

**YOUTH
ACTION**

YOUNG PEOPLE IN GREATER WESTERN SYDNEY

BEYOND STEREOTYPES



JUNE 2017

'Our community never fails to come together when needed... It is simple things like this that make me believe Western Sydney is one of the greatest places to live in Australia.'

FEMALE, 17, SOUTH WEST SYDNEY



Snapshot

Greater Western Sydney is home to 470,000¹ young people – many of whom have been negatively impacted by stereotypes and inaccurate depictions of the region.

This report gathers the real life experiences of young people in the region and challenges these stereotypes. The results demonstrate the successes of Greater Western Sydney, and highlights four main elements that make it thrive:

PEOPLE

People in Western Sydney are **welcoming** and accepting.



COMMUNITY

Western Sydney is a **connected, supportive, friendly** community.



CULTURE

Western Sydney celebrates **cultural diversity**.



PLACE

Young people love the **uniqueness** of Western Sydney.



1. Australian Bureau of Statistics (2016), Population by Age and Sex, Regions of Australia, 2015 (cat. no. 3235.0). Note: Figure based on 2015 Estimated Resident Population – 30 June 2015. There were 469,629 persons aged 10-24 years in the identified Greater Western Sydney region.

Introduction

In April 2017, Youth Action asked young people aged 12–25 years in Greater Western Sydney 'What Makes You Smile About Where You Live?'. 857 young people responded, sharing what they love, like, and feel happy about when thinking of where they live.

Greater Western Sydney is undergoing transformative economic growth, demographic change, and major infrastructure investment that will alter the region forever.

In future-proofing the region – which is home to two million people – governments, policymakers, and community leaders are tasked with challenging negative stereotypes about the Greater West, and highlighting the positive stories and experiences that make the region a great place to live.

Stories and experiences of young people demonstrate the strength of the region – which for decision-makers can be leveraged to further grow the social, cultural, and economic capital of the region.

Young people demonstrated excitement and positivity about living in Western Sydney. This is not to be mistaken for naivety, but rather an optimism for the hopes that they hold for the future. Nor does it gloss over the region's challenges – from unemployment to infrastructure –

but it does show the solid base from which a positive picture of growing up in Western Sydney can be built.

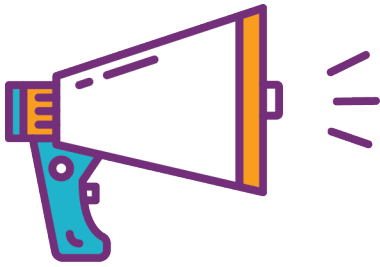
Western Sydney is not a cultural wasteland as it is often portrayed, but is vibrant and loved, and showcases the best of Australian society.

This powerful message from the young people who know the region best needs to be heard by Western Sydney's decision-makers and leaders.



Figure 1: Responses to the question 'What makes you smile about where you live?'

The word cloud above represents the key words that were presented in survey responses – the larger the word, the more often it appeared.



WHAT DID YOUNG PEOPLE TELL US?

Interestingly, many responses began with feelings: 'I love...' and 'I feel...', as well as adjectives such as beautiful, amazing, and unique.

The affective nature of the responses (what people feel, as much as what they think) suggests young people feel best about Greater Western Sydney when

they are engaged and experience acceptance and belonging.

The picture most often painted of young people, particularly in Western Sydney, is negative. This creates a sense of inadequacy, and young people are seen as a problem to fix. Alternatively, young people could be seen through a strength-based model – seeing young people as agents of their own destiny and as assets who contribute to confronting the broader challenges facing the region.

This survey confirms that the young people identify themselves within this strength model – presenting a strong sense of agency and engagement. While this can partly be attributed to the positive nature of the survey questions, the word cloud and analyses confirms that the young people in this survey directly associate their own actions and relationships with the vibrancy and success of the Greater Western Sydney community.

It's a hub of culture, arts, storytelling and entrepreneurship

FEMALE, 21, WESTERN SYDNEY



What makes young people smile about living in Western Sydney?

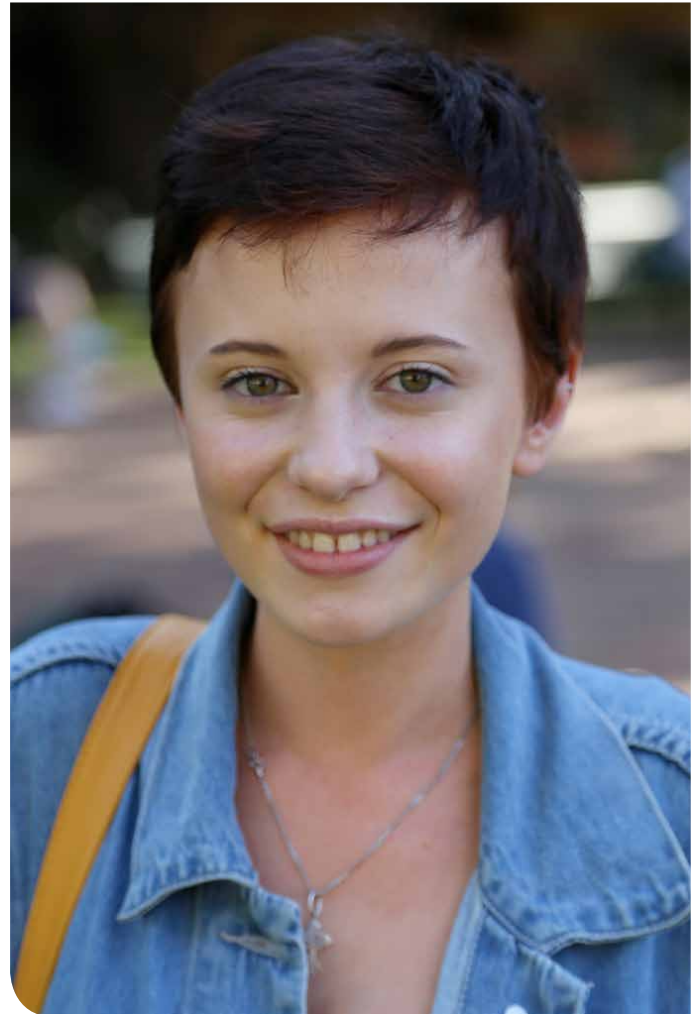
THEME ONE: PEOPLE

PEOPLE IN WESTERN SYDNEY ARE WELCOMING AND ACCEPTING.

The people of Western Sydney were central to making respondents smile.

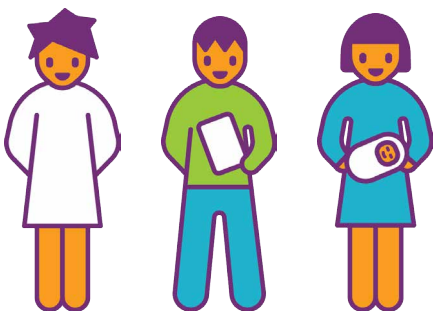
People were linked to home, family, friends and neighbourhoods as well as to diversity and a sense of community. When describing their neighbourhood, young people said that Western Sydney people are accepting of diverse cultures and that they feel supported in this diversity. This was a central reason that young people described feeling lucky to be part of Western Sydney.

Diversity meant many things – diverse cultures, diverse natural landscapes and diverse backgrounds. Diversity was expressed in values, beliefs and difference. It linked to feelings young people had towards their opportunities – to grow, to learn and to develop a sense of belonging, and enabling acceptance of others.



Our own circle of friends brings in thousands of years of different traditions, cultures and attitudes – it's a world of love where people are learning about themselves and others.

FEMALE, 25, SOUTH WEST SYDNEY



THEME TWO: COMMUNITY

WESTERN SYDNEY IS A STRONG,
SUPPORTIVE, FRIENDLY COMMUNITY.

People were also linked to
community – to feelings of
care, support, and safety.

This was highlighted in the links between people and their immediate communities. Connections with neighbours, quiet streets, and local events were all linked around this theme. This shows how young people value the experience of 'neighbouring' – the set of relationships and practices which generate belonging, emotional support, status, and respect. This active building of relationships, coupled with a sense that others care, were reflected in the way respondents described their neighbourhoods and streets.

Young people also highlighted the importance of friends, family and neighbourhoods, saying they feel supported by people around them, including their neighbours and teachers. As well as discussing their peers as friends, the young people talked about the friendliness of others, the friendliness of the community and how they felt accepted because of this.



What makes me smile about where I live
is that my neighbourhood is very friendly.

At school I have amazing friends that
support me and are very close to me.

MALE, 12, SOUTH WEST SYDNEY

What makes young people smile about living in Western Sydney?



THEME THREE: CULTURE

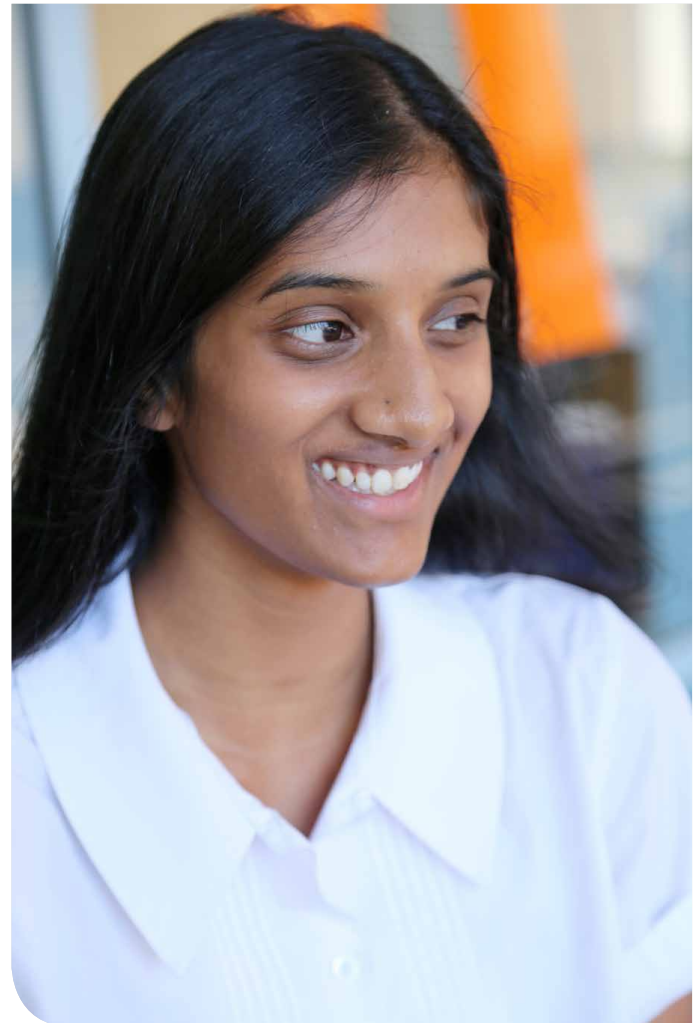
WESTERN SYDNEY CELEBRATES CULTURAL DIVERSITY.

Young people clearly identified 'cultural difference' as unique and valuable to Greater Western Sydney – differentiating it, in a positive way, from other Sydney regions, and celebrating it.

Difference was attributed to cultures, backgrounds, languages, and foods, and something respondents welcomed and embraced.

Living in Western Sydney has meaning in the feeling of being immersed in a multicultural place. Rather than perceiving attitudes that exclude some ethnic and cultural backgrounds, the respondents felt that people in Western Sydney actively encourage diversity and multiculturalism. Multiculturalism was expressed in the more predictable ways mentioned above – food, customs, language – but also at a deeper level: by learning from others and hearing others' stories and backgrounds.

Some young people noted that 'diversity' in Western Sydney had changed over time. Acceptance was also a common theme, not only of ethnicity and cultural background, but also of gender and sexual orientation.



I love how diverse our community is and how accepting we are of other cultures. I think many communities are misunderstood, especially recent refugees and migrants. But once you really get to know them, they let down their guard and there's so much that we can learn from them.

FEMALE, 22, SOUTH WEST SYDNEY



THEME FOUR: PLACE

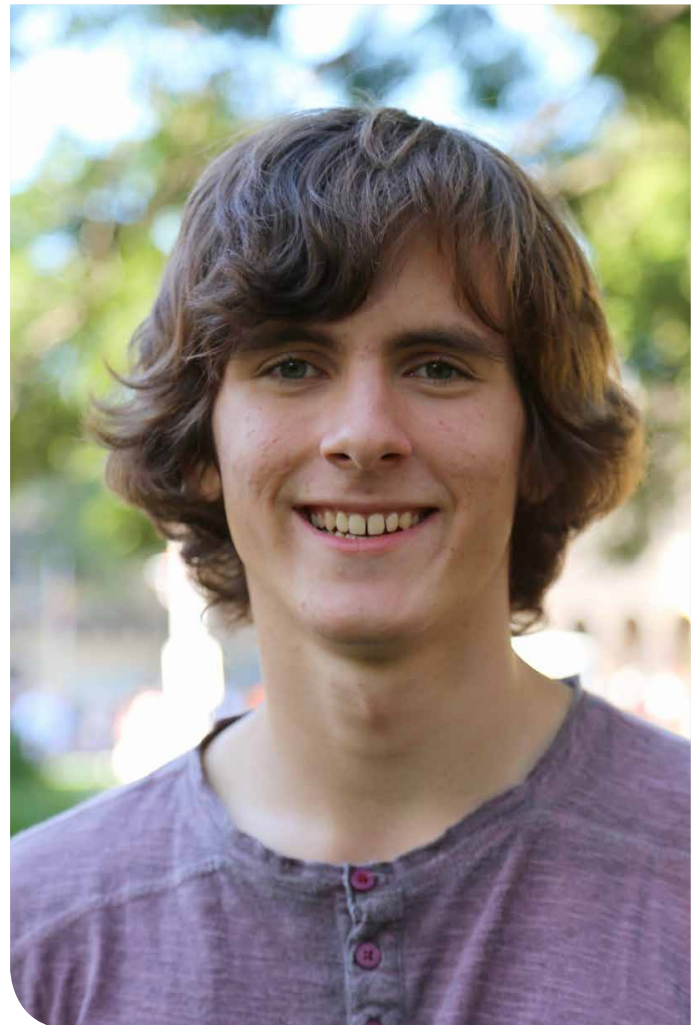
YOUNG PEOPLE LOVE THE UNIQUENESS OF WESTERN SYDNEY.

Places are made special by the experiences that embed them in memory and create attachment to specific areas.

Places are not just physical or geographical locations, but sites that nurture the creation of identity and feelings of belonging. A place gives us a sense of safety and comfort and it is something that was identified as unique in Western Sydney. The word 'love' emerged consistently in survey responses.

The theme of Place linked to home, community and people – in a way bringing the other three themes together. Western Sydney was noted to be unique, and different from other parts of Sydney, but at the same time not separate from the rest of the city.

The beauty of the natural environment was identified as a point of difference between Western Sydney and the greater Sydney region. The biodiversity, the open spaces, views of the Blue Mountains and the surrounding valleys and the quality of fresh air made young people smile about living in Western Sydney. The natural environment was also linked to homes, sporting events, and pets.



I love how supportive and protective the community is of each other, particularly when media/other parts of Sydney latch on to negative stereotypes.

FEMALE, 23, SOUTH WEST SYDNEY

Regional break down

In addition to the aggregate analysis, the data was divided to have a deeper insight into three subregions:

People, cultural diversity, and community were key themes across all three regions – something clearly captured in the overall snapshot. There were also some small but significant differences. For example, in the Nepean/Blue Mountains region, young people pointed to opportunities around them, engaging in the changing urban environment and commenting on local development. In Western Sydney, diversity and culture take centre stage with the value of cultural, ethnic and religious differences being foregrounded. In South West Sydney people, culture, diversity, and community are highlighted but with a more localised dimension of home and school.





1. NEPEAN/BLUE MOUNTAINS

BLUE MOUNTAINS, HAWKESBURY, PENRITH

Those respondents from Nepean/Blue Mountains cited people, the natural environment, friends, development, and opportunities as 'reasons to smile'.

PEOPLE

In Nepean/Blue Mountains 'people' were strongly linked to diversity, and diversity was strongly linked to culture. The mixing of peoples and cultures made respondents feel welcome and in turn enabled them to be more welcoming of others.

FRIENDS

Established friendship networks and making new friends were also important to the young people of the Nepean/Blue Mountains region. This does not come as a surprise given the age group surveyed, but it is

important to note that friends were linked to 'care' and 'support', and that the region was seen as a place in which friendships were made and maintained easily.

OPPORTUNITIES

Young people in the Nepean/Blue Mountains region recognised a variety of opportunities around them. These opportunities were linked to the outdoors in terms of access to the diversity of flora and fauna, sport, sporting facilities and recreational areas, work, and education.

DEVELOPMENT

The continued development of the region in terms of infrastructure was discussed positively. Respondents were happy about the development of transport networks and places for community involvement and participation. Respondents noted that the maintenance of a balance between urban development and open spaces for wildlife, recreation and peaceful reflection would keep them smiling.

We welcome and love our neighbours, no matter who they are or where they come from or who they are born as, or who they'll become.

FEMALE, 19, NEPEAN/BLUE MOUNTAINS





2. WESTERN SYDNEY

BLACKTOWN, CUMBERLAND, THE HILLS, PARRAMATTA

People, culture, diversity, and community topped the list of what made young people of the Western Sydney region smile.

CULTURE

The Western Sydney region was identified as a melting pot of cultures, ethnicity, and religion. Respondents acknowledged the value of multiculturalism and described it in terms of non-judgemental attitudes towards the many differences they experienced. The pleasure of eating a diverse range of food was strongly emphasised in this region but was also discussed in relation to differences in ethnicity across different suburbs, and even in the same suburb.

DIVERSITY

People, culture and diversity were discussed together but diversity was often linked to both acceptance and friendliness. Diversity was connected to food but also music, events, religion and beliefs. Diversity was not spoken about in terms of exclusion or division. Instead it was something that allowed people to come together.

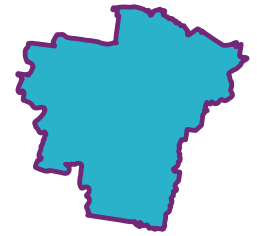
COMMUNITY

Respondents in the Western Sydney region stated that an important reason they loved the area was community spirit. The feeling of living in a community, knowing the people in the street and at the local shops made people smile. Respondents also discussed being part of a greater community in which diverse cultures and values were celebrated.

The sense of belonging and community. Most friends, peers, colleagues and neighbours are from migrant backgrounds as well. Even though we may be from different backgrounds, our families all came here for a common reason.

MALE, 25, SOUTH WEST SYDNEY





3. SOUTH WEST SYDNEY

CAMDEN, CAMPBELLTOWN, CANTERBURY-BANKSTOWN, FAIRFIELD, LIVERPOOL

PEOPLE

Again, people made the young people of South West Sydney smile. These were the people that surrounded them: their friends and family, as well as the broader neighbourhood.

COMMUNITY AND PLACE

People were linked strongly with community, and community was strongly linked with place. Place took on the dimension in South West Sydney as being associated with wide-open spaces such as parks. The beauty of the place also received attention. Having something in common, and belonging to a

place was highlighted. The local dimensions of home and school were also important factors for young people in South West Sydney.

CULTURE

In South West Sydney culture was linked to acceptance and diversity, as in the other subregions. Similar to Western Sydney, culture was also linked to multiculturalism, food and difference. Again respondents welcomed the diversity of cultures and celebrated it. Family and culture were linked, and cultural harmony was discussed alongside cultural diversity.

HOME

More than the other regions, those in South West Sydney called their region home. They associated home with security, work, and family. Home was also linked with cultural practices, food and feeling at home.

SCHOOL

Young people also commented on their educational opportunities, both in terms of exposing them to diversity but also in terms of the more scholarly aspects of learning. This also included recognition of the access to educational resources for sports, arts, or enabling them to strive for excellence.

What makes me smile about Western Sydney is how distinct and unique every corner is from one another. This multicultural exposure truly makes Western Sydneysiders a more tolerant and accepting people.

MALE, 23, SOUTH WEST SYDNEY



About This Report

SURVEY

Youth Action invited young people in Greater Western Sydney to respond to a short survey asking for demographics and the question “What Makes You Smile About Where You Live?” The survey was an opt-in online form and was open from 20 March–19 April 2017.

RESPONDENTS

The 857 respondents were young people aged between 12–25 years living in Greater Western Sydney (in the local government areas of Blacktown, Blue Mountains, Camden, Campbelltown, Canterbury-Bankstown, Cumberland, Fairfield, Hawkesbury, Hills Shire, Liverpool, Parramatta, and Penrith).

55% of the respondents spoke a language other than English at home. 29 of the 857 identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Of the 86 respondents to the gender or sexuality diverse (or both) indicator, 9% identified as gender diverse, 26% identified as both gender and sexuality diverse and 65% identified as

sexuality diverse. The majority of responses came from young people attending high school who were also unemployed. There was also a range of employed respondents, including those in part-time, casual and full-time employment. Many were both studying and working in some capacity at the time of the survey.

ANALYSIS

Youth Action partnered with Western Sydney University to analyse the survey responses using digital and non-digital text analyses. After aggregating the raw data, it was uploaded to Leximancer, which produced semantic maps of intersecting concepts and themes, generated from the rate at which words co-occurred (are most frequently and closely co-located throughout the data). From these maps, researchers got a visual depiction of prominence and centrality of the top themes; and could test the meaning using various quantitative and qualitative tools, as well as hyperlinking to segments of text to verify context.

LIMITATIONS

Several broad points about online opt-in surveys are noted:

The respondents are not a representative sample, and are less randomised than the formal statistical polling methods. As such, the results stand alone as an aggregate voice of 857 young people living in Western Sydney rather than a representation of the actual population distribution (age, gender, etc.) of all Western Sydney residents aged 12-25 years.

That said, formal polling methods, while aggregating a representative sample, are not wholly randomised either. By relying on landlines and, more recently, automatised responses, the polling companies skew heavily towards those most likely to be in secure housing and against young people, as well as low-income people, more transient people, share households specifically and renters generally. All these groups are, to varying degrees and for various, less likely to have a landline or respond to automated surveys.



About Youth Action

Youth Action is the peak organisation representing 1.25 million young people in NSW and youth services that support them. Our work helps build the capacity of young people, youth workers and youth services, and we advocate for positive change on issues affecting these groups.

It is the role of Youth Action to:

1. Respond to social and political agendas relating to young people and the youth service sector.
.....
2. Provide proactive leadership and advocacy to shape the agenda on issues affecting young people and youth services.
.....
3. Collaborate on issues that affect young people and youth workers.
.....
4. Promote a positive profile in the media and the community of young people and youth services.
.....
5. Build capacity for young people to speak out and take action on issues that affect them.
.....
6. Enhance the capacity of the youth services sector to provide high quality services.
.....
7. Ensure Youth Action's organisational development, efficiency, effectiveness and good governance.

REPORT ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Report design by Camille Manley.

.....
e info@youthaction.org.au

p 02 8354 3700

youthaction.org.au

