Youth count is first step

Tom Volling

KEEPING youth off the streets and out of a torturous juvenile detention system is the aim of an Alice Springs Town Council report that plans to detail the current Youth Night Patrol.

A youth services catalogue and count of roaming kids will be sought as Council looks to take on a facilitating role in the battle against youth problems.

“We can put any number of resources into after-hours youth services, but if we are going to make a long lasting impact on young people who are at risk or causing issues to themselves or other people, we need to put more effort into preventative measures,” Councilor Jade Kudrenko said.

The motion to prepare a report and engage with Congress, NT Government and other interested parties was moved on Monday night – moments before the ABC’s Four Corners program aired.

“Dealing with young children with trauma requires specialised care. It is just not a matter of entertaining them for the night. They actually need critical medical and professional services to assist that,” Ms Kudrenko said.

She said had recommendations from a 2010 inquiry into child protection been implemented, the town would not be in as “dire a situation”.

“It is one part of the overall issue and services. We could have a night patrol for the next 20 years and it won’t change in the long run. If we are truly to make a change it has to be a holistic effort,” she said.

Last week Commander Danny Bacon poured water over the overnight youth centre idea. A lack of legislation was cited as a major hurdle.

Chief executive Rex Mooney said the Department of Children and Families also had reservations about the overnight youth centre idea.

Councilor Chansey Paech said the focus should be on diversionary programs. “A facility like this would have the ability to erode the capacity of the families,” he said.

Last month, 1149 youths were picked up by night patrol. Many are believed repeat pick-ups and an exact number is yet to be released.

Councillor Brendan Heenan said education was the key to stopping the “revolving door” of street kids.

Councillor Steve Brown raised the idea at the committee meeting two weeks ago.

On Monday night he said he was not talking about enforcing law and order or locking children up, but offering a fun, voluntary and safe refuge.

Aboriginal Community Police Officer Francine Elsegood made sure everyone was safe while Jazelle Austin enjoyed an apple and Laylah Wanat indulged in her passion for footy at a barbecue on the Alice Springs Town Council lawns last Friday.

Night bus popular with kids

Andrea Johnston

CHILDREN alone on the streets of the Alice Springs CBD are making full use of a night bus service, according to those who run it.

“Getting them home safe is the main thing,” said Alice Springs Town Council ranger unit manager Kevin Everett.

“Last week we took home nearly 500 kids, and we’ve taken home kids as young as eight.”

“It really is a multi-agency effort. The police are very supportive.

A night bus was held last Friday to celebrate the end of the school holidays and bring together some of the other agencies involved.

Aboriginal Community Police Officer Francine Elsegood said the gathering had a positive effect.

“It helps the kids to know they can go and meet with these different organisations and not be scared,” she said.

“As soon as they see us they just run, which frightens me late at night with cars. We try to emphasise the police are there to help and if they need anything they can come and talk to us.”

“It breaks my heart when you see these kids out at night. As a parent you know they should be home,” she said.