

# Midnight Basketball gains momentum

BY JASMINE HIGHFIELD

**GUNNEDAH is one step closer to starting a Midnight Basketball tournament with the program's CEO attending a community meeting last week.**

Midnight Basketball Australia CEO Tess White visited Gunnedah on Thursday to gauge support for the program and explain what establishing a Midnight Basketball tournament involves.

The program runs on a Friday or Saturday night, the highest risk period for anti-social behaviour in most communities. It involves workshops on youth issues, fun and competitive games of basketball and a safe bus ride home at the end of the night.

Midnight Basketball was established when, in 2007, Ms White was part of a social leadership program the Benevolent Society ran that looked at ways to reduce anti-social behaviour in Redfern.

"It was just for Redfern but it was such a strong model that it spread nationally," she said.

"Generally there are not enough ways communities engage youth in activities on a Friday and Saturday night – there is a large gap in most areas."

Ms White said establishing a tournament needs a lot of support from different areas of the community.

"There was great diversity here today – it bodes well for the Gunnedah area," she said.

"There is obvious pride in the community and care about local youth

issues which is really important from our perspective."

Meeting facilitator Shelley Corney from Barwon Division of General Practice Preventative Health Initiative said that community involvement is a key component to the success of the program.

"It will definitely rely on many hands on deck to get it off the ground and happening," she said.

A community committee would have to be set up to run the tournament efficiently. Ms White said that everyone in the community can "bring something to the table" although it would be beneficial to have someone in the committee who has an understanding of local youth issues.

To apply for funding for the program, the community committee has to complete an Expression of Interest and submit an application to Midnight Basketball Australia.

The meeting was also an opportunity for any concerns about the program to be raised.

"Most issues will have been experienced by other towns so we were able to provide examples of how we've addressed those issues," Ms White said.

Ms White said that getting participants to write the Code of Conduct and set rules themselves at the start of the tournament had also proven to be effective.

"It's a very powerful process to set the scene for the ethic of the program," Ms White said.

The program is heavily focused on community engagement for local youth

and Ms White stressed it is not a substitute for services currently running in Gunnedah.

"We believe in supporting utilities that already exist in the community," she said.

"That's what meetings like these are all about."



*MIDNIGHT Basketball Australia CEO Tess White visited Gunnedah on Thursday to talk with community members about the prospect of starting a tournament in the area.*