

YPS MNC (Young Peoples Space Mid North Coast)

YPS MNC (Young People Space Mid North Coast) is a Specialist Youth Homelessness Service in the Port Macquarie Hastings and Kempsey LGAs on the Mid North Coast of NSW. YPS provides support and accommodation to children and young people aged 12 to 25 years. YPS has been in operation for over 33 years.

The service lists the three leading causes of child/youth homelessness in Mid North Coast is Domestic & Family Violence, family breakdown and abuse.

YPS provides youth accommodation and development services in the areas of crisis and transitional housing, early intervention and prevention, as well as skill development and capacity building. They support youth in acquiring independent living skills and reuniting with family.

Over the last 12 months, YP SPACE MNC has supported 136 young people into new tenancies and 57 young people into crisis accommodation.

YP Space relies on commercial accommodation for crisis accommodation and social housing and the private rental market for long-term accommodation for clients. The Kempsey Macleay and Port Macquarie Hastings regions are popular holiday destinations, with populations increasing considerably during school holiday periods. In recent years, migration to the NSW Mid North Coast began to steadily increase as mainly older people retired to the area and students attend university campuses established in Port Macquarie. Supply of appropriate housing for YP Space clients was manageable during this time.

YPS has 15 staff (20FTE) across the Kempsey and Port Macquarie Hastings sites. Volunteers are used to support fundraising and community activities. Student placements are used for direct client work.

Core service delivery funding is provided by the Department of Communities and Justice. This is supplemented by one-off government and philanthropic funding, such as local council and Australia Post grants, and fundraising via donations and a relationship with Huma Charity Challenge. The work of YPS is also supported by in-kind donations.

Impact of disasters on YP Space MNC

In recent years, the Kempsey and Port Macquarie Hastings LGAs have been impacted by drought, bushfires, including the 2019/20 Black Summer Bushfires, floods and the COVID-19 pandemic. YP Space had limited direct impacts from these events, noting that staff were unable to access work for a short period at the height of flooding and had to function on skeleton staff during that time.

The major impacts of the service have come via secondary impacts of the disaster events:

2019/20 Black Summer Bushfires

These bushfires did not impact the town of Kempsey but properties in outlying localities, that may provide cheaper rental options, were lost in the fires. The supply of affordable rentals was also impacted by the fires as people who lost homes sought alternative places to live.

2021 NSW Mid North Coast floods

These floods impacted the Kempsey and Port Macquarie CBDs, damaging or limiting access to much of the motel accommodation used for crisis accommodation for young people accessing YP Space services. The supply of affordable rentals was also impacted by flood events as people who lost homes sought alternative places to live. Cheaper housing options, such as long-term caravan site rentals were also reduced as many caravan parks were impacted by flooding.

A positive outcome from the floods is that YP Space has been able to acquire flood-damaged cabins free of charge to refurbish for their new youth accommodation service.

YPS has recently acquired a disused caravan park in central Kempsey and is refurbishing flood-damaged cabins to establish affordable housing for people aged between 16 and 25 who are experiencing homelessness. The funds for this project were available due to the service selling another property in the region. The cabins were salvaged from caravan parks impacted by the 2021 Mid North Coast flooding. Other costs associated with this initiative are met by in-kind support from the construction industry and staff and volunteer input. YPS has consolidated their other Kempsey based sites to this location to create a youth support hub.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-02-10/derelict-kempsey-caravan-park-houses-homeless-youths/100815636>

COVID-19 Pandemic

Kempsey and Port Macquarie Hastings LGAs were impacted by COVID-19 with a number of outbreaks and pressure on health systems, similar to other regional centres. YP Space was able to maintain service delivery during this time, taking necessary precautions to protect staff and clients.

Main issue for YPS: Lack of affordable housing

The greatest impact on the service was the drastic reduction in rental properties suitable for YP Space clients. This was due to a number of factors including the aftermaths of consecutive disaster events:

- Steady migration to the region before 2019/20 bushfires.
- Steady private residential development but minimal investment in affordable housing.
- Increase in demand for residential properties from residents who lost their homes in the 2019/2020 bushfires or 2021 floods.
- A spike in migration from cities during the height of the COVID pandemic due to work from home arrangements, regional locations being viewed as having a lower risk of COVID-19 exposure and property prices being cheaper in the regions compared to cities.

What is needed most?

Housing

- More residential properties, both private rental and social housing. There has been some limited relief in the rental market as people move back to the city since the lifting of COVID restrictions. However, housing stock needs to be increased significantly to address the current shortage.
- A social housing mortgage scheme to support people on low incomes to buy their own home.
- Local government supporting a mix of development, for financial and social reasons. For example, social housing needs to be considered as part of residential developments.
- Collaboration between government departments to develop innovative solutions to issues. For example, transitioning Dept of Transport temporary accommodation for highway workers into semi-permanent housing to address housing shortage.
- Use community sector expertise to design solutions. For example, a local council has invited input from YPS into the co-design of their local housing strategy.

Funding

- Funding that is flexible enough to meet the needs of the service, such as for more staff and to cover HR costs.
- Disaster funding that responds to indirect, as well as direct, impacts of disasters on service delivery.