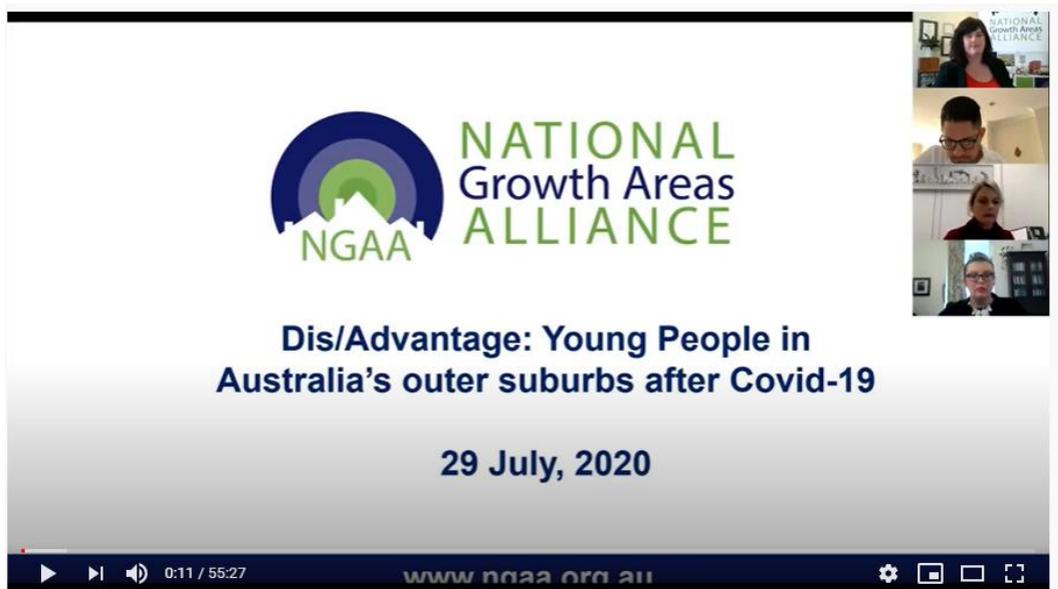


## Dis/Advantage: Young People in Australia's outer suburbs after Covid-19



### Presenters:

- Rebekah Milne, Manager Community Services, City of Armadale WA
- Luis Puig, Manager Economic Development & Advocacy, City of Armadale, WA
- Dr Lizzie Knight, Research Fellow, Centre for International Research on Education Systems (CIRES), Victoria University

**Moderator:** Bronwen Clark, Executive Officer, NGAA

### SUMMARY

#### Overview of national situation in growth areas

- Double national growth (3%)
- 4.6 million people (1 in 5 of all Australians)
- Higher than average concentration of young people
- Families with children
- 1.7 million under the age of 25
- Lower educational attainment
- Higher levels of disengagement

**Dr Lizzie Knight** from the [Centre for International Research on Education Systems](#) at Victoria University provided an update on the latest academic findings on youth disengagement from education. The key challenge discovered by Lizzie was the lack of significance put on peri-urban (including outer urban growth) areas. Academic research continues to focus on regional or rural disadvantage and ignore the disengagement in growth areas. A key issue in these areas is

educational and career ‘inheritance’ (following in footsteps of their parents) which contributes to much lower levels of educational attainment as well as the ‘risky transition’ when young people either need to move away from home or face a long and costly commute to their place of study, combining part-time work as income support from their family is not an option.

Dr Knight also spoke of the cultural barriers that impact a young person’s education and career pathway, noting ‘Each young person is located in their own socio-spatial context that needs to be explored in order to gain a broader understanding of their educational choices’ (Bowl 2003).

She also look at ‘coldspots’ where provision of education options were low, noting the connection between UK research on coldspots, and [local research showing the links between health indicators, spatial data and educational attainment in Brimbank Council in Melbourne](#).

### **Statistics of City of Armadale, WA**

- Higher than metro average of children and young people. Half of the Aboriginal community aged 0-17.
- Diverse suburbs, drilling down to suburb level data is key: most vulnerable suburb Armadale south.
- SEIFA 840.
- Youth unemployment and disengagement around 26-7%
- Over 20% of children developmentally vulnerable.
- Educational attainment low.

### **A new approach to community services**

The City of Armadale has restructured its community services division to focus on suburb level initiatives for long term change. In 2019, the Council analysed feedback from around 900 residents and identified the top four social priorities for each suburb. The division was divided into teams that would each tackle one social priority and develop placed-based, interdisciplinary programs.

An example of some of the priorities identified:

1. Youth engagement and education
2. Early years and family support
3. Community safety
4. Culturally and linguistically connection to groups and services.

The aim of the restructure initiative was to tackle social issues in young people before they begin families of their own, and intergenerational poverty and inherited disadvantage takes hold. The internal restructure also was designed to match the shift of council funding from Annual contributions into service agreements. This has given Council control over the service being provided and introduced greater accountability that services are delivering results.

Council found that a major barrier to services was residents lacking basic needs such as food, shelter, safety and social contact. Addressing these needs first, led to greater engagement with services. The other key elements to successful programming including engaging with and harnessing local people, such as existing community champions, having the right people in the right jobs, collocating social services (one-stop-shop), basing services in the right location, and contracting external services to make best use of council resources.

For example, a staff community centre is located in Armadale South where there is a large population of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents. The centre provides hot desking to cater up to 24 different agencies and services, including Aboriginal health, food security, child health and the Department of Justice. Another program proving to be effective is the ASPIRE

program which supports places for school students in local businesses for six weeks, to get a taste of the workplace and develop key skills such as how to write a resume. A Youth Advisory Committee also provides regular feedback and advice on initiatives every second month.

**Rebekah Milnes, Manager of Community Development at the City of Armadale**, advises that working with key stakeholders operationally and strategically can create the greatest change. Further, she advises getting the right data before implementing strategies, removing silo workplaces and designing in evaluation in each program before they're launched are also key.

**Luis Puig, Manager of Economic Development and Advocacy at the City of Armadale** explained the value of having business cases ready to go when state and federal governments are looking for responsive stimulus or investments. For example, the Council successfully secured funding from the WA Government for a purpose-built TAFE campus to be built in the city centre. Council had been advocating for this for around 12 years. However, the COVID-19 pandemic brought an opportunity to revisit their lobbying and they were successful. Luis stated that the biggest challenge for local governments to advocate for their local businesses is working with state agencies and connecting state-based organisations with local ones. However, he encourages that efforts to create collaboration between state agencies and local businesses can help deliver results.