respondents as requiring travel out of the Shire.

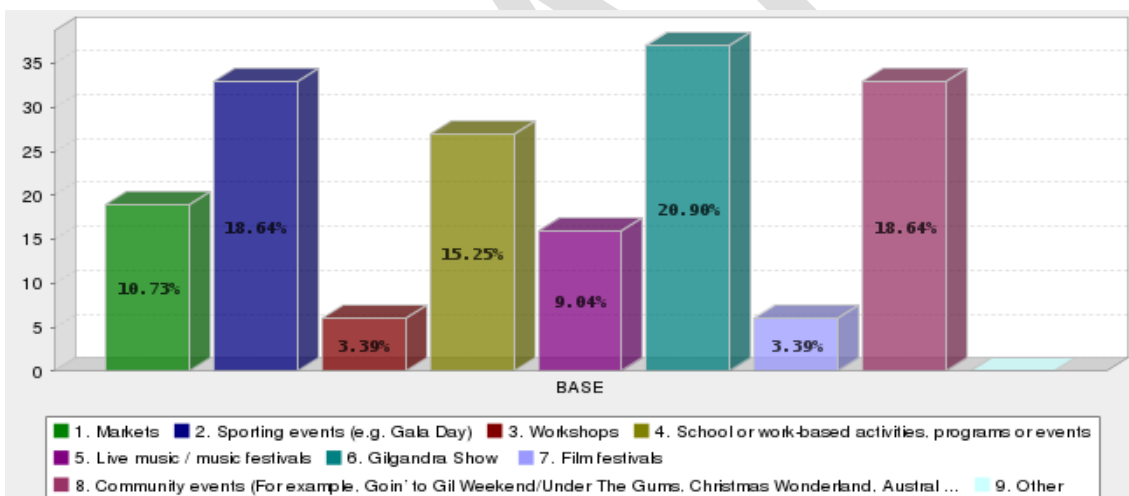


Activity	Number	%
Netball	19	8.1%
Rugby League	18	7.7%
Soccer	15	6.4%
Motocross / dirt bike riding	15	6.4%
Dance	15	6.4%
4WD driving	14	6.0%
Camping	13	5.5%
Attend School	13	5.5%
Music	11	4.7%
Swimming	11	4.7%
Hockey	11	4.7%
Fishing	10	4.3%
Cricket	10	4.3%
Basketball	9	3.8%
Walking trails	8	3.4%
Athletics	7	3.0%
Pony club / horse riding	7	3.0%

Martial Arts	7	3.0%
Tutoring	7	3.0%
Art	6	2.6%
Other	5	2.1%
Golf	3	1.3%
Skateboarding / Scootering	1	0.4%
Total	235	

What community events do children and young people attend in Gilgandra?

The Gilgandra Show was the most frequently reported event, with a little over one in five responses reporting attendance, while sporting events such as Gala Days and seasonal community events also scored at a high level. Film festivals and workshops attracted the lowest response rate, possibly reflecting the limited frequency with which these types of events are staged.



Activity / Event	Number	%
Gilgandra Show	37	20.9%
Sporting events (e.g. Gala Day)	33	18.6%
Community events (For example, Goin' to Gil Weekend/Under The Gums, Christmas Wonderland, Australia Day)	33	18.6%
School or work-based activities, programs or events	27	15.3%

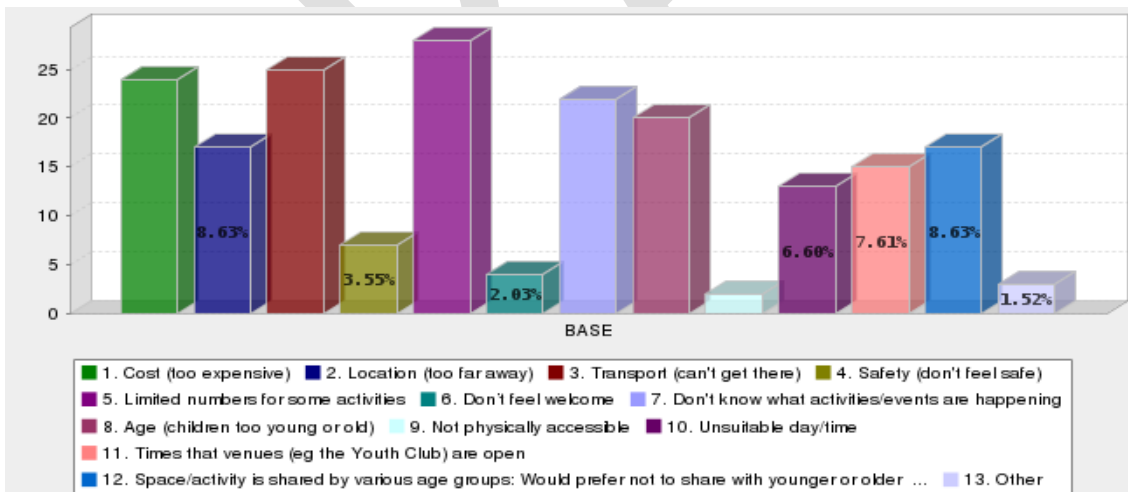
Markets	19	10.7%
Live music / music festivals	16	9.0%
Workshops	6	3.4%
Film festivals	6	3.4%
Other	0	0.0%
Total	177	

Are there any barriers that prevent children, young people or families in Gilgandra from attending and/or enjoying activities, places, or events?

The limited number of people locally to make some activities viable was the most frequently cited barrier to participation, with just over 14% of participant responses citing this factor.

Transport barriers, making it impossible to get to where activities are taking place was the next most cited barrier, which, when considered with the response 'location, too far away' indicates the need for improved transport options. Cost and lack of information about what events are going on were also reported in 11-12% of responses.

Heat, lack of shelter/shade and clashes with work commitments had not been included in the survey, but were additional barriers identified by respondents.



Barrier to Participation	Number	%
Limited numbers for some activities	28	14.2%
Transport (can't get there)	25	12.7%

Cost (too expensive)	24	12.2%
Don't know what activities/events are happening	22	11.2%
Age (children too young or old)	20	10.2%
Space/activity is shared by various age groups: Would prefer not to share with younger or older people	17	8.6%
Location (too far away)	17	8.6%
Times that venues (eg the Youth Club) are open	15	7.6%
Unsuitable day/time	13	6.6%
Safety (don't feel safe)	7	3.6%
Don't feel welcome	4	2.0%
Other	3	1.5%
Not physically accessible	2	1.0%
Total	197	

What sorts of activities do you think should be available for children and/or young people to do in Gilgandra in the future?

More than half of all survey respondents felt that the same activities as are currently available for children and young people, should be on offer going forward.

Suggested new/additional activities included recreational opportunities such as a splash park, BMX track, outdoor movie nights and gymnastics. The theme of a splash park, contemporary 'water sport' offer at the local pool has emerged through a variety of data collection processes and surveys.

What sorts of activities do you think should be available for children and/or young people to do in Gilgandra in the future?	
The same as are available in Gilgandra now	56.1%
Other	43.9%
Total	100 %

What do you think are the top three (3) most important issues or challenges that children and young people are facing?

The key themes that emerged from the suggestions from respondents re 'key issues' are consistent with those generated in the 2 questions that were included in the Community Satisfaction Survey and with data from focus group discussions and interviews with individuals.

The lack of activities, recreational opportunities, etc for children and young people and limited opportunities for employment and careers were among the top three most frequently cited challenges. The issue of parental care, family environment and supervision also emerged as a key theme, though while some respondents linked this to creating a lack of respect for authority others saw it as a factor in preventing children and young people from thriving.

Issues / challenges for young people	No. of times mentioned
Limited things for children and young people to do	27
Family and parenting issues – lack of care, limited supervision, lack of respect, family breakdown	13
Limited employment opportunity	11
Limited access to activities and opportunities – poor transport / public transport, feeling unwelcome, lacking information about what's on, adequate time/notice to save for participation fees	8
Bullying, peer pressure, feeling lack of acceptance if 'different'	7
Cost of living, expense of activities	6
Online behaviours and/or dependency	5
Housing – affordability, availability, homelessness	5
Secondary and post-school education – limited locally	4
Health and wellbeing issues – mental health, nutrition, access to mental health support	4
Illegal activities, lack of policing	3
Drug and alcohol use	3
Local infrastructure – age/maintenance of facilities, river not used	3
Difficulties finding / maintaining friendships	3
Limited choice of shops, lack of access to items locally	2
Limited provision / access for children/young people with a physical disability or who are neuro-divergent	2

Climate, temperature, lack of cover in public areas	2
Total	108

Comments included:

- *A varied amount of activities need to be available. Not all chn like to play sport. Art and cultural opportunities are needed, maybe in the form of workshops, art exhibitions where they can display their work.*
- *The pool and youth facilities are falling behind the stand [ard of] other communities in the region, these are spaces for causal [sic] and organised activities and there has not been a significant investment in these facilities for over 50 years. That may sound a bit out there as obviously money has been spent on the pool and the youth centre [sic] but essentially they are the same as when they were originally constructed and have not kept up*

Do you expect to be living in Gilgandra in 5 years' time?

Just over half of all respondents agreed that they see their future in Gilgandra. However, just over one quarter of respondents were unsure if they will continue to live in the shire and just under one quarter indicated that they do not expect to be living in Gilgandra in five years' time.

Reasons provided for staying in Gilgandra related to family connections (5 responses); employment commitments (4 responses); sustaining a farm (3 responses); schooling (1) and home ownership (1). Two respondents stated that they were going to stay in Gilgandra because they liked living here.

Reasons provided for "no" responses largely related to the limitations survey respondents felt exist around access to work/career/wages (5 responses) and educational opportunity (2 responses); and the lack of services such as health/medical (1 response) and child care (1 response).

4 respondents described a level of ambivalence about whether to stay or leave Gilgandra, citing uncertainty about future life directions.

Response	Number	%
Yes	23	56.1%
No	6	14.6%
Unsure	12	29.3%
Total	41	

Comments included:

- *Generationally will be here, we farm here. We will stay because of that. Trying to work on the other elements to make is easier/better to stay*
- *Will be leaving as unfortunately this town is a retirement village, to make anything of yourself you need to change locations.*
- *Depends if there is employment when I finish School Depends if University studies can be done on line or in Dubbo*
- *Our work but our kids will not go to high school here. That means as active community members our involvement will diminish as we got involved in activities where they go to school*

Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your experiences of living in Gilgandra now, or about what you hope Gilgandra will be like in 10 years' time?

Responses concerning the things that survey participants would like to see for Gilgandra's future included: population, business and industry growth (including capitalising on its geographic location); improved local infrastructure, particularly the Youth Centre, pool (including development of a splash park), and basketball facilities; more things for children and young people to do (including more arts/culture activities); improved child care options; more affordable housing; more shade trees; and a more inclusive community that cares for those in social need.

Comments included:

- *Gilgandra has a lot to offer in businesses in the town. When you compare our town to Warren and Coonamble our town is improving and we need to continue that.*
- *I would like to see more investment in some of our facilities by local and state govt eg the pool, as I think sometimes our proximity to a major centre in Dubbo means that the assumption is we can just go there, but that is not the case for everyone. This is also applicable for medical and health services. The concern is that a lot of services and facilities will shift to the main centres*
- *Maintain the services and good business mix. Whilst I have pointed out some short comings in the pool facility and youth centre [sic] space, Gilgandra has a strong business and service mix and losing that would create a whole other set of issues. We would be talking about the need for essential services not just a new pool*

Do you have access to the internet via any device at home?

All survey respondents (100%) answered 'yes' to this question; however, it is worth noting possible bias afforded by this survey being completed online.

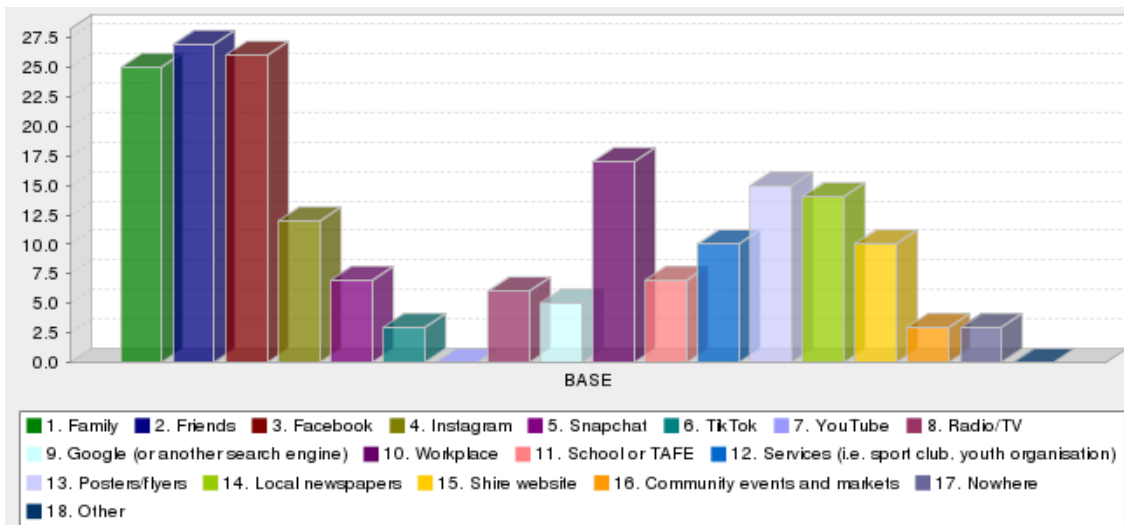
Yes: 100.00%

How do you find out about what is happening in your local area?

Friends were the most frequently cited source of information for survey respondents, with just over (14%) of responses, with Facebook (just under 14%) and Family (just over 13% of responses) a close second and third. Workplaces (9%) were, perhaps surprisingly, a relatively common source of information about what is happening in the community.

While Instagram (6.3%) was the most popular choice of social media channel, it's use was not high and other social media sources that are often linked to younger people (Snapchat, Tik Tok) were

also less frequently cited. This may be a reflection of the age range and circumstances (child completing with an adult) of survey completion.



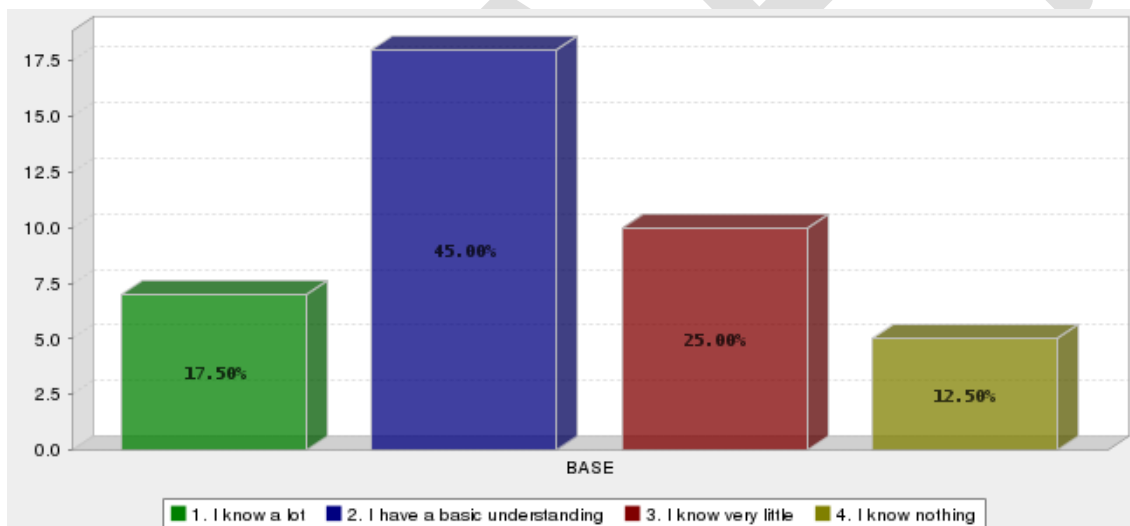
Response	Number	%
Friends	27	14.2%
Facebook	26	13.7%
Family	25	13.2%
Workplace	17	9.0%
Posters/flyers	15	7.9%
Local newspapers	14	7.4%
Instagram	12	6.3%
Shire website	10	5.3%
Services (i.e. sport club, youth organisation)	10	5.3%
Snapchat	7	3.7%
School or TAFE	7	3.7%
Radio/TV	6	3.2%
Google (or another search engine)	5	2.6%
TikTok	3	1.6%
Community events and markets	3	1.6%

Nowhere	3	1.6%
YouTube	0	0.0%
Other	0	0.0%
Total	190	

How much do you know about the role and activities of your local Council (Gilgandra Shire Council)?

A majority of respondents indicated that they knew either 'a lot' or, at least, had a basic understanding of the work of Gilgandra Council. At the same time, just under 40% of respondents suggested they knew 'very little' or 'nothing' about Council.

The potential, inherent bias of the survey methodology (available online, via the Council website) towards respondents who were at the very least aware of, interested in and capable of visiting the Council website should be noted.

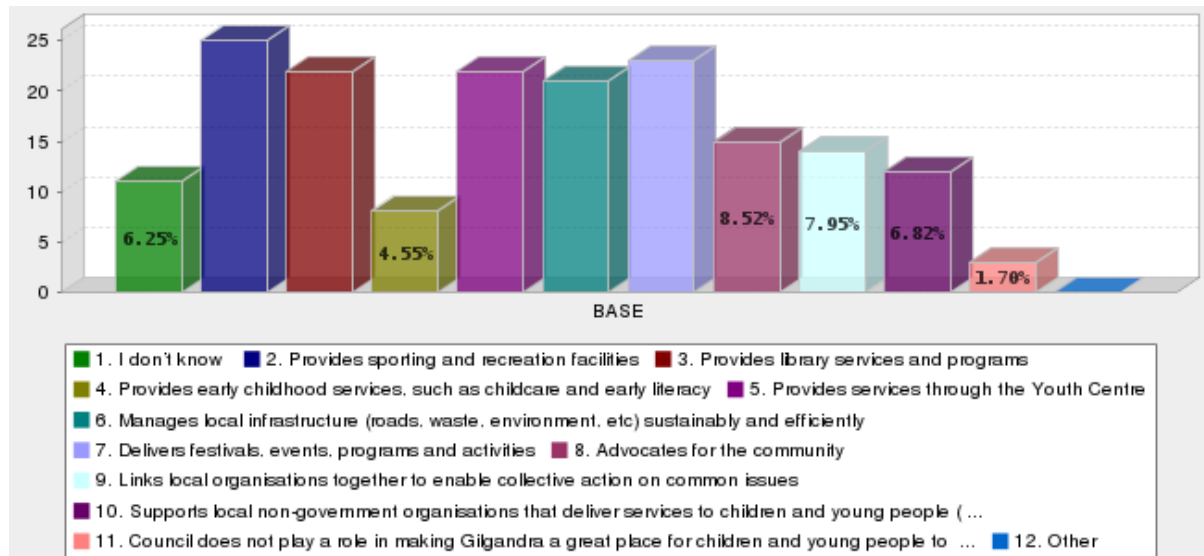


Response	Number	%
I know a lot	7	17.5%
I have a basic understanding	18	45.0%
I know very little	10	25.0%
I know nothing	5	12.5%
Total	40	

What role does Council play in making Gilgandra a great place for children and young people to live?

Council's role in providing sporting and recreation facilities and delivering festivals, events, programs and activities were the most frequently recognised functions, followed by the provision of library services and the Youth Centre, which each achieved a score of 12.5%. Management of local infrastructure was also clustered with these areas of higher awareness.

Council's role in providing early childhood services was the least well known service area.



Response	Number	%
Provides sporting and recreation facilities	25	14.2%
Delivers festivals, events, programs and activities	23	13.1%
Provides library services and programs	22	12.5%
Provides services through the Youth Centre	22	12.5%
Manages local infrastructure (roads, waste, environment, etc)	21	11.9%
Advocates for the community	15	8.5%
Links local organisations together to enable collective action on common issues	14	8.0%
Supports local non-government organisations that deliver services to children and young people (eg: grants programs, affordable venues, business advice)	12	6.82%
I don't know	11	6.3%

Provides early childhood services, such as childcare and early literacy	8	4.6%
Council does not play a role in making Gilgandra a great place for children and young people to live	3	1.7%
Other	0	0.0%
Total	176	

How would you like Gilgandra Shire Council to get your opinion on things happening in your local area?

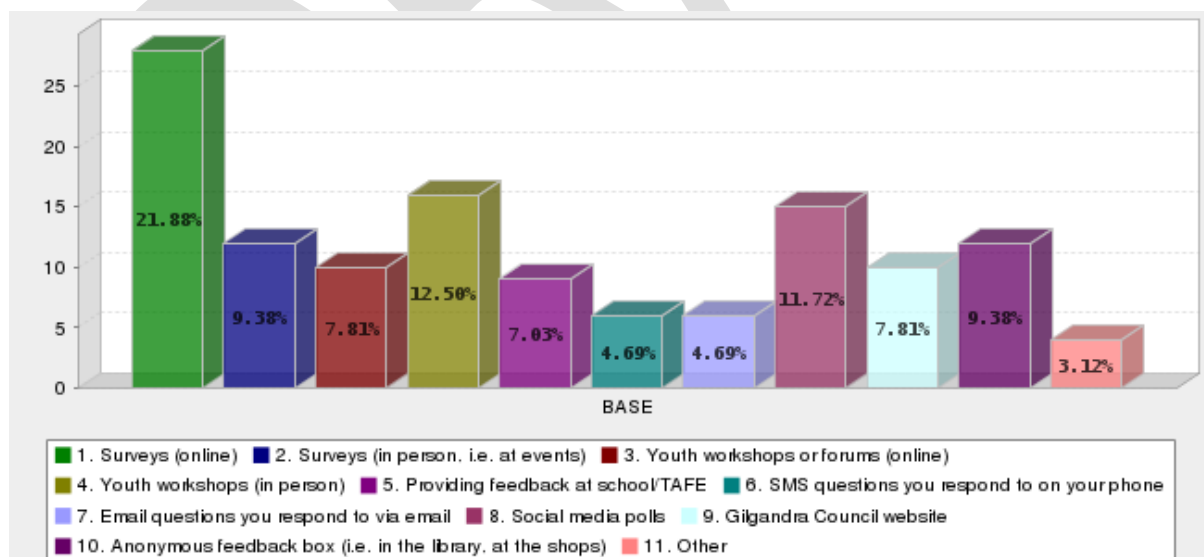
Perhaps not surprisingly, given that respondents were completing an online survey, just over 20% of responses suggested a preference for providing opinions via online surveys.

Interestingly, attending 'in person' workshops around youth issues was the second most common response (12.5%) which indicates possible future interest in participating in committees and working groups.

Participating in social media polls (11.7%), responding to surveys 'in person' at events (9.4%) and providing feedback anonymously via a 'feedback box' in public spaces (9.4%) were also relatively frequent responses.

An interesting 'other' response was the suggestion that:

I wouldn't do it face to face it has to be anonymously otherwise repercussions and punishment



Response	Number	%
Surveys (online)	28	21.9%

Youth workshops (in person)	16	12.5%
Social media polls	15	11.7%
Surveys (in person, i.e. at events)	12	9.4%
Anonymous feedback box (i.e. in the library, at the shops)	12	9.4%
Youth workshops or forums (online)	10	7.8%
Gilgandra Council website	10	7.8%
Providing feedback at school/TAFE	9	7.0%
SMS questions you respond to on your phone	6	4.7%
Email questions you respond to via email	6	4.7%
Other	4	3.1%
Total	128	

Would you be interested in doing any of the following Council-related activities?

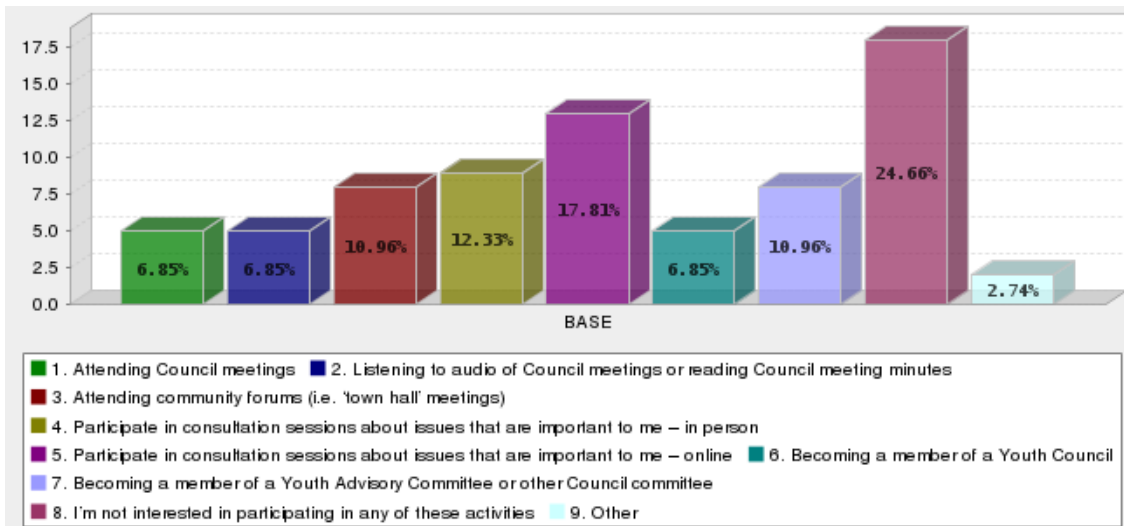
While almost 75% of the responses provided indicated an interest in participating in Council-related activities, a quarter of responses indicated no interest.

Notably, a majority of responses (30%) indicated interest in participation (online or in-person) in relation to specific issues of importance to the respondent, rather than in participation generally.

Encouragingly, 11% of responses indicated an interest in attending 'in person' community forums, while almost 18% of responses showed interest in being part of a Youth Council or a youth representative on Council committees.

One response, to the 'other' category reported:

Our community opinion means nothing they do what they want anyway



Response	Number	%
I'm not interested in participating in any of these activities	18	24.7%
Participate in consultation sessions about issues that are important to me – online	13	17.8%
Participate in consultation sessions about issues that are important to me – in person	9	12.3%
Attending community forums (i.e. 'town hall' meetings)	8	11.0%
Becoming a member of a Youth Advisory Committee or other Council committee	8	11.0%
Becoming a member of a Youth Council	5	6.9%
Attending Council meetings	5	6.9%
Listening to audio of Council meetings or reading Council meeting minutes	5	6.9%
Other	2	2.7%
Total	73	100%

In the last six months how many interactions would you say you have had with your local Councillors?

More than half of respondents reported minimal, if any, contact with Councillors in recent months.

Response	Number	%
0-1	26	63.4%

2-4	7	17.1%
4-6	3	7.3%
More than 6	5	12.2%
Total	41	

Do you want to have your say about the Youth Strategy in a focus group consultation with University of Newcastle's peer researchers?

Response	Number	%
Yes	12	29.3%
No	29	70.7%
Total	41	

Appendix C

Youth Strategy – Community Engagement Strategy

Method: It is proposed to utilise a mixed method qualitative approach, which engages in peer-to-peer knowledge exchange (Mollica et al. 2024) for the focus group cohorts between the ages of 12-25 (youth cohort). Peer-to-peer exchanges provide significant insights as they generate a responsive problem-solving environment, which centres the voices of young people to create solutions to problems identified.

To capture a diverse range of perceptions and to ensure a holistic strategy is developed, alongside the traditional focus group method, we are also proposing a reflective exercise known as 'word-clouding'. This method will allow us to anonymously elicit sentiment, and perspectives on the issues most important to young people from a diverse cohort.

For adult focus group cohorts, we propose employing a youth-led, adult supported reflective approach. While questions are designed to elicit perspectives on needs, services and supports, we are also proposing a strategy that captures sentiment. This will ensure a holistic strategy is developed, which draws not only on adult experiences in their role as parents, caregivers or service providers, but also seeks to capture their historical experiences growing up in your town, moving to or returning home after a period of absence in their youth.

To elicit reflective responses, we propose utilising a photo-elicitation strategy (Shaw 2021). To develop a responsive, needs-based, evidence informed youth strategy we seek a diverse tapestry of stories and perspectives. This will ensure that community responses are integral to the final strategy recommended.

We provide a series of illustrative questions below for each cohort, yet we recognise that it is unlikely we will get through all questions in an hour. To conduct these focus groups, we adopt a semi-structured approach (Horten et. al 2024), which utilises questions as a guide, but is driven by participant discussion. This aligns with our commitment to the responsive and reflective approach noted above. For clarity in the review process, we have ordered the questions from most important – least important and welcome suggestions about ordering.

Consultation Cohort: Adolescents aged 12-18

- a) **Word-clouding activity** for adolescents
- b) **2 x focus groups** with this cohort: 12–15-year-olds; 16–18-year-olds.

Word clouding

In addition to focus group, we are also proposing that we place butchers' paper or a whiteboard/blackboard (with post it notes) in the foyer of the library or in a café (location of Council's choosing). The board will offer an invitation to people to 'have their say' and each day the question on the board will change.

PROPOSED WORD CLOUDING QUESTIONS

DAY ONE: What do you like about?

DAY TWO: Draw your dream town?

DAY THREE: What social activity/group would you like to participate in that you don't already?

DAY FOUR: Finish this sentence – "On the weekend I like to....."

a) Focus Groups with Adolescents:

Proposal for days, location: **During school holidays (Second week beginning 7 October). At a location to be provided by Council.**

PROPOSED TIMES: Focus group for 12–18-year-olds between 3-30-4:30pm to ensure we don't disrupt their participation in any during the day activities

Approximately 10 participants per session.

FIRST FIFTEEN MINUTES OF THE FOCUS GROUPS– Icebreakers

General demographic data	Reflection Exercise
	Groups will be provided with butcher's paper for this exercise. As they are drawing, we will ask them to talk about and reflect on how these might represent recommended actions for a youth strategy.
How old are you?	Draw or describe what "community" means to you? What do you like about living here?

	What do you like to do when you are not in school
Do you identify as Female, Male, Non-Binary, prefer not to say?	Describe or draw your “dream town” If you could do anything, what would you like to do when you leave school? Do you see yourself living in here when you are older.
How long have you lived here	What “youth strategy” means to you? FINISH THE SENTENCE: My community needs a youth strategy because....

Illustrative Focus Group Questions (cohort 12-18-years old):

PLEASE NOTE: In accordance with the semi-structured interview approach outlined above, focus groups are designed to be community driven. As such, these questions offer a guide for the discussion, but t are not exhaustive, and do not reflect all follow up questions that may be asked in response to the discussion that occurs.

The research team has been trained to listen for verbal ques and to ask follow-up questions accordingly.

SERVICES INTERESTS AND NEEDS

- 1) Are there opportunities to participate in groups that align with your interests?
- 2) How would you describe the barriers to your participation in community?
- 3) If you could do anything, what would you like to do when you leave school?
- 4) What groups/activities would you like to see Council support?
- 5) Why do you travel outside your community?
- 6) How has the town changed?
Have you had friend move away? Why?

CIVIC KNOWLEDGE

- 7) What does government mean to you?
- 8) What does “Council” mean to you?
- 9) What sorts of things do you think council provides?
- 10) Finish the sentence “I would like to get involved with my local council by...”
- 11) Would you participate in a youth council?

FOLLOW UP:

- **If yes**, what would you like the council to look like?
- What sorts of activities would you want to youth council to be responsible for?
- What level of interaction would you like to see with elected councillors?
- **If no**, what barriers prevent you from participating?
- What sort of incentives might encourage you to participate?

VOLUNTEERING

- 12) Describe what “volunteering” means to you?
- 13) Where do you see volunteering happening in your community?
- 14) Where are volunteers most needed?
- 15) What are the opportunities for volunteering?
- 16) What opportunities would you like there to be?
- 17) How many hours can you physically see yourself volunteering?

FOLLOW UP (if no):

- What are the factors that prevent you from volunteering in your community?

PROBLEM SOLVING/RECOMMENDATIONS

- 18) “We have talked about a lot of issues today” - Of all these which do you believe is the most important?

FOLLOW UP

- Why have you identified this as the most important issue?
- If you were the mayor, what would you be doing to solve this issue?”

PROBLEM SOLVING/ RECOMMENDATION BUILDING – Final 10 mins of the discussion

- 1) “We have talked about a lot of issues today” - Of all these which do you believe is the most important?

POTENTIAL FOLLOW UP QUESTIONS:

- Why is this the most important issue for your family/child?
 - How does this issue directly impact on your child?
- 2) “If you were the mayor, what would you be doing to solve this issue?”

Focus Group Cohort: Youth 18-25

Approximately 10 participants per session.

FIRST FIFTEEN MINUTES OF THE FOCUS GROUPS – Icebreakers

General demographic data	Reflection Exercise Groups will be provided with butcher’s paper for this exercise. As they are drawing, we will ask them to talk about and reflect on how these might represent recommended actions for a youth strategy.
How old are you?	Draw or describe what “community” means to you? What do you like about living here? What do you like to do when you are not in school
Do you identify as Female, Male, Non-Binary, prefer not to say?	Describe or draw your “dream town” If you could do anything, what would you like to do when you leave school? Do you see yourself living here when you are older.

How long have you lived here?	What “youth strategy” means to you?
How would you describe your employment/education status?	FINISH THE SENTENCE: My community needs a youth strategy because....

Within the focus group: Pair 18-20-year-olds with 21-25-years old. To facilitate peer engagement and encouragement.

Approximately 10 participants per session.

Illustrative Focus Group Questions:

PLEASE NOTE: In accordance with the semi-structured interview approach outlined above, focus groups are designed to be community driven. As such, these questions offer a guide for the discussion, but t are not exhaustive, and do not reflect all follow up questions that may be asked in response to the discussion that occurs.

The research team has been trained to listen for verbal ques and to ask follow-up questions accordingly.

COMMUNITY/PLACE

- 1) What do you like to do on a Friday and Saturday Night
- 2) Do you have any weeknight activities?
- 3) Are there places in town you avoid or don't feel welcome in as a young person?
- 4) How would you describe the barriers to your participation in community?
- 5) How do you get around town?
- 6) For what reasons do you leave?

FOLLOW UP QUESTIONS:

- How do you get there?
 - What elements of other towns/cities would you like to see?
- 7) Finish the sentence “I would be interested in participating more in my community by...”
 - 8) Finish the sentence “I would like to see the following events supported here....”

MOVEMENT

- 9) Have your friends moved away?

FOLLOW UP QUESTIONS:

- What factors caused them to leave?
 - Where did they go?
- 10) Why did you stay?
 - 11) What factors might lead you to leave in the future?

HOBBIES

- 12) What do you do in your free time?

- 13) Are there opportunities to participate in groups that align with your hobbies?
- 14) What groups are you currently involved in?
- 15) If the Council was to create groups, what activities would they involve?
- 16) What do you like to do when you aren't at working or studying?

VOLUNTEERING

- 17) Describe what "volunteering" means to you?
- 18) Where do you see volunteering happening in your community?
- 19) Where are volunteers most needed?
- 20) What are the opportunities for volunteering?
- 21) What opportunities would you like there to be?

FOLLOW UP QUESTION:

- How many hours can you physically see yourself volunteering?
- What are the factors that prevent you from volunteering in your community?

PROBLEM SOLVING/ RECOMMENDATION BUILDING – Final 10 mins of the discussion

- 3) "We have talked about a lot of issues today" - Of all these which do you believe is the most important?

POTENTIAL FOLLOW UP QUESTIONS:

- Why is this the most important issue for your family/child?
 - How does this issue directly impact on your child?
- 4) "If you were the mayor, what would you be doing to solve this issue?"

Focus group discussions outlined below are specifically to fulfil the requirements of the Gilgandra Tender.

Focus Group Cohort: Parents & Caregivers 0-5

TARGET PARTICIPANT: **Approximately 10 participants**

STAGE ONE OF FOCUS GROUP: 10 mins

Community Groups to Engage	General demographic data	Reflection Exercise
		<p>A series of photos are shown to focus group participants.</p> <p>Photos will be taken by researchers upon arrival. Please note no images of children will be included (Proposed photos: Storytime, Medical centre, Hunter Park play equipment, Primary school).</p>

library Storytime	How many children do you have?	For each photo, participants are asked to talk about the significance of the photo for the lives of their children/their family.
Barnardo's supported playground	How would you describe the location where you raise your family (in town, farm lane, border district)?	As part of the discussion, they are also asked to reflect and share about whether the photo represents their own childhood, youth <i>and</i> how.
	How would you describe the make-up of your family (multi-generational, single parent etc.)	

Illustrative Focus Group Questions:

PLEASE NOTE: In accordance with the semi-structured interview approach outlined above, focus groups are designed to be community driven. As such, these questions offer a guide for the discussion, but t are not exhaustive, and do not reflect all follow up questions that may be asked in response to the discussion that occurs.

The research team has been trained to listen for verbal ques and to ask follow-up questions accordingly.

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY:

- 1) Why have you chosen here as the place to raise your children?
- 2) Finish this statement: "A youth strategy is important for my family's future because..."

POTENTIAL FOLLOW UP QUESTION:

- Have you always lived here?
 - If no, what made you move here?
 - If there is discussion about moving away and returning: what made you move back?
- 3) How does the community support you in raising your children?
 - 4) How do you as parents/caregivers of young children support your community?
 - 5) What barriers do you faces participating in community as a family with young children?
 - 6) How would you describe the role of Council in families' lives?

ACITIVITES, NEEDS AND SERVICES

- 7) Do your children participate in activities?
- 8) Are these activities financially accessible to you?

POTENTIAL FOLLOW UP QUESTIONS:

- What support would you like to see provided to increase the accessibility of services?

- 9) As your child/ren grow - what sorts of activities do you hope are available to them?
- 10) How would you describe the needs of your children?

POTENTIAL FOLLOW UP QUESTIONS:

- How have these needs impacted how you interact within the community?
- 11) What services, experiences, activities are missing within the community?

PROBLEM SOLVING QUESTIONS/RECOMMENDATION OPPORTUNITY

- 12) “We have talked about a lot of issues today” - Of all these which do you believe is the most important?

POTENTIAL FOLLOW UP:

- Why have you identified this as being the most important?
- 13) “If you were the mayor, what would you be doing to solve this issue?”

VOLUNTEERING

- 14) What is your opinion on volunteering?
- 15) How do you see volunteering functioning in your community?
- 16) Would your community benefit from more volunteer engagement?
- 17) Where are volunteers most needed?
- 18) What are the opportunities for volunteering?

POTENTIAL FOLLOW UP:

- What opportunities would like there to be? (How many hours can you physically see yourself volunteering?).
- 19) Of all the options that have been talked about, what areas/services would you see yourself volunteering with?

IN THE FINAL 10MINS

- 20) Is there anything else you would like to tell us that you believe is important for the development of a youth strategy.

Consultation Cohort: Adults/Caregivers with children 6-12

a) Focus Groups

FIRST TEN MINUTES OF THE DISCUSSION – Icebreakers

Community Members to engage	General demographic data	Reflection Exercise A series of photos are shown to focus group participants.
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		Photos will be taken by researchers upon arrival. Please note no images of children will be included (Proposed photos: Storytime, Medical centre, Hunter Park play equipment, Primary school).
Parents and caregivers of this cohort (focus group): 10-15 participants	How many children do you have?	For each photo, participants are asked to talk about the significance of the photo for the lives of their children/their family.
	How would you describe the location where you raise your family (in town, farm lane, border district)?	As part of the discussion, they are also asked to reflect and share about whether the photo represents their own childhood, youth <i>and</i> how.
	How would you describe the make-up of your family (multi-generational, single parent etc.)	FINISH THE SENTENCE My community needs a youth strategy because....

Illustrative Focus Group Questions:

PLEASE NOTE: In accordance with the semi-structured interview approach outlined above, focus groups are designed to be community driven. As such, these questions offer a guide for the discussion, but are not exhaustive, and do not reflect all follow up questions that may be asked in response to the discussion that occurs.

The research team has been trained to listen for verbal cues and to ask follow-up questions accordingly.

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

- 1) Why have you chosen here as the place to raise your children?
- 2) How does the community support your children and your family?
- 3) How do you as parents/caregivers of young children support your community?

POTENTIAL FOLLOW UP:

- What benefit do you see for your children when you support your community?
- 4) What barriers do you face participating in community as a family with young children?
 - 5) How would you describe the role of Council in families' lives?

ACTIVITIES, NEEDS AND SERVICE

- 5) Do your children participate in activities?
- 6) Are the current activities that your children participate in financially sustainable?
- 7) Are there activities that are not financially accessible to you?

- If yes, what are they?
- 8) As your child/ren grow - what sorts of activities do you hope are available to them?
- 9) Have you noticed a decrease (**quality and number**) in the services available to your children?
- 10) Beside financial, are there other barriers that prevent you from placing your child in an activity?
- 11) How would you describe the needs of your children?
 - Are there any other needs that you family have, which are important but may not directly impact your child?
- 12) What challenges exist for you to have these needs met?
- 13) How would you describe your experience accessing services for your children?

EDUCATION

- 14) How well do local schools or preschools support your child/children's learning or accessibility needs?
- 15) Do you children talk to you about their school?
 - If yes, what types of things do they talk with you about?
 - If no, how do you get information about your child's experience at school?
- 16) What other education support would you like to see available?

PROBLEM SOLVING/ RECOMMENDATION BUILDING

- 17) "We have talked about a lot of issues today" - Of all these which do you believe is the most important?

POTENTIAL FOLLOW UP QUESTIONS:

- Why is this the most important issue for your family/child?
- How does this issue directly impact on your child?
- 18) "If you were the mayor, what would you be doing to solve this issue?"

VOLUNTEERING

- 19) What is your opinion on volunteering?
- 20) How do you see volunteering functioning in your community?
- 21) Would your community benefit from volunteering?
- 22) Where are volunteers most needed?
- 23) What are the opportunities for volunteering?

POTENTIAL FOLLOW UP QUESTIONS:

- What opportunities would like there to be for volunteering?
- How many hours can you physically see yourself volunteering?

Focus Group Cohort: Community members from neighbouring districts

Proposal to conduct 1 x online focus group (via teams or zoom) with this cohort to gather insights about the relationship between these communities.

TIMING: In the week following the community consultation.

RATIONALE: Allows for an analysis of the similarities and differences. Provides an acknowledgement of how individuals move between communities.

Approximately 10 participants.

FIRST TEN MINUTES OF THE DISCUSSION – Icebreakers

Community Members to engage	General demographic data	Reflection Exercise
		<p>A series of photos are shown to focus group participants.</p> <p>Photos will be taken by researchers upon arrival. Please note no images of children will be included (Proposed photos: Storytime, Medical centre, Hunter Park play equipment, Primary school).</p>
TBD (Joel and Ellen to do some research on community groups in neighbouring districts)	How old are you?	For each photo, participants are asked to talk about the significance of the photo for the lives of their children/their family.
	Which community are you from?	As part of the discussion, they are also asked to reflect and share about whether the photo represents their own childhood, youth <i>and</i> how.
	How would you describe your employment/education status?	FINISH THE SENTENCE: Gilgandra community needs a youth strategy because....

Illustrative Focus Group Questions:

PLEASE NOTE: In accordance with the semi-structured interview approach outlined above, focus groups are designed to be community driven. As such, these questions offer a guide for the discussion, but are not exhaustive, and do not reflect all follow up questions that may be asked in response to the discussion that occurs.

The research team has been trained to listen for verbal cues and to ask follow-up questions accordingly.

RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER NEIGHBOURING COMMUNITIES

- 1) What is your relationship with the neighbouring shire?
- 2) What interactions have you had with shire?
- 3) How often do you visit?

INTERACTIONS WITH AND SUPPORT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

- 4) Why have you chosen this area to raise your children?
- 5) How does your community support your children and your family?
- 6) How do you as parents/caregivers support your community?

7) What barriers do you face participating in community as a family with children?

NEEDS AND SERVICES

- 8) As your child/ren grow - what sorts of activities do you hope are available to them?
- 9) How would you describe the needs of your family?
- 10) What challenges exist for you to have these needs met?
- 11) How would you describe your experience accessing services for your children?

COMMUNITY AND COUNCIL

- 12) How has the town changed?
- 13) What changes have you observed?
- 14) How would you describe the role of Council in families' lives?

PROBLEM SOLVING/ RECOMMENDATION BUILDING – Final 10 mins of the discussion

- 15) "We have talked about a lot of issues today" - Of all these which do you believe is the most important?

POTENTIAL FOLLOW UP QUESTIONS:

- Why is this the most important issue for your family/child?
- How does this issue directly impact on your child?

- 16) "If you were the mayor, what would you be doing to solve this issue?"

Focus Group Cohort: Service Providers

Proposal to conduct 1 x online focus group (via teams or zoom) with this cohort to gather insights about the relationship between young people and those who interact most with them.

Timing: To be conducted the week following community engagement

Approximately 10-15 participants.

FIRST TEN MINUTES OF THE DISCUSSION – Icebreakers

Community Members to engage	General demographic data	Reflection Exercise A series of photos are shown to focus group participants. Photos will be taken by researchers upon arrival. Please note no images of children will be included (Proposed photos: Storytime, Medical centre, Hunter Park play equipment, Primary school).
TBD (Joel and Ellen to do some research on community stakeholders)	How old are you?	For each photo, participants are asked to talk about the significance of the photo for the lives of their children/their family.

Council to recommend stakeholders they would like us specifically to invite.	How would you describe your role in the community?	As part of the discussion, they are also asked to reflect and share about whether the photo represents their own childhood, youth <i>and</i> how.
	How would you describe your employment/education status?	FINISH THE SENTENCE: Gilgandra community needs a youth strategy because....

Illustrative Focus Group Questions:

PLEASE NOTE: In accordance with the semi-structured interview approach outlined above, focus groups are designed to be community driven. As such, these questions offer a guide for the discussion, but are not exhaustive, and do not reflect all follow up questions that may be asked in response to the discussion that occurs.

The research team has been trained to listen for verbal cues and to ask follow-up questions accordingly.

INTERACTIONS WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

- 1) In your opinion what does “young person” mean?
- 2) Describe the interactions that you have with young people?
- 3) In your opinion, are there differences between the needs of youth and children?

FOLLOW UP QUESTION:

- Do these differences inform your interactions with these cohorts
- 4) What have you learnt from interacting the young people?
 - 5) Finish the sentence... “the relationship I would like to have with young people is...”
 - 6) Finish the sentence... “the role young people should have in community is....”

SERVICES AND NEEDS

- 7) What are some of the barriers that young people face accessing your services?
- 8) What are the opportunities that are created for young people by your services?
- 9) What barriers do you face providing your service to young people?

CHANGES IN COMMUNITY

- 10) How have the community changed in the last five years?
- 11) How has that impacted the work that you do with young people?

PROBLEM SOLVING/ RECOMMENDATION BUILDING – Final 10 mins of the discussion

- 17) “We have talked about a lot of issues today” - Of all these which do you believe is the most important?

POTENTIAL FOLLOW UP QUESTIONS:

- Why is this the most important issue for your family/child?

- How does this issue directly impact on your child?

18) "If you were the mayor, what would you be doing to solve this issue?"

DRAFT

Appendix D

Gilgandra TAFE Data

All Gilgandra TAFE course offered on campus, combination and virtual classroom on campus and workplace

Course	Qualification level	Locations of study	Study options	Cost	Course Duration	Weekly study hours Community Engagement/Consultation) Report	Jobs available after study/skills
Advance Responsible Conduct of Gambling	TAFE Statement	On Campus	Part time	\$330	1 day	Class time 6h Additional Study 1h	
Apply First Aid and CPR	Statement of Attainment	On Campus Combination	Part time Full Time	\$200	1 day	Class time 8h Additional Study 6h.	First Aid Certified
Career Advancement	Certificate III	On campus Virtual Classroom on Campus.	Full Time	\$6,950	4 Months.	20h per week	Workplace stills
Career Preparation	Certificate II	Combination	Part Time	\$4,480	4 Months.	Class time 10h Additional study 5h	Workplace skills
Disability Support	Certificate IV	Virtual Classroom on Campus	Self-Paced	Not given	6 months.	Class time 8h additional Study 10h	Disability support Community support
Early Childhood Education and Care	Diploma	Combination	Part Time	Not given	1 year 6 months.	Class time 6h additional study 12h	Childcare worker/educator nanny
Early childhood Education and care	Certificate III	Combination Virtual Classroom on Campus.	Part time	Not given	1 year 6 months	Class time 6h Additional Study 10h	Childcare worker/educator nanny
Individual Support (Disability)	Certificate III	Combination Virtual Classroom on Campus.	Part Time.	Not given	12 months.	4h class time, 10h additional Study per week.	Disability services
Pathways to Further Study (Year 11 equivalent)	Certificate III	Combination Virtual Classroom on Campus.	Full time	\$0-\$8220	6 months	Class time 17h Additional study 17h	Further study: pathway to university Year 11 equivalent study
Provide First Aid in an education	Statement of attainment	On Campus Combination	Part Time Full time.	\$205	1 day	Class time 8h	First Aid Certified worker

and care setting						Additional Study 7h	
Provide Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation	Statement of Attainment	On Campus Combination	Part Time Full Time.	\$80	1 day	4h class and study time	First Aid certified worker
Retail Services	Certificate II	Combination	Full Time	\$0-\$4,330	4 months	Class time 16h Additional Study 4h	Retail worker Further study for retail management required
School Based Education Support	Certificate III	Combination	Part Time	Not given	12 months	Class time 10h Additional Study 10h	School learning support Community education support Tutor Nanny
School Based Education Support	Certificate IV	Combination	Part Time	Not given	12 months	Class time 10h Additional Study 10h	School learning support Community education support Tutor Nanny
Tertiary Preparation	Certificate IV	Combination Virtual classroom on campus	Full time	\$0-\$12,360	12 Months	Class time 12h Additional Study 12h	Pathway to University Pathway to TAFE Diploma



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