

George McCormick joined Walgett Shire Council in 2006 as a “Youth Development Officer” and in 2012 he was promoted to the position, Manager Community Services. During his 13 years with Council, George has made a huge impact on the way community services are delivered to the community. George has made an outstanding and positive contribution to the betterment of the Walgett Shire communities, in particular the younger generation through the many initiatives that have delivered generational change.

Living in the third most disadvantaged community in NSW, George recognised the need for a Youth Council. He co-ordinated its foundation, its structure, and over a 13 year period, George and the broader community have witnessed young people develop, become empowered and progress to lead and mentor youth from their communities. Through the development of Walgett Shire Youth Council an innovative approach to identifying, engaging and encouraging young people to participate in their community has been established. George has worked tirelessly in partnership with three (3) schools, community groups and local services, now supporting the Youth Council.

The whole community has benefited enormously from the development of insecure young people into confident, connected youth, eager to make effective transitions to adulthood and reaching their full potential. Over 250 young people between 12-21yrs, across the remote Walgett Shire, have been involved with the Youth Council since its inception in 2009. Another George initiative, an idea that has flourished offering shy and self-conscious young peoples a pathway to becoming active community ambassadors. The project has resulted in a drop in youth crime across the Shire which has dropped by 16%, and increased retention rates at school as participants must attend school regularly.

As “Youth Development Officer” George identified the need for Council participation in a youth week program. It is fair to say he never realized how big this event would become or how sustainable the outcomes would prove. Through the model of diversion/ engagement/ participation, positive change has been witnessed at ground level, on the streets of all three (3) townships, Walgett Lightning Ridge and Collarenebri. Evidenced by outstanding outcomes the regenerating group have achieved recognition never witnessed before within our disadvantaged communities, setting about generational change by developing connected, community conscious young people. The positive impact of George’s approach to Youth Week can be seen through the whole of community. It has changed the lives of our young people, broken negative stereotyping and has resulted in sustainable youth leadership. These outcomes, have been recognised broadly through National Youth Local Government Award in 2010, and winner of various NSW Local Government Youth Week Awards for the past 12 years. Recognition over a 12 year period demonstrates a committed, sustainable approach with transferability evidenced through many other Council’s adopting the Walgett model. The highly successful award winning Youth Week is a credit to George as the program has achieved way beyond its initial expectations and continues to achieve outstanding outcomes.

George has a love for children and he has been instrumental in the development of youth centres in the Walgett LGA in all three (3) major centres, Walgett, Collarenebri and Lightning Ridge. As a result Council now offers free after school activities in all three centres and now employs 12 permanent part-time and casual qualified youth workers to support the centre operations. This is a huge increase in engagement activities, as in 2006 Council employed 2 staff in its youth centres. Food, activities and support are free to all school aged youth and young people

wishing to be engaged in meaningful programs and activities. George was also a change agent in creating a standalone free *Holiday Program* service to the three communities mentioned along with a remote service on the Opal Fields at Grawin. This along with other strategic programs is aiding in the visual outcome of less anti-social issues, less crime and a more connected community.

During the summer holidays at Walgett there is a tendency for a spike in anti-social behaviour, and George believed the community development staff could act as a conduit to bring together services from the Walgett community to meet and plan a series of events during the summer months in Walgett. The outcome, a "*Beat the Heat Initiative*" was born and involved supporting the community to engage in the coolest space in town, the local swimming pool and adding value to these initiatives it was planned that other services/agencies could utilise this time to promote their service, capture potential clients and utilise this opportune time to engage with the wider community. George as Chairman of the interagency committee rolled out nine events in 2016/17 and recorded an average of over 110 people per event. Transport and accessibility issues were worked through with free transport offered to and from events, free healthy cooked BBQ and refreshments also were offered. Reports of a notable reduction in anti-social behaviours and issues across the township have recognised the program's success. The success has seen this rolled out over the past two Christmas holiday periods and other service are wanting to become a part of such a successful initiative.

Some 12 years ago while attending the LGNSW Youth Week awards, George met a Korean Church elder, the two men established a friendship that would bring about a remarkable youth and cultural event that has been held in Walgett for the past 11 years. George invited the Korean people to visit Walgett, to see first-hand the Australian outback and enjoy a cultural exchange with children from Walgett Shire. The inaugural visit saw 6 children and supervisors from Sydney attend the Walgett and Lightning Ridge events, however, from little things big things grow and the visit in 2018 realised 66 children from Sydney and 40 children from Walgett Shire participate in the week long experience. The Korean Church children perform traditional dance routines, taekwondo and cooking demonstrations, while the Walgett dance troop perform traditional aboriginal dance numbers, digeridoo playing, while the elders show off the many indigenous displays throughout the shire.

Community Service delivery in Walgett Shire in the past 13 years has achieved amazing results with generational social change, and the accolades for this belong to Mr. George McCormick. George McCormick is a true gentleman, an exceptional down to earth person who is self-motivated and extremely valued and respected by his community and the Walgett Shire Council.