

PARLIAMENT OF NEW SOUTH WALES



Committee on Children and Young People

Children and Young People Aged 9-14 Years in NSW: The Missing Middle

Volume One

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Terms of Reference

For the purpose of performing its statutory functions under the *Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998* in relation to the Commission, the Committee is to inquire into and report on children and young people aged 9-14 years in New South Wales, and in particular:

1. the needs of children and young people in the middle years i.e. between about nine and fourteen years of age;
2. the extent to which the needs of children and young people in the middle years vary according to age, gender and level of disadvantage;
3. the activities, services and support which provide opportunities for children and young people in the middle years to develop resilience;
4. the extent to which changing workplace practices have impacted on children and young people in the middle years, including possible changes to workplace practices which have the potential to benefit children and young people in the middle years; and
5. any other matter considered relevant to the inquiry by the Committee.

Chair's Foreword

On the cusp between the presumption of innocence accorded to young children, and the negative and fearful assumptions that increasingly attach to adolescents, there is little coherence to the legislative, policy or media responses to this age group. For example, we are collectively shocked by the commercial pressures they face, but scathing when those pressures lead to behaviour we disapprove of. We have reduced the choices available at school during middle childhood, yet treat 10 year olds as criminally responsible. We fear for children's safety and limit their freedom to explore and play, yet are horrified at their obesity and use of computer games.¹

This telling quote from a recent report of *Action for Children* in the United Kingdom neatly encapsulates the dilemma in dealing with children in the age group 9-14 years, the 'missing middle' who are the subject of this Report of the Committee on Children and Young People. At this developmental fork in the road, children and young people can acquire the resilience – that ability to bounce back from adversity – which sets them on the path to confident adulthood; or they can be overwhelmed by the processes of biological, emotional and social change which they encounter. In deciding how we as parents, teachers, community members and policy makers respond to the needs of children and young people, we play a pivotal role in setting them on one path or the other.

The Committee has repeatedly heard that the best response to the missing middle is connectedness. The over-arching theme of the evidence and research in this field is ensuring that 9-14 year olds remain connected to their families and peers, engaged with their schools, and participants in their communities. The Committee also heard that to do so successfully requires a nuanced approach which sees children and young people both as individuals with burgeoning independence, and as part of a family, or wider community group, with a need for belonging.

The Inquiry's broad Terms of Reference enabled the Committee to examine and make recommendations on all aspects of the needs of children and young people aged 9-14. These included education, health issues, alcohol and drug abuse, technology, employment and homelessness. However, one issue raised in evidence which is not addressed in the Report is the effect of the built environment upon children and young people. This is because the NSW Commission on Children and Young People recently released its response to the Committee's 2006 *Inquiry into Children, Young People and the Built Environment*, and the Committee has resolved to undertake a follow-up Inquiry into this important issue.

The Committee's response to the issues in evidence can be encapsulated by stressing to professionals, service providers, and Government agencies that the needs of children in the middle years are best met by a coordinated approach which sees issues or problems not in isolation, but as part of a developing whole, as 9-14 year olds move from childhood into young adulthood. To support this approach, funding for relevant programs should not be haphazard, with pilot programs that are not rolled out more widely. Instead, the Committee considers that a Government funding stream should be allocated specifically to provide services and programs for 9-14 year olds and their families.

¹ Action for Children. 2009. *Stuck in the middle: the importance of supporting six to 13 year olds*, p 15.

Chair's Foreword

Rather than simply make aspirational recommendations, the Committee has devised practical responses to the issues in evidence. Fortunately in New South Wales, we have an excellent means of advocating for these practical changes – the Commission for Children and Young People. Accordingly, the Report places the Commission squarely at the centre of ensuring that the links in the chain of connectedness remain strong.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank my predecessor as Chair, Hon Carmel Tebbutt MP, for her foresight in bringing the attention of the Committee to this important and under-researched area. I would also like to thank the current and former Members of the Committee during the 54th Parliament for their commitment to this long and wide-ranging Inquiry process.

Many organisations and individuals took the time and effort to make submissions to the Inquiry. Without their vital input, this Report would never have come to fruition. The Committee owes a particular debt of gratitude to Professor Anne Graham, Director of the Centre for Children and Young People at Southern Cross University. Professor Graham's expertise in the social and emotional wellbeing of children and young people, and their participation and engagement in school and community, was of invaluable assistance to the Committee in finalising its Report.

The evidence to the Inquiry identified an ongoing need to genuinely consult with children and young people about their needs when developing relevant policies and services. On behalf of Committee Members, I especially would like to pay tribute to the many children and young people who gave evidence to the Committee; Members were genuinely impressed with the maturity, honesty and thoughtfulness with which they addressed the Inquiry's Terms of Reference, and were greatly encouraged by the idea of these children and young people as the future leaders of New South Wales. The Committee hopes that they will see in the Report that the Committee has genuinely striven to take their views into account.

Finally, I would like to stress that it has been the aim of the Committee to find out what works, and what might work better, to meet the needs of children and young people aged 9-14 in New South Wales. In pointing out areas where we as a community can do better, the Committee would be loath for readers of the Report to conclude that there is not already an enormous amount of excellent work being done in homes, classrooms and youth centres across the State. In conducting the Inquiry, Committee Members have been repeatedly impressed by the extraordinary hard work and unstinting dedication of parents, carers, teachers, and all those working in this field, and hope that the Report and its recommendations will assist them in this vital work.



Robert Coombs MP
Chair

Executive Summary

The middle years, which may be defined as the years between 9 and 14, is a time of significant physical, social, emotional and psychological change. It is a critical transition period with children moving from primary to secondary school. It is also a time when peers assume greater significance in the lives of children and young people. Increased autonomy and responsibility mean that children and young people in this age group begin to spend more time without the supervision of adults, assume greater levels of family responsibility and may also commence employment for the first time.

As the years between the ages of 9 and 14 are crucial to physical, social and emotional development, they provide a key opportunity for positive intervention to help children and young people reach their full potential. Identifying and responding to early warning signs can help prevent children in this age group from becoming more vulnerable and make a significant difference to their current and future lives. Research indicates that intervening in the middle years can be effective, and that this period of major transition and heightened risk can be a key turning point for children and young people.

While in recent years there has been an increased emphasis on providing services and conducting research about children 0-8 years, children and young people in the middle years have been largely overlooked. Evidence to the Inquiry identified gaps in services across a wide range of areas critical to the education, health and welfare of this age group, and has identified a number of promising programs.

Many programs and approaches that have the potential to impact on the health, wellbeing and resilience of children and young people in the middle years are discussed in this Report. Of particular interest to the Committee are those programs that are likely to impact on multiple outcomes for this age group. For instance, well-designed sport and recreational activities conducted outside of school hours can assist in the social, emotional and skills development of 9-14 year olds; reduce the risks associated with lack of adult supervision; contribute to improved health and wellbeing; and in some circumstances support parents/carers to participate in the workforce.

Indeed, the Committee has found that in many cases programs may be relevant to the work of more than one NSW Government Department and has recommended a cross-government approach to the planning and implementation of such programs. Therefore, the development of a whole-of-government plan for children and young people from 0-18 years is a key recommendation of the Committee. The plan would identify a small number of significant programs/approaches with the potential to impact on multiple outcomes for different age groups (such as 0-8 years, 9-14 years). It would include a focus on early intervention, as well as on programs for disadvantaged children and young people.

The Committee considers that funding for programs for this age group should not be piecemeal. Instead, a funding stream to provide services and programs for 9-14 year olds should be recognised as essential for the support of children and families. This would allow for the development of services for the 9-14 age group identified as priorities in the whole-of-government plan, and would support the implementation of a number of other recommendations in this Report.

Executive Summary

Research indicates that the participation of children and young people is likely to contribute to better decision-making about policies and programs. The Committee found that the input provided by children and young people throughout its Inquiry was both inspiring and informed. A more systematic approach, by all levels of government, to involve children and young people in decision-making that may affect their lives, is needed. To this end, the Committee has recommended that the NSW Commission for Children and Young People work with relevant NSW Government Departments to develop plans to increase the genuine participation of children and young people in New South Wales.

List of Recommendations – Volume One

RECOMMENDATION 1: The Committee recommends that the Premier, in his capacity as the Minister for the Arts, facilitate the development of a youth arts plan with a major focus on regional New South Wales.

The Committee further recommends that the Commissioner for Children and Young People be consulted in the development of any proposed youth arts plan..... 42

RECOMMENDATION 2: The Committee recommends that the Premier, in his capacity as the Minister for the Arts, facilitate the development of further arts activities in school holidays for children in the middle years with a focus on disadvantaged communities, particularly Indigenous communities. 42

The Committee further recommends that the Commissioner for Children and Young People be consulted on any proposed development..... 42

RECOMMENDATION 3: The Committee recommends, that pursuant to s 11(d) of the *Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998*, the Commissioner for Children and Young People consult with the Minister for Youth and the relevant Commonwealth Minister about the feasibility of implementing a series of pilot programs to trial modified versions of the *Active After-school Communities Program*. 45

RECOMMENDATION 4: The Committee recommends, that pursuant to s 11(d) of the *Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998*, the Commissioner for Children and Young People consult with the Minister for Sport and Recreation about the feasibility of subsidising the costs of participation in sports and other activities outside school hours, with priority given to low-income families and Indigenous families. 47

RECOMMENDATION 5: The Committee recommends that the Minister for Sport and Recreation expand initiatives to increase access of children and young people aged 9-14 with a disability to sport, arts and other types of recreation..... 49

The Committee further recommends that the Commissioner for Children and Young People be consulted on the proposed expansion of initiatives that aim to increase access of children and young people in the middle years with a disability to sport, arts and other types of recreation. 49

RECOMMENDATION 6: The Committee recommends that, pursuant to s 11(d) of the *Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998*, the Commissioner for Children and Young People consult with the Minister for Education and Training about developing and actively implementing a policy allowing use of schools for activities outside of school hours by students and community members..... 50

RECOMMENDATION 7: The Committee recommends that the Minister for Community Services establish project officer positions, based on the model developed by Waverley Council, to coordinate and foster the development of programs outside of school hours for children and young people aged 9-14 throughout the State..... 52

The Committee further recommends that the Commissioner for Children and Young People be consulted on any proposed developments. 53

RECOMMENDATION 8: The Committee recommends that the NSW Government provide funding for activities outside of school as a core component of a state-wide funding stream for 9-14 year olds, with a particular focus on disadvantaged communities, including those with high numbers of Aboriginal children and young people.54

The Committee further recommends that the Commissioner for Children and Young People be consulted on any proposed funding for activities outside of school.....54

RECOMMENDATION 9: The Committee recommends that the Department of the Arts, Sport and Recreation collaborate with other relevant government departments to develop a whole-of-government approach to providing activities outside of school for 9-14 year olds.54

The Committee further recommends that the Commissioner for Children and Young People be consulted on the proposed development of a whole-of- government approach to providing activities outside of school for 9-14 year olds.54

RECOMMENDATION 10: The Committee recommends that the Minister for Community Services:58

- expand the provision of youth services to allow for the development of new programs in areas of need and to enhance the hours of operation for existing services; and.....58
- provides funding to implement and evaluate a range of activities and support based programs for 9-14 year olds involving youth services.58

The Committee further recommends that the Commissioner for Children and Young People be consulted on the proposed expansion of youth services to allow for the development of new programs in areas of need, and in the implementation and evaluation of a range of activities and support programs.59

RECOMMENDATION 11: The Committee recommends that, pursuant to s 11(d) of the *Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998*, the Commissioner for Children and Young People consult with the Minister for Education and Training about making school facilities across the State available to not-for-profit out of school hours care services at minimal cost.63

RECOMMENDATION 12: The Committee recommends that the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care continue to work with other government departments and agencies to:.....71

- increase access of children and young people with a disability to existing youth-oriented services and activities; and71
- develop appropriate new service models for children and young people aged 9-14 years with a disability.71

The Committee further recommends that the Commissioner for Children and Young People be consulted as part of this process.....71

RECOMMENDATION 13: The Committee recommends that the Commission for Children and Young People work with key stakeholders to conduct a conference about age-appropriate activities/care for 9-14 year olds.76

RECOMMENDATION 14: The Committee recommends that the NSW Government adopt a whole-of-government approach to expanding the provision of vacation care/school holiday programs, particularly in disadvantaged communities..... 84

The Committee further recommends that the Commissioner for Children and Young People be consulted on any proposed whole-of-government approach..... 84

RECOMMENDATION 15: The Committee recommends that the Minister for Community Services develop and evaluate school holiday/vacation care programs for 9-14 year olds specifically designed as an early intervention strategy in disadvantaged communities..... 84

The Committee further recommends that the Commissioner for Children and Young People be consulted on the proposed development and evaluation of school holiday/vacation care programs for 9-14 year olds. 84

RECOMMENDATION 16: The Committee recommends that, pursuant to s 11(d) of the *Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998*, the Commissioner for Children and Young People consult with the Department of Education and Training to ensure schools are providing adequate safety education for middle years students in the use of internet and other technology..... 92

RECOMMENDATION 17: The Committee recommends that, pursuant to s 11(d) of the *Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998*, the Commissioner for Children and Young People consult with the Minister for Transport about changing the conditions of use of the school bus pass system to allow children and young people to use their bus pass to travel free of charge to out of school hours care. 96

RECOMMENDATION 18: The Committee recommends that the NSW Government expand the *Kids' Adventure Passport* scheme to include children up to the age of 15 and offer greater public transport concessions and greater access to discounted activities in school holiday periods. 99

The Committee further recommends that the Commissioner for Children and Young People be consulted on any proposed expansion of the *Kids' Adventure Passport* scheme. 99

RECOMMENDATION 19: The Committee recommends that, pursuant to s 11(d) of the *Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998*, the Commissioner for Children and Young People consult with the Minister for Ageing and Disability Services about reviewing policies to allow community transport buses under the *Home and Community Care* program to be available for youth transport initiatives on weekends and other low use times..... 102

RECOMMENDATION 20: The Committee recommends, that pursuant to s 11(d) of the *Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998*, the Commissioner for Children and Young People consult with the Minister for Transport about making provision for: 102

- additional innovative youth transport programs across New South Wales; 103
- adequate long-term funding for existing youth transport programs; 103
- allowing existing youth transport programs to be extended to include a younger age group where appropriate; and 103
- Aboriginal Transport Development Officers in all Community Transport Organisations based in areas with Aboriginal communities. 103

RECOMMENDATION 21: The Committee recommends that the Ministry of Transport work with other government departments to ensure a whole-of-government approach to youth transport, in consultation with relevant non-government organisations..... 103

The Committee further recommends that the Commissioner for Children and Young People be consulted on the proposed whole-of-government approach to youth transport..... 103

RECOMMENDATION 22: The Committee recommends that NSW Health expand the provision of counselling services and mental health early intervention programs for children and young people, with services for Aboriginal children and young people as a priority...113

The Committee further recommends that the Commissioner for Children and Young People be consulted on any proposed expansion.....113

RECOMMENDATION 23: The Committee recommends, that pursuant to s 11(d) of the *Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998*, the Commissioner for Children and Young People consult with the Minister for Health and the Minister for Education and Training, about increasing the availability of age-appropriate sexual health programs that encompass the 9-14 age group, particularly in disadvantaged communities.122

RECOMMENDATION 244: The Committee recommends that, pursuant to s 11(d) of the *Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998*, the Commissioner for Children and Young People consult with the Minister for Health about funding for non-government organisations providing support services for young people with sexuality/gender issues and young people with a disability.123

RECOMMENDATION 25: The Committee recommends that, pursuant to s 11(d) of the *Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998*, the Commissioner for Children and Young People consult with the Minister for Health about expanding innovative strategies to provide oral health prevention and treatment for disadvantaged children and young people.127

RECOMMENDATION 26: The Committee recommends that the Department of Health establish additional youth health services across New South Wales and enhances the capacity of existing youth health services, with priority given to areas with a substantial Indigenous population. 136

The Committee further recommends that the Commissioner for Children and Young People be consulted on any proposed expansion of youth health services.136

RECOMMENDATION 27: The Committee recommends that, pursuant to s 11(d) of the *Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998*, the Commissioner for Children and Young People consult with the Minister for Health about the feasibility of establishing youth health coordinator positions in each Area Health Service in New South Wales..... 136

RECOMMENDATION 28: The Committee recommends that pursuant to s 11(d) of the *Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998*, the Commissioner for Children and Young People consult with the Minister for Community Services, the Minister for Housing and the relevant Commonwealth Ministers about strategies to address the need for appropriate accommodation and support for children and young people under fifteen years who are currently accessing SAAP services.145

RECOMMENDATION 29: The Committee recommends that, pursuant to s 11(d) of the *Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998*, the Commissioner for Children and

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The Committee further recommends that the Commissioner for Children and Young People be consulted on the development of the proposed <i>Brighter Futures</i> -type model.	175
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The Committee further recommends that the Commissioner for Children and Young People be consulted on the development of any such strategies.....	178
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RECOMMENDATION 37: The Committee recommends that, pursuant to s 11(d) of the <i>Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998</i> , the Commissioner for Children and Young People consult with the Minister for Health and the Minister for Community Services about the feasibility of establishing a mechanism for reviewing and assessing access of children and young people in out-of-home care to health services.	186

RECOMMENDATION 38: The Committee recommends that, pursuant to s 11(d) of the *Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998*, the Commissioner for Children and Young People consult with the Minister for Community Services about strengthening provisions for children and young people in out-of-home care to participate in social and recreational activities and in tutoring.....187

List of Recommendations – Volume Two

RECOMMENDATION 39: The Committee recommends that, pursuant to s 11(d) of the *Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998*, the Commissioner for Children and Young People consult with the Minister for Education and Training about expanding positively evaluated programs such as the *Schools in Partnership Program*, and the *Priority Action Schools Program*.

RECOMMENDATION 40: The Committee recommends that, pursuant to s 11(d) of the *Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998*, the Commissioner for Children and Young People consult with the Minister for Education and Training about evaluating the *Links to Learning Program* and making the results publicly available.

RECOMMENDATION 41: The Committee recommends that, pursuant to s 11(d) of the *Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998*, the Commissioner for Children and Young People consult with the Minister for Education and Training about the feasibility of reviewing the provision of tutoring and homework assistance particularly to disadvantaged students.

RECOMMENDATION 42: The Committee recommends that, pursuant to s 11(d) of the *Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998*, the Commissioner for Children and Young People consult with the Minister for Education and Training about strengthening the Department's current scheme on quality teaching in the middle years of schooling.

RECOMMENDATION 43: The Committee recommends that, pursuant to s 11(d) of the *Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998*, the Commissioner for Children and Young People consult with the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority and the NSW Board of Studies about incorporating career guidance and financial literacy into the curriculum for all Year 7 and 8 students.

RECOMMENDATION 44: The Committee recommends that, pursuant to s 11(d) of the *Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998*, the Commissioner for Children and Young People consult with the Minister for Education and Training about providing additional careers advisors in schools and expanding the provision of career advice to students in Years 7 and 8.

RECOMMENDATION 45: The Committee recommends that, pursuant to s 11(d) of the *Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998*, the Commissioner for Children and Young People consult with the Minister for Education and Training about implementing targeted evidence-based resilience programs.

RECOMMENDATION 46: The Committee recommends that, pursuant to s 11(d) of the *Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998*, the Commissioner for Children and Young People consult with the Minister for Education and Training about monitoring compliance with its *Good Practice Guide* to ensure the appropriate implementation of its *Suspension and Expulsion of School Students – Procedures*.

RECOMMENDATION 47: The Committee recommends that, pursuant to s 11(d) of the *Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998*, the Commissioner for Children and Young People consult with the Minister for Education and Training about identifying best practice models with respect to reducing suspensions and improving outcomes for suspended students.

RECOMMENDATION 48: The Committee recommends that the Minister for Education and Training conduct a review of the provision of school counselling, with a view to ensuring the availability of appropriate levels of school counselling services in NSW public schools.

The Committee further recommends that the Commissioner for Children and Young People be consulted about the provision of school counselling.

RECOMMENDATION 49: The Committee recommends that, pursuant to s 11(d) of the *Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998*, the Commissioner for Children and Young People consult with the Minister for Education and Training about expanding the *Schools as Community Centres* program to include late primary students in disadvantaged schools, and trialling and evaluating the program in high schools.

RECOMMENDATION 50: The Committee recommends that the Department of Education and Training develop an overarching strategy to support public schools to further implement and evaluate school-community partnerships in all disadvantaged areas in New South Wales.

RECOMMENDATION 51: The Committee recommends that the *Occupation Health and Safety Act 1990* be amended to include specific reference to children's safety in the workplace and that a Code of Practice be developed and implemented.

RECOMMENDATION 52: The Committee recommends that the NSW Commission for Children and Young People liaise with the NSW Board Of Studies about including workplace and employment education in the Personal Development, Health and Physical Education syllabus for Year 7 students.

RECOMMENDATION 53: The Committee recommends that the NSW Commission for Children and Young People liaise with the NSW Board Of Studies about including information about 'light work' and/or odd jobs and employment-related matters such as safety and conditions at work in the Personal Development, Health and Physical Education syllabus for Years 5 and 6.

RECOMMENDATION 54: The Committee recommends that the Department of Premier and Cabinet, in its review of the State Plan, consult with the Commission for Children and Young People to ensure participation by young people is explicitly acknowledged in the State Plan and embedded in the policy development process.

RECOMMENDATION 55: The Committee recommends that the Commission for Children and Young People work with relevant NSW Government departments to develop individual plans to increase the consultation and participation of children and young people across these departments.

RECOMMENDATION 56: The Committee recommends that the Commission for Children and Young People continue to work with local councils to increase the consultation and participation in council processes of children and young people, including children in the 9-14 age group.

RECOMMENDATION 57: The Committee recommends that the NSW Government develop a model of child impact statements that would be required for all decisions which may affect children and young people.

RECOMMENDATION 58: The Committee recommends that the Premier, through the NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet, facilitate a cross-government planning process,

involving all relevant government departments, to develop a stronger whole-of-government approach to supporting the care, development and wellbeing of children and young people 0-18 years.

The resulting whole-of-government plan should:

- identify priority key programs/approaches that are likely to impact on multiple outcomes for different age groups of children and young people;
- have a significant focus on providing programs and services to disadvantaged children and young people;
- include a focus on programs and services for children and young people in the middle years.

The Committee further recommends that the Commission for Children and Young People be consulted on the proposed whole-of-government plan.

RECOMMENDATION 59: The Committee recommends that the NSW Government provide a state-wide funding stream for programs and services for 9-14 year olds and their families with a major focus on those programs and services identified as a priority in a whole-of-government plan for children and young people.

The Committee further recommends that the Commission for Children and Young People be consulted on any proposed state-wide funding stream for programs and services for 9-14 year olds.

Acknowledgements

The Committee would like to thank the Commission for Children and Young People for its advice in the planning stage of the Inquiry and for its valuable submission and evidence to the Inquiry.

The Committee also wishes to acknowledge the expert input and advice which was given by Professor Anne Graham, Director, Centre for Children and Young People, Southern Cross University. Anne's research and professional interests include children's social and emotional well-being, participation and engagement in schools, ethical issues in researching with children and young people, and teacher learning.

The participation of children and young people was one of the most valuable aspects of the Inquiry. The Committee was extremely impressed by the contributions of children and young people who spoke at the hearings as representatives of the following schools and youth organisations:

- Ashbury Public School;
- Beverly Hills Girls High School;
- Hebersham Public School;
- Castle Hill High School;
- St Luke's Grammar School;
- St Francis De Sales Primary School;
- Freeman Catholic College;
- Young People, Big Voice, Young Person's Consultative Committee, Centre for Children and Young People, Southern Cross University.

The Committee also deeply appreciates the assistance given by the staff who guided these young people in the preparation of their excellent submissions and presentations to the Inquiry.

Many community organisations and individuals who helped to arrange the regional hearings in Casino, Lismore and Fairfield and gave some of the most informative and often deeply moving evidence about the needs of children and young people in their localities. The Committee is most grateful for their hospitality, assistance and support. Thanks are certainly also due to all the participants who shared their knowledge and views with the Committee through the many submissions and evidence given at the public hearings of this extensive inquiry.

Chapter One - Introduction

Why focus on 9 to 14 years? The year 12 students of 2016, the focus of the State Plan participation targets, already are in year four. They are the missing middle. Australian public policy has concerned itself relentlessly with the post-compulsory years of schooling since the early 1990s and in New South Wales since the Wyndham report of 1957. More recently, the community has come to acknowledge the critical importance of the early years, nought to five. It is time to rediscover the middle years, though we might still argue over the definition which years are exactly the middle years.²

Background to the Inquiry

- 1.1 In deciding upon the scope of this Inquiry, the Committee considered that the 9-14 age group had generally been overlooked in terms of research, policy and evidence-based interventions. This is despite the fact that it is undoubtedly a time of substantial change for children and young people, and a transition period that provides a key opportunity to provide interventions which will build resilience. Evidence given to the Inquiry identified a lack of focus on this age group, suggesting that indeed the 9-14 year old age group is the 'missing middle'.
- 1.2 The Committee formed the view that further investigation of the needs of children and young people in the middle years is important, due to the gap in the research and interventions for this age group in New South Wales, compared with both younger and older age groups. In noting this, the Committee in no way wishes to detract from the important work being done in respect of those age groups; it would simply like to see the 9-14 age group being given its fair share of research and programs.
- 1.3 This Chapter explains the manner in which the 9-14 age range has been defined, provides some statistics about this age group, and concludes with an explanation of the Inquiry process itself.

Determining the age range

- 1.4 The 9-14 year age range is known by a variety of terms, with a potentially confusing lack of consistency across disciplines. For example, in the education sector in New South Wales the name 'middle years' is generally used; but in other contexts the terms 'middle childhood', 'late childhood', 'early adolescence', 'pre-adolescence', 'pre-teens' and 'tweens' may be used to describe the group.
- 1.5 Moreover, the term 'middle years' itself may apply to different age or school year ranges in different jurisdictions. The NSW Department of Education and Training has used the following definition:

Middle Years' students are in Years 5-9 and are generally aged between 9 and 14 years.³
- 1.6 However, as shown below, other states and territories apply different criteria:
 - in Victoria, the term 'middle years of schooling' applies to students from Years 5 to 8;
 - in the Northern Territory, the middle years are from Year 4 to Year 9;

² Mr Ian Baker, Catholic Education Commission NSW, Transcript of evidence, 2 July 2008, p. 49.

³ NSW Department of Education and Training. 2006. *Our middle years learners – engaged, resilient, successful*, p. 1.

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- for the purposes of the Queensland School Curriculum Council's *Middle Years of Schooling Forum* the middle years were considered to be Years 5 to 10 (typically students are aged 10-15 years); and
- the draft South Australian *Curriculum Standards and Accountability Framework* defines the 'Middle years band' as Years 6 to 9.⁴

1.7 In determining the age range for this Inquiry, the Committee took into account this variation in definitions, as well as other aspects, such as the fact that government-funded children's programs and services, like *Brighter Futures* and *Families NSW*, are only available for children up to the age of eight. Ultimately, the age range of 9-14 years reflects a definition used by the NSW Department of Education and Training, which encompasses the vital primary to secondary school transition period.

Children and young people 9-14 years in New South Wales

1.8 As at June 2007, nearly one in five NSW residents were under 15 years of age, accounting for 19.4 per cent (1.33 million people) of the State's population.⁵ Of the 533,732 children between the ages of 9-14 years living in New South Wales in 2006, 274,100 were male and 259,632 were female.⁶

1.9 The following information describes some of the characteristics of children and young people in New South Wales:

- there is significant diversity in the cultural backgrounds of children in the middle years, with 4.1 per cent of this age group Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and 16.6 per cent speaking a language other than English;
- children 11-15 years made up 26 per cent (3,287) of the total number of children in out-of-home care in New South Wales. Twenty eight per cent of the children on control orders in detention were under 15 years at the time of admission, while 50.5 per cent of children who participated in a Youth Justice Conference were under the age of 15;
- the majority of NSW children in the middle years (67.3 per cent) live in major cities;
- in 2003, almost 96,000 New South Wales children aged 5-14 had a reported disability. Of these 59,000 were males and 37,000 were females.⁷

Why the need for an Inquiry into children and young people aged 9-14 years?

1.10 With respect to the important issue of 'early intervention', a 2007 NSW Department of Community Services literature review noted that studies examining the effectiveness of early intervention programs have predominantly targeted infancy and early childhood. It noted that "early intervention does not necessarily mean intervening

⁴ Australasian Committee of Chief Executive Officers of Curriculum, Assessment and Certification Authorities website.

⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics. 2007. *Population by age and sex, regions of Australia, 2007, 3235.0, New South Wales*.

⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics. 2006, *2006 Census Tables: New South Wales age by sex, 20680*.

⁷ Submission no. 90, NSW Commission for Children and Young People, pp.2-3;

Australian Bureau of Statistics. 2003. *Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of findings, 4430.0, State Tables for New South Wales*.

early in life, but rather early in the developmental pathway, with a focus on transition periods, such as the transition from childhood to adolescence.”⁸ Accordingly, the literature review concluded that “it is apparent that there are many gaps in the research regarding early interventions for children and young people aged 8 to 14 years”.⁹

- 1.11 This point was repeatedly raised in the course of the Committee’s Inquiry, with at least thirteen submissions noting the lack of attention to the middle years. For example, the submission from Mosman Municipal Council included the following comment:

While significant research and ensuing service development in New South Wales and Australia has focused in recent years on early childhood and older youth, the needs of children and young people in the middle ages of 9-14 years has appeared to be somewhat overlooked.¹⁰

- 1.12 In its submission, the Commission for Children and Young People commented as follows:

The middle years of childhood have attracted less attention from policy and research than early childhood or adolescence, perhaps because the middle years are perceived as a less dramatic period of development. However, the development and social changes that generally occur in a child’s life between 9-14 years are significant. Consider the difference between the abilities, interests, relationships and understandings of a nine year old girl in Year Four at primary school compared to those of a 14 year old teenage girl in Year Nine at high school.¹¹

- 1.13 The NSW Department of Community Services literature review of early intervention strategies for children and young people 8 to 14 years identified the following areas as deficient in research undertaken in Australia:

- parenting programs - especially parenting programs that have been developed to meet the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse groups;
- programs to prevent violence, substance use and child sexual abuse;
- after-school programs;
- extracurricular activities;
- mentoring programs;
- community programs;
- health promoting schools initiatives; and
- school suspension and expulsion.¹²

- 1.14 According to Tucci et al., there is also a dearth of Australian research that actively seeks the views and perspectives of children and young people:

⁸ NSW Department of Community Services. 2007. *Early intervention strategies for children and young people 8 to 14 years: literature review*, prepared by L Tully, Centre for Parenting & Research, Ashfield, p. 1.

⁹ *ibid.*, p.61.

¹⁰ Submission no. 75, Mosman Municipal Council, p. 1.

¹¹ Submission no. 90, NSW Commission for Children and Young People, p. 3.

¹² NSW Department of Community Services. 2007. *Early intervention strategies for children and young people 8 to 14 years: literature review*, prepared by L Tully, Centre for Parenting & Research, Ashfield, pp.60-69.

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Whilst an emerging trend internationally, little research has been undertaken in Australia that seeks the views of children about childhood, family life and the world in which they live. Children's views are often excluded from research due to the belief that they are unable to provide reliable accounts of their life. Many studies have shown, however, that children are both competent and coherent commentators on their own lives and the contexts within which they live.¹³

- 1.15 It is the Committee's opinion that it is critical to conduct further research about, and with, this age group, as well as to evaluate the effectiveness of different intervention programs. In recent years there has been a greater emphasis on evaluating programs for the 0-8 year olds. This needs to be replicated for the middle years age group, to assist in identifying which programs should be rolled out on a large scale across New South Wales.

Changes that occur in this age range

- 1.16 As noted earlier, one of the main reasons for focusing on the needs of children and young people in the middle years is that it is a time of substantial change. At least 27 submissions to the inquiry noted that children in this age range experience significant changes. These range from physical maturation to social and emotional development. The most significant physical transformations are associated with the onset of puberty and include "a growth spurt, maturity of sexual organs and an increased production of hormones."¹⁴ The changes associated with the beginning of puberty can be stressful for young adolescents, as is illustrated in a case study compiled by the primary school students from St Francis De Sales School:

One day, Macy, went to the toilet. She was in there for a while so the teacher sent Lorie (Macy's best friend) to go see if she was o.k. So Lorie went to see if Macy was o.k. When she got to the toilets she called out "Macy are you o.k.?" she heard a quiet reply that said "yeah I'm fine" so then Macy came out of the cubicle and said, "I just need to talk to the teacher." When Macy came back to the classroom she asked if she could see the teacher (Miss Valentine). "Miss Valentine I have my period can I please go home?" Miss Valentine said "sure". So she went home. Macy was 11 and this scared her because she hadn't been told much about it. This affected Macy because she'd take longer in the toilet and it would be embarrassing.¹⁵

- 1.17 As well as the physical changes described above, recent studies in neuroscience have shown that the structure of the brain continues to develop throughout late childhood and early adolescence, a time which is perhaps the human brain's "most important developmental period."¹⁶ Other studies have demonstrated that the activity of brains in teenagers significantly differs from that of adult brains.¹⁷ As noted in the Youthsafe submission:

Recent neuroscience research has identified that the adolescent brain is still developing and not fully mature until young people reach their twenties. The prefrontal cortex is a late maturing part of the brain responsible for reasoning, self control and making better judgement.¹⁸

¹³ Tucci, J., Mitchell, J., & Goddard, C. 2007. *Children's fears, hopes and heroes - modern childhood in Australia*, Australian Childhood Foundation, Ringwood, Victoria, p. 8.

¹⁴ Robinson, E. 2006. *Opinions*, October 2006, Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia.

¹⁵ Submission no. 95, St Francis De Sales School, p. 9.

¹⁶ Sylwester, R. 2006. *The tween brain: midway between infant dependency and adult autonomy*.

¹⁷ Talukder, G. 2000. *Decision-making is still a work in progress for teenagers*.

¹⁸ Submission no. 44, Youthsafe, p. 6.

- 1.18 As the brains of children and young people develop, so do their cognitive abilities. The NSW Department of Education and Training described some of these changes:
 During the Middle Years, students are moving from concrete to abstract thinking. They have an intense curiosity and a growing capacity for higher order analysis and reflection. They are also moving towards more rational decision making and a better understanding of the consequences of behaviour.¹⁹
- 1.19 The way children and young people view themselves and their emotional behaviour changes significantly in this period. Thus, the submission from Mission Australia noted that, “Children and young people are in the developmental stage in which factors such as communication, empathy, help seeking, goals and aspirations become major milestones in their development.”²⁰
- 1.20 The role of peers dramatically increases in significance: wanting to fit in and to be liked become “all consuming tasks for the young adolescent.”²¹ At the same time, a sense of personal identity is beginning to take shape, and they strive for greater levels of independence from their family.²² Society’s expectations of children also change throughout the middle years, allowing them greater autonomy and increased exposure to the world.²³ Children’s expectations around participation and involvement also change during this time, as they begin to assume greater responsibility and an interest in contributing to family, school and community life. The desire for increasing autonomy as well as the need for recognition of their evolving capacity to contribute to social and political life throughout the middle years will be discussed further in Chapter 2.
- 1.21 These physical, social, emotional and psychological changes are reflected in the institutional transitions experienced by children in the middle years. Perhaps the most significant transition of this type is that from primary school to high school. Other transitions include the move from out of school hours care services (which cease at 12 years of age) to youth services (which begin at 12 years of age), and other programmed activities.²⁴ Increased autonomy and responsibility mean that children and young people in this age group begin to spend more time without the supervision of adults, assume greater levels of family responsibility, and may also commence employment for the first time.²⁵

A key intervention point

- 1.22 As the years between the ages of 9 and 14 are crucial to physical, social and emotional development, they provide a key opportunity for positive intervention, such as providing relevant services or support. On this point, the Commission noted in its submission that:

As the middle years are a time of significant physical growth and when lifestyle choices begin to be established, these years also provide a window of opportunity for children to

¹⁹ NSW Department of Education and Training. 2006. *Our middle years learners – engaged, resilient, successful*, p. 2.

²⁰ Submission no. 83, Mission Australia, p. 1.

²¹ Robinson, E. 2006. *Opinions*, October 2006, Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia.

²² Submission no. 87, NSW Government, p. 2.

²³ Submission no. 40, Scouts Australia NSW, p. 5.

²⁴ Submission no. 43, City of Sydney, pp. 1-2.

²⁵ Submission no. 7, The Smith Family, p. 2.

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develop healthy attitudes and behaviours. The role of parents and carers is significant in supporting children to develop these healthy attitudes and behaviours.

During the middle years identifying and responding to early warning signs of later problems can help children from becoming vulnerable and make a significant difference to children's lives.²⁶

1.23 All of the changes associated with this age group create opportunities and risks. As Julie Robinson of the Marrickville Youth Resource Centre explained to the Committee:

Part of being an adolescent is becoming this independent person. The way that you do that is you push boundaries ... It is often a time of conflict. Some of it is minor conflict; some of it is quite major conflict. It is a time of experimenting. It is a time of trying to break away from your family. You are becoming more dependent on your peers. If you have great peers who are very connected, fantastic. If you have peers who maybe a bit more involved in some of the more antisocial behaviour, it becomes a lot harder to stand up to some of that stuff for some young people, not all. It is an age group that has the potential to be quite difficult.²⁷

1.24 Submissions to the Inquiry identified some of the risks faced by children and young people at this stage. These include:

- conflict with parents;²⁸
- peer group pressure;²⁹
- bullying and discrimination by others;³⁰
- self-esteem issues;³¹
- feelings of loneliness, depression and alienation;³²
- disengagement from school;³³
- the start of substance-using behaviour;³⁴ and
- initial contact with the criminal justice system.³⁵

1.25 As these risk factors may only become apparent during the middle years, it is an opportune time to provide interventions.

1.26 The transition from primary to high school was identified as a particularly critical stage in 25 of the submissions made to the Inquiry. This transition and the other changes that take place in this period pose risks if they are not managed effectively. It is a time when behavioural, academic and motivational problems may emerge.

²⁶ Submission no. 90, NSW Commission for Children and Young People, p. 4.

²⁷ Ms Julie Robinson, Marrickville Youth Resource Centre, Transcript of evidence, 11 June 2008, p. 52.

²⁸ Submission no. 27, Marrickville Youth Resource Centre, p. 1.

²⁹ Submission no. 104, Northern Territory Government, p. 6.

³⁰ Submission no. 27, Marrickville Youth Resource Centre, p. 1.

³¹ Submission no. 11, Ballina Shire Council, p. 2.

³² Submission no. 104, Northern Territory Government, p. 6.

³³ Submission no. 36, Federation of Parents and Citizens' Associations of NSW, pp. 1-2.

³⁴ Submission no. 87, NSW Government, p. 7.

³⁵ *ibid.*, p. 45.

Conversely, positive adjustment to the transitions during the middle years tends to foreshadow future educational attainment and personal wellbeing.³⁶

- 1.27 For example, longitudinal surveys conducted by the Australian Council for Educational Research have found that levels of literacy and numeracy at the age of 14 are significant indicators of occupational success in later life. Students with high levels of literacy and numeracy are less likely to be unemployed, and report having higher earnings and jobs of higher occupational status. Studies such as this demonstrate the importance of implementing interventions prior to this age.³⁷
- 1.28 Important research by Smart et al. as part of the Australian Temperament Study, suggests that it is not too late to intervene in early adolescence. In the study, researchers found that a substantial number of children identified as being 'at risk' of antisocial behaviour at 11-12 years engaged in little or no antisocial behaviour at age 17. The results of the study suggest that:
- individuals whose personal characteristics place them 'at risk' of developing adolescent antisocial behaviour are still amenable to change during late childhood and early adolescence; and
 - interventions aimed at enhancing family relationships, discouraging detrimental peer relationships and fostering school attachment may divert young people from traversing an antisocial pathway in adolescence.³⁸
- 1.29 Similarly, on the basis of their comprehensive review of the literature on serious and violent juvenile offenders, Loeber and Farrington concluded that "it is never too early, never too late" to intervene in pathways to antisocial behaviour.³⁹
- 1.30 Studies in brain development also suggest that it is not too late to intervene during the middle years. Talukder contends that the fact changes are still occurring in the brain during adolescence:
- ... provides some evidence against some popular theories that suggest that our brains are hardwired during early childhood. These brain imaging studies instead suggest that adolescence may provide a sort of 'second chance' to refine behavioural control and rational decision making.⁴⁰
- 1.31 This crime prevention and brain development research suggests that providing interventions in the middle years can be effective, and that the pathways of children and young people are amenable to change. This is a period of major transition and heightened risk, and can be a key turning point for children and young people.

³⁶ Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services. 2004. *Review of the early intervention parenting program and good beginnings prototypes*, prepared by RPR Consulting, Family and Children's Services Branch, vol. 2, p. 14.

³⁷ Penman, R. 2004. *What do we know about the experiences of Australian youth? An easy reference guide to Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth research reports, 1996–2003*, Australian Council for Educational Research, pp. 52-60.

³⁸ Smart, D., Vassallo, S., Sanson, A., Richardson, N., Dussuyer, I., McKendry, B., Toumbourou, J., Prior, M. and Oberklaid, F. 2003. *Patterns and precursors of adolescent antisocial behaviour: types, resiliency and environmental influences*, Crime Prevention Victoria, Melbourne. pp. xiii-xiv.

³⁹ Loeber, R. & Farrington, D. P. 1998. 'Never too early, never too late: risk factors and successful interventions for serious and violent juvenile offenders.' *Studies on crime and crime prevention*, vol. 7, issue 1, pp. 7-30.

⁴⁰ Talukder, G. 2000. *Decision-making is still a work in progress for teenagers*.

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1.32 In light of the above, the Committee is of the view that a strong focus in terms of research and intervention is required for children and young people in the middle years, as has recently been provided for children in the early years. Intervening in the middle years will provide opportunities for children and young people to develop greater resilience. The concept of resilience and its implications for intervention are discussed in detail in the following section.

Resilience

1.33 Resilience can be defined as a phenomenon or process reflecting relatively positive adaptation despite experiences of significant adversity or trauma.⁴¹ It is often described as the capacity to 'bounce back' or recover after hard times,⁴² a view reflected in a number of submissions. For example, students at Ashbury Public School gave the following definition:

Resilience means springing back from a fall. The dictionary defines resilience as being elastic or being able to recover quickly after sickness, depression, grief and other emotional upsets. This is a value which can help us cope with difficult situations that are presented in life. We believe that resilience is a must have skill and all children should have some understanding of how to develop their resilience.⁴³

1.34 Most definitions of resilience include two key elements, namely:

- exposure to adverse or traumatic circumstances; and
- successful adaptation following exposure.⁴⁴

1.35 Resilience is not an all-or-nothing characteristic, as everyone has it to some degree.⁴⁵ An individual will easily overcome some challenges, while others prove to be more difficult, and it is unlikely that a child, young person or adult will demonstrate resilience across all situations.⁴⁶ Moreover, resilience is not a fixed attribute of an individual; thus if circumstances change then resilience may also change.⁴⁷ Consequently a child's resilience may change over time, according to their developmental stage and subsequent experiences.⁴⁸

1.36 Australian studies have shown that the development of resilience in young people is now linked to long-term success in life and the prevention of substance abuse,

⁴¹ MacDermid, S., Samper, R., Schwarz, R., Nishida, J. & Nyaronga, D. 2008. *Understanding and Promoting Resilience in Military Families*, Military Family Research Institute at Purdue University, p. 1.

⁴² Hampshire, A. & Borer, A. 2005. 'Developing resilience at every stage of a young person's life', *Proceedings of the 9th Australian Institute of Family Studies Conference*, Melbourne, 9-11 February 2005, p.3.

⁴³ Submission no. 92, Ashbury Public School, p.6.

⁴⁴ Howard, S., Johnson, B. 2000. 'Resilient and Non-Resilient Behaviour in Adolescents', *Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice series*, Australian Institute of Criminology, No. 183, p. 1.

⁴⁵ Kindt, Michael. T . 2006. *Building population resilience to terror attacks*, Air University, Maxwell Air Force Base, p. 5.

⁴⁶ Luthar, S.S. 2006. 'Resilience in development: a synthesis of research across five decade cited in D. Cicchetti, D. and Cohen, D.J. (Eds.), *Developmental psychopathology: risk, disorder, and adaptation*, New York: Wiley, pp. 740-795.

⁴⁷ Rutter, M. 1984. 'Resilient children. Why some disadvantaged children overcome their environments, and how we can help', *Psychology Today*, March 1984, pp. 57-65.

⁴⁸ NSW Department of Community Services. 2007. *Risk, protection and resilience in children and families*, p.3.

violence and suicide.⁴⁹ It is also critical to the way in which children and young people cope with adversities during periods of transition.⁵⁰ This was highlighted by the Federation of Parents and Citizens' Association who noted that resilience is "a trait of utmost importance and one that has great significance in coping with the amount of change that accompanies the middle years."⁵¹

- 1.37 Enhancing the resilience of children and young people in the middle years is essential so that they can cope with, and bounce back from, adversities during this transition period, which, while a period of heightened risk, is also a time of significant identity formation. Implementing strategies that build resilience will allow children and young people in the middle years to effectively deal with trauma and adversity, and increase the likelihood of long-term success in life.

Risk and protective factors

- 1.38 The concepts of risk and protection form a crucial part of research relating to children and families. Whereas risk factors heighten the probability that children will experience poor outcomes,⁵² protective factors increase the likelihood of a positive outcome for young people and help to promote resilience.⁵³ Both risk and protective factors can be broadly grouped into four domains, namely child, family, school and community factors.⁵⁴
- 1.39 A range of risk factors has been identified in the literature, including:
- child characteristics such as low birth weight or disability;
 - family characteristics such as domestic violence, parental substance abuse or poor parental supervision and discipline;
 - school characteristics such as bullying, negative peer group influences or school failure; and
 - community characteristics such as neighbourhood violence and crime, lack of support services, or social and cultural discrimination.⁵⁵
- 1.40 Poverty may be a paramount risk factor.⁵⁶ For example, a range of behaviour problems are consistently found to be higher in children who live in low-income families. Poverty is associated with a cluster of other risk factors, including single parent status, large family size, teenage parenting and so forth. However, poverty is

⁴⁹ Mission Australia. 2005. *Developing resilience at every stage of a young person's life*, Mission Australia, p.2.

⁵⁰ Newman, T. & Blackburn, S. 2002. *Transitions in the Lives of Children and Young People: Resilience Factors*, Scottish Executive Education Department, Edinburgh, p. 1.

⁵¹ Submission no. 36, Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of NSW, p.5.

⁵² Newman, T. & Blackburn, S. 2002. *Transitions in the lives of children and young people: resilience factors*, Scottish Executive Education Department, Edinburgh, p. 3.

⁵³ Mission Australia. 2005. *Developing resilience at every stage of a young person's life*, Mission Australia, p.2.

⁵⁴ NSW Department of Community Services. 2007. *Risk, protection and resilience in children and families*, p.1.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*

⁵⁶ Newman T. & Blackburn, S. 2002. *Transitions in the lives of children and young people: resilience factors*, Scottish Executive Education Department, Edinburgh, p. 2.

less likely to actually cause problems per se than to provide an environment that harbours other factors that do directly cause problems.⁵⁷

- 1.41 A range of protective factors consistently appears in the literature. These may be internal assets such as social competence, problem solving skills, autonomy and a sense of purpose and future.⁵⁸ Alternatively, they may be external, assets such as family, school and community support. These protective factors also feature strongly in the literature about resilience.
- 1.42 Indeed, a supportive family has been singled out as the most powerful resilience-promoting factor. The submission from the Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations identified that a strong connection to family is one of the most important protective factors for young people in the 11 to 16 age group.⁵⁹ Many of the protective factors identified by research clearly relate to the consistency and quality of care and support which the child experiences during infancy, childhood and adolescence.⁶⁰
- 1.43 Another vital protective factor identified by international research is school achievement and school support.⁶¹ A sense of belonging to school can enhance academic performance, motivation and emotional wellbeing; and involvement in an educational establishment can protect against risky health behaviours. Academic success has such long-term benefits for a young person's choices in life that a positive school experience can often operate to modify negative life experiences.⁶²

Characteristics of risk and protective factors

- 1.44 Risk and protective factors have some distinctive characteristics. For instance, a single risk or protective factor may ultimately influence a range of outcomes. Harsh parenting, for example, can be a risk factor for behavioural problems, school failure, poor physical health, physical abuse and drug use. Conversely, a positive parent-child relationship protects against all these outcomes.⁶³
- 1.45 Risk factors are also cumulative. Children may be able to overcome and even learn from moderate risks but when risk factors accumulate children's capacity to survive rapidly diminishes.⁶⁴ The cumulative impact also appears to apply equally to protective factors. The more protective factors that are present in a child's life, the more likely he or she will display resilience,⁶⁵ and positive outcomes.⁶⁶

⁵⁷ Owens, E. & McCall, R. 1996. *Resilient children: factors that protect against psychosocial stressors*, National Network of Family Resiliency.

⁵⁸ Howard, S., Dryden, J. & Johnson, B. 1999. 'Childhood resilience: Review and critique of literature', *Oxford Review of Education*, vol. 25, no. 3, pp.307-323.

⁵⁹ Submission no. 88, Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, p.16.

⁶⁰ Newman, T. & Blackburn, S. 2002. *Transitions in the lives of children and young people: resilience factors*, Scottish Executive Education Department Edinburgh, p. 11.

⁶¹ *ibid.*

⁶² UnitingCare Burnside, Questions answered after hearing, 11 June 2008, p.3.

⁶³ NSW Department of Community Services. 2007. *Risk, protection and resilience in children and families*, p.2.

⁶⁴ Newman, T. & Blackburn, S. 2002. *Transitions in the lives of children and young people: resilience factors*, Scottish Executive Education Department Edinburgh, Scotland, p. 3.

⁶⁵ Howard, S., Dryden, J., & Johnson, B. 1999. 'Childhood resilience: Review and critique of literature', *Oxford Review of Education*, vol. 25, no. 3, pp. 307-323.

⁶⁶ NSW Department of Community Services. 2007. *Risk, protection and resilience in children and families*, p.2.

- 1.46 Research suggests that risk factors in one domain may be offset by positive factors in another domain. Thus, a young person who has a difficult home life may find solace in a school environment that offers belonging and connectedness, or may find support from elsewhere, due to an easygoing temperament.⁶⁷ Many researchers argue that caring and support across all three external systems of family, school and community is the most critical variable throughout childhood and adolescence.⁶⁸

Implications for interventions

- 1.47 Research findings about resilience, risk factors and protective factors have implications for the kinds of interventions that are most appropriate for this age group. Knowledge about the importance of risk, protection and resilience in different environments has also led to an emphasis on multi-component programs, which address risk and protective factors in the different domains.
- 1.48 For example, the first phase of the Pathways to Prevention Project initiated in 1999 by Griffith University in partnership with Mission Australia is a community-based prevention program in a disadvantaged region of Brisbane.⁶⁹ This ongoing project deals with risk and protective factors in multiple domains by providing parenting programs, home visiting and quality children's services. In its first phase, the program involved the integration of family support programs with preschool and school-based programs in seven schools, delivered within a community framework.⁷⁰
- 1.49 The knowledge that there are many common risk and protective factors connected to a range of outcomes also has particular implications for early intervention. Early intervention programs that successfully target a number of risk and protective factors have the capacity to prevent a range of problems simultaneously, rather than simply deal with a single problem.⁷¹ For example, research has demonstrated that some health promotion programs to strengthen school connectedness may ultimately impact on a range of outcomes such as academic achievement, substance use, antisocial behaviour and early initiation of sexual intercourse.⁷² Targeting common, interrelated risk and protective factors may lead to a positive impact on a range of outcomes.
- 1.50 Organisations working with young people clearly need to be mindful of the complex interaction of factors when deciding what works best. The NSW Department of Community Services has observed that understanding of risk, protection and resilience is constantly evolving. In its view, further research will help to better understand how multiple factors interact to produce different outcomes and how best to intervene to promote resilience in children.⁷³

⁶⁷ Robinson, E. 2006. *Opinions*, October 2006, Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia, p.3.

⁶⁸ Howard, S., Dryden, J. & Johnson, B. 1999. 'Childhood resilience: Review and critique of literature', *Oxford Review of Education*, vol. 25, no. 3, pp. 307-323.

⁶⁹ Homel, R., Freiberg, K., Lamb, C., Leech, M., Hampshire, A., Hay, I., Elias, G., Carr, A., Manning, M., Teague, R. & Batchelor, S. 2006. *The pathways to prevention project: the first five years, 1999-2004*. Sydney, Mission Australia and the Key Centre for Ethics, Law, Justice & Governance, Griffith University, p.vii.

⁷⁰ NSW Department of Community Services. 2007. *Risk, protection and resilience in children and families*, p.5.

⁷¹ *ibid.*

⁷² *ibid.*

⁷³ *ibid.*, p. 6.

Introduction

- 1.51 Research findings about resilience point to the importance of developing multi-component programs that operate in different domains, such as at school and at home, not just programs that deal with one domain. In addition, research findings about protective factors indicate that a strong focus on supporting families and parenting, as well as increasing students' sense of belonging at school are required.
- 1.52 Being able to identify and implement interventions that have the capacity to prevent a number of problems simultaneously such as substance misuse, early school leaving and antisocial behaviour, is of particular interest to the Committee. These types of interventions could produce multiple outcomes relevant to the work of a number of government departments and could form a core part of a whole-of-government approach to prevention and early intervention.

The Committee on Children and Young People

- 1.53 The Parliamentary Joint Committee on Children and Young People was first established in August 2000. The Committee's primary responsibility is to monitor and review the work of the Commission for Children and Young People (the Commission) and report its findings and recommendations to Parliament. In particular, the Committee is required to examine and report on annual and other reports of the Commission. However, the Committee has a broader responsibility to examine trends and changes in services and issues affecting children and young people, and to make recommendations as to the need for changes to the functions and procedures of the Commission.
- 1.54 The Committee's functions under the *Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998* are set out in s 28 of the Act, as follows:
- (a) to monitor and review the exercise by the Commission of its functions;
 - (b) to report to both Houses of Parliament, with such comments as it thinks fit, on any matter appertaining to the Commission or connected with the exercise of its functions to which, in the opinion of the Joint Committee, the attention of Parliament should be directed;
 - (c) to examine each annual or other report of the Commission and report to both Houses of Parliament on any matter appearing in, or arising out of, any such report;
 - (d) to examine trends and changes in services and issues affecting children, and report to both Houses of Parliament any changes that the Joint Committee thinks desirable to the functions and procedures of the Commission;
 - (e) to inquire into any question in connection with the Committee's functions which is referred to it by both Houses of Parliament, and report to both Houses on that question.

Conduct of the Inquiry

- 1.55 On 28 February 2008 the Committee resolved to adopt the Terms of Reference for an inquiry into the needs of children and young people aged 9-14 in New South Wales.⁷⁴
- 1.56 The Committee called for submissions by advertising in major metropolitan newspapers, as well as by notifying rural and regional newspapers. In addition, invitations were made to a range of public sector agencies, academics, organisations and interest groups, which the Committee considered would have a direct interest in the subject matter of the Inquiry.
- 1.57 The Committee was impressed with the number and quality of submissions received, which confirmed its view that the Inquiry was one of real relevance to children and young people, parents, carers and teachers, and the community as a whole. A full list of the 110 public submissions received appears at Appendix 1.

Public hearings and regional visits

- 1.58 The Committee held seven public hearings and one roundtable, taking evidence from a total of 133 witnesses. Public hearings were held at Parliament House on 11 June 2008, 2 July 2008, 17 March 2009 and 15 April 2009. In addition to these, the Committee also conducted two regional visits as part of the Inquiry.
- 1.59 On 5 and 6 August 2008, the Committee travelled to Ballina, Lismore and Casino, holding two hearings and one roundtable. The Committee also conducted visits to service providers in the area, namely ACE Casino, Casino Youth Services, Ngunya Jarjum Aboriginal Child and Family Network, Lismore Outside School Hours Care Centre, and Ballina District Community Service Association.
- 1.60 On 8 August 2008, the Committee travelled to Fairfield to conduct a public hearing, as well as meeting with representatives of local organisations The Junction Works, Powerhouse Youth Theatre and Cabramatta Community Centre. The witnesses appearing at the public hearings and roundtable discussions are listed in Appendix 2.
- 1.61 In conducting the Inquiry, the Committee has been mindful of the principles governing the work of the Commission, namely that:
- the safety, welfare and wellbeing of children are paramount considerations;
 - the views of children are to be given serious consideration and taken into account; and
 - a co-operative relationship between children and their families, and between children and their community, is important for the safety, welfare and wellbeing of children.⁷⁵
- 1.62 In framing recommendations based on the evidence presented to it, the Committee has had as its primary aim the continuing support of the important work of the Commission, and has borne in mind one of the Commission's most important

⁷⁴ At that time, the Committee was chaired by Hon Carmel Tebbutt MP, with Dr Andrew McDonald MP as Deputy Chair. Pursuant to Schedule 1 to the *Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998*, Ms Tebbutt's re-appointment to the Ministry and Dr McDonald's appointment as Parliamentary Secretary assisting the Minister for Health, meant that they ceased to be Members of the Committee. On 30 October 2008, Mr Robert Coombs MP and Hon Kayee Griffin MLC were elected Chair and Deputy Chair of the Committee respectively.

⁷⁵ Section 10, *Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998*.

statutory functions, which is to make recommendations to government and non-government agencies on legislation, policies, practices and services affecting children.⁷⁶ Thus, where it has considered it appropriate, the Committee has also made such recommendations, further to its function under s 28(d) of the Act to examine trends and changes in services and issues affecting children and young people.

Children and Young People's Participation

- 1.63 From the outset of the Inquiry, members of the Committee felt it was important for children and young people to participate and have an opportunity to voice their opinions regarding the terms of reference of the Inquiry.⁷⁷ To this end, the Committee invited students from seven primary and secondary schools across the Sydney metropolitan region to make submissions to the Inquiry, and to appear at the public hearing at Parliament House.
- 1.64 However, involving children in a Parliamentary Inquiry is procedurally complex, and it was the first time that this had been undertaken by the Committee. Moreover, the Committee initially required the permission of school principals and the bodies governing the schools – the NSW Department of Education and Training and the Sydney Archdiocesan Catholic Education Office – for students to participate in the Inquiry. Once this permission was granted, the Committee provided consent forms to the parents or guardians of each child who was to appear before the Committee.⁷⁸
- 1.65 The students worked on a project to prepare submissions for the Committee, based on the Inquiry's Terms of Reference. Finally, on 2 July 2008, students from the schools' Student Representative Councils appeared before the Committee to present their findings. The confidence, thoughtfulness and honesty of the participants greatly impressed members of the Committee.
- 1.66 While in Lismore, the Committee also heard from Young People Big Voice - the young persons' consultative committee of the Centre for Children and Young People at Southern Cross University. Young People Big Voice was established to give young people a voice about issues that are important to them and Committee Members were again impressed with the maturity of the participants and the candour with which they discussed sensitive issues.

⁷⁶ Section 11(d), *Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998*.

⁷⁷ The importance and need for children and young people to participate in the consultation and decision-making that affects their lives will be specially dealt with later in this report.

⁷⁸ The Committee also provided an information pack to schools which contained the following information:

- a brief introduction of the Committee and the Inquiry;
- an overview of the student participation that was intended for the Inquiry;
- further details about how to research and write a submission for the Inquiry.
- further details about how to prepare for the hearing, as well as information about what would happen on the day of the hearing and after the hearing;
- the Terms of Reference for the Inquiry;
- a number of questions in plain English, based on the Terms of Reference, that students could answer as part of their submission;
- a sample Parent/Caregiver Consent form;
- information about visiting Parliament House; and
- a copy of the Oath and Affirmation so that students could acquaint themselves with the words and practice what they had to say during the hearing.

- 1.67 In the course of the Lismore hearings, members of Young People Big Voice advised the Committee of an academic model of participation known as Hart's Ladder. The first three rungs of the ladder represent effective non-participation by children and young people, while the next five represent degrees of participation of increasing inclusiveness:
- manipulation;
 - decoration;
 - tokenism;
 - assigned but informed;
 - consulted and informed;
 - adult-initiated, shared decisions with youth;
 - youth-initiated and directed;
 - youth-initiated, shared decisions with adults.⁷⁹
- 1.68 Whilst the highest rungs of participation may not be possible in all situations, Ms Ryall from Young People Big Voice gave the Committee a description of Rung Five and voiced a hope that the Inquiry would function at this level:
- Rung five...happens when young people give advice on projects or programs designed and run by adults. The young people are informed about how their input will be used and the outcomes of the decisions made by adults. We would hope that this inquiry sits on rung five of the ladder as we are being consulted and at the same time informed. However, unless our points are being properly considered this rung of the ladder is the same as rung four.⁸⁰
- 1.69 The participation of children and young people in this Inquiry proved to be a valuable evidence-gathering exercise for the Committee, and certainly not mere decoration or tokenism. Bearing this in mind, wherever possible, the Committee has quoted directly from the evidence of children and young people, and used their words and ideas to address the Report's subject matter.

Structure of the Report

Chapter 1 of the Report sets out the Committee's reasons for initiating an Inquiry into the needs of 9-14 year olds. It provides a background for the Inquiry as well as describing the role of the Committee and the conduct of the Inquiry.

Chapter 2 addresses the first term of reference of the Inquiry, and reports on the needs of children and young people aged 9-14 such as self-esteem; belonging, feeling connected and supported; and increasing independence within a safe environment.

Chapters 3 to 17 address the second and third terms of reference of the Inquiry.

Chapter 3 reports on the recreation services that offer support and skills to children and young people aged 9-14 years, with particular regard to activities outside of school and access to youth centres.

⁷⁹ NSW Commission for Children and Young People website. *Research and resources about participation*.

⁸⁰ Ms Maia Ryall, Young People Big Voice, Centre for Children and Young People, Transcript of evidence, 6 August 2008, pp. 7-8.

Chapter 4 focuses on out of school hours care, including before and after school care, and vacation care.

Chapter 5 looks at the role technology plays in the life of children aged 9-14 years in New South Wales.

Chapter 6 provides an overview of the issues relating to transport for children in the middle years.

Chapter 7 reports on mental health services.

Chapter 8 addresses alcohol and other drug issues for children in the middle years.

Chapter 9 investigates other health services issues including sexual health and sexuality, dental health, overweight and obesity, injury prevention, and access to health services.

Chapter 10 discusses homelessness in relation to the 9-14 age group.

Chapter 11 focuses on parenting programs and parenting support, as well as early intervention.

Chapter 12 looks at issues relating to child protection and juvenile justice.

Chapter 13 is about engagement with school and transition to high school programs.

Chapter 14 addresses teacher quality and curriculum issues.

Chapter 15 is about literacy and numeracy.

Chapter 16 focuses on problems at school, including behavioural problems, suspension procedures and the use of school counsellors.

Chapter 17 discusses schools engaging with the community.

Chapter 18 addresses the fourth term of reference of the Inquiry. This chapter inquires into work and family balance, flexible work practices for parents and carers, as well as employment of children and young people.

Chapter 19 discusses better ways of delivering services to the 9-14 age group. This chapter examines the need for the participation of children and young people, an increased focus on prevention and early intervention, the importance of providing services to families and intervening at a younger age.

Chapter 20 examines the manner in which co-ordination and allocation of funding impacts on the provision of services to children and young people aged 9-14.

Conclusion

- 1.70 From the above, it will be seen that there is a widespread concern in New South Wales amongst parents, practitioners and children and young people themselves, that the 9-14 year old age group is indeed the 'missing middle' in terms of the availability of the requisite services and support. The Committee's aim in undertaking this Inquiry is to provide practical recommendations to address this gap. The starting point for this process is the assessment of what are the needs of children and young people 9-14 years, and this is dealt with in the following Chapter.

Chapter Two - The Needs of Children and Young People 9-14 years

...9 to 14-year-olds are interested in learning and opportunities that promote this. They need a network of people who they can talk to and trust, and also have social time with. The need for family support and learning opportunities for extracurricular activities, as well as community-based programs, are all essential.⁸¹

Introduction

- 2.1 This Chapter examines the needs of children and young people aged 9-14 years. Evidence to the Inquiry identified a variety of needs of this age group, including the need to:
- have good self-esteem;
 - belong, feel connected and supported;
 - have increasing independence in a safe environment;
 - be able to achieve, learn and feel competent; and
 - be heard, participate, and be listened to.
- 2.2 Having these needs met is integral to the development of resiliency, and to the social and emotional wellbeing of children and young people.

Self-esteem, recognition and respect

- 2.3 As noted in Chapter 1, resilience is the ability to deal with difficult events and succeed despite challenging situations. An important characteristic of a resilient person is that they possess a good level of self-esteem, based on a positive sense of self and positive recognition from others.⁸²
- 2.4 In research inviting the views and perspectives of children and young people regarding their understanding of wellbeing, the NSW Commission for Children and Young People identifies self-esteem as being important to children's sense of social and emotional wellbeing:
- Children described this as 'how you feel in yourself', feeling that you are a 'good' or an 'okay' person, having a general sense that things are going well and feeling appreciated for who you are, including what you do. Acting with integrity, being given positive recognition from others and having time to reflect are things that children identified as important to a positive sense of self and wellbeing.⁸³
- 2.5 The submission from St Francis De Sales School identified that being confident and having high self-esteem was important to enable young people to become useful adults in the community:
- This would allow us to take on what life brings. It allows us to be able to handle all aspects of our life, as we get older. For example as we get older we know we will be tempted by drugs and other harmful things but if we are confident we will be able to

⁸¹ Mr Edmund B., Ashbury Public School, Transcript of evidence, 2 July 2008, p. 3.

⁸² Submission no. 90, NSW Commission for Children and Young People, p. 10.

⁸³ NSW Commission for Children and Young People. 2007. *Ask the children: an overview of children's understandings of wellbeing*, p. 6.

ignore peer pressure and make good decisions for ourselves. We need the ability to say NO. Self-esteem gives you the ability to take on new challenges and try to achieve a useful and productive life.⁸⁴

2.6 Receiving positive recognition from others is also crucial to the way children and young people perceive themselves. The Commission noted in its submission that obtaining positive recognition and feeling valued contribute to positive self-esteem.⁸⁵ More widely, research shows that children's sense of self is influenced by how they see themselves, as well as positive appraisal and support from others who are important to them, such as parents, friends, teachers and peers.⁸⁶

2.7 The submission from Hebersham Public School also recognised the importance of positive recognition by others:

We need to be supported and encouraged by our peers, friends, parents and teachers in our lives. It is important for our local media like newspapers to write stories about the good things we do as we grow up as it allows us to gain confidence and achieve more. It also helps us look up to others and support us to know we can achieve whatever we want to.

...As we grow up we need to feel supported, understood, heard and more importantly valued as members of the community. We want to succeed and develop into worthwhile adults who respect each others culture and values.⁸⁷

2.8 In its submission to the Inquiry, the Youth Unit of the NSW Synod of the Uniting Church in Australia commented that schools that thrive tend to have teaching staff who convince young people they are valued learners:

Young people appreciate anything that taps their strengths or passions. Schools that thrive tend to have teaching staff that convince young people they are valued learners. Using a young person's strengths makes them feel needed, and this has positive effects on social inclusion and self-esteem: two vital factors in developing resilience.⁸⁸

2.9 The Commission also noted in its submission that obtaining positive recognition and feeling valued contribute to positive self-esteem.⁸⁹ Whereas small, every-day acts of recognition may be overlooked or taken for granted by adults, they are often highly memorable to children.

2.10 Despite this, a 2007 Australian survey by Tucci et al. of 600 children and young people aged 10-14 years found that children's sense of themselves is under threat:

Overwhelmingly, a substantial proportion of children feel insecure. Nearly half [46%] of the children surveyed did not feel confident about themselves. More than half [57%] worried about what others thought about them. Four in ten stated that they do not ever feel like they are doing well enough.⁹⁰

2.11 In that study, the researchers concluded that:

⁸⁴ Submission no. 95, Saint Francis De Sales School, p. 1.

⁸⁵ Submission no. 90, NSW Commission for Children and Young People, p. 6.

⁸⁶ *ibid.*

⁸⁷ Submission no. 96, Hebersham Public School, p. 2.

⁸⁸ Submission no. 22, Youth Unit of the NSW Synod of the Uniting Church in Australia, p. 5.

⁸⁹ Submission no. 90, NSW Commission for Children and Young People, p. 6.

⁹⁰ Tucci, M., Mitchell, J. & Goddard, C. 2007. *Children's fears hopes and heroes*, Australian Childhood Foundation, Ringwood, Victoria, p. 5.

The developmental tasks of building confidence, self-esteem and resilience in children is the basis for their preparation to reach adulthood. These findings suggest that we are struggling to reassure and build the self-esteem of a significant proportion of children.

Children need to experience a sense of confidence and competence in themselves as the building blocks to feel equipped to take on life's challenges. Pressures to succeed, confirm and keep up appear to take a toll on children who are only beginning to know themselves and what they are capable of achieving.⁹¹

- 2.12 In its submission, the Smith Family identified that heightened self-awareness can be a contributing factor to the low self-esteem and lack of self-confidence experienced by this age group when they are in unsupported settings:

It is a stage of life characterised by rapid and pronounced change, for example: puberty; the primary to high school transition; the possible commencement of part/full-time employment; the assumption of heightened levels of family responsibility; greater personal autonomy; and, an escalation in independent [informal and structured] social interaction. These changes make diverse and complex demands on children, families, teachers and the community.

The elevated levels of self-awareness typically accompanying this period create opportunities to develop crucial life skills such as resilience, confidence and perseverance. However, in unsupported environments and/or disadvantaged settings, heightened self-awareness can provoke and entrench social isolation, reduced opportunity, and potentially cyclic and intergenerational self-esteem problems.⁹²

- 2.13 In its submission, Ballina Shire Council also commented about the vulnerability of children and young people, and their self-esteem:

The ages of 9 to 14 can be a challenging time in the lives of many young people. These young people can be very vulnerable and experience degrees of anxiety about a number of issues including self-esteem, health concerns and relationships. The effect of these and other issues on the young person can also have an impact upon their families and even their local communities.⁹³

- 2.14 Tucci et al. believe that there is a crisis of confidence affecting many Australian children:

Issues of self-confidence and acceptance are of critical concern to children and underpin their sense of who they are, their future and what they are capable of achieving in their lives.⁹⁴

- 2.15 These authors warn that the consistently significant numbers of children showing such low levels of self confidence signals the need for parents, teachers, professionals and policy makers to agenda this issue as a priority for children.⁹⁵

- 2.16 The importance of providing programs designed to build self-esteem and self-confidence in children and young people was noted in several submissions received by the Committee. Examples of existing programs and gaps in services are discussed in Chapters 3-18.

⁹¹ Tucci, M., Mitchell, J., & Goddard, C. 2007. *Children's fears hopes and heroes*, Australian Childhood Foundation, Ringwood, Victoria, p. 11.

⁹² Submission no. 7, The Smith Family, pp. 1-2.

⁹³ Submission no. 11, Ballina Shire Council, p. 1.

⁹⁴ Tucci, M., Mitchell, J., & Goddard, C. 2007. *Children's fears hopes and heroes*, Australian Childhood Foundation, Ringwood Victoria, p. 23.

⁹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 15.

Belonging, feeling connected and supported

2.17 The need to belong and to feel supported is a fundamental to all people, regardless of age. However, evidence to the Commission suggested that the changes unique to the 9-14 years age group, makes this need all the more pressing. Thus, the submission from Wesley Mission identified that:

The greatest need for children in this age group is the surety of a secure, nurturing family which is supported by a strong socially cohesive social structure.⁹⁶

2.18 A very important source of such support is to be found in healthy relationships. In its study of children's understanding of wellbeing, the Commission found that the support provided through children's relationships and connections with others is central to their ability to develop resilience:

Children's ability to cope with adverse circumstances is developed through the support they are provided in specific contexts and within specific relationships. Children did not describe resilience as a personality trait but something developed through relationships and encounters in everyday life. Through this support, they develop an understanding and ability that they could use in the future; and are better able to cope with the adversities they confront.⁹⁷

2.19 Australian research has found that children who are well-connected and supported tend to feel comfortable with themselves, have trust in adults and feel safe and secure. Disconnected children are least trusting of adults, feeling that adults do not understand, respect or look out for them and feeling that there are few people upon whom they can rely.⁹⁸

2.20 Research has clearly shown that children need and want adults in their lives to act as a support and to create a sense of belonging. Indeed, a sense of connectedness and belonging to family, friends, school and the community is widely held by researchers to be important for the emotional health and wellbeing of young people.⁹⁹ This finding is supported by the Commission's research conducted with children and young people, in which children said that good relationships with families, friends, school and communities protect them from becoming vulnerable and therefore enable their wellbeing.¹⁰⁰

Connectedness to family

2.21 As noted in Chapter 1, having a supportive family is often singled out as the most powerful resilience-promoting factor. Being connected to family is of primary importance to children and young people. In 2004, the Commission undertook consultations with children and young people, which found that:

⁹⁶ Submission no. 61, Wesley Mission, p. 1.

⁹⁷ NSW Commission for Children and Young People. 2007. *Ask the children: an overview of children's understandings of wellbeing*, p.16.

⁹⁸ Tucci, M., Mitchell, J. & Goddard, C. 2007. *Children's fears hopes and heroes*, Australian Childhood Foundation, Ringwood Victoria, p. 10.

⁹⁹ *ibid.*, p. 23.

¹⁰⁰ Submission no. 90, NSW Commission for Children and Young People, p.2.

...family was strongly identified as most important to children and young people. Children in the online survey ranked being part of a loving family as number one in importance to them.¹⁰¹

- 2.22 The Committee was informed by one of the students representing Beverley Hills Girls High School, that a survey of students, parents and relevant professionals, reached similar conclusions:

Although the needs of children and young people 9 to 14 years old varied, we found that regardless of age, gender and socio-economic status there was a widespread need. That need was family. It was placed as a priority amongst all the other needs. From this information it can be concluded that children and young people from 9 to 14 believe that family is their main need.¹⁰²

- 2.23 Similarly, the submission by the Region Youth Development Officers Network (RYDON) noted that:

Kids Help Line [2006] and Mission Australia [2008] studies' of children and family relationships both indicate that children feel a higher sense of security when there are positive family connections.¹⁰³

- 2.24 Recent research by the Commission also noted the importance of family as a source of assistance and security, so that children and young people know that there are people to 'fall back on' or 'turn to' when faced with adversity.¹⁰⁴ Tucci et al. commented that children rely on their family to help them understand their experiences and to feel better about themselves and their life:

Parents are children's every day heroes because they love, care and support them. In essence, positive relationships with family offer children an important buffer to their fears and concerns. They enable children to interpret meaning from difficult experiences and they promote optimism, happiness and strength in children.¹⁰⁵

- 2.25 The converse of this is that in the absence of trusted and supportive family to whom they can turn to in times of crisis, children are all the more vulnerable. Thus, the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) discussed the negative impact of unsupportive family environments:

Caring, quality family relationships have a significant and lasting effect on a child's development and social and emotional wellbeing....Stable and secure family relationships also protect children from stress, illness and hazards. In contrast children's wellbeing is adversely affected by poor parental mental health, conflict in the home and abusive or harmful family environments.¹⁰⁶

- 2.26 The submission from the NSW Government commented on the importance of providing support to the family:

The family environment is a primary source of influence on the wellbeing of a young person. In order to address young people's needs, parents/carers and the family's

¹⁰¹ Commonwealth Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. 2007. *A world fit for children, Australia's response*, pp. 45-46.

¹⁰² Miss Milena M, Beverley Hills Girls High School, Transcript of evidence, 2 July 2008, p. 4.

¹⁰³ Submission no. 48, Region Youth Development Officers Network (RYDON), p. 8.

¹⁰⁴ NSW Commission for Children and Young People. 2007. *Ask the children: an overview of children's understandings of wellbeing*, p. 8.

¹⁰⁵ Tucci, M., Mitchell, J., & Goddard, C., 2007. *Children's fears hopes and heroes*, Australian Childhood Foundation, Ringwood Victoria, pp. 6, 19.

¹⁰⁶ Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth. 2008. *Report card on the wellbeing of young Australians*, p. 28.

needs must also be supported. The most salient features of the family environment that impact on young people are the availability of social and economic resources.¹⁰⁷

- 2.27 A recurring theme of evidence presented to the Committee during the Inquiry was the importance of family support, that is, not only supporting the child or young person, but also supporting the family unit. The Committee believes that support for the family, particularly in times of crisis, is an essential element in strengthening the resilience of children and young people. This is discussed further in Chapter 19.

Connectedness to friends and to community

- 2.28 While a supportive family remains a key element in developing resilience and coping with adversity, friendships become increasingly important to children and young people in this age group. Submissions to the Inquiry indicated that the focus of children's relationships change once they reach high school, as friendships with peers take on greater importance. For example, the Federation of Parents and Citizens' Association of NSW commented that the years 9-14:

...bridge the gap between childhood and adolescence and are accompanied by a shift in values, perceptions and relationships. The child becomes more focused on image and conforming with peers, at times withdrawing from the family unit, becoming more self-centred and more withdrawn or resistant to authority at home and in the classroom.¹⁰⁸

- 2.29 A survey into the needs of children and young people conducted by Beverley Hills Girls High School found that 73 per cent of 9-11 year old primary school students, indicated that family and education were their main needs, whereas only a very small percentage (five per cent) identified that they needed friendship, and to have more freedom and independence.¹⁰⁹ However, the results were considerably different for the 12-14 year old age group:

We surveyed 154 students in this age bracket. 31% said that having friends and being accepted by their peers was a key factor in their wellbeing, while 69% said family was still one of the main needs. 47% of these students had also listed being respected, having input into decisions, having a sense of belonging and a need for a society without bullying.

From these results it can be concluded that at a young age, children tend to need their parents more than friends but as they grow older their priorities change and they see friends and acceptance by others as their main needs.¹¹⁰

- 2.30 In its 2007 national survey, Mission Australia found that friendships were highly valued by 63.2 per cent of surveyed respondents aged 11-14 years.¹¹¹ Kids Help Line found from its analysis of telephone and online contacts received by its counsellors that almost half of all peer relationship concerns were presented by children aged between 10 and 14 years. The most common issue regarding friends or peers was occasional or one-off feelings of rejection (36 per cent), followed by reports of concern for a friend's well being (32 per cent).¹¹²

¹⁰⁷ Submission no. 87, NSW Government, p.8.

¹⁰⁸ Submission no. 36, Federation of Parents and Citizens' Associations of NSW, pp.1-3.

¹⁰⁹ Submission no. 93, Beverley Hills Girls High School, p.3.

¹¹⁰ Submission no. 93, Beverley Hills Girls High School, p.3.

¹¹¹ Mission Australia. 2007. *National survey of young Australians 2007: key and emerging issues*, p. 6.

¹¹² Kids Helpline. 2008. *Kids Helpline 2007 overview – issues concerning children and young people*.

- 2.31 Research conducted by the Commission has concluded that the depth of friendship developed through shared experiences allows children to share their experiences of adversity:
- Having a group of friends who are ‘there for you’ and ‘who stick by you no matter what’, is also important. More specifically, children identify certain friends who they can confide in because these friends understand where the child is ‘coming from’ and can empathise.¹¹³
- 2.32 Similarly, the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth noted that:
- In later childhood and in youth, peer relationships are increasingly important to wellbeing for young people. Friendships provide a sense of belonging and companionship and are a valuable source of advice and support. In the absence of peer relationships, children and young people may experience social exclusion.¹¹⁴
- 2.33 The evidence given to the Committee and relevant research identifies friendships as extremely important to children and young people in this age group. Although family relationships remain significant, children and young people aged 9-14 are more likely to turn to their friends for support.
- 2.34 As they get older, children and young people in this age group may also reach out further to the wider community for support and connection. Members of the community can have an important role to play in the lives of children and young people in this age group, as they obtain increasing independence and interact more with the broader community:
- Many people play an important role in the lives of children and young people, including parents, older siblings, extended family members, neighbours, family friends, teachers, health professionals, religious leaders, coaches and mentors, among other people. It is important to ensure that all these people leave a positive impact on the lives of the younger ones.¹¹⁵

Public space

- 2.35 Whilst some children and young people connect with adults in their community, Australian research has indicated others feel a sense of exclusion, particularly in their use of public space. The presence of groups of young people in public spaces is often contested, as it involves conflict over differing perceptions of legitimate public behaviour and the purposes of that public space:
- Particularly in shopping centres or consumer areas, the mere congregation of young people is regularly objected to by older people and business owners, who perceive such socialising as being related to “rowdiness”, “loitering” or other antisocial behaviour. Behaviour among young people that is considered by them as merely ordinary social interaction with their peers may be viewed by other members of the public as a nuisance, if not in some way a prelude to criminal activity.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ NSW Commission for Children and Young People. 2007. *Ask the children: an overview of children’s understandings of wellbeing*, pp. 2-8.

¹¹⁴ Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth. 2008. *Report card on the wellbeing of young Australians*, p. 28.

¹¹⁵ Submission no. 17, Association for Children’s Welfare Agencies, p.3.

Network of Community Activities also stressed the importance of engagement with their local community in the development of resilience: Submission no. 49, Network of Community Activities, p. 2.

¹¹⁶ NSW Law Reform Commission. 2005. *Report 104 - Young Offenders*.

- 2.36 Research conducted by Tucci et. al. discovered that half of the children surveyed (51%) did not feel welcome in shops and cafes, while over a third (36%) believed that adults do not care about what children think.¹¹⁷ The authors concluded that this perception reinforces the notion that children must resort to adults within their immediate environment for help, rather than feeling confident that help and support is more broadly available to them within the community in which they live.¹¹⁸
- 2.37 As Anita Harris has noted, in the Australian context the local suburban mall may literally be the ‘coolest’ place to go on a hot and humid day.¹¹⁹ However, by simply congregating without any intent to purchase, young people come into conflict with what has been described as ‘the central logic of the shopping mall’, namely the pursuit of commercial concerns:
- Young people often congregate and ‘hang out’ in and around *commercial spaces* and their very visibility, perceived lack of financial power, and behaviour [hanging around in groups, making noise] can render them an unwelcome presence – regardless of whether or not they actually transgress the law or actively engage in offensive activity.¹²⁰
- 2.38 Nonetheless, the Committee notes that by stopping them from simply ‘hanging out’ in otherwise public spaces, owners and managers of shopping centres are in fact breaching the rights of children and young people under Article 15 of the UN *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CROC):
1. States Parties recognize the rights of the child to freedom of association and to freedom of peaceful assembly.
 2. No restrictions may be placed on the exercise of these rights other than those imposed in conformity with the law and which are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security or public safety, public order (*ordre public*), the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.¹²¹
- 2.39 This conflict points to the need for initiatives to bring children, young people and adults together in ways designed to increase mutual understanding. As Dr Mike Dee, sociologist, has recently posited:
- A successful model of rights to public space for children and young people would, in outline form, need to enshrine rights, protections, standards, responsibilities and expectations for all users of public space, giving equal weight to the interests and demands of children and young people. This work is clearly a task still in progress.¹²²
- 2.40 Negotiating the use of public spaces is thus predicated on adults not simply assuming that their view of an appropriate use is the only valid one, but rather being prepared to enter into a dialogic approach with children and young people on the design and use of these contested spaces.

¹¹⁷ Tucci, M., Mitchell, J. & Goddard, C. 2007. *Children’s fears hopes and heroes*, Australian Childhood Foundation, Ringwood, Victoria, pp. 11-12.

¹¹⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 5-13.

¹¹⁹ Harris, A. 2005. ‘Citizenship and the Self-Made Girl’, *Gender and Education Reader*, Arnot, M & Macan Ghaill, M (eds), Routledge, London.

¹²⁰ White, R. & Cuneen, C. 2006. ‘Social Class, Youth Crime and Justice’, citing White, R. & Alder, C. (Eds) *The Police and Young People in Australia*. Melbourne. 1994. Emphasis in original.

¹²¹ United Nations. 1989. *Convention on the rights of the child*.

¹²² Dee, M. 2008. ‘Towards a matrix of rights to public space for children and young people in Australia’, *TASA Re-imagining Sociology Conference*, Melbourne, 2-5 December 2008, pp. 9-10.

Increasing independence within a safe environment

A safe environment

- 2.41 Young people in the middle years need a safe and nurturing environment. A safe environment should include - but is not limited to - home, school, places of recreation, places of worship, the neighbourhood and public places such as malls, shopping centres and parks. Making these places safe is the responsibility of the family in some cases, the community in other cases and of the three tiers of government in most cases.¹²³
- 2.42 Safety at home, at school and in the community is of basic importance to the wellbeing of children and young people. In a study on children's wellbeing conducted with children and young people 8-15 years by the Commission, children said they felt safe when they had the protection of parents, a safe place to be, or trusted people around them,¹²⁴ and that parents were primarily responsible for keeping them safe.¹²⁵
- 2.43 All children and young people need a safe and stable home, whether they live with their families or in alternative care.¹²⁶ Exposure to abuse or violence at home can have short-term and long-term detrimental impacts on children and young people. The impact of physical abuse, for example, may be long-term adverse outcomes in terms of intellectual and cognitive functioning, mental health problems and general ill-health. In its most extreme form, physical abuse of children and young people may be permanently disabling or result in death.¹²⁷
- 2.44 Safety at school also is important for children and young people. The need to feel safe and secure at school was identified as a priority by parents who gave feedback to the Committee.¹²⁸ This safety includes freedom from bullying, which was raised as an issue in a number of submissions to the Inquiry. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 16.
- 2.45 Children and young people also need to feel safe in their community more broadly. When children feel safe in their neighbourhood, they feel part of it and are able to act independently within it. The design and qualities of the built environment are important factors in making a community safe or unsafe and influence how safe children feel. The lack of 'safe spaces' for general use restricts children's capacity to engage in activities in their own way.¹²⁹
- 2.46 In consultations conducted by the Commission as part of its study of children's understandings of wellbeing, children associated a lack of safety in their neighbourhoods with a decline in 'community spirit':

¹²³ Submission no. 17, Association for Children's Welfare Agencies, p. 1.

¹²⁴ NSW Commission for Children and Young People. 2007. *Ask the children: an overview of children's understandings of wellbeing*, p. 4.

¹²⁵ Submission no. 90, NSW Commission for Children and Young People, p. 6.

¹²⁶ Submission no. 103, Queensland Commission for Children and Young People, p. 2.

¹²⁷ Special Commission of Inquiry into Child Protection Services in NSW. 2008. *Report of the special commission of inquiry into child protection services in NSW*, conducted by Hon James Wood, vol. 1, p.207.

¹²⁸ Submission no. 36a, Federation of Parent and Citizens' Associations of NSW, p. 1.

¹²⁹ NSW Commission for Children and Young People. 2007. *Ask the children: an overview of children's understandings of wellbeing*, p. 5.

I don't think I would go out on the street and introduce myself to my neighbour's children and play with them because... everyone keeps to themselves now. There is not quite as big a community spirit as I think there was. [Girl, 14 years]¹³⁰

2.47 The Commission concluded that:

When children feel safe in their neighbourhood, they feel part of it and are able to act independently within it. The lack of 'safe spaces' for general use restricts children's capacity to engage in activities in their own way.¹³¹

2.48 Having safe communities in which they feel welcome, and where there are activities in which they can be involved, is important to the wellbeing of children and young people. Evidence to the Inquiry noted that a safe space in which to 'hang out' is a vital need for young people, whether they live in the metropolitan Sydney or in a regional New South Wales. This is not a desire for something extravagant or upmarket, but rather simply somewhere to be themselves with others their own age. Lynnette Smith of Adult Community Education Inc told the Committee that:

Kids do not want a lot of fancy things. They just want a place to go, a place to feel safe, a place where they are respected and a place where they can just be them. They do not particularly want us to organise 107 activities and things to do—art and craft, sport or whatever—they just want to be with their peer group, like we all do.¹³²

Need for increasing independence

2.49 During the middle years, children and young people seek more independence, particularly from parents. The submission from the Commission included germane comments from young people:

I don't know, I just think that when we are changing and we are sort of thinking for ourselves more, it may be daunting to parents. [Girl, 14 years].

I know like they think oh... they have changed so much they are not like the same little girl anymore but we can't be. [Girl, 13 years].¹³³

2.50 Many submissions emphasised this increasing need for independence, a process which needs to be positively supported. As stated in the submission from Network of Community Activities:

Critical for the healthy development of 9-12 year olds are opportunities for independence, risk taking, leadership engagement with their local community and the provision of supportive role models. The goal to ensure that children are resilient and able to cope with life's successes and disappointments is an important developmental outcome for this age group.¹³⁴

2.51 In its submission, Scouts Australia NSW stressed the necessity of having a safe environment for all activities and interaction to allow children and young people to extend themselves:

The importance of a 'safe' environment cannot be reiterated too strongly – at their best support structures should be robust, consistent and almost unseen. This sense of underlying safety provides enormous freedom for children and young people to express

¹³⁰ Submission no. 90, NSW Commission for Children and Young People, p. 6.

¹³¹ NSW Commission for Children and Young People. 2007. *Ask the children: an overview of children's understandings of wellbeing*, p. 5.

¹³² Ms Lynnette Smith, Adult Community Education Inc, Transcript of evidence, 5 August 2008, p. 5.

¹³³ Submission no. 90, NSW Commission for Children and Young People, p. 5.

¹³⁴ Submission no. 49, Network of Community Activities, p. 2.

and extend themselves as they transition from childhood to become young adults, regardless of age and gender. It is even more critical to children from disrupted backgrounds.¹³⁵

- 2.52 While this age group seek more independence, they still require appropriate guidance. The need to strike this balance between 'letting go' and providing the right amount of supervision for a range of activities in a safe setting is the paramount issue not only for parents, but also for service providers. The importance of providing appropriate guidance and supervision was emphasised in a number of submissions, and summed up by Marrickville Youth Resource Centre as follows:

They want to be able to have fun with their friends in safe environments, they want increasing freedom with increasing age and this often presents challenges to parents as to 'letting go' and balancing the need for appropriate levels of supervision. For many of the young people we see they are looking for things to do 'to not be bored' and to have a safe space they can hang out with their friends.¹³⁶

- 2.53 At home, children in the middle years are typically given more freedom and responsibilities by their parents. A key factor in this process is in children and young people finding that balance between being cared for and learning through experience. In its submission, the Commission noted that:

In our wellbeing research children said they wanted their decisions to be respected by adults. However, children want guidance from their parents to set boundaries and provide advice and support. The opportunity for children to develop their agency is only possible within the boundaries set by adults, particularly parents, who both restrict and allow children to exercise their decision making abilities.¹³⁷

- 2.54 The positive impact of appropriate guidance was highlighted by UnitingCare Burnside in its submission:

...children and young people need encouragement of their independence, firm boundaries and warmth. Family 'warmth' and 'connection' are terms that were explained by Burnside service providers as a need that children and young people, even those who leave home during times of crisis, will come back to their families for.¹³⁸

- 2.55 The middle years, is a time when children seek and are given increasing independence. This process needs to be positively supported by the provision of safe environments in which children and young people can extend themselves, as well as age-appropriate guidance. This provides a supportive environment for children and young people in the middle years to learn and achieve.

Achieving, learning and feeling competent

- 2.56 Many researchers have concluded that competence and personal esteem are central to a child's wellbeing,¹³⁹ and children themselves tell us that activities in which they achieve are important to them, because they contribute to experiences of competence. In its submission, the Commission noted that:

¹³⁵ Submission no. 40, Scouts Australia NSW, p. 6.

¹³⁶ Submission no. 27, Marrickville Youth Resource Centre, p. 2.

¹³⁷ Submission no. 90, NSW Commission for Children and Young People, p. 5. See also the Commission's 2001 Report, *Participation: Sharing the stage, A guide to helping children and young people to take part in decision making*.

¹³⁸ Submission no. 76, UnitingCare Burnside, p. 7.

¹³⁹ Submission no. 90, NSW Commission for Children and Young People, p. 7.

Activities where children can exert some control are most associated with wellbeing. If children do not feel competent at an activity they may feel excluded or humiliated by other children or by adults. The experience of competence is important to children because it contributes to children being given recognition and being appreciated for achieving, which in turn makes children feel good about themselves.¹⁴⁰

- 2.57 Undoubtedly, one area where children and young people have the opportunity to achieve is in the education system. The submission from Freeman Catholic College commented on the importance of education to young people:

What we view as needs may be different to what adults view as our needs. What would you classify as a need? The latest ipod or loving parents? A need is something required for survival. It allows you to have success or achieve a goal. One need that embodies this definition is the need for education.¹⁴¹

- 2.58 When surveyed by the Student Representative Council, the majority of Freeman Catholic College students in Years 7 to 9 believed that education was a need for a variety of reasons, including gaining a good job, and a good quality of life. Some students also said that they felt education was a need for society as a whole, as there would be no advancement or improvement in its absence.¹⁴²

- 2.59 Freeman Catholic College also emphasised the value of school in providing lessons for life, in addition to academic subjects:

Our education may not just include school lessons, but rather life lessons, experienced and learnt at school and other environments. Society demands that we learn these lessons so as to contribute, rather than burden, and to mature and grow as our knowledge grows.¹⁴³

- 2.60 Students from Hebersham Public School also expressed a keen appreciation of the opportunities for a wider range of experiences which school can provide:

School gives us a good foundation for our future. School allows children to gain experiences that they might not be able to get from their families. Education allows young people a chance to get their foot in the door in the real world.¹⁴⁴

- 2.61 Participation in activities outside the formal education process also provides opportunities to learn and feel competent, as children and young people in the middle years have a strong need for increased stimulation and exposure to the world around them. As noted by the Commission:

By becoming involved in activities such as environmental initiatives, Scouts, Guides, fundraising events, church and faith groups, children can gain the opportunity to help others and feel good about themselves, as well as develop skills and competence.¹⁴⁵

- 2.62 Brother Peter Carroll of Trinity Catholic College, Lismore discussed activities that give this age group opportunities to develop resilience, while at the time helping them to achieve, learn and feel competent. He told the Committee that it was important:

...to engage them in committees and things that are productive and give them a sense of mastery over their environment, being able to achieve something. In the previous

¹⁴⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁴¹ Submission no. 97, Freeman Catholic College, p. 2.

¹⁴² *ibid.*

¹⁴³ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ Submission no. 96, Hebersham Public School, p. 2.

¹⁴⁵ Submission no. 90, NSW Commission for Children and Young People, p. 9.

session a young man said it was only when he went to boxing at the PCYC that he started to engage. That is great evidence of the importance of that sort of activity and involvement.¹⁴⁶

- 2.63 Such activities help children and young people to develop the social and emotional skills that allow them to negotiate the world around them. UnitingCare Burnside noted the importance of excursions, extra-curricular activities and camps for the stimulation of young people to help them to develop much needed life skills, such as active listening, co-operation and appropriate body language.¹⁴⁷ It was also observed that such activities may contribute to a young person's capacity to develop positive relationships:

Among other benefits, these activities help children and young people in the middle years to build the skills to enhance relationships with their families and peers. These relationships provide critical support when they face adolescent and teenage challenges.¹⁴⁸

- 2.64 Children and young people who have experienced neglect or social isolation have reduced access to the stimulation and resources needed for gradual skills development. Researchers have noted that intervention in the middle years provides an opportunity to make a difference for disadvantaged children and young people at a key stage of their cognitive development, and at a time of high socialisation.¹⁴⁹
- 2.65 The experience of competence is central to the wellbeing of children and young people. Participation in formal education and activities outside of school provide important opportunities to learn new skills and to feel competent. The Committee is of the view that it is vital that these opportunities are provided, particularly in relation to disadvantaged children and young people.

Being heard, participating, being listened to

- 2.66 Children and young people need to be listened to and have opportunities to participate. Under the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, participation is the right of every child.¹⁵⁰ Children have the right to participate in decisions taken in their regard - within the family, the school or the community. Article 12 of the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* states the opinions of children should be heard and respected, with the views of the child being given due weight according to the age and maturity of the child.¹⁵¹
- 2.67 Being able to participate in and influence decisions affecting their lives is important to children and young people. Children have told the Commission that it is important to their wellbeing to have the power to take independent action, including being able to make choices in everyday situations, and influence everyday occurrences at home and at school. Children also said that it is important to their wellbeing to be involved

¹⁴⁶ Brother Peter Carroll, Trinity Catholic College, Transcript of evidence, 6 August 2008, p. 18.

¹⁴⁷ Submission no. 76, UnitingCare Burnside, p. 8.

¹⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p. 9.

¹⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p. 8.

¹⁵⁰ In November 1989, the UN General Assembly adopted the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. Having ratified the Convention in December 1990, Australia has a duty to ensure that all children in Australia enjoy the rights set out in the treaty.

¹⁵¹ United Nations. 1989. *Convention on the rights of the child*.

in decisions about their lives, and that having some degree of control is important to achieve goals which were important to them.¹⁵²

2.68 In its submission, Wesley Mission commented on the importance of children participating in decisions that affect them:

As they develop the ability to make more mature decisions they need the respect of the adults around them and this needs to be demonstrated by listening to their opinion and allowing them full participation in decisions which affect them.¹⁵³

2.69 A common thread throughout the literature is that children and young people want to be allowed to participate and want their opinions to be valued and respected.¹⁵⁴ The Committee was informed by students from Hebersham Public School of their need to be heard, understood and valued:

As we grow up we need to feel supported, understood, heard and more importantly valued as members of the community. We want to succeed and develop into worthwhile adults who respect each other's culture and values.¹⁵⁵

2.70 The benefits of the participation of children and young people are well-established. They have been found to include:

- enhancement of skills capacity, competence and self-esteem;
- improved self-efficacy; and
- strengthening of social, negotiation and judgment skills through trial, error and compromise.¹⁵⁶

2.71 Professor Anne Graham of the Centre for Children and Young People at Southern Cross University informed the Committee about the importance of participation for children and young people:

Children and young people report that being recognised, respected and valued as individuals with opinions and feelings and able to constructively contribute to and shape decisions facing their everyday lives is important to them. It is important because it gives them a sense of belonging to their community, gaining new skills and experiences, meeting new friends and building a sense of their own agency.¹⁵⁷

2.72 Similarly, in its submission, the NSW Government considered the benefits of the participation of children and young people in decision-making:

Children and young people need to participate in decision-making to help them have a sense of autonomy over their lives and to be generally more positive in establishing their own direction. Young people who believe their lives are largely within their own control are more likely to have positive attitudes towards others.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵² NSW Commission for Children and Young People. 2007. *Ask the children: an overview of children's understandings of wellbeing*, pp. 2-3.

¹⁵³ Submission no. 61, Wesley Mission, p. 1.

¹⁵⁴ UnitingCare Burnside. 2002, *Children and young people's participation in the welfare sector: a literature review*, prepared by Elizabeth Reimer, Social Justice and Research Program, p. 7.

¹⁵⁵ Submission no. 96, Hebersham Public School, p. 2.

¹⁵⁶ Graham, A., Whelan, J. & Fitzgerald, R. 2006. 'Progressing participation: taming the space between rhetoric and reality', *Children, Youth Environments*, vol. 16, no. 2, p. 233.

¹⁵⁷ Professor Anne Graham, Centre for Children and Young People, Transcript of evidence, 6 August 2008, p.3.

¹⁵⁸ Submission no. 87, NSW Government, p. 34.

2.73 Together with caring relationships and high expectations, opportunities to participate and contribute have been identified as protective factors in young people's environments. However, these factors are distinct components of a dynamic protective process, in which they must work together. For example, caring relationships without high expectations or opportunities for meaningful participation foster dependency and co-dependency – not positive youth development.¹⁵⁹ By way of illustration, some children and young people with a disability may have experienced caring relationships, but their growth and development may have been impeded by low expectations or insufficient meaningful opportunities to participate.

2.74 Mr Paul Murphy of the NSW Department of Community Services also discussed the importance of young people being able to participate in projects. He provided the example of the Better Futures funded Menai Youth Action Project, which is:

... very positively viewed in the community and seems to have very effective ongoing strategies to ensure that young people not only participate in the program, but have a genuine voice in the way the various aspects of the services are designed and delivered. From our perspective that is very important to us in the way we look at Better Futures because there clearly is evidence to show that where young people feel they have genuine opportunities to participate, there are much higher levels of resilience and much more positive connections to community and family than would otherwise be the case.¹⁶⁰

2.75 Professor Graham informed the Committee that children's participation is not only important for them, but it has also been shown to be important for families and for family life. Research suggests that children and young people who feel respected and heard are more likely to respect others, be more committed to the decisions that are made, feel responsibility for those decisions and to differentiate between and accept what they can and cannot influence.¹⁶¹ More broadly, the benefits of participation have been shown to include:

- enabling the positive development of children's identity, competence, sense of responsibility and sense of belonging in the community;
- enabling children to protect themselves;
- better decisions, development programs and policy results;
- broadening and deepening how we practice democracy and citizenship.¹⁶²

2.76 Professor Graham also noted that children's participation is:

... accepted as strengthening the status of children in social and political life, raising issues associated with their social exclusion, challenging the accountability and responsiveness of institutions like schools and health care systems with which young people interact, as well as contributing far reaching benefits for children's wellbeing.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁹ Bennard, B. 2004. *Resiliency: what we have learned*, WestEd, San Francisco, p. 44.

¹⁶⁰ Mr Paul Murphy, NSW Department of Community Services, Transcript of evidence, 2 July 2008, p. 27.

¹⁶¹ Professor Anne Graham, Centre for Children and Young People, Transcript of evidence, 6 August 2008, p.3.

See also Oliver, K.G., Collins, P. Burns, J and Nicholas, J. 2006. 'Building resilience in young people through meaningful participation', *Australian e-Journal for the Advancement of Mental Health*, vol. 5, no. 1.

¹⁶² Submission no. 64, Centre for Children and Young People, p. 2.

¹⁶³ Professor Anne Graham, Centre for Children and Young People, Transcript of evidence, 6 August 2008, p.3.

2.77 In the same vein, the submission from the Centre for Children and Young People noted the importance of participation, particularly for this age group:

Research also shows that children attribute a great deal of importance to being recognized and acknowledged as individuals with opinions and feelings of their own and as agents capable of contributing to decisions made in their everyday lives. When children are understood as participants, they see themselves as being important and legitimate players in social, cultural, economic and political life. Whilst this research concerning participation applies across a spectrum of ages, from very young children to young adults, it is particularly relevant for children aged 9-14 years as they make the transition between 'child' and 'adolescent' status and negotiate the quite complex issues in families, schools and communities that they are part of.¹⁶⁴

2.78 Having input into decision-making gives children and young people a sense of agency and brings benefits to children and young people, their families and to society more broadly. It also leads to better program development and policy decisions, as discussed further in Chapter 19.

Committee comment

2.79 Evidence given to the Inquiry identifies a range of needs of children and young people 9-14 years. These include positive self-esteem; belonging and connectedness; safety; increasing independence; achievement, learning and feeling competent; being heard, participating and being listened to. Undoubtedly these are all basic human needs, and not unique to the middle years. However, research has shown that, having regard to the complex physiological and emotional changes which characterise the middle years, the extent to which these needs are met by families, friends, community and government is critical for the development of resilience. The role that services in New South Wales play in meeting these needs is examined in the following chapters.

¹⁶⁴ Submission no. 64, Centre for Children and Young People, p. 2.

Chapter Three - Recreation, Support and Skills

Government and the community have a responsibility to support children during these formative years in order that they gain the resilience to cope with future challenges in a rapidly changing world. In spite of the importance of these formative years, there are few services specifically designed to meet the needs of this age group.¹⁶⁵

Introduction

- 3.1 Young people in the middle years need a wide variety of stimulating activities that are readily accessible to them after hours and on weekends. Services which are currently available often do not adequately provide for 9-14 year olds and, if they do, there are often barriers to participation. This chapter considers the positive benefits of sporting and cultural activities for young people, the current gaps in services providing activities and the types of programs which would be suitable for young people during the critical childhood to adolescence years.

Needs and Access

- 3.2 While submissions to the Inquiry provided information about a range of programs and services relevant to children and young people in the middle years, they also identified a need for programs and services specifically designed for the 9-14 year-old age group.¹⁶⁶ The Committee was informed that the 9 to 11-12 age group have particularly pressing needs:

These children are at an age which has many challenges and they need support and attention, (e.g. puberty [e.g. becoming independent but not at a maturity level to be responsible for self]) yet there is a gap in community services for children during this vital period. *Families NSW*-funded services' age is maximum 8 years, while Youth services generally start at 12 years. There is therefore a large gap in services at a time which is crucial.¹⁶⁷

- 3.3 Lack of access to services after normal working hours and on weekends can also be a concern. The submission from Southern Youth and Family Services included the following comment:

There is an appalling lack of services working after normal hours and on week-ends with young people and yet these times are often key times to engage with young people. The SAAP [Supported Accommodation Assistance Program] services... are often the only services open after 6 pm on any evening and throughout the night. There is an appalling lack of a responsive and adequate after hours service leaving community agencies to do for which they are not adequately resourced.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁵ Submission no. 24, Ms Judy Finlason, p. 1

¹⁶⁶ Submission no. 43, City of Sydney, p. 4.

See also Submission no. 80, Mt Druitt Blacktown Youth Service Network (MBYSN), p.2.

¹⁶⁷ Submission no. 30, Marrickville South Interagency, p. 1.

In 2007, Fairfield City held a summit addressing the needs of children aged 8-11 years, having identified these children as the 'often-forgotten' yet critical age group. Although the summit developed a number of working groups, without adequate funding, Council and the non-government organisations were unable to sustain momentum: Submission no. 35, Fairfield City Council, p. 2.

¹⁶⁸ Submission no. 54, Southern Youth and Family Services, p. 10.

Knowing what is available

- 3.4 Readily and widely available information is needed in order for children and young people to access available services. Evidence to the Inquiry identified that a lack of such knowledge may be a barrier to access, particularly in urban areas.¹⁶⁹ This has been identified as a particular issue for parents of 'at-risk' children and young people in this age group.¹⁷⁰
- 3.5 Problems due to lack of information about services are exacerbated for newly arrived migrants. Students from Beverly Hills Girls High School surveyed 15 Intensive English Centre students who had been in Australia for a few months, and found that only two of the students could successfully name a support group or service.¹⁷¹
- 3.6 The *Better Futures Inner and Eastern Sydney Pre-teen Research Report* noted that there was a need for easily accessible information, both printed and electronic, to inform children and parents and service providers about the range of private and public activity programs available. Such information should be coordinated and compiled in a form that is simple to access and easily kept up to date.¹⁷² Children interviewed as part of the report process generally thought that postings in the school newsletter and announcements at assembly would be most effective, followed by postings on the Internet.¹⁷³
- 3.7 A number of suggestions were made to the Inquiry in relation to providing information about services. These included:
- television advertising;
 - advertising in teen magazines, flyers, school newsletters and within the school environment;¹⁷⁴
 - developing an information diary to be given to parents through schools;¹⁷⁵ or
 - radio.¹⁷⁶
- 3.8 The Committee notes that widely available information for both children and young people and their parents or carers is a vital first step in accessing the services and systems which are discussed in the following chapters.

Activities outside of school

Mr Steve Cansdell MP: If there was one thing you would like the Government to step in and help you with in your area, what would it be?

...

Mr W: ... places we could go without our parents supervising us so that we can do things that we want.

Mr Steve Cansdell MP: And just have a safe environment?

¹⁶⁹ Brown, M. 2005. *The Better Futures Inner and Eastern Sydney pre-teen research report*, Waverley Council, p. 8.

¹⁷⁰ Mr Lee Shields, Newcastle PCYC, Transcript of evidence, 11 June 2008, p. 55.

¹⁷¹ Submission no. 93, Beverley Hills Girls High School, p. 5.

¹⁷² Brown, M. 2005. *The Inner and Eastern Sydney pre-teen research report*, Waverley Council, p. 27.

¹⁷³ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ Submission no. 93, Beverley Hills Girls High School, p. 6.

¹⁷⁵ Mr Lee Shields, Newcastle PCYC, Transcript of evidence, 11 June 2008, p. 55.

¹⁷⁶ Submission no. 97, Freeman Catholic College, p. 3.

Mr W: Yes, because at a park, it is safe, but anyone can access it. If we had places that had a room so that we can just play around knowing that we are safe.¹⁷⁷

- 3.9 Article 31 of the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* states that children have the right to relax and play and be able to join a variety of cultural, artistic and other recreational activities.¹⁷⁸ The importance of young people aged 9-14 participating in social and recreation activities outside of school for young people was frequently raised in the evidence presented to the Inquiry. Evidence to the Committee dealt with matters such as the benefits of participating in activities, demand for them and barriers to participating and opportunities for expanding the provision of activities.

Benefits of participating in activities

- 3.10 Significant benefits for children and young people participating in social and recreational activities after school were identified in evidence submitted to this Inquiry. The submission from Ku-ring-gai Council identified that the “nature and regularity of social and recreation activities out of school hours is critical for social, physical and intellectual development in this age group.”¹⁷⁹
- 3.11 In its submission, the Federation of Parents and Citizens’ Associations of NSW commented on the importance of activities for developing well-adjusted young adults:
- The promotion of extra-curricular activities as an essential, not additional, element of the child’s education and development is one strategy with the potential to provide very positive outcomes. This will provide opportunities for children and young people in these middle years to develop the necessary characteristics to prepare them for a well-adjusted and productive adolescence and adulthood.
- ...Special interest extra-curricular activities not only provide young people with additional skills, they also foster personal growth and a sense of belonging.¹⁸⁰
- 3.12 In his evidence to the Committee, Professor Matthew Sanders of the University of Queensland noted the capacity for participation in a range of activities to act as a protective factor against antisocial behaviour. Professor Sanders responded, as follows, to a question about evidence of the impact of participating in activities on increasing the resilience of children and young people in this age group:
- I think the important mechanism here is connectedness. If kids are meaningfully involved in age-appropriate activities, in particular, activities that involve peers who are not engaged in antisocial behaviour, that is a protective factor. When kids are meaningfully connected through their schools in a range of activities, whether they are sporting, artistic or recreational activities that involve some kind of adult supervision and connectedness - not necessarily supervision in a controlling sense, but adults are part of the activity, particularly with younger teenagers - there is significantly less likelihood of the kids becoming involved in antisocial behaviour, crime, causing problems on the streets with graffiti and other sorts of behaviours that generally cause community alarm when it occurs.¹⁸¹
- 3.13 Extra-curricular activities can include formal activities such as sports, arts related activities, environmental initiatives and community service, as well as informal

¹⁷⁷ Mr Tom W, Castle Hill High School, Transcript of evidence, 2 July 2008, p. 14.

¹⁷⁸ Submission no. 57, Ku-ring-gai Council, p. 3.

¹⁷⁹ Submission no. 45, Campbelltown City Council, p. 1.

¹⁸⁰ Submission no. 36, Federation of Parents and Citizens' Associations of NSW, p. 4.

¹⁸¹ Professor Matthew Sanders, Parenting and Family Support Centre, University of Queensland, Transcript of evidence, 17 March 2009, p. 37.

recreational activities or play. The benefits of some of these types of activities have been identified in the literature and evidence to the Inquiry.

3.14 The health benefits of participating in physical activity have been well documented. A 2005 Discussion Paper published by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing identified a number of immediate health benefits for children and youth who participate in physical activity. The paper concluded that physical activity was found to have beneficial effects on obesity, skeletal health and several aspects of psychological health.¹⁸² The Department's *Active kids are healthy kids* brochure also lists further health benefits of being physically active for children aged between 5 and 12 years of age. According to the brochure, physical activity can:

- promote healthy growth and development;
- build strong bones and muscles;
- improve balance and develop skills;
- maintain and develop flexibility;
- help achieve and maintain a healthy weight;
- provide opportunities to make friends; and
- improve self-esteem.¹⁸³

3.15 Participation in sport or other types of physical activities may assist in reducing anti-social behaviour. In a report on sport, physical activity and anti-social behaviour Morris, Sallybanks and Willis examined evidence which suggests the "provision of well-structured sport and physical activity programs may assist to reduce youth antisocial behaviour."¹⁸⁴ The following exchange from the Committee's public hearing at Lismore between Mr Ahri Tallon of Young People Big Voice and the Chair of the Committee illustrates this point:

Chair:¹⁸⁵ Ahri, you said earlier when you were in year 8 and a bored youth and you were going out and getting into a bit of trouble. Is there anything in particular that changed you or made a difference to you that, as you moved on, you thought you needed to operate in a different way? What made the difference? What made you turn the corner to become more settled—maybe still bored sometimes but a more settled young person?

Mr Tallon: No, I am never bored, I am always busy. I just went to a public school, Richmond River, and all my friends were smoking all the time and going in a downward spiral and not doing much. One afternoon my friend asked me to go to boxing at the PCYC and that kind of sets off a chain reaction where I got involved in more sport, I got involved in the PCYC. I can pretty much thank the PCYC because I went on this leadership camp—the Blue Star program, you might have heard of it in Sydney. Then I became the State youth representative and it turned into a big snowball from getting involved in a community sport. That was it, just getting involved.

Chair: That is very illuminating. How old were you when you started going to the PCYC? What year was that?

¹⁸² Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing. 2005. *Discussion paper for the development of recommendations for children's and youths' participation in health promoting physical activity*.

¹⁸³ Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing. 2004. *Active kids are healthy kids*.

¹⁸⁴ Morris, L. Sallybanks, J. & Willis, K. 2003. *Sport, Physical Activity and Antisocial Behaviour in Youth*. Research and Public Policy Series No. 49, Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra, p. 2.

¹⁸⁵ Hon Carmel Tebbutt MP.

Mr Tallon: I think that would have been towards the end of year 8.¹⁸⁶

- 3.16 Arts activities are another means of providing positive outcomes for children and young people. The Barnados Australia submission to the Inquiry indicated that children aged 9-14 respond well to arts activities that are used as engagement strategies, or for skill development:
- ... young people in this age group have been very responsive to group work that uses the arts, for example, circus skills, art work, theatre workshops, for both the engagement strategy and educational/skills development intervention.¹⁸⁷
- 3.17 In a recent paper on after-school arts programs, Dr Robin Wright noted the growing evidence on the benefits of after-school arts programs:
- There is growing research evidence that well-designed and structured after-school community based programs can promote positive youth development and enrich the lives of youths, improve school performance, as well as reduce negative behaviours like delinquency and alcohol and drug abuse.¹⁸⁸
- 3.18 The submission from Monkey Baa Theatre for Young People outlined some of the benefits of arts programs, particularly those with a theatre or drama orientation:
- studies have shown that involvement in dramatic play has resulted in a reduction in 'risk factors' for marginalized youth, improved personal communication skills and builds a greater sense of community and social inclusion for these youths;
 - the use of drama supports other literacy-based programs in the school environment. The essence of drama is the use of enactment to improve a student's talking and listening skills, as well as the reading, writing and understanding of written text; and
 - the arts have the ability to develop the physical, social, emotional and spiritual growth in a young person's life. Beyond the recognisable tangible outcomes, there are wide ranging intangible outcomes such as patience, observation, risk taking in a safe environment, planning and social skills, working collaboratively and increased feelings of self-esteem.¹⁸⁹
- 3.19 However, in a separate 2006 journal article, Wright et al. noted that few existing programs provide good evaluation of the outcomes of the programs. In the United States, after a comprehensive review of existing evaluation research on the impact of arts-based programs for at-risk youth, the Rand Corporation concluded that while there were many interesting arts programs, few of them had been properly evaluated.¹⁹⁰
- 3.20 There is an increasing amount of international research to support the need for children aged 9-14 years to be allowed safe play opportunities¹⁹¹ or participation in

¹⁸⁶ Mr Ahri Tallon, Young People Big Voice, Centre for Children and Young People, Transcript of evidence, 6 August 2008, p. 12.

¹⁸⁷ Submission no. 21, Barnados Australia, p. 4.

¹⁸⁸ Wright, R. 2007. 'A conceptual and methodological framework for designing and evaluating community-based after-school arts programs,' *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, vol. 13, no. 1, pp. 123-132.

¹⁸⁹ Submission no. 99, Monkey Baa Theatre for Young People Ltd, pp. 2-3.

¹⁹⁰ Wright, R., John, L., Alaggia, R. & Sheel, J. 2006. 'Community-based Arts Program for Youth in Low-Income Communities: A Multi-Method Evaluation,' *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, vol. 23, no's.5-6, pp. 635-652.

¹⁹¹ Submission no. 49, Network of Community Activities, p. 2.

informal activities such as bike riding or going to skate parks. The United Kingdom Department of Children, Schools and Families outlined a number of the benefits of play for children in an evidence summary supporting the department's *2008 Play Strategy*:

We know that children who access play opportunities enjoy a range of significant benefits. Play supports their sense of wellbeing, emotional development, learning and interpersonal skills, health and independence. It is also important in terms of children having fun and enjoying life.¹⁹²

- 3.21 In short, both research and evidence to the Inquiry have identified that participating in extra-curricular social and recreational activities provides significant benefits for children and young people in the middle years.

Need for activities

- 3.22 The need for more activities after school for children and young people in this age group was a major theme of the Inquiry, highlighted in forty submissions. In its submission, the Commission commented that young people have consistently reiterated the need for affordable, accessible and interesting activities:

Lack of access to suitable activities after school, on weekends and in the school holidays is an issue for children in the middle years in many parts of NSW. During the Commission's many consultations with children since our establishment, children have constantly raised the need for affordable, accessible and interesting things to do in their local area.¹⁹³

- 3.23 The Committee's own consultations with children and young people in Lismore resulted in similar comments about the need for activities outside school. Some members of the Young People Big Voice consultative committee discussed the severe shortage of 'things to do' in the Northern Rivers region and the problems that the subsequent boredom can engender:

Mr Rodwell: I can admit to being a bored youth as well. Ask yourself how many youth actually are in the northern rivers? You only need to look around and see how many public events and facilities there are to facilitate use: it is ridiculous. They have nowhere to go, they go through puberty and go crazy. They have nothing to do. There is no public transport so they end up in Byron. They end up drinking, falling over people and doing stupid stuff. The words "bored youth" is not sarcastic, it is real, it is a real fact, ask any news here today and they will say, "Yes". Everyone has gone through it.

Mr Cooper: There is a unique problem. In populations such as Newcastle with 200,000 or so people, there are a lot more services in those places than in Lismore and Coffs Harbour and Grafton. We are not rural like Bourke, but we are not like Newcastle either, we are in the middle. A lot of young people come to Lismore to go to uni and there needs to be recognition that we are missing out.

Miss Ryall: We often just think of them as bored youth, but we do not ask why they are bored. Something needs to be done so they are not bored and there may not be as many problems.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹² UK Department for Children, Schools and Families. 2008. *The play strategy: Evidence Summary*, p. 1.

¹⁹³ Submission no. 90, NSW Commission for Children and Young People, p. 18.

¹⁹⁴ Mr Tully Rodwell, Young People Big Voice, Centre for Children and Young People; Mr Ben Cooper, Young People Big Voice, Centre for Children and Young People; & Miss Maia Ryall, Young People Big Voice, Centre for Children and Young People, Transcript of evidence, 6 August 2008, p. 9.

- 3.24 Casino Aboriginal elder Ms Nora Caldwell also voiced concerns about the lack of activities available outside of schools:

We need more for our kids, things they can use like cinemas. They have got nothing here for the kids. When they want to go to an indoor game they have to go to Lismore. Indoor bowls, a stadium, they go over there... If they are bored they are on the street. They will tell you themselves, "There is nothing here for us". I sit down and talk with the kids. They just sit and play cards."¹⁹⁵

- 3.25 Service providers, such as the Marrickville South Interagency, also recognised the need for a range of activities:

Children in the middle years need to be provided with programs that offer activities to alleviate their boredom, to teach them respect for each other and those older than them, respect for authority and rules, to educate them in various ways and give them a sense of belonging to a group, encourage mentorship and fun in their holidays. This would be an early intervention exercise, preventing children from learning risky behaviours and activities.¹⁹⁶

Need for a variety of activities

- 3.26 In the middle years, children and young people need choice and the opportunities to experiment and try out a range of activities, as not all children have the same interests. While sporting activities are often well catered for, there may be few other choices.¹⁹⁷ The submission from Wesley Mission noted that a variety of activities other than sport should be available:

...there needs to be a recognition that not all children are interested in sport and as wide a range of activities as possible should be offered. Creative activities such as Art or Music have also been found to be very beneficial, particularly for children who have less developed social skills. These activities need not involve competition or the ability to work as part of a team but never the less engage the children with their peer group and help develop social relationships.¹⁹⁸

- 3.27 Mr Byron M from Hebersham Public School outlined some of the activities that he would like to see available in the western suburbs of Sydney:

In the western suburbs children really need a range of things to do to relax and have fun. We need sporting centres, dance groups, discos, social clubs, facilities for hobbies, and community centres where we can learn new things and just be together, meet new people and talk to someone that can help with concerns and problems.¹⁹⁹

- 3.28 The submission from the Lismore DGO (District Guidance Officers) group recommended an increase in the number of activities available to disadvantaged children. These children can benefit greatly from activities outside school but may not fit into existing programs that are available:

An increase in "after school's" activities groups where schools and parents can refer children with behavioural and/or emotional challenges where they can practice new ways of doing things, increase their self-image, make new friends, learn social skills

¹⁹⁵ Ms Nora Caldwell, Junbung Elders, Transcript of evidence, 5 August 2008, p. 11.

¹⁹⁶ Submission no. 30, Marrickville South Interagency, p. 2.

¹⁹⁷ Submission no. 24, Ms Judy Finlason, p. 1.

¹⁹⁸ Submission no. 61, Wesley Mission, p. 4.

¹⁹⁹ Mr Byron M, Hebersham Public School, Transcript of evidence, 2 July 2008, p. 8.

and so on. Many young people with these needs do not “fit” into already established groups such as Scouts, netball clubs etc.²⁰⁰

3.29 The need for various types of activities for children in the 9-14 age group was a major theme of the evidence to this Inquiry. Different types of activities after school are now examined in greater depth, including both formal and informal activities or ‘play’.

Informal recreation activities

3.30 The United Kingdom’s play strategy uses ‘play’ to describe what children and young people do when they follow their own ideas and interests in their own way and for their own reasons, balancing fun with a sense of respect for themselves and others. Children described were asked about what play as activities inside and outside of the home, including football, playing on equipment at the park, playing on computers or the internet, watching television, board games, and baking cakes.²⁰¹

3.31 Data is available about the participation of Australian children and young people 9-14 years in informal recreational activities, which indicates the popularity of a range of different activities for children and young people 9-14 years. For example, in the two weeks prior to interviews conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics in April 2006:

- 1,587,900 children aged between 9 and 14 participated in watching television, videos or DVDs;
- 1,440,000 participated in homework or other study;
- 1,212,600 participated in reading for pleasure;
- 1,086,800 participated in playing electronic or computer games;
- 1,030,300 participated in bike riding;
- 651,400 participated in art and craft; and
- 385,000 participated in skateboarding or rollerblading.²⁰²

3.32 Participation rates for almost all activities are lower for the 12-14 age group compared with the 9-11 age group. A marked example is bike riding, which decreases from 72.1% to 54.5%. The only exception to the trend is homework, which increases from 87.1% to 89.6%.²⁰³

3.33 More formal activities can include organised sport, arts and cultural activities, and participation in programs such as environmental programs.

Arts and cultural activities

3.34 Participation in arts and cultural activities can include involvement in different types of arts related programs and activities such as singing, drama and playing a musical instrument. It may also involve attending arts and cultural activities such as visiting art galleries, museums or performing arts events.

²⁰⁰ Submission no. 25, Lismore DGO Group, p. 2.

²⁰¹ UK Department for Children, Schools and Families. 2008. *Fair play: A consultation on the play strategy*, p.9.

²⁰² Australian Bureau of Statistics. 2006. *Children’s participation in cultural and leisure activities*, pp. 37-38.

²⁰³ *ibid.*

- 3.35 According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics,²⁰⁴ 1,164,100 Australian children and young people aged between 9 and 14 attended selected cultural venues and events in the 12 months prior to April 2006, while 598,100 participated in selected organised cultural activities.²⁰⁵ Interestingly, the New South Wales attendance rate at selected cultural venues and events was the lowest for any of the states and territories, at 67.6%.²⁰⁶
- 3.36 A range of opportunities are available for the participation of children and young people 9-14 years in arts related activities outside of school hours. The submission from the NSW Government²⁰⁷ outlined a number of programs inclusive of 9-14 year olds run by Arts NSW. These include the *ConnectEd* program,²⁰⁸ the *Performing Arts Touring* program,²⁰⁹ the youth theatre sector,²¹⁰ and activities organised by cultural institutions such as the Art Gallery of NSW, Australian Museum, State Library of NSW and Sydney Opera House.²¹¹
- 3.37 Programs for engaging children and young people in arts-based activities are also run as part of after-school activities on school sites, and by organisations such as youth services, church groups, and private providers. The *Better Futures* program has also provided some funding for arts activities inclusive of this age group.
- 3.38 Evidence to the Inquiry suggests the need for systematic approaches to increase participation in the arts programs and events. Research conducted as part of the *Better Futures* Inner and Eastern Sydney pre-teen research project identified that children would like to take part in interesting arts activities:
- The majority of children surveyed for this research said they would like to take part in interesting arts activities... Network has suggested that an arts-based activity program, similar to the Active After Schools Community Program, would benefit children and providers. Having young, well-trained and enthusiastic staff to deliver art and craft activities would be a major attraction to older aged children.²¹²
- 3.39 The submission from Ku-ring-gai Council suggested that arts projects could be funded in different areas during school holidays:
- Provision of children 9-14 years of age with an integrated Arts based program where children would become involved in a variety of art modes including music, creative

²⁰⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics. 2006. *Children's participation in cultural and leisure activities*, pp. 18, 25.

²⁰⁵ The cultural venues and events surveyed were: visited public library, visited museum or art gallery, and attended performing arts event; the organised cultural activities surveyed were: playing a musical instrument, singing, dancing, and drama.

²⁰⁶ All other states and territories had an attendance rate above 70%, with the ACT achieving the highest attendance rate of 80.8%.

²⁰⁷ Submission no. 87, NSW Government, pp. 43-44.

²⁰⁸ Through travel and ticket subsidy, the *ConnectEd* arts strategy provides access to quality performing arts and visual arts workshops, camps and performances for isolated, rural and disadvantaged schools, with the specific target group of students in Years 5-8.

²⁰⁹ This program in part supports regional tours that benefit children in the middle years and are delivered by arts organisations, youth theatre, dance and music companies who are committed to touring in regional NSW.

²¹⁰ Arts NSW supports metropolitan and regional youth theatres that are nationally and internationally recognised for providing calibre workshop and performing programs for young people aged 4-25 years.

²¹¹ These offer an extensive range of education programs linked to the NSW school curriculum, as well as specific activities and workshops for children and young people across the age range.

²¹² Submission no. 53, Waverley Council, p. 15.

writing and the visual arts (drawing, painting, collage). This could occur through funding of arts projects in different local areas and could occur each school holiday period.²¹³

- 3.40 Correspondence received from Waverley Council suggested funding for an 'arts after school' program, similar to the *Active After-school* program.

The NSW Government could initiate an Active after school arts program throughout NSW to provide a wider range of arts activities in after school hours than is offered within the school curriculum. This could be delivered through schools, youth services art organisations or OSHC's in much the same way as the AASC program is currently being delivered ... Through the medium of play the program would also aim to assist children to improve their social skills as well as teach them more about team work; how to listen to their friends and the people around them and how to share materials and the classroom.²¹⁴

- 3.41 The submission from Monkey Baa Theatre also recommended an increase in funding to Arts NSW for Arts/Education linked programs with particular reference to the NSW Youth Action Plan, specifically Action 29, which supports arts activities for young people in regional New South Wales;²¹⁵ and to encourage Arts NSW to accelerate its plan to implement a Youth Arts Policy detailing initiatives that inspire and involve children and young people in the arts.²¹⁶

- 3.42 Evidence to the Inquiry indicates that it is important for children and young people in the middle years to have access to a variety of activities outside of school and that there is growing evidence of the benefits of well developed and structured after school arts programs. The Committee considers that increased provision of arts based programs for children and young people in the middle years, particularly in disadvantaged communities, should be a priority and that such programs should be provided through a range of organisations including neighbourhood centres, multicultural services, Aboriginal organisations and youth services.

RECOMMENDATION 1: The Committee recommends that the Premier, in his capacity as the Minister for the Arts, facilitate the development of a youth arts plan with a major focus on regional New South Wales.

The Committee further recommends that the Commissioner for Children and Young People be consulted in the development of any proposed youth arts plan.

RECOMMENDATION 2: The Committee recommends that the Premier, in his capacity as the Minister for the Arts, facilitate the development of further arts activities in school holidays for children in the middle years with a focus on disadvantaged communities, particularly Indigenous communities.

The Committee further recommends that the Commissioner for Children and

²¹³ Submission no. 57, Ku-ring-gai Council, p. 6.

²¹⁴ Waverley Council, Questions answered after hearing, 17 March 2009, p. 1

²¹⁵ Submission no. 99, Monkey Baa Theatre for Young People Ltd, p. 3.

²¹⁶ *ibid.*

Young People be consulted on any proposed development.

Sport

- 3.43 Sport is undoubtedly one of the most popular after-school activities for children and young people aged 9-14 years, with 60-70 per cent participating in some form of organised sport.²¹⁷ Interestingly, this age group represents both the peak (9-11 year olds), and the greatest decrease, in participation (12-14 year olds).²¹⁸
- 3.44 The NSW Department of Sport and Recreation runs a number of sport and recreation programs for 9-14 year olds such as *Outdoor Education Programs*,²¹⁹ a state-wide learn to swim and water familiarisation program; youth in sport programs;²²⁰ and the *Duke of Edinburgh's Award*,²²¹ and also conducts programs to assist athlete development.²²² Sports activities are also offered through organisations such as Police Community Youth Clubs, sporting clubs, and community based and youth organisations.
- 3.45 The Commonwealth Government funds the nationwide *Active After-school Communities Program* (AASCP), as part of its \$116 million *Building a Healthy, Active Australia* package. AASCP provides primary school aged children access to free structured physical activity programs between 3.00 p.m. and 5.30 p.m., and is designed to engage otherwise non-active children in structured physical activities, as well as connecting pathways with local community organisations. The program is open to all Australian primary schools and childcare benefit-approved out of school hour care services.²²³ As at December 2007, 38,392 NSW children at 823 schools and out of school hours care services, many of which are located in regional and remote areas.²²⁴
- 3.46 An interim evaluation of AASCP undertaken by Colmar Brunton Social Research found that the program is achieving its aims of:
- enhancing the physical activity of Australian primary school-aged children through a nationally coordinated program;
 - providing increased opportunities for inclusive participation in quality, safe and fun structured physical activity;
 - growing community capacity and stimulating local community involvement in sport and structured physical activity; and

²¹⁷ Australian Bureau of Statistics. 2006. *Children's participation in cultural and leisure activities*, p. 18.

²¹⁸ Submission no. 87, NSW Government, p. 10.

²¹⁹ These programs aim to increase personal confidence, awareness, independent living skills and skills of working within a team, and are offered at 11 Sport and Recreation Centres across NSW.

²²⁰ PCYC NSW is funded to develop and implement programs to link participation in sport with a reduction in antisocial behaviour.

²²¹ The *Duke of Edinburgh's Award* is a leadership program for young people 14 years and older incorporating components in adventure, recreation and community service: See <www.dukeofed.org.au>

²²² Submission no. 87, NSW Government, p. 41.

²²³ Submission no. 53, Waverley Council, p. 75.

²²⁴ Australian Sports Commission. 2008. *Helping kids and communities get active: an interim report of the evaluation of the Australian Sports Commission's Active After-school Communities program 2005-2007*, p.12.

- satisfying stakeholders with the operation and effectiveness of the program.²²⁵
- 3.47 However, despite these successes, evidence to the Inquiry noted that changes to the scope of AASCP would make it more attractive to children and young people in the 9-14 age group:
- ... kids, because of the nature of this age group, do not like committing to things week after week. So, we would like to see it be more flexible, not just about sports, but include arts programs and music and culture and theatre to really cover the range of interests of kids in that age group ... We have found that OOSHs are a kind of natural fit for it. You would imagine that most schools have sports programs anyway. So, the active after-school communities program was targeted at underactive kids, basically.²²⁶
- 3.48 It was suggested to the Committee that if extra resources were allocated to this area at the high school level, children could be linked back through youth services with an integrated planning approach, thereby exposing the children to a whole range of activities, rather than simply sports.²²⁷
- 3.49 The Committee believes that consideration should be given to piloting an *Active After-school Communities* (AASCP) type-program for early high school aged young people. Some variation to the current scope of AASCP would be required in order to attract a broader range of students and in order to engage early high school aged students. A more flexible range of activities, including arts activities, would appeal to a broader cohort and adding variety could improve engagement with the program. In addition, providing alternate venues or organisations to run the program might allow the program to reach young people averse to attending after-school programs on school grounds.
- 3.50 The Committee also notes that the recent House of Representatives Standing Committee on Health and Ageing inquiry into obesity in Australia has recommended that the Minister for Health and Ageing continue to support the AASCP, and consider ways to expand the program to more sites across Australia.²²⁸
- 3.51 Three different types of pilot programs could be implemented with the following features:
- Trial 1 - *Active After-school Communities* type programs for primary school aged children, including a combination of sports and arts activities;
 - Trial 2 - *Active After-school Communities* type programs for early high school aged children, including a combination of sports and arts activities;
 - Trial 3 - *Active After-school Communities* type programs run by non-government organisations such as Aboriginal organisations, youth services and other community organisations, including (a) a combination of arts and sports (b) sport only;

The trials should be evaluated and, if successful, widely implemented across New South Wales.

²²⁵ Australian Sports Commission. 2008. *Helping kids and communities get active: an interim report of the evaluation of the Australian Sports Commission's Active After-school Communities program 2005-2007*, pp.16-17.

²²⁶ Ms Margaret Brown, Waverley Council, Transcript of evidence, 17 March 2009, p. 4.

²²⁷ *ibid.*

²²⁸ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Health and Ageing. 2009. *Weighing it up: obesity in Australia*, Canberra, pp. 52-53.

RECOMMENDATION 3: The Committee recommends, that pursuant to s 11(d) of the *Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998*, the Commissioner for Children and Young People consult with the Minister for Youth and the relevant Commonwealth Minister about the feasibility of implementing a series of pilot programs to trial modified versions of the *Active After-school Communities Program*.

Other types of programs

3.52 Children and young people in the middle years may have other interests outside of sport and the arts. For example, the Blue Mountains City Council indicated that activities based around environmental issues could engage young people aged 9-14:

Many young people in the Blue Mountains are passionate about wildlife rescue, bush regeneration, and environmental issues but there are limited opportunities for engagement. Bush regeneration groups could actively engage this age group. Connections from within schools would address the issue of access for parents that cannot drive children to programs.²²⁹

3.53 The Canterbury City Council submission also noted the need for more programs to “raise awareness of environmental issues and the role of local action.”²³⁰

Access and barriers to participation in activities

3.54 Other than programs and activities for children and young people in the middle years, not being available, there may be other barriers to participation. Evidence to the Inquiry identified access to sport and recreational activities as a significant issue, particularly in rural areas. The Monkey Baa Theatre for Young People observed that young people are severely disadvantaged in terms of arts related opportunities in rural and regional New South Wales.²³¹

3.55 A range of other barriers can prevent children and young people aged 9-14 from participating in sports, arts and other types of activities. With respect to sport, the NSW Department of Art, Sport and Recreation have identified several key factors. These can be generally grouped as:

- logistical - e.g., costs, equipment, locations, transport;
- institutional - available facilities and officials, risk of injury in some sports; and
- personal - changing activity preferences and competition for leisure time.²³²

3.56 Barriers to engagement in arts and cultural activities are likely to include a lack of access to transport,²³³ lack of culturally and age-appropriate programs and events, and cost. Arts programs are often one-off, short-term projects, which operate with

²²⁹ Submission no. 74, Blue Mountains City Council, p. 3.

²³⁰ Submission no. 102, Canterbury City Council, p. 5.

²³¹ Submission no. 99, Monkey Baa Theatre for Young People Ltd, p. 3.

²³² Submission no. 87, NSW Government, p. 11.

²³³ Transport as a barrier to participation in activities is discussed in Chapter 6.

limited funding; and with few organisations working specifically in this area there are few long-term opportunities for young people.²³⁴

- 3.57 A considerable amount of evidence to the Inquiry identified cost as a barrier to children and young people participating in activities, particularly for lower socio-economic groups. Cost was reported as limiting access to out of school activities for low-income families in at least 14 submissions. Ms Vivienne Martin of the Marrickville South Interagency found that children from low-income families do not have as many opportunities to participate in after-school activities, as compared with children from higher income families:

We find that if children come from more advantaged backgrounds, there is an array of things that they can tap into. If they have professional working families or working families, there is after-school care and vacation care. If you have money, you can go to sports, you can go to ballet and music and a whole range of activities after school. Children from more disadvantaged families find that much more difficult.²³⁵

- 3.58 This sentiment was reflected in the submission from Randwick City Council, which provided the following example of the various prohibitive costs that prevent disadvantaged children from participating in sporting activities:

A typical example is ... participation in local sporting activities. The cost of membership fees for sporting club, purchasing of sporting equipment and uniforms, mouth and shin guards, and cost of travel to competition venues can be prohibitive to financially disadvantaged families.²³⁶

- 3.59 The submission from Network of Community Activities indicated that access to galleries and museums is also restricted by cost:

Currently the cost of accessing a range of NSW galleries and educational museums, is prohibitive for young people, nor are they encouraged to attend these places unaccompanied by an adult by administrators of such institutions.²³⁷

- 3.60 A number of submissions recommended providing cheaper access to transport and activities for children and young people, for example, by introducing a Juniors Card scheme. The submission from Network of Community Activities recommended that consideration should be made to providing opportunities for open days at museums and special events during the school vacation period, where children can attend for a nominal fee or as part of a transport package.²³⁸ These suggestions are addressed further in Chapter 6 of this Report.

- 3.61 In its submission, the Commission recommended developing a subsidy scheme to help low income families of children in the middle years to meet the costs of participation in sports, including registration and clothing.²³⁹

- 3.62 Evidence to the Inquiry has identified that cost can be a major barrier to participation in well-designed sport and recreation activities outside of school, yet there are numerous benefits of participation in such programs that are of particular importance

²³⁴ Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth. 2007. *Working with multicultural youth: programs, strategies and future directions*, prepared by Francis, S. & Cornfoot, S., Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues, Melbourne, p. 40.

²³⁵ Ms Vivienne Martin, Marrickville South Interagency, Transcript of evidence, 11 June 2008, p. 50.

²³⁶ Submission no. 46, Randwick City Council, p. 3.

²³⁷ Submission no. 49, Network of Community Activities, p. 7.

²³⁸ *ibid.*

²³⁹ Submission no. 90, NSW Commission for Children and Young People, p. 12.

in disadvantaged communities. The Committee considers that access to sport and recreation activities for children and young people in the middle years from socio-economically disadvantaged communities ought to be a priority.

RECOMMENDATION 4: The Committee recommends, that pursuant to s 11(d) of the *Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998*, the Commissioner for Children and Young People consult with the Minister for Sport and Recreation about the feasibility of subsidising the costs of participation in sports and other activities outside school hours, with priority given to low-income families and Indigenous families.

3.63 Barriers to participating in activities outside of school are likely to affect some groups of children and young people more than others. Non-participation in sport or cultural activities is notably higher among children born overseas in non-English speaking countries, as well as children in one-parent families or whose parents are not employed, as shown by the following figures for children aged 5-14:

Around 44% of children born overseas in non-English speaking countries did not participate, compared with 26% of children born in Australia and 27% born overseas in English-speaking countries. Around 36% of children in one-parent families did not participate compared with 25% of children in couple families. Children whose parents were not employed were less likely to be involved in cultural and sporting activities (49% non participation) than those with at least one employed parent (23%).²⁴⁰

3.64 Despite the low levels of participation for culturally and linguistically diverse groups, the Committee has heard evidence demonstrating the significant value that activities have for fostering interaction and social inclusion for these children and young people. Mr Jorge Aroche of the Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors (STARTTS), made the following comments:

For many of these victims we see, some of the things we take for granted in terms of recreation are not available where they come from. The transition into those, and making them available, is very important. We have found this support an incredibly good way to link kids into new things. It is also a terribly good way to facilitate social inclusion ... Often we work with minorities within minorities in their own country. Identity is quite a complex issue for them. We have found a sport activity is one of the best ways to facilitate that interaction and social inclusion.²⁴¹

3.65 Children and young people with disabilities may also face additional barriers to participating in recreational activities outside of school. The submission from The Children's Hospital at Westmead and the Australasian Faculty Rehabilitation Medicine identifies some of the barriers to participating in sport:

Children and young people with disabilities may require additional resources to access recreational and sporting activities that accommodate their cognitive and/or physical impairments. Opportunities for the younger children (primary school age) are greater but competitiveness increases in high school and thus the children with limited abilities are often excluded from team based sporting activities. In this age group playing team sports provides opportunities to develop abilities that have positive implications for other

²⁴⁰ Australian Bureau of Statistics. 2006. *Children's participation in cultural and leisure activities*, p. 7.

²⁴¹ Mr Jorge Aroche, STARTTS, Transcript of evidence, 8 August 2008, p. 18.

domains of well being, i.e., team skills, understanding the implications of winning and losing and coping with this.²⁴²

- 3.66 Similarly, the submission from Vision Australia identified a need for recreational facilities, which are fun and accessible for children who are blind or have low vision. These need to incorporate safety features such as changes in surface textures, the use of tactile ground surface, and indicators or barriers to identify hazards which may not be detectable by a child who is blind or has low vision.²⁴³
- 3.67 The submission from the Institute of Family Advocacy commented about the additional support that children and young people with a disability require to be active members of their local community including active participation in before and after school and vacation programs, community and cultural groups and activities. To facilitate community inclusion requires:
- an increase in resources to provide individual support (through both state and Commonwealth programs);
 - the development of individualised support arrangements to enable teenagers with a disability to participate in after school and vacation activities with their friends; and
 - an increase in the competence of support workers to build and enhance friendships between children and young people with disability and their peers rather than providing a 'paid' friendship.²⁴⁴
- 3.68 The *2007-08 Annual Report of NSW Department of Arts, Sport and Recreation* has a significant focus on disability and sport and recreation.²⁴⁵ The report listed a number of programs conducted by the Department throughout the year, such as the *Inclusive School Sport* program,²⁴⁶ the *Active Everyone* program,²⁴⁷ and the *Disability Sport Assistance Program*.²⁴⁸ The report had less of a focus on disability and the arts, listing a number of initiatives involving organisations such as the Australian Theatre of the Deaf, Powerhouse Youth Theatre and Accessible Arts.

Committee comment

- 3.69 The Committee commends the Department of Arts, Sport and Recreation on the initiatives that it has established in relation to children and young people with a disability. However it notes that there is considerable room to expand on these programs, particularly in the arts, to allow equitable access for all children and young people to activities outside of school. The Committee recommends that NSW Department of Arts, Sport and Recreation continues to develop new initiatives in this area.

²⁴² Submission no. 77, The Children's Hospital at Westmead and the Australasian Faculty of Rehabilitation Medicine, p. 3.

²⁴³ Submission no. 82, Vision Australia, p. 11.

²⁴⁴ Submission no. Institute for Family Advocacy and Leadership Development, pp. 4-5.

²⁴⁵ NSW Department of the Arts, Sport and Recreation. 2008. *Department of the Arts, Sport and Recreation Annual Report 2007-08*, pp. 28-30.

²⁴⁶ The *Inclusive School Sport* program focused on skills, knowledge and better practice for the inclusion of students with disabilities in sport and physical education programs, and links to community sport.

²⁴⁷ The *Active Everyone* program provided physical activity and sport opportunities for children with a disability across southwest Sydney.

²⁴⁸ The *Disability Sport Assistance Program* assisted organisations to tailor programs that help people with a disability access regular sport and physical activity opportunities.

- 3.70 The Committee also recommends later in this chapter, that the NSW Government provide funding for activities outside of school as a core component of a state-wide funding stream for 9-14 year olds. Increasing access of children and young people with a disability to existing and planned sport and recreational activities outside of school should be a key consideration.

RECOMMENDATION 5: The Committee recommends that the Minister for Sport and Recreation expand initiatives to increase access of children and young people aged 9-14 with a disability to sport, arts and other types of recreation.

The Committee further recommends that the Commissioner for Children and Young People be consulted on the proposed expansion of initiatives that aim to increase access of children and young people in the middle years with a disability to sport, arts and other types of recreation.

Other opportunities for expanding the provision of activities

- 3.71 There are further opportunities to expand activities for children and young people in the middle years, including through the use of school grounds outside of school hours, better linkages between schools and clubs, and increased co-ordination between existing service providers through the *Better Futures* program.

School grounds

- 3.72 Schools are an obvious venue for after-school activities, having a range of facilities which could be used extensively to provide arts, sport and recreational activities for children and young people. There are opportunities to form partnerships with local sporting groups, recreational groups or arts groups so that they can run programs for children and young people on school grounds. School facilities could be more fully utilised if made available to the wider community. Some of these considerations will be discussed further in Chapter 17 of this Report.
- 3.73 Ms Robyn Monro-Miller of the Network of Community Activities commented on the quality sporting facilities in schools that are often not available outside of school hours:
- High schools have the best sporting facilities, for example, basketball courts ... often put away because vandals could come in and damage them, which they can. However, there is also the idea that people generally—teenagers and young people—want access to basketball courts and to activities that are available at those schools.²⁴⁹
- 3.74 Ms Ricci Bartels of the Fairfield Migrant Resource Centre also told the Committee about the under-utilisation of school facilities. Whilst noting obstacles such as public liability issues, Ms Bartels suggested that the use of school facilities might be a

²⁴⁹ Ms Robyn Monro-Miller, Network of Community Activities, Transcript of evidence, 11 June 2008, p. 36.

practical and effective way of bringing together local government, schools and the community sector.²⁵⁰

- 3.75 The submission from NSW Women's Refuge Child Support Workers also recommended that the NSW Department of Education and Training (DET) consider the use of school property for the after school hours educational and support needs of children.²⁵¹
- 3.76 The Catholic Education Commission indicated that Catholic schools generally do allow external organisations to use school facilities, provided the organisation fulfils certain conditions, such as holding public liability insurance.²⁵²
- 3.77 DET has a 1994 policy statement about the use of school facilities by community groups entitled *Community Use of School Facilities*.²⁵³ The policy statement sets out the arrangements required for community groups and organisations to make use of school facilities, and includes regulations regarding the charges to be applied to different user groups, insurance and other requirements, as well as a sample of the *Community User Agreement* to be drawn up between the school and community group.
- 3.78 The Committee notes that while DET has a policy about the use of school facilities by community groups, evidence to the Inquiry has identified that school facilities could be used more widely. In addition, the use of school facilities by community members is an integral component of extended schools and greater involvement of community with schools is desirable, as is discussed in Chapter 17. Moreover, the Committee considers that allowing school facilities to be used outside of schools would free up a valuable resource for both students and community members.

RECOMMENDATION 6: The Committee recommends that, pursuant to s 11(d) of the *Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998*, the Commissioner for Children and Young People consult with the Minister for Education and Training about developing and actively implementing a policy allowing use of schools for activities outside of school hours by students and community members.

The education system

- 3.79 A number of submissions to the Inquiry recommended a greater role for schools generally, and the education system as a whole, in the provision of after-school activities. For example, the submission from the Newcastle Police and Community Youth Club proposed that NSW schools:
- ... reflect research by developing a larger range of extracurricular activities for children to be involved in; keeping children engaged in friendly and safe activities and acting as a crime prevention strategy. More schools need to develop groups such as choir,

²⁵⁰ Ms Ricci Bartels, Fairfield Migrant Resource Centre, Transcript of evidence, 8 August 2008, p. 21.

²⁵¹ Submission no. 19, NSW Women's Refuge Child Support Workers, p. 4.

²⁵² Catholic Education Commission NSW, Questions answered after hearing, 17 March 2009, p. 2.

²⁵³ NSW Department of Education and Training. 1994. *Community use of school facilities: policy statement and implementation procedures*.

dance, band, drama and hobby clubs to provide children with the opportunity to be involved in activities after school.²⁵⁴

- 3.80 Some schools are already involved in conducting after-school activities. Waverley Council noted that a number of schools in the area hold after-school activities on school grounds:
- Several primary schools have developed their own after school programs for a fee (often started by P&C Committees) with specific older children's activities such as dance, language, chess, sailing and other one day a week activities on the school grounds.²⁵⁵
- 3.81 Practically, links could be established between schools and organisations such as PCYC and Scouts, at a local and state-wide level, to increase participation of children and young people in extra-curricular activities. Both Scouts and PCYC²⁵⁶ identified the potential for stronger links between schools and their organisations.
- 3.82 The Federation of Parents and Citizens' Associations of NSW suggested that appropriate organisations that provide quality extra-curricular activities ought to be funded, and that these additional activities should become a more pivotal and expected aspect of the education system, given that they not only provide young people with additional skills, but also foster personal growth and a sense of belonging.²⁵⁷
- 3.83 The Committee notes that the *Extended Schools* program in the United Kingdom provides a commitment to offering a range of services through schools from 8 am to 6 pm, 48 weeks out of the year. This includes a wide variety of activities for primary and secondary school students.²⁵⁸ This is discussed further in Chapter 17 of this Report.
- 3.84 The expansion of the *Schools As Community Centres* program and introduction of extended schools - as discussed in Chapter 17 - could provide an opportunity for external organisations to be involved in the expanded provision of activities outside school hours. The Committee considers that it would be highly desirable for schools to have a greater role in providing after school activities, whether those activities are provided by school staff or by external providers.

Co-ordination and planning

- 3.85 Evidence to the Committee points to the need for increased co-ordination in the provision of sport and recreational activities at a local level. A 2004 NSW Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources (DIPNR) report entitled *Assessing Sydney's Recreation Demand and Opportunities* indicated that more integrated planning of recreation and leisure activities is needed:

This planning should include local councils, health service providers, schools, government and community-based conservation bodies and various levels of sports

²⁵⁴ Submission no. 15, Police and Community Youth Club Newcastle, p. 1.

²⁵⁵ Submission no. 53, Waverley Council, p. iii.

²⁵⁶ Ms Susan Metcalf, Scouts Australia NSW, Transcript of evidence, 11 June 2008, p. 49.

²⁵⁷ Submission no. 36, Federation of Parents and Citizens' Associations of NSW, p. 4.

²⁵⁸ UK Department for Children, Schools and Families. 2008. *Publicising your extended services: a toolkit for schools, local authorities and their partners*, p. 3.

associations who all deal with various aspects of sports and leisure, but rarely talk to each other.²⁵⁹

- 3.86 An integrated approach to the planning of leisure and recreation activities was discussed in the submission from Waverley Council. Research conducted by the Waverley Council as part of the *Better Futures* pre-teen research project led to the following recommendations regarding an integrated approach to providing activities for children and young people:
- initiate a more integrated approach and communication between sports groups, schools, out-of-school hours care centres, arts organisations, Network of Community Activities, the *Active After-school Communities Program* and local governments to identify resources (such as transport) that could be shared for the mutual benefit of children seeking after-school hours activities;
 - develop a model of planning to help create structures and strategies that support an integrated approach to delivering initiatives in the future and make them transferable across other urban areas in Australia;
 - create structures at local government level which support the development and progression of these initiatives in each local government area.²⁶⁰
- 3.87 Waverley Council was funded by the DoCS (Better Futures section) to develop some pilot projects in Inner and Eastern Sydney based on some of the findings of the above-mentioned research. A project officer worked with local services in a linking and co-ordinating role, while a small amount of program funding assisted in generating projects. Ms Maree Girdler of Waverley Council provided an example of how this co-ordination along with a relatively small grant can achieve outcomes that would not otherwise be available:
- We used the model of a community development project worker who was responsible for planning. We have found that you need someone to plan for the services. The services do not have the capacity, the funding or the training to do that sort of work themselves; they are very much focused on running their small services. If you bring in an outside person who works from local government—it works very well from local government, but it does not have to be from local government—he or she can use a planning approach to bring those people together, either to provide training for them or to set up new activities. You can do it with a relatively small amount of funding.²⁶¹
- 3.88 Evidence to the Inquiry indicates that the type of position funded through the *Better Futures* project in Inner and Eastern Sydney can successfully enhance the capacity of existing services to develop programs for 9-14 year olds. The Committee considers that the model developed by Waverley Council as part of the *Better Futures* program has the potential to be successfully implemented in many other areas throughout New South Wales.

RECOMMENDATION 7: The Committee recommends that the Minister for Community Services establish project officer positions, based on the model developed by Waverley Council, to coordinate and foster the development of programs outside of school hours for children and young people aged 9-14

²⁵⁹ Submission no. 53, Waverley Council, p. 34.

²⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p. 35.

²⁶¹ Ms Maree Girdler, Waverley Council, Transcript of evidence, 17 March 2009, p. 2.

throughout the State.

The Committee further recommends that the Commissioner for Children and Young People be consulted on any proposed developments.

Funding and policy

3.89 Approximately one third of all submissions to the inquiry identified both the significant benefits flowing to children and young people from participating in out of school activities, and the need to make such activities more widely available to this age group. Increasing the participation of children and young people in the middle years in sport, arts and other recreational activities corresponds to the priorities and targets of the *NSW State Plan: A New Direction for NSW* (NSW State Plan). Priority R4, *Increased participation and integration in community activities*, has two associated targets:

- increase the proportion of the total community involved in volunteering, group sporting and recreational activity, or group cultural and artistic activity by 10 per cent by 2016.
- halve existing gaps in the participation rates of low income, non-English speaking and Aboriginal communities in volunteering, group sporting activities and group cultural and artistic activities compared to the total NSW population by 2016.²⁶²

3.90 Priority E8, More people using parks, sporting and recreational facilities, and participating in the arts and cultural activity, is also highly relevant. The targets associated with this priority are to:

- increase visits to State Government parks and reserves by 20% by 2016.
- increase participation in sporting activities by 10% by 2016.
- increase visits to and participation in the arts and cultural activity by 10% by 2016.²⁶³

3.91 While the NSW State Plan has targets relating to increased participation in sports, cultural and other activities, a number of submissions to the Inquiry commented on the funding of activities outside of school for children and young people. The submission from the Commission recommended a state-wide funding initiative to develop and run activities outside of school.²⁶⁴ UnitingCare Burnside recommended a review of the availability and spread of such activities, with a view to increasing these activities in disadvantaged communities.²⁶⁵

3.92 The Committee notes that increasing the participation of children and young people in the middle years in sport and recreation activities relates to the core business of a number of NSW Government Departments, including the NSW Department of Arts, Sport and Recreation, DoCS, and NSW Health.

3.93 In addition, there are priorities in the NSW State Plan relating to participation in group sporting and recreational activities; cultural and artistic activities, volunteering; use of

²⁶² NSW Government. 2006. *State Plan: a new direction for NSW*, Premier's Department, p. 35.

²⁶³ *ibid.*, pp. 132-133.

²⁶⁴ Submission no. 90, NSW Commission for Children and Young People, p. 19.

²⁶⁵ Submission no. 76, UnitingCare Burnside, p. 5.

parks, sporting and recreational facilities which should include measures to assess the levels of participation of children and young people.

- 3.94 The Committee also notes that the need for activities after school was raised in about one third of the submissions to this Inquiry and that significant benefits for children and young people were identified. The benefits of physical activity are well-established and evidence is developing about the benefits of other types of recreational activities provided in a range of settings such as schools.
- 3.95 The Committee notes that providing sport and recreational activities outside of school may have a dual function of meeting the recreational and developmental needs of this age group, as well as the need for supervision and care outside of school hours. Therefore, the Committee recommends that additional sport and recreational activities outside of school should be funded as a core component of a state-wide funding scheme for this age group, with a particular focus on disadvantaged communities.

RECOMMENDATION 8: The Committee recommends that the NSW Government provide funding for activities outside of school as a core component of a state-wide funding stream for 9-14 year olds, with a particular focus on disadvantaged communities, including those with high numbers of Aboriginal children and young people.

The Committee further recommends that the Commissioner for Children and Young People be consulted on any proposed funding for activities outside of school.

RECOMMENDATION 9: The Committee recommends that the Department of the Arts, Sport and Recreation collaborate with other relevant government departments to develop a whole-of-government approach to providing activities outside of school for 9-14 year olds.

The Committee further recommends that the Commissioner for Children and Young People be consulted on the proposed development of a whole-of-government approach to providing activities outside of school for 9-14 year olds.

Access to youth centres

- 3.96 A number of submissions noted the need for additional youth centres.²⁶⁶ The NCOSS submission commented on the situation across New South Wales:

Youth health services, youth centres with health outreach models, and youth health coordinator positions are currently limited in number and geographical reach. For example, the majority of young people living in rural NSW do not have access to these

²⁶⁶ See, e.g., Submission no. 98, Community First Step; and Submission no. 102, Canterbury City Council.

services/positions and where youth-specific health services do exist, young people are likely to experience lengthy waiting lists due to under-resourced services.²⁶⁷

- 3.97 The difficulties of providing services in rural areas was highlighted by the Richmond Valley Council's submission that noted that only one part time youth worker covers the whole of Casino and surrounds with approximately 830 young people.²⁶⁸
- 3.98 Inadequate funding of youth centres was identified as an issue in evidence to the Inquiry. Again in Casino, Miss Lynnette Smith of Adult Community Education Inc. told the Committee about the youth centre in Casino:
- ... the Youth Centre ... is open from 9.00 to 4.00 Monday to Thursday yet any Friday or Saturday night you drive down the streets of Casino here, you will see kids in groups, not causing trouble but playing cards, but sitting out in the outdoor café in the middle of winter freezing because they have absolutely nowhere to go.²⁶⁹
- 3.99 She went on to comment about the need for additional staffing:
- We need a youth centre that operates on weekends. We need a youth centre that is staffed with more than one worker. It is unreasonable and unsafe to expect one person to manage these kids. We normally do not operate in the school holidays. One year we operated in the school holidays and we had 108 kids attend the program, and some days we had 60 and 70 kids there in a space that is probably designed to accommodate about 25 comfortably.²⁷⁰
- 3.100 The submission from Southern Youth and Family Services noted that many youth projects in New South Wales are funded only for part time positions and for workers to work in sole positions, thereby making networking or agency liaison difficult and causing occupational health and safety problems.²⁷¹
- 3.101 NCOSS commended youth services provided under the DoCS *Community Services Grants Program*, but noted that there has been no substantial increase in funding in recent years:
- It is our understanding that a large number of youth services that are currently funded under the Community Services Grants Program [CSGP], offer terrific programs for children and young people...It funds youth services, family support services and neighbourhood centres, and essentially it enables those organisations to meet the needs that confront them, or whatever the needs are in the local community. It can be flexible in the sorts of programs and services that it provides to those communities. The program has not had a substantial increase in funds for a number of years. In fact, again in our pre-budget submission, NCOSS has called on a substantial increase in funding for that program, which, of course, would flow to youth services, allowing them to offer more services and also to meet the increased demand for their services in many areas.²⁷²
- 3.102 Members of the North Coast Region of Parents and Citizens' Associations suggested that the two most pressing needs for children 9-14 years in Casino were a well-

²⁶⁷ Submission no 16, Council of Social Service of NSW, p.7.

²⁶⁸ Submission no. 14, Richmond Valley Council, p. 7.

²⁶⁹ Miss Lynnette Smith, Adult Community Education Inc, Transcript of evidence, 5 August 2009, p. 5.

²⁷⁰ *ibid.*

²⁷¹ Submission no. 54, Southern Youth and Family Services, p. 6.

²⁷² Ms Alison Peters, Council of Social Service of NSW, Transcript of evidence, 17 March 2009, pp.22-23.

funded youth centre, and for greater access to counselling for children and young people in this age group.²⁷³

3.103 Funding for staffing after-hours and weekends is also an issue, as more than one staff member may be required due to occupational health and safety issues. Thus Miss Noeline Olive from the Casino Neighbourhood Centre told the Committee that the Centre has had to cut down one day of service in order to be able to offer service at night, due to penalty rates for staff working at night.²⁷⁴

3.104 In some cases, shortfalls in funding for programs and youth centres may be covered by local government. The City of Sydney provided information about funding for its six youth services for 12-24 year olds:

One of these receives a small amount of state government funding. Another receives some federal government funding. The significant remainder of the cost involved in providing the services is funded by Council (approx \$900,000 for the 6 programs)

Council provides Tweenies programs (for 9-14 year olds) as part of the existing Youth and OOSH budgets.²⁷⁵

3.105 A number of submissions commented that youth services were not funded to service children under 12 years old. For example, the Mt Druitt Blacktown Youth Service submission noted that youth workers are turning away under 12's, as they are not funded or trained to cater for this age group.²⁷⁶

3.106 Indeed, funding agreements may specifically preclude youth services from providing service to children under 12 years of age. The submission from Waverley Council noted that the DoCS addressed this issue in the Inner and Eastern suburbs of Sydney:

In 2007 NSW DOCS South Eastern Sydney office sent a letter to Community Services Grants Program (CSGP) funded youth services in I&ES supporting the servicing of under 12s in appropriate programs. Most funding agreements clearly state the ages that services are to work with, which is usually from either 11 or 12 years old. This has provided the opportunity for youth services to run various programs for younger children, but without direct CSGP funding.²⁷⁷

Age range

3.107 There are a number of issues associated with youth services providing programs for 9-14 year olds, other than that of inadequate funding. Youth services may already find catering for a wide age range from 12-25 challenging. According to the Ballina Shire Council submission:

Existing youth services are funded to target young people aged between 12 to 25. The practicalities of providing services /programs aimed at meeting the collective needs of the age group often makes it impossible to cater for the varying needs.²⁷⁸

3.108 The Gloucester Youth Advisory Committee submission commented that upper age of 25 at a drop-in centre is too high and places constraints on the effective activity and development programs delivered by Youth Development Officers and volunteers to

²⁷³ Submission no. 36a, Federation of Parent and Citizens' Associations of NSW, p. 3.

²⁷⁴ Miss Noeline Olive, Casino Neighbourhood Centre, Transcript of evidence, 5 August 2008, p. 8.

²⁷⁵ Submission no. 43, City of Sydney, p. 1.

²⁷⁶ Submission no. 80, Mt Druitt Blacktown Youth Service Network, p. 1.

²⁷⁷ Submission no. 53, Waverley Council, p. 4.

²⁷⁸ Submission no. 11, Ballina Shire Council, p.1.

the 12-14 age group. The presence of young adults at drop in centres compromises the attendance and activities of the 12-14 age group.²⁷⁹

- 3.109 A number of submissions identified a need for different programs for groups *within* the 9-25 age group. For example, the Gloucester Youth Advisory Committee submission commented:

Youth Development Officers believe that while Youth Centres are funded for 12 to 25 year olds, that 9 to 12 year olds require a separate program to ensure that both these groups do not impede each other's effective development.²⁸⁰

- 3.110 In its submission Ballina Shire Council made similar comments:

What would assist communities such as Ballina is to have access to age specific youth services. This would enable programs to target the specific needs of the younger age group. It should be noted that the developmental differences between 9 year olds and that of 14 year olds will necessitate the running of separate programs/services.²⁸¹

- 3.111 Miss P of Hebersham Public School described to the Committee the types of programs she thinks that youth centres should offer:

Ms Marie Andrews MP: What do you have in mind that youth centres should address? Should they comprise structured programs?

Miss P: Just places in the community that young people can go to with their friends that have computers and stuff, just to hang out when they do not want to be at home.²⁸²

- 3.112 Some youth centres have developed programs for this age group, offering programs for 8-11 year olds, not traditionally serviced by youth centres. Port Stephens Council's Youth Services, for example, aims to support young people (primary target group 10-17 years of age, secondary target group 18-25 years of age) to build and maintain a sense of belonging within their local community so that they might enjoy a happy and rewarding lifestyle while living in Port Stephens.²⁸³

- 3.113 Examples of programs for the younger age group were provided by Mosman Municipal Council:

Club 114

A monthly social and recreational program for young people aged 11 to 14 on a Friday night. This program aims to target the issues specific to young people who are in the transitional age between primary and secondary school. The program targets a different issue each month that is relevant to this group and seeks to couple this with an activity such as rock climbing or laser tag, or nights where the young people stay at the Youth Centre for a pool competition and pizza for example.

Year 6 Open Days

Youth Services engages local primary schools to bring their Year 6 classes to the Youth Centre for an excursion late in the school year. The purpose is to introduce the young people to the Centre, Youth Services staff and its programs and services. The groups get to "try out" the fun things to do at the centre which aids in encouraging them to return in future.²⁸⁴

²⁷⁹ Submission no. 71, Gloucester Youth Advisory Committee, p.2.

²⁸⁰ *ibid.*

²⁸¹ Submission no. 11, Ballina Shire Council, p. 2.

²⁸² Miss Sofie P, Hebersham Public School Transcript of evidence, 2 July 2008, p.13.

²⁸³ Submission no. 10, Port Stephens Council, p. 6.

²⁸⁴ Submission no. 75, Mosman Municipal Council, pp. 2-3.

3.114 Some transition programs have also been developed, for example, by Marrickville South Interagency.²⁸⁵ Programs specifically targeting the transition of children and young people in the middle years from out of school hours care to youth services are discussed further in Chapter 4.

3.115 In the context of discussing children in late primary school, the submission from Mosman Municipal Council commented that risk-taking and experimentation is now occurring amongst this age group and that targeted programs are required:

Council and other agencies working with youth are finding that this age group is very vulnerable and increasingly engaging in risk-taking and experimental behaviour at this stage, where in the past this behaviour was not generally evident until later in the secondary years. Thus targeted programs that address these developmental issues are needed. This highlights the need for Youth Services to connect with this group through constructive, age-appropriate and supervised activities before this age group no longer finds children's services engaging.²⁸⁶

3.116 Similarly, Mr Reodica of YAPA noted that:

... anecdotally we have been hearing from people who have been around for a while that across the country some of the issues that some of the older members saw as traditional or longstanding youth issues fitting squarely within the 12-upwards age group are now starting to be seen with younger people. Further to that I think it is actually quite a good thing to look at allowing funding programs to extend down to about the nine years of age group.²⁸⁷

3.117 Evidence to the Inquiry discussed the appropriateness of youth services providing services for a younger age group. Mr Reodica told the Committee that he considers it appropriate for youth services to provide particular programs for a younger age group, but noted some of the attendant difficulties.²⁸⁸

Committee comment

3.118 Evidence to the Inquiry has identified a substantial need for increased funding of youth services to cater for their existing target group, typically aged 12 years and over. Some youth services have been engaged in providing specialised programs such as 'tweenies' programs for children and young people in the middle years, often in partnership with other services. The Committee considers that this is an appropriate model for service delivery, which should be expanded.

RECOMMENDATION 10: The Committee recommends that the Minister for Community Services:

- expand the provision of youth services to allow for the development of new programs in areas of need and to enhance the hours of operation for existing services; and
- provides funding to implement and evaluate a range of activities and

²⁸⁵ Miss Lucinda Malcolm, Marrickville South Interagency, Transcript of evidence, 11 June 2008, p. 60.

²⁸⁶ Submission no. 75, Mosman Municipal Council, p. 2.

²⁸⁷ Mr Rey Reodica, YAPA, Transcript of evidence, 17 March 2009, p. 25.

²⁸⁸ *ibid.*

support based programs for 9-14 year olds involving youth services.

The Committee further recommends that the Commissioner for Children and Young People be consulted on the proposed expansion of youth services to allow for the development of new programs in areas of need, and in the implementation and evaluation of a range of activities and support programs.

Chapter Four - Out of School Hours Care

Too often young people in the critical stage of early adolescence are blamed for social tension and ill-will, but it seems resources and places to keep them actively engaged in healthy pursuits are hard to come by, and not properly funded.²⁸⁹

Introduction

- 4.1 The participation of the middle years age group in out of school hours care and vacation care is low compared with that of younger children. Barriers to participation include the fees charged for services, the appropriateness of activities that can be provided for young people, as well as the availability of suitably trained staff and the adequacy of resources. Workplace demands often limit a family's capacity to provide supervision.
- 4.2 This chapter considers the importance of out of school hours care and vacation care for young people in the middle years. It examines current services and funding arrangements and considers the reasons why young people currently have difficulty fitting into existing programs. The chapter also considers the need to provide respite through vacation care for families of young people with a disability.

Service provision

- 4.3 Out of school hours care services provide a child care environment for children who ordinarily attend school. Out of school hours care can be provided before school, after school and during school holidays. These services are the only children's services registered by the Department of Community Services (DoCS) that specifically cater for children aged 9-14 years in New South Wales.²⁹⁰
- 4.4 The submission received from the NSW Government provided the following details regarding out of school hours care services operating in New South Wales:
- As at the end of March 2008 a total of 2,351 operating OSHC services had registered with the DoCS. Of these 1,340 services provide before/after care and 1,011 services provide vacation care. Registered services are operated by 1,110 providers, with some providers operating multiple services.²⁹¹
- 4.5 Evidence from Network of Community Activities suggests that approximately 90 per cent of out of school hours care services across New South Wales are community based, and run by parent groups or community agencies such as local government.²⁹² A 2006 report from the Community and Disability Services Ministers Conference noted that approximately 60 per cent of community out of school hours care services in New South Wales services are operated on school sites.²⁹³

²⁸⁹ New South Wales Teachers Federation, Questions answered after hearing, p. 5.

²⁹⁰ Submission no. 87, NSW Government, p. 39.

²⁹¹ *ibid.*, p. 40.

²⁹² Ms Robyn Monro-Miller, Network of Community Activities, Transcript of evidence, 17 March 2009, p. 11.

²⁹³ Community and Disability Services Ministers Conference. 2006. *A review of the approach to setting national standards and assuring quality of care in Australian childcare services*, p. 39.

Before and After School Care

- 4.6 In August 2008, a national survey on out of school hours care usage by parents of children aged 5-15 years was undertaken, having been commissioned by the National Foundation for Australian Women. The results of the survey showed that 17 per cent of parents had used some type of out of school hours care facility in the week prior to being surveyed. However, the proportion was much higher for parents with children aged 5-9 (26 per cent) compared with those with children aged 10-15 years (10 per cent).²⁹⁴ The survey also showed that the usage of care facilities was also found to be considerably higher in capital cities (23 per cent) compared with regional areas (8 per cent).²⁹⁵
- 4.7 The submission from the NSW Government indicated that, in practice, only a very small proportion of children aged over 13 years attend out of school hours care services:
- ... most children cease attending OSHC once they commence high school, typically around 12 or 13 years of age. This is borne out by data from the 2004 Commonwealth Government Child Care Census which shows that only 70 children over 13 years of age attended Commonwealth funded OSHC services in NSW, from a total of 37,317 children.²⁹⁶
- 4.8 Despite the low attendance rates of older children at out of school hours care, evidence to the Inquiry has indicated that parents are concerned about lack of supervision for their children. Members of the North Coast region of Parents and Citizens' Associations made the following comments to the Committee:
- Year 10 children and under need supervision. After Year 10, children are a bit more mature and have usually made a decision to remain in school (as they could have left at the end of Year 10), so the need for supervision is not as acute. But prior to this age, parents considered after-school supervision is very important.²⁹⁷
- 4.9 Evidence to the Inquiry has raised issues relating to children of all ages who use out of school hours care, as well as some issues particular to 9-14 year olds. Some of the more general issues applicable to all age groups included the need for research and evaluation of the services provided, the adequacy of funding for out of school hours care, as well as access issues. The Commission for Children and Young People (the Commission) noted that there are many areas of New South Wales that have no services at all.²⁹⁸

Funding

- 4.10 According to the submission from the City of Sydney, the main source of public funding for out of school hours care services is the Commonwealth Government's Child Care Benefit, which prioritises the allocation of places based on the workforce participation of parents, rather than the needs of the children.

²⁹⁴ National Foundation for Australian Women. 2008. *Out of school hours care study*, p. 3.

²⁹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 5.

²⁹⁶ Submission no. 87, NSW Government, p. 39.

US research supports this, indicating that enrolment in daily school-age child care programs drops sharply at about age 11, when involvement in activities like lessons and sports picks up, as does the prevalence of self-care: Lerner, M. Zippiroli, L. & Behrman, R. 1999. 'When school is out: analysis and recommendations,' *The future of children*, vol. 9, no. 2 – fall 1999, p. 12.

²⁹⁷ Submission no. 36a, Federation of Parent and Citizens' Associations of NSW, p. 2.

²⁹⁸ Submission no. 90, NSW Commission for Children and Young People, p. 18.

Out of School Hours Care

- 4.11 Under this funding model, a fee is charged to all families and fees are reduced for eligible families through the means tested child care benefit model. Records of attendances and absences must be kept to claim the benefit and families' access to the benefit is restricted according to workforce participation.²⁹⁹
- 4.12 Evidence to the Inquiry suggested that this funding model has some inherent difficulties. Thus, Waverley Council's submission noted the following practical problems:
- the heavy administrative workload (and costs) that the Child Care Benefit places on services;
 - insufficient flexibility in relation to children who only attend the service intermittently;
 - small service sizes which make it very difficult to remain viable;
 - restricted hours of operation for the bulk of the year;
 - difficulties in attracting and retaining staff due to low wages and part time hours, which can lead to service quality issues; and
 - difficulties in obtaining insurance, which restricts the range of activities that out of school hours care services can offer.³⁰⁰
- 4.13 The submission from Warialda Community Care Inc. provided an example of the difficulties faced by a rural service trying to maintain financial viability:
- We were forced to staff the centre with two people, even though our largest afternoon on record had only 16 children attend. As many of the children were there to keep off the street, and their parents weren't working, the parents didn't pay. I made a \$22,000.00 loss for the year and had to sell a block of land, to pay the bills. I closed the Warialda Respite Centre, outside school hours care service, on the 23/8/2007.³⁰¹
- 4.14 Another funding issue for out of school hours care services is the provision of services for children and young people with disabilities. The Committee heard from Lismore Outside School Hours Care Centre that the particular issue relating to children with disabilities is the inability of services to meet the gap between the funding subsidy of wages for staff and actual wages:
- The current wages subsidy is \$15.61 per hour and the hourly wage rate is \$22.42. This leaves a gap of \$6.81 per hour per ISS staff member. The service operated at a deficit for the 2007/08 year of some \$21,000.00 of which \$11,995.29 was the gap in ISS wages. Additional funding needs to be provided for appropriate resources; such as providing stimulating play equipment while also meeting their physical needs regarding any mobility issues and medical issues.³⁰²

Schools

- 4.15 A number of submissions to the Inquiry raised the issue of the rent or fees charged by schools to out of school hours care services based on school grounds. According to the *Better Futures Inner and Eastern Sydney Pre-teens Research Report 75* per

²⁹⁹ Submission no. 43, City of Sydney, p. 2.

³⁰⁰ Submission no. 53, Waverley Council. pp. 28-29.

³⁰¹ Submission no. 2, Warialda Community Care Inc. p. 2.

³⁰² Submission no. 100, Lismore Outside School Hours Care Centre, p. 2.

cent of services are school-based.³⁰³ The submission from Network of Community Activities described the variability in costs that services face:

Out of School Hours Services Services are frequently constrained by the financial challenges of maintaining low cost accessible care that meets the needs of children and families. Schools where these services exist provide a variety of different levels of support some charging no rent to others charging a high rental that is the passed on to the families in the form of fees.³⁰⁴

- 4.16 Network of Community Activities suggested that greater collaboration within the State Government would “ensure that all schools were able to offer their facilities at low cost for the organisation and operation of not for profit services for children to access.”³⁰⁵ Similarly, NSW Women's Refuge Child Support Workers recommended that the Department of Education should consider the viability of providing space to appropriate services, free or for a nominal cost, to provide after school care and support for the age group 9-14.³⁰⁶
- 4.17 A number of submissions to the Inquiry discussed issues of rent or fees charged by schools to out of school hours care services that are based on school grounds. The Committee considers that not-for-profit out of school hours care services located on public school grounds provide a valuable service for children and their families and that the use of school facilities should be provided for free or at nominal cost.

RECOMMENDATION 11: The Committee recommends that, pursuant to s 11(d) of the *Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998*, the Commissioner for Children and Young People consult with the Minister for Education and Training about making school facilities across the State available to not-for-profit out of school hours care services at minimal cost.

Research and evaluation

- 4.18 In a submission to the Commonwealth Government, Security for Women commented on the lack of Australian research into out of school hours care:
- There is no published indication of any Australian qualitative research nor of evaluation of programs, nor for example of any linkage of lack of out of school care to concerns about risk or juvenile behaviours ... There is a deplorable paucity of Australian independent or Government sponsoring of research which might inform policy and practice on aspects of needs, service types, benefits and the other elements of the provision of care for school aged children.³⁰⁷
- 4.19 While there has been anecdotal evidence to the Inquiry showing positive outcomes for out of school hours care, quantitative data from Australian research is needed. Ms Robyn Monro-Miller of Network of Community Activities noted that much of the

³⁰³ Submission no. 53, Waverley Council, p. 27.

³⁰⁴ Submission no. 49, Network of Community Activities, p. 9.

³⁰⁵ *ibid.*

³⁰⁶ Submission no. 19, NSW Women's Refuge Child Support Workers, p. 3.

³⁰⁷ Security for Women. 2008. Submission to *Inquiry into pay equity and associated issues related to increasing female participation in the workforce*, Commonwealth Standing Committee on Employment and Workplace Relations. p. 10.

available research data is from the United Kingdom and the United States, but, as, they operate with different models, there is not a “true Australian perspective.”³⁰⁸

- 4.20 The Committee notes that research conducted for the Scottish Executive has identified that a number of social and economic benefits of out of school hours care have been identified in the international literature. It is apparent that the strength of evidence provided in support of these findings varies greatly.³⁰⁹
- 4.21 There is a consensus in the literature from the United Kingdom that the principal economic benefits of out of school hours care are in terms of parents’ access to employment, education and training and associated benefits; while for children, benefits relate to an increase of household income.³¹⁰ Evidence about some of the economic benefits of out of school hours care is much stronger than for the social benefits. There is growing evidence that there is a range of social benefits for children, parents, communities, school and service providers in relation to childcare and out of school hours care.³¹¹
- 4.22 However, given that models of out of school hours care vary greatly between countries, the Committee considers that Australian-based research is required to establish whether the economic and social benefits identified in the literature are evident in relation to the Australian model of out of school hours care.
- 4.23 The Committee also notes that Security for Women’s submission to the Commonwealth Government *Inquiry into pay equity and associated issues related to increasing female participation in the workforce* recommended that the Commonwealth develop a program of evaluation and research with a view to more adequately identifying the need for various types of out of school hours care and enhancing the quality and provision of out of school hour care.³¹²
- 4.24 The Committee considers that there is a substantial need to foster Australian research in all areas of out of school hours care in Australia; in particular, about the impact of attendance at out of school hours care on outcomes for children and young people, particularly disadvantaged young people. This would help inform policy makers about the potential of out of school hours care as an early intervention program for disadvantaged children and young people.

Children home alone or not properly supervised after school

- 4.25 A considerable amount of evidence to the Inquiry indicates that many children and young people in the middle years are being left at home without any adult supervision. Prior to appearing before the Committee, students at Ashbury Public School conducted a survey on the needs of children aged 9–14 years and reported the results in their submission to the Inquiry. A total of 87 students in Years 5 and 6 completed the survey, which included the question ‘Who cares for you when both your parents aren’t there?’:

³⁰⁸ Robyn Monro-Miller, Network of Community Activities, Transcript of evidence, 17 March 2009, pp. 11-12.

³⁰⁹ Blake Stevenson Ltd, 2003. *Assessment of the benefits and costs of out of school care*. Prepared for the Scottish Executive. pp. 20, 63.

³¹⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 20, 37-38.

³¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 63.

³¹² Security for Women. 2008. Submission to *Inquiry into pay equity and associated issues related to increasing female participation in the workforce*, Commonwealth Standing Committee on Employment and Workplace Relations. p. 16.

The results were that 58 kids are looked after by relatives or friends, 19 kids go to before and after school care, and 47 kids look after themselves.

Seeing as only stage three (years five and six) completed this survey, the results weren't really very surprising because as we are all around the ages of 11 and 12, we are becoming more mature and responsible. With the majority of parents working full-time, this means that there are a great many stage three children at home looking after themselves (that is, unsupervised) after school.³¹³

- 4.26 The National Foundation for Australian Women conducted a national survey of parents with children aged between 5 and 15 years. The survey found that:
... 15% of parents with children aged 5 - 15 years claimed that, during the past week, a child of theirs had been at home by themselves ... For those parents with children aged 5-9 years it was around 3%, while for those with children aged 10-15 years it was 21%.³¹⁴
- 4.27 Evidence to the Inquiry indicates that the negative effects of children not being properly supervised after school can include parental concern about the safety of their child; social isolation for the child; the use of libraries as pseudo-child minding centres; unsupervised use of the internet by children; and general lack of feeling safe among some children.³¹⁵
- 4.28 A number of submissions identified factors contributing to children being at home alone including commuting long distances, parents working long hours and/or in multiple jobs, as well as the impact of the *Welfare to Work* scheme. For example, the submission from Blue Mountains City Council noted that parents in the Blue Mountains may spend up to four hours each day commuting to and from work.³¹⁶
- 4.29 Together with the lack of access to out of school hours care and the fact that it is geared towards a younger age group, longer working hours can mean that young people are unattended at home, and often caring for younger siblings as well. In addition:
The casualisation of work also means changing working hours from week to week, having to work public holidays and working weekends – all meaning more difficulties in locating and accessing organised child care and younger people more likely to be at home unattended. There are consequences in terms of the safety of the younger person as well as in their relationship with their parents or care-providers.³¹⁷
- 4.30 Marrickville Youth Resource Centre noted that parents working long hours on multiple jobs is particularly prevalent in families from a refugee background, with the result that, after school these young people are often left to look after themselves or young siblings.³¹⁸

³¹³ Submission no. 92, Ashbury Public School, p. 2.

³¹⁴ National Foundation for Australian Women. *Home alone*, media release, 29 August 2008.

³¹⁵ See also Lerner, M. Zippiroli, L. & Behrman, R. 1999. 'When school is out: analysis and recommendations,' *The future of children*, vol. 9, no. 2 – fall 1999, p. 12. This article echoes evidence to the Inquiry, highlighting American concerns about what unsupervised youngsters are doing after school when their parents are at work, and the need for after school care programs, particularly in low income areas, that engage older children and make them "want to go".

³¹⁶ Submission no. 74, Blue Mountains City Council, p. 3.

³¹⁷ Submission no. 74, Blue Mountains City Council, p. 3.

³¹⁸ Submission no. 27, Marrickville Youth Resource Centre, p. 4.

- 4.31 The submission from NSW Women's Refuge Child Support Workers noted the impact of requirements for single parents having to participate in the *Welfare to Work* scheme on the supervision and care of this age group after school:

Some consideration needs to be given to the impact on children by the requirement for single mothers to enter the workplace. This has huge implications on her ability to supervise and care for the age group 9-14 after school hours. Children of this age group are demanding independence but require supervision that allows for them to engage with the community in a safe way.³¹⁹

Impact of children and young people being left unsupervised

- 4.32 Changing workplace practices and government policies have undoubtedly contributed to children and young people being left unsupervised after school hours. The Smith Family submission noted that children react to this in a variety of ways:

While many children cope quite well with this arrangement, it can be a source of great anxiety, particularly when a lone parent or both parents work erratic hours, or, a child is alone without siblings. The absence of support resources for children experiencing event-based stress or developmental issues at school or in other aspects of their lives can also create problems.³²⁰

- 4.33 Rosemount Good Shepherd Youth and Family Services also reported on the anxiety that some children in this age group feel when left at home alone after school:

Children have confided to counsellors about how lonely they feel in this situation and some have disclosed instances where they are left, not only at home alone, but with responsibility for younger siblings. Moreover, a number of children in the middle years are carers of their parents; often to the extent that they are actually running the household. For example, not merely assisting with cooking, cleaning, and shopping but with sole responsibility for these tasks.³²¹

- 4.34 Wesley Mission's submission noted that children who are required to look after themselves after school may be prevented from participating in social activities:

Many parents of children in this age group, when faced with the cost of before and after school care, consider the children old enough to supervise themselves while their parents are at work. This also impedes the children's ability to be part of a social activity group as these are usually offered during on weekdays; there is often a cost involved; and frequently no one who is available to transport the children to the activity.

Parents in this situation usually discourage their children from having other children in the home when they are not present. This can lead to social isolation or to the children defying the embargo and having other children there with no one to supervise their activities.³²²

- 4.35 In addition, children who are not adequately catered for by either out of school hours care or youth services might stop attending those services, with the attendant risk that they will become involved in delinquent behaviour:

School age after school and holiday centres are generally not able to adequately meet the needs and interests of the 9 – 14 age group. Youth centres generally cater for an older age group and parents are often reluctant to enrol younger children in these centres. Funding is not available to provide age specific programs. There is a risk that

³¹⁹ Submission no. 19, NSW Women's Refuge Child Support Workers, p. 12.

³²⁰ Submission no. 7, The Smith Family, p. 3.

³²¹ Submission no. 85, Rosemount Good Shepherd Youth & Family Services, p. 1.

³²² Submission no. 61, Wesley Mission, p. 5.

children will become involved in delinquent behaviour out of sheer boredom. The cost of keeping one child in a juvenile justice centre is far higher than providing appropriate services in the community.³²³

Age Issues

- 4.36 Another specific matter raised in evidence to the Inquiry was the appropriateness of out of school hours care services for older children: eleven submissions indicated that existing after school programs are unsuitable for older age groups in the 9-14 range.
- 4.37 It was suggested that children are dissatisfied with existing services or inappropriate programming. Other matters are staff training issues, behavioural problems, higher expenses for services running programs targeting older children, space requirements for older children and the cost to parents. The issues raised were similar to those reported in the *Better Futures Inner and Eastern Sydney Pre-teens Research Report*.³²⁴

Unappealing to older age children

- 4.38 The submission received from the Centre for Work and Life at the Hawke Research Institute, University of South Australia reported that many older children find existing out of school hours care programs to be unappealing:
- Existing after school programs are negatively perceived by many children in the middle years. Young people often say they are boring, inappropriately resourced for middle years teenagers and lacking desirable social activity (especially for those 13 years and older who want to 'hang' with their friends not with younger children). The role of after school programs, their funding and implementation need to be examined and input sought from young people of varying ages.³²⁵
- 4.39 The *Better Futures Inner and Eastern Sydney Pre-teens Research Report* included a list of reasons that children aged 9-13 had given for not attending out of school hours care or other recreational activities. Some of the children's responses included comments such as they would "rather hang out with friends" and that it is "boring/babyish".³²⁶ The report also noted that older children see out of school hours care as being more suitable for younger children.³²⁷
- 4.40 Some evidence identified a gap in staff training focused on the need of the older age group. Many workers in out of school hours care are trained in early childhood care, but their training rarely covers the needs of older children.³²⁸ The Committee notes that as a means of addressing this deficiency, Network of Community Activities has offered specific training courses to out of school hours care staff.³²⁹

Programming

- 4.41 Fairfield City Council made reference to the fundamental difficulty of organising activities that cater for the entire age range of 5-12 years that out of school hours

³²³ Submission no. 24, Ms Judy Finlason, p. 2.

³²⁴ Submission no. 53, Waverley Council, p. 25.

³²⁵ Submission no 3, Centre for Work and Life at the Hawke Research Institute, University of South Australia, p. 1.

³²⁶ Submission no. 53, Waverley Council, p. 33.

³²⁷ *ibid.*, p. 17.

³²⁸ *ibid.*, p. 14.

³²⁹ Robyn Monro-Miller, Network of Community Activities, Transcript of evidence, 11 June 2008, p. 34.

Out of School Hours Care

care services are expected to accommodate,³³⁰ whilst Waverley Council concluded that the main problem in out of school hours care is that there is a focus on care rather than on programming, which disaffects the older age child.³³¹

4.42 Blue Mountains Council noted that some Blue Mountains out of school hours care services are not taking children in this age group because the services are not resourced to program effectively for them and find that they are disruptive to the activities of younger children.³³²

4.43 The Network of Community Activities highlighted the importance of consulting with this age group when planning and delivering out of school hours care services:

In Out of School Hours services there is a common philosophy and understanding that children are to be involved in planning and consultative processes as everyday practices. Such an acknowledgement comes after many years working with school age children and recognises this as a valuable practice for high quality provision ... services who maintain ongoing active and meaningful collaboration with children retain more 9-12 year olds than those with limited or tokenistic child consultation methods and they report less behavioural issues.³³³

4.44 Thus, the participation of children and young people in service planning and design is a critical factor: asking children and young people what they want when designing programs is crucial to providing successful services.

Behavioural problems

4.45 Some evidence to Inquiry indicated that inappropriate programming can lead to behavioural problems among the older age cohort. The Lismore Outside School Hours Care Centre noted that this can further translate into negative effects on younger children at the service:

Children in this age bracket tend to want to be treated as young adults and resent being placed into childcare which can result in challenging behaviours which effects younger children by exposing them to inappropriate language/concepts - inappropriate role modelling.³³⁴

Higher cost of services for older children and young people

4.46 Out of school hours care services often find that it is more expensive to program for children over nine years old: with limited staff and low numbers of children over nine it is often not viable to provide appropriate programs.³³⁵

Older children need more expensive equipment such as computers, games and activities. Many want sports and games that have cost and staffing impacts on OSHC services. Most of the games and sports equipment in OSHC services is inadequate, old or broken and there are no funds to replace them. Those centres that have participated in the Active After Schools Community Program have enjoyed using the funds to upgrade and replace sporting equipment and purchase new games. Having better games is an attraction for the older children.³³⁶

³³⁰ Ms Amanda Bray, Fairfield City Council, Transcript of evidence, 8 August 2008, p. 9.

³³¹ Ms Margaret Brown, Waverley Council, Transcript of evidence, 17 March 2009, p. 3.

³³² Submission no. 74, Blue Mountains City Council, p. 1.

³³³ Submission no. 49, Network of Community Activities, p. 6.

³³⁴ Submission no. 100, Lismore Outside School Hours Care Centre, p. 1.

³³⁵ Submission no. 53, Waverley Council, p. 2.

³³⁶ *ibid.*, p. 15.

- 4.47 Many out of school hours care services lack enough space to provide active after school care for the 9-14 age group.³³⁷ Practically, 12-year-old children take up more room than 5-year-old children, especially boys.³³⁸ The *Better Futures Inner and Eastern Sydney Pre-teens Research Report* indicated there was a widespread belief, among out of school hours care centres surveyed, that providing a separate space for older children would improve the service they offered to this age group.³³⁹

Cost to parents

- 4.48 Cost is undoubtedly a significant factor in many parents' decisions about after school care for children aged over nine. Network of Community Activities told the Committee that financial pressure is an issue for parents of children in this age group:

If parents have to make a decision about whether to pay childcare fees for their five-year-old or their 10-year-old, they often decide that maybe their 10-year-old can go home by themselves or do something else that will not cost any money. So there is that financial pressure on parents and they sometimes make choices for their older children that they would not allow their younger children to participate in.³⁴⁰

- 4.49 Families with low-incomes are particularly affected by cost issues, as are those with more than one child in this age group.³⁴¹

- 4.50 Chester Hill Neighborhood Centre noted that before-and-after-school care is often prohibitively expensive for low-income or heavily indebted families. Parents in these families may choose instead to allow their children to stay at home unsupervised, which can lead to long-term problems:

... payment of fees ... can prove such a serious burden on low-income or heavily indebted families that parents prefer to allow their children to walk home from school and stay at home unsupervised, or at best, under the care of grandparents or neighbours. This often invites long-term trouble. There are few services involving these children that provide for life-enrichment activities rather than simply supervision and entertainment until parents pick them up.³⁴²

Reduced enrolments

- 4.51 All of the above-mentioned factors may contribute to lower participation rates for students in late primary school. The submission from Mosman Municipal Council observed the decrease in out of school hours care attendance for older children:

Council's BASC [before and after school care] Service finds that there is a reduced participation rate of older primary school aged children (particularly 11 and 12 year olds) and that this is a common experience amongst other services.³⁴³

- 4.52 Network of Community Activities told the Committee that retention rates for children 9-12 years tends to drop off if sufficiently stimulating programs are not available for this older age group:

A lot of services are doing this very well and they have high retention rates. Where services do not do this so well we see the retention rates for that age group drop off and

³³⁷ Submission no. 53, Waverley Council, p. 33.

³³⁸ Ms Maree Girdler, Waverley Council, Transcript of evidence, 17 March 2009, p. 3.

³³⁹ Submission no. 53, Waverley Council, p. 15.

³⁴⁰ Ms Robyn Monro Miller, Network of Community Activities, Transcript of evidence, 11 June 2008, p. 34.

³⁴¹ Submission no. 53, Waverley Council, p. 33.

³⁴² Submission no. 18, Chester Hill Neighbourhood Centre, p. 3.

³⁴³ Submission no. 75, Mosman Municipal Council, pp. 1-2.

parents are increasingly pressured into sending their children home or to alternative accommodation.³⁴⁴

- 4.53 Waverley Council similarly found that children over the age of 8 or 9 tend to drop out of out of school hours care, due to reasons such as boredom and parents' concerns about the cost of child care:

OOSH services report that children most often drop out after age 8, due mostly to children finding 'child care' not stimulating enough for them and that older children not wanting to attend often create behaviour issues for staff. The second reason was parent concern about affordability of OOSH, compared with allowing their 9+ children to go home on their own.³⁴⁵

- 4.54 Evidence to the Inquiry has revealed a raft of factors that point to the need for more appropriate out of school hours care for children in late primary school in some out of school hours care services. These include a lack of age-appropriate programming, a need for staff training focused on the older age group, costs associated with appropriate equipment, games and activities, as well as insufficient space.

Issues for specific groups

- 4.55 Evidence to this Inquiry has indicated that young people with a disability and young people over 12 years of age face additional difficulties relating to out of school hours care. Older children with a disability often continue to access such services because there is simply no alternative. Network of Community Activities indicated that access to respite care is limited, and that inclusion support services have long waiting lists, but stressed that the resulting age range is inappropriate:

In out of school hours care there is a growing trend for young people with disabilities to continue to access the service up until the age of 18... This situation results in children as young as 5 accessing a service with a disabled 18 year old. The situation for either child is not satisfactory or appropriate. There is an urgent need for services for this age group.³⁴⁶

- 4.56 Similarly, the Institute for Family Advocacy and Leadership Development noted that: Many OOSH services have continued to include high school children who have been at their centres because they are good people and they know what will happen if they do not. Sometimes it is inappropriate because you have a strapping 17-year-old in a place where there are five-year-olds, six-year-olds or seven-year-olds, but they do it with a good heart. Of course, other schools have had to say, "I am sorry, but it is no longer appropriate."³⁴⁷

- 4.57 Ms Epstein-Frisch told the Committee about the importance of attaching after-school care for teenagers with disabilities to organisations that relate to teenagers, indicating that services attached to primary schools are no longer appropriate:

The other important thing as far as their interests is that we need to make sure that any after-school and vacation programs for teenagers come from a teenage-type auspice. Attaching it to the primary school no longer becomes appropriate, but there are the Police and Community Youth Clubs [PCYC]. Local councils have a range of activities. It

³⁴⁴ Ms Robyn Monro Miller, Network of Community Activities, Transcript of evidence, 11 June 2008, p. 34.

³⁴⁵ Submission no. 53, Waverley Council, p. 2.

³⁴⁶ Submission no. 49, Network of Community Activities, p. 3.

³⁴⁷ Ms Belinda Epstein-Frisch, Institute for Family Advocacy and Leadership Development, Transcript of evidence, 11 June 2008, p. 26.

is just about finding an auspice for that kind of support that is congruent with teenagers.³⁴⁸

- 4.58 Evidence to the Inquiry has identified a need for services outside of school hours for young people with a disability. While existing out of school hours care services may be able to provide care for younger children with a disability, older children may end up attending services targeting younger age groups due to the lack of age-appropriate alternatives, or may be unable to find any appropriate care services at all. There is an urgent need for alternatives to out of school hours care for young people with a disability who are aged over 12.
- 4.59 Alternatives to out of school hours care could include increased access to existing age-appropriate sport and recreation activities, as well as the development of additional specialised models of recreation, support and care for this age group, outside of school hours. In order for these alternatives to be developed, the Committee considers that the NSW Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care should continue to work with relevant government departments to ensure that existing programs and new programs are accessible to children and young people with a disability.

RECOMMENDATION 12: The Committee recommends that the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care continue to work with other government departments and agencies to:

- increase access of children and young people with a disability to existing youth-oriented services and activities; and
- develop appropriate new service models for children and young people aged 9-14 years with a disability.

The Committee further recommends that the Commissioner for Children and Young People be consulted as part of this process.

Lack of appropriate services for young people over 12 years old

- 4.60 A number of submissions commented about a lack of services providing care outside of school hours for young people aged 12 years and over. The submission from Wollongong City Council commented on the lack of services for children aged 12-14:

There is a lack of services for young people in the 12 to 14 age bracket. This includes lack of services for out of school hours care. Youth programs offer services to this age group but they usually operate on a drop in basis and may not be appropriate as after school hours care and do not offer the same level of supervision as other models.³⁴⁹

- 4.61 Lachlan Shire Council similarly commented that there are no after school services for this age group and noted that these children are too young for youth services:

³⁴⁸ Ms Belinda Epstein-Frisch, Institute for Family Advocacy and Leadership Development, Transcript of evidence, 11 June 2008, p. 27.

³⁴⁹ Submission no. 51, Wollongong City Council, p. 1.

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One big concern for our service is that once children are turning 12 years of age there are no services available to these children. Parents comment that their children are too young to be left at home and too young to attend youth services. Our service has been accepting children age 12 years or children who have not attended high school but we are finding that the mixture of children 10 to 12 and 5-9 years is very difficult to manage as these age group are at different stages of development.³⁵⁰

- 4.62 Children over 12 years of age require specialised programs and facilities, together with staff who are trained to work with this age group. The submission from Lismore Outside School Hours Care Centre indicated the characteristics required for after school care for children over 12:

The 12 plus age group requires specialist youth workers rather than child care workers to assist in social and group interaction and facilitate a means for getting their options heard and valued. Simple tools such as internet access, printing access, publication of their artistic and written works, musical instruments, guests artists and community sports people and ability to watch age appropriate movies together.³⁵¹

- 4.63 According to Ms Pauline O’Kane of Network of Community Activities, legislation in New South Wales does allow older children to access out of school hours care. However, in practice this is problematic for number of reasons such as existing services being full from the demand of 5-12’s. In addition a lot of older children would not want to go back to those services, unless there was a program that was planned to cater for and meet their needs.³⁵²

- 4.64 Ms Monro-Miller of Network for Community Activities spoke of the concerns parents have about what happens to their child out of school hours once they are enrolled in high school:

... the concern about what happens to a child once they start high school is very high. The phone calls we get in the office from parents increasingly report that they do not know what to do with their children once they enter high school. Some out-of-hours school services do allow children to attend for that first year of high school but it is not necessarily something they have to do and certainly it is not always what the children wish to do.³⁵³

- 4.65 Lismore Outside School Hours Care Centre is an example of a service that does accept enrolments from children who have finished primary school. However, the Centre’s submission did raise a number of issues relating to care for these children, such as challenging behaviour and disengagement:

Developmentally this age group can [be] challenging as they are beginning to feel 'too big' for primary school and start to resent the fact that they are attending a care group with so many young students present. This can be compounded by the fact that some may have been attending since their first years at school and are getting sick of the setting. These things, if not addressed can manifest themselves as behavioural problems (defiant antisocial behaviour) and disengagement from the program which can often filter down to the younger students who look up to the older kids and copy these behaviours.³⁵⁴

³⁵⁰ Submission no. 63, Lachlan Shire Council, p. 1.

³⁵¹ Submission no. 100, Lismore Outside School Hours Care Centre, p. 2.

³⁵² Ms Pauline O’Kane, Network of Community Activities, Transcript of evidence, 17 March 2009, p. 11.

³⁵³ Ms Monro-Miller, Network for Community Activities Transcript of evidence, 11 June 2008, p. 34.

³⁵⁴ Submission no. 100, Lismore Outside School Hours Care Centre, pp. 1-2.

- 4.66 Evidence to the Inquiry has revealed that children aged 12-14 are often seen as too old for out of school hours care and too young for youth services. There are no age-appropriate after school care services for these children and parents are reportedly concerned about what happens to their child once they are enrolled in high school.

Impact of lack of services

- 4.67 The lack of appropriate after school care services for children over 12 years of age has a number of negative impacts, with the potential for children getting into trouble while they are unsupervised. Fairfield Business Education Partnership observed that some children are left with few choices other than congregating around shopping centres and libraries.³⁵⁵ Lack of supervision has been linked to increased rates of smoking and substance abuse in adolescents, especially adolescents in disadvantaged communities.³⁵⁶
- 4.68 The Committee received particularly tragic evidence of the results of limited opportunities for activities for over 12s from Warialda Community Care Inc. Six fourteen year olds turned away from an out of school hours care facility took a 'driving lesson' that same day, leaving three dead, two critically injured condition and one facing life in prison.³⁵⁷ Although an atypical example of the difficulties children can find themselves in when they are left without supervision outside of school hours, this tragedy does illustrate the potential for severe outcomes arising from the lack of adequate care for children over twelve years old.
- 4.69 In some areas there are existing programs that have been specifically developed for children in the middle years outside of school hours. These are discussed in the next section.

Existing programs for 9-14 year olds

- 4.70 Some examples of existing initiatives developed to cater for the 9-14 years age group were presented in evidence to the Inquiry. These include out-of-school hours services implementing strategies to cater for 9-12 year olds; youth services developing initiatives to cater better for 12-14 year olds; and well as programs for 'tweenies', which encompasses 9-14 year olds.
- 4.71 The *Better Futures Inner and Eastern Sydney Pre-teens Research Report* identified the Darlo Play Centre and the Summer Hill Centre as best practice models for out of school hours care services for 9-12 year olds. The Darlo Play Centre ran numerous activities that were found to interest older children, such as wax sculpture, running a cafe, ball games, origami, collage, chess club, parachute, games, making jewellery, candle making, cooking, elegant dinner parties, cricket matches, Indigenous art and games.³⁵⁸
- 4.72 The Summer Hill Centre found that activities perceived as risky were of more interest to older children, particularly boys. Providing a separate quiet room for the older children, as well as lots of unstructured time for children to socialize around activities of their own choosing were identified as successful features of this centre.³⁵⁹

³⁵⁵ Ms Carol Richardson, Fairfield Business Education Partnership, Transcript of evidence, 8 August 2008, p.12.

³⁵⁶ Submission no. 76, UnitingCare Burnside, p. 19.

³⁵⁷ Submission no. 2, Warialda Community Care Inc., pp. 1-2.

³⁵⁸ Submission no. 53, Waverley Council, p. 85.

³⁵⁹ *ibid.*, p. 86.

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- 4.73 The City of Sydney runs a number of programs and events catering for children aged 9-14, such as structured hip hop and drama workshops, a weekly young women's program, a weekly *Tweenies Day*, one-off events held within the school holiday programs including excursions, and a one-off introductory session with grade 7s at a local high school. The City of Sydney also noted that youth services in the area provide age specific programs which account for the needs of the 12–14 year olds who attend the centres.³⁶⁰
- 4.74 According to the *Better Futures Inner and Eastern Sydney Pre-teens Research Report*, some Police Citizens Youth Clubs and youth services provided good examples of organisations external to the outside school hours care model that provide activities and care for children aged 9-13 years. Fees are low, the activities are age-appropriate and the venues have an older age membership, which is attractive to pre-teens.³⁶¹
- 4.75 Several submissions identified a need for transition programs from out of school hours care services to youth services. For example, the City of Sydney submission commented:
- OOSH Services provide a structured service catering to the needs of young people aged 5 to 12 years, while Youth Services offer a less structured and more informal provision aimed at the needs of young people aged 12 – 25. For young people to transition smoothly from one service to another, gradual programs need to be tailored easing the target group from the OOSH Service to the Youth Service. This may include such activities as an induction day or enrolment day.³⁶²
- 4.76 Some transition programs have been developed, such as that of Mosman Municipal Council, developed jointly by the council's children's services and youth services:
- Council's Children's Services have commenced using the Youth Centre on occasion for their older vacation care group (Years 3-6) which has aided in this group becoming aware and comfortable in accessing the Centre. Other joint programs across services, including intergenerational initiatives with Council's Senior's Centre and Library have recently been initiated.³⁶³
- 4.77 Waverley Council informed the Committee of some *Better Futures* Projects that have been largely concerned with transitions from out of school hours care to youth services. Youth service staff assist children to transition from the children's care space to the youth space, run by staff from the Children's and Youth Teams together. These programs involve a mix of physical activities, excursions, centre based arts and cultural play.³⁶⁴
- 4.78 Programs that assist with the transition from out of school hours care services to youth services have been identified as useful for children in the middle years. Waverley Council reported that some existing programs are run at a relatively low cost, using staff that are already employed by out of school hours care centres or youth centres, however some funding is required.³⁶⁵ Regional project officers, as

³⁶⁰ Submission no. 43, City of Sydney, p. 5.

³⁶¹ Submission no. 53, Waverley Council, p. 87.

³⁶² Submission no. 43, City of Sydney, p. 4.

³⁶³ Submission no. 75, Mosman Municipal Council, p. 3.

³⁶⁴ Waverley Council, Questions answered after hearing, 17 March 2009, p. 2.

³⁶⁵ Submission no. 53, Waverley Council, p. 108.

described in Chapter 3, could have a role in building relationships between services and fostering the development of these types of programs.

Potential service models for the care and support of 9-14 year olds outside of school

- 4.79 Evidence to the Inquiry has commented on the need for outside school hours services to strengthen their programming for children in late primary school, and a need for youth services to cater more adequately for children and young people in early high school as discussed in Chapter 3. A strong need has also been identified for a range age-appropriate activities/care for 9-14 year olds outside of school.
- 4.80 A number of submissions to the Inquiry described programs that provide activities and care for children aged 9-14 that are available in some local government areas. These programs are at the forefront of service delivery for this age group and exemplify the types of initiatives that are needed across the State to provide care for children and young people in the middle years.
- 4.81 Evidence to the Inquiry suggests that a number of different providers, as well as different models of activities and care may be appropriate. For example, Chester Hill Neighbourhood Centre recommended funding programs for 9-12 year olds that are somewhere in between existing out of school hours care and youth services:
- Hon Fred Nile MLC:** A number of the organisations have spoken about children being left at home. Obviously, that is a problem where both parents are working, particularly with single mothers. What suggestions do you have to deal with that?
- Ms Donadel:** I think a version of funded programs like the youth workers that we have but for the age group 9 to 12, but not fee-paying like after-school care, in a formal setting. It would need a bit more structure perhaps than, for example, drop-in youth centres have; perhaps somewhere in between the two.³⁶⁶
- 4.82 Some evidence suggested that joint approaches to providing services may be appropriate. For example, the *Better Futures Inner and Eastern Sydney Pre-teens Research Report* observed that the best centres providing care to older children are those which offer facilities that are well equipped and purpose built. Consequently, out of school hours care providers that do not have such facilities could explore sharing venues and facilities with other organisations:
- The best examples of programming for older children in the primary school range are those that are in premises which are purpose built for youth activities, such as PCYCs and Youth Services. Children want pool tables, computer games, musical equipment, art and craft materials of a high standard, and lots of varied games. Since it is unlikely that most OSHC providers can ever provide all of this it may be better for OSHC services to explore sharing venues and facilities with organisations who provide recreation or other services to older children.³⁶⁷
- 4.83 The New South Wales Teachers Federation indicated that numerous different organisations and groups should be responsible for providing a variety of services and activities outside of school ranging from homework centres to low cost sporting and cultural activities, noting that involvement in sport outside school costs a considerable amount of money in fees, equipment and registration. The Federation commented, "Community organisations such as PCYC, YMCA, Youth Centres, cultural groups, sporting organisations need to be funded to provide activities."³⁶⁸

³⁶⁶ Ms Dale Donadel, Chester Hill Neighbourhood Centre, Transcript of evidence, 8 August 2008, p. 18.

³⁶⁷ Submission no. 53, Waverley Council, p. 15.

³⁶⁸ NSW Teachers Federation, Correspondence in response to questions, 4 May 2009, p. 5.

Out of School Hours Care

- 4.84 Similarly, Ms Margaret Brown of Waverley Council considered that a range of providers should be involved in delivering after school and vacation-care programs for children and young people aged 9-14 years:

I do not think OOSH is the only provider; I think it is a combination of a whole bunch of things. Lots of people provide for this age group, for example, sports groups, youth clubs and everything from girl guides and boy scouts down to football clubs.³⁶⁹

- 4.85 Based on the evidence to the Inquiry, the Committee considers that a range of organisations should be involved in providing activities/care for children and young people 9-14 years. The Committee notes that while there is a gap in service provision for this age group in relation to activities and care outside of school, some existing initiatives developed by different sectors have been effective in providing age-appropriate programs.
- 4.86 To foster and increase the profile of this relatively new area of service provision the Committee considers that it would be appropriate to hold a conference to showcase local and international developments in this area, and to obtain input from children and young people about service delivery. Such a conference would be relevant to staff from a range of sectors, including sport and recreation, out of school hours care, transport, education and community services. A roundtable of key stakeholders could be convened prior to the conference to assist in identifying the scope and content of the conference.

RECOMMENDATION 13: The Committee recommends that the Commission for Children and Young People work with key stakeholders to conduct a conference about age-appropriate activities/care for 9-14 year olds.

- 4.87 The Committee notes that, as it is appropriate for different types of service providers to be involved in providing activities/care for this age group, mechanisms for co-ordination become very important. To assist with co-ordination of programs for children and young people in the middle years outside of school hours at a local level, the Committee has recommended establishing project officer positions based on the model developed by Waverley Council (see Chapter 3).
- 4.88 At a state level the Committee has recommended a whole-of-government approach to providing activities outside of school for 9-14 year olds (see Chapter 3). Both of these strategies have the potential to address the need for out of school hours care, as well as for activities designed to meet the recreational and developmental needs of this age group.

Funding

- 4.89 The provision of funding of programs for the 9-14 years age group was raised in evidence presented to this Inquiry. The New South Wales Teachers Federation, for example, commented on the need for continuity and consistency in the funding of programs:

Too often great programs start up on an ad hoc basis, with seed funding, or no guarantees of continuity of funding. Continuity and consistency is the one area where

³⁶⁹ Ms Margaret Brown, Waverley Council, Transcript of evidence, 17 March 2009, p. 3.

adolescents are reliant on provision from the adults they are in contact, and the agencies and programs set up to work with and for them.

Some of the money spent putting young people at risk into detention could be diverted to programs supporting young people and their families.³⁷⁰

- 4.90 Mosman Municipal Council commented on the difficulties faced by services that attempt to develop programs for older primary school children due to funding constraints. The council recommended that Commonwealth and state funding needs to encourage the development of targeted programs for 9-14's:

Even where other local services attempt to adapt their programs to meet the needs of this older primary age group, funding constraints often mean younger and older groups cannot be separated and age-specific program provision is limited. Commonwealth funding and State support needs to recognize the specific needs and encourage the development of targeted programs for this age group.³⁷¹

- 4.91 In 2007, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission made the following recommendation regarding the funding of services that provide care and activities outside school hours:

That governments offer co-ordinated grant-based funding to community-based organisations, schools and children's services to establish innovative projects that provide age appropriate activities for high school-age children and young people, before and after school and during school holidays.³⁷²

- 4.92 The Committee has recommended that the NSW Government provide funding for activities outside of school as a core component of a state-wide funding stream for 9-14 year olds, with a particular focus on disadvantaged communities (see Chapter 3).

Vacation Care

- 4.93 Vacation care includes a wide range of services that are available to school-aged children during school vacation periods, and are usually run for 5-12 year olds. Approved vacation care services are those programs provided by a service provider approved to receive Commonwealth Government Child Care Benefit payments on behalf of eligible families. These services may be operated by community organisations, councils or private providers.³⁷³

- 4.94 Approved vacation care services must:

- be available for at least eight continuous hours on each normal working day;
- be open for a least seven weeks of schooling holidays in a year;
- participate satisfactorily in the Commonwealth Government funded quality assurance system; and
- abide by the Commonwealth Government *Priority of Access* system.³⁷⁴

³⁷⁰ New South Wales Teachers Federation, Correspondence in response to questions, 4 May 2009, p. 5.

³⁷¹ Submission No 75, Mosman Municipal Council, p. 2.

³⁷² Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission. 2007. *It's About Time: women, men, work and family*, p.165.

³⁷³ Bryant, L. Reilly, S. & Green, J. 2006. *Vacation care needs in Fairfield and Liverpool*, Fairfield City Council and Community Childcare Co-operative, p. 14.

³⁷⁴ *ibid.*, p. 16.

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- 4.95 A range of other vacation care programs have developed as a response to the need to engage children during school vacation periods, especially disadvantaged children, children living in Department of Housing accommodation, and children at risk. These programs range from all day drop-in services to one-off activities, for example, sports activities in a park or storyline at a local library.³⁷⁵
- 4.96 Many local councils see school holiday recreation programs as a core component of their community service provision for local residents – particularly for disadvantaged residents. These programs may include sports clinics, art and craft activities, drop-in activities at local community centres, and may be run by council or in partnership with local community organisations.³⁷⁶ Additionally, some councils run user pay service activities during school holidays at leisure centres. These activities target higher income residents, and those stay-at-home parents and families who need some fun and stimulating activities during long school holiday periods.³⁷⁷
- 4.97 There is also a strong private sector market aimed at providing children with a variety of activities during school holidays, including sports clinics for week-long periods. Some speciality disability services also offer a range of vacation care programs to children with a disability such as respite care and various holiday programs.³⁷⁸
- 4.98 Australian data is available on the use of vacation care by school children aged 5-11 years, and on the number of vacation care services. The Committee notes that in 2004, there were 1,340 vacation care services and that 93 per cent of parents who use vacation care, do so for work-related purposes.³⁷⁹ In 2005, over 250,000 (14 per cent) school children aged 5-11 years had attended a vacation care program in the previous 12 months. Of those school children in two-parent families, 13 per cent attended vacation care, compared with 19 per cent of those school children in one-parent families. A higher proportion of school children in one-parent families with an employed parent attended vacation care (26 per cent) than in couple families with one or both parents employed (7 per cent and 16 per cent respectively).³⁸⁰
- 4.99 The need for vacation care has increased in tandem with the increased presence of Australian women with parenting responsibilities in the workforce. In June 2004, mothers were employed in 71 per cent of families whose youngest child was 10-14 years. Mothers worked full-time in 35 per cent of families with a youngest child 10–14 years, and 36 per cent worked part-time.³⁸¹
- 4.100 In research conducted by the National Foundation for Australian Women, when respondents were asked which factors would make it easier to balance work with the needs to care for children, the key issues were:
- greater flexibility in their own job;
 - greater flexibility in their partner's job; and

³⁷⁵ Bryant, L. Reilly, S. & Green, J. 2006. *Vacation care needs in Fairfield and Liverpool*, Fairfield City Council and Community Childcare Co-operative, pp. 14-15.

³⁷⁶ *ibid.*

³⁷⁷ *ibid.*

³⁷⁸ *ibid.*

³⁷⁹ Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission. 2007. *It's about time: women, men, work and family*, report prepared by S. Squire & J. Tilly, Sex and Discrimination Unit, p. 164.

³⁸⁰ Australian Bureau of Statistics. 2007. *Australian social trends 4102.0*, p. 56.

³⁸¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics. 2006. *Australian social trends 4102.0*, p. 124.

- easier access to school holiday programs designed for children.³⁸²

4.101 Demand for vacation care arises out of concerns about leaving children and young people in this age group unsupervised, as noted the submission from Ku-ring-gai Council:

Feedback from parents over several years has indicated that a large proportion of parents do not feel comfortable with children this age either staying at home by themselves or with siblings or engaging in school holiday activities without parental supervision ... Working parents feel their children should be supervised in the school holiday times when they are working. It is especially so during the transition years when children first enter high school and [are] coming to terms with the changes associated with school and adolescence.³⁸³

4.102 As with after school hours, lack of supervision during school holidays can lead to risk situations for children and young people. Marrickville South Interagency discussed the consequences of lack of supervision:

Those 9 and 10 year olds are some of the children who are out on the street and hanging around in the parks. Mum is very tied up with her new children in the house. The children are not going to stay around at home and will wander out. The children of course who are out on the street are at risk. They not only ride around without their bicycle helmets, but they are at risk of predators—older people who may be involved in some criminal activities, such as drugs and all those sorts of things.³⁸⁴

4.103 Vacation care not only provides supervised programs for children, but also allows respite for parents and families. The benefits of vacation care, including the provision of respite, were discussed in a report about vacation care needs in Fairfield and Liverpool:

Vacation Care ... caters for the care needs of working and studying families, provides respite care for parents, especially single parents and families of children with a disability. It provides opportunities and experiences for school aged children which they may not otherwise have access to and addresses the social and child protection/safety needs of children under 12 while meeting the community needs to ensure that young children are adequately supervised during vacation periods.³⁸⁵

4.104 The provision of respite through vacation care is particularly important for the families of children with a disability, to give respite for families and carers, so that they can have a break over the holidays. Some parents accumulate their allocation of respite for use during the holidays. Other parents also need access to care during holidays to enable them to work.³⁸⁶

4.105 A submission from Marrickville South Interagency identified that the demand for vacation care exceeds availability for children and young people in the middle age bracket:

There is also the issue that availability of vacation care places does not match the demand. Although there are some free programs during the school holidays, such as Children and Young people services at the Libraries in the area, they often are limited to a couple of hours maximum and parents need to attend. Often children in the middle

³⁸² National Foundation for Australian Women. 2008. *Out of school hours care study*, p. 34.

³⁸³ Submission no. 57, Ku-ring-gai Council, p.8.

³⁸⁴ Ms Vivienne Martin, Marrickville South Interagency, Transcript of evidence, 11 June 2008, p. 51.

³⁸⁵ Bryant, L., Reilly, S. & Green, J. 2006, *Vacation care needs in Fairfield and Liverpool*, Fairfield City Council and Community Childcare Co-operative, p. 19.

³⁸⁶ *ibid.*, p. 53.

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age bracket with parents who are unable to supervise cannot get to these services, and need full supervision for the equivalent duration of a school day.³⁸⁷

4.106 There is a particular gap in vacation care services for the over 12 year olds. The Ku-ring-gai Council submission noted:

Council staff's vacation care research, experience and community feedback has revealed there is a severe lack of school holiday based care services which cater for children up to the age of 14, with the exception of a small number of services, most vacation care and school holiday programs cease servicing children at age 12.³⁸⁸

4.107 This is a pressing issue for children over 12 years of age with disabilities. According to an assessment of vacation care needs in Fairfield and Liverpool, "It is difficult to find places for children over 12 years of age anywhere and they are generally unable to place them in mainstream vacation care. They are concerned that their high school aged children may be bullied or may not cope or feel they do not fit in."³⁸⁹

4.108 One of the main barriers to accessing vacation care is that of cost. Evidence to the Committee from YWCA NSW noted:

They also feel that they have no access - and I am talking predominantly the disadvantaged low socio-economic families - to things like PCYC activities. They are \$10 a day. New South Wales Sport and Recreation is \$40 a day. If you have got more than one child, even if you have got a family with two working parents, it is unaffordable. And so children up to the age of 14 still require supervision. It may be that they can be left for a period of time but up to that age group a number of them still need to be supervised during school holidays and so it places a great deal of pressure on middle class families, but in terms of families within the poverty bracket there is very little for them to do during the holiday period.³⁹⁰

4.109 According to the report on vacation care needs in Fairfield and Liverpool, many low-income earners and families doing shift work indicated that they simply could not afford to pay for care during the school holidays: even with the Child Care Benefit, resulting in direct fees to families being as low as seven dollars per day, families are not able to afford approved vacation care fees.³⁹¹ Others indicated that with mortgages and rising petrol prices, even on two incomes, there is no money for 'extras'. Some working parents indicated that as care by a family member is available at no cost, there seemed little point in paying for children to go to care outside the home.³⁹² The report concluded that socially and economically disadvantaged families should have access to free and flexible activities.³⁹³

4.110 In response to these financial pressures, organisations such as Marrickville South Interagency attempt to ease the cost of vacation care for families:

We run a school holiday program every two weeks of every holidays, and it is always popular. We try to keep our costs down quite substantially. If going to Laserzone costs

³⁸⁷ Submission no. 30, Marrickville South Interagency, pp. 1-2.

³⁸⁸ Submission no. 57, Ku-ring-gai Council, p. 6.

³⁸⁹ Bryant, L., Reilly, S., & Green, J., 2006, *Vacation Care needs in Fairfield & Liverpool*, Fairfield City Council & Community Child Care Co-Operative, p. 53.

³⁹⁰ Ms Frances Trimboli, YWCA New South Wales, Transcript of evidence, 6 August 2008, p.25.

³⁹¹ The report also noted that some parents were not aware of the availability of reduced fees through the Child Care Benefit, which can reduce fees substantially.

³⁹² Bryant, L., Reilly, S. & Green, J. 2006. *Vacation care needs in Fairfield and Liverpool*, Fairfield City Council and Community Childcare Co-operative, p. 44.

³⁹³ *ibid.*, p. 20.

us \$20, we charge the young people and their families \$5. If we know the family cannot afford that, we will subsidise that.³⁹⁴

- 4.111 As with out of school hours care, a barrier for children and young people accessing vacation care is the inappropriateness of some programs for the older age group. Ms Noeline Olive of the Casino Neighbourhood Centre told the Committee about some of the limitations of vacation care programs for 10, 11 and 12 year-olds:

Though you are offering a particular range of programs for them, they are in the situation where they feel they are not children but they are not teenagers ... They really do not want to be there because they see it as a childcare centre, which it is in a way. They need more stimulating and different things that are up and above what we can do ... They are not old enough to have no supervision but they do not want to participate in those sorts of activities. We have it quite often where there is that little gap before they can come into the youth service. Our youth service is 13 to 20. So there is that little gap in between.³⁹⁵

- 4.112 Some children are being excluded from vacation care programs due to their age:

We were registered for 5-12 year old children. As our service operated, the children over 12 years of age, would hang at the door, watching the younger children with envy. I was afraid to let them in, in case we had a spot check and they were caught. Vacation care was particularly bad, as there was not any organized sport during the holidays, and parents were at work. The teenagers were bored and looking for fun.³⁹⁶

- 4.113 A number of submissions provided examples of school holiday programs which are suitable for children and young people in this age range. These include the *FRESH Program*, the *Airds/Bradbury Koori Holiday Program*, as well as programs conducted by the City of Sydney and Waverley Council.

- 4.114 The *FRESH* school holiday program for 8-12 year olds was developed as a partnership project. It was initiated by Anglicare Family Support Service, Marrickville and involved a range of local organisations and a school. The program had a number of activities that were set to run each day, with afternoons consisting of a flexible program with concurrent activities, such as craft, mural painting, pool, air hockey and Xbox.³⁹⁷ This model had an ongoing family work component, and had a broad impact on the family as a whole:

This program has a positive impact on the community of offering children and families an alternative to spending time on the streets and from boredom at home and providing activities that engage them and are fun. The program also helps them learn how to share, respect one another and adults, honour boundaries and guidelines, through fun activities and games and interaction with young adult volunteers and community service workers. It is often a mentor relationship that is one of the most vital parts of growing up. There was evidence of these types of relationships throughout the week, in particular between the girls and some of the young women volunteers.³⁹⁸

- 4.115 Surry Hills OOSH Centre offers a youth room to Year 6 participants, with their involvement increasing as they move towards the age bracket where they can access youth services. During summer school holidays, prior to entering Year 7, participants

³⁹⁴ Ms Vivienne Martin, Marrickville South Interagency, Transcript of evidence, 11 June 2008, p. 53.

³⁹⁵ Ms Noeline Olive, Casino Neighbourhood Centre, Transcript of evidence, 5 August 2008, p. 2.

³⁹⁶ Submission no. 2, Warialda Community Care Inc., p. 1.

³⁹⁷ Submission no. 30, Marrickville South Interagency, p. 3.

³⁹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 4.

are able to attend their choice of either OOSH school holiday programs or youth services school holiday programs.³⁹⁹

4.116 Waverley Council runs age specific holiday programs. Although ages may be advertised as 7-12, 10-14 or 9-13, the programming is specifically aimed at meeting the needs of middle children. Activities have included: surfing workshops, drama, hip hop dancing, acrobatics, cartooning, CSIRO Science Workshops, reading groups, and environmental craft. Randwick and Woollahra Councils have also begun to run some age specific holiday programs for middle years children.⁴⁰⁰

4.117 The *Airds/Bradbury Koori Holiday Program* was a vacation care program operated by UnitingCare Burnside South Campbelltown Family Centre in partnership with local public schools. The program was funded by the *Aboriginal Child, Youth and Family Strategy* in the DoCS, and was developed as an early intervention program for children aged 5 to 13 years living in Airds who were at a high risk of abuse or neglect. It used recreation and cultural activities as a non-threatening means of assisting children to build on their social and interpersonal skills, and establish positive friendship networks. The *Airds/Bradbury Koori Holiday Program* was formally evaluated:

The Program ran in school holidays between 2003 and 2005. An evaluation in 2005 reviewed the effectiveness of the program over 9 holiday periods, with 278 children from 123 families attending. The Program had a high return rate, with 78% of children returning for one or more holiday Program and 63% attending all Programs.

The evaluation found that there were significant benefits for individual children, families, and the community as a result of the program. For example, teachers and principals reported that children who attended the program had decreased challenging behaviours, decreased suspension rates and increased school attendance.⁴⁰¹

4.118 Although the program was not re-funded in 2006 due to funding constraints, UnitingCare Burnside considers that it remains a viable model for vacation care programs in disadvantaged communities.⁴⁰²

4.119 One of the major issues that vacation care services face in providing services to this age group is obtaining funding. Ms Frances Trimboli of YWCA NSW discussed with the Committee the difficulty of obtaining funding for a holiday program for children who are seven to 12 years old:

... holiday programs are not funded or easy to get funds, other than for the support of local government, Department of Housing, a little bit here and there, but really we have had to have a cap in hand approach because it does not fit a criteria for funding. Our program that we have been running for the last seven years currently has no funding and we are trying to find ways to continue that program.⁴⁰³

Children with a disability

4.120 Vacation care services may face particular difficulties in providing services to children and young people with disabilities, as noted by Ku-ring-gai Council:

³⁹⁹ Submission no. 43, City of Sydney, p. 5.

⁴⁰⁰ Submission no. 53, Waverley Council, p. 4.

⁴⁰¹ Submission no. 76, UnitingCare Burnside, p.17.

⁴⁰² *ibid.*

⁴⁰³ Ms Frances Trimboli, YWCA NSW, Transcript of evidence, 6 August 2008, p. 25.

Mainstream vacation care services are sometimes challenged to cater for children with disabilities as additional staff and training is sometimes required. Additional resources can be required to integrate children with disabilities in vacation care activities especially excursion programs. Children with disabilities require mainstream and customised services ... during the school holidays. Article 23 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child states children's right to special care and support to live a full and independent life.⁴⁰⁴

- 4.121 The main issue for families with children and young people with disabilities is around the quality of vacation care, and ensuring that the special needs of their children are met. According to an assessment of vacation care needs in Fairfield and Liverpool, parents of children with special needs and difficulties expressed concern about the need for staff with skills and experience in supporting and providing care and in managing challenging behaviour. Services just do not have the resources to provide the level of care required for children with moderate to high support needs.⁴⁰⁵
- 4.122 One response to this is that approved vacation care services attract the *Inclusion Support Subsidy*, which supports them to include children with ongoing high support needs into quality care. The subsidy helps build the capacity of childcare services to successfully include children with ongoing high support needs, such as children with a disability, and provides funding towards the cost of extra staff, releasing staff for inclusion training and specialised equipment.⁴⁰⁶
- 4.123 These services can also attract a wide range of Inclusion Support under the Commonwealth Government's *Inclusion and Professional Support Program (IPSP)* that is part of their wider *Child Care Support Program*. Specialist Inclusion Support Facilitators are experienced in helping services build their capacity to include children with ongoing high support needs, including children with a disability.⁴⁰⁷
- 4.124 Approved vacation care services also have access to a specialist equipment pool which is designed to enable children with high physical support needs to access and participate in services. The pool includes equipment such as specialist seating, standing, positioning and toileting equipment, visual aids etc.⁴⁰⁸ Access to school holiday/vacation programs may serve a number of important functions, including in meeting parents' needs for childcare. With respect to parents of children with a disability, it can also meet needs for respite care.
- 4.125 Provision of quality school holiday/vacation care also reduces risks associated with lack of supervision of this age group in the school holidays, and provides important developmental opportunities for children and young people, particularly those from disadvantaged communities. Evidence provided by UnitingCare Burnside about the *Airds/Bradbury Koori School Holiday Program* indicates that well designed vacation care programs can have a positive impact on a variety of outcomes for children at risk of abuse and neglect.

⁴⁰⁴ Submission no. 57, Ku-Ring-Gai Council, p. 5.

⁴⁰⁵ Bryant, L. Reilly, S. & Green, J. 2006. *Vacation care needs in Fairfield and Liverpool*, Fairfield City Council and Community Childcare Co-operative, p.14.

⁴⁰⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 17.

⁴⁰⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 17.

⁴⁰⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

Committee comment

- 4.126 The Committee notes that there is the potential for vacation care/school holiday programs to be expanded in disadvantaged communities as part of programs discussed in other sections of this Report, including through Schools as Community Centres for middle years students or extended schools (see Chapter 17), or as a component of a *Brighter Futures*-type program for 9-14 year olds (see Chapter 12). Additional school holiday programs could also be developed through non-government organisations or local government, however additional funding would be required.
- 4.127 While there is some evidence of the effectiveness of school/holiday vacation care programs on improving outcomes for disadvantaged children and young people, the Committee notes that there is a need to review the existing research in this area, and to build an evidence base in relation to the effectiveness of these programs.
- 4.128 The Committee considers that it is appropriate to develop and evaluate school holiday/vacation care programs specifically designed as an early intervention strategy for 9-14 year olds in disadvantaged communities in New South Wales, in order to identify models of best practice and to build the evidence base about the effectiveness of these programs in improving outcomes for this age group. This should be undertaken with the view to funding school holiday programs in disadvantaged communities more widely as a core component of a state-wide funding stream for 9-14 year olds.
- 4.129 Given that the provision of vacation care serves a number of functions, including facilitating the participation of parents in the workforce and that a number of different sectors are involved in the provision of school holiday/vacation care programs, the Committee supports a whole-of-government approach to expanding the provision of school holiday programs/vacation care.

RECOMMENDATION 14: The Committee recommends that the NSW Government adopt a whole-of-government approach to expanding the provision of vacation care/school holiday programs, particularly in disadvantaged communities.

The Committee further recommends that the Commissioner for Children and Young People be consulted on any proposed whole-of-government approach.

RECOMMENDATION 15: The Committee recommends that the Minister for Community Services develop and evaluate school holiday/vacation care programs for 9-14 year olds specifically designed as an early intervention strategy in disadvantaged communities.

The Committee further recommends that the Commissioner for Children and Young People be consulted on the proposed development and evaluation of school holiday/vacation care programs for 9-14 year olds.

Chapter Five - Technology

We start thinking about going to university and getting a good job earlier and earlier. We need to know that we have libraries, internet connection and specialised subject areas that will assist us in getting the jobs we want in the future. We don't all have internet access at home so we need to be able to go to public areas where we can study and get the information we need for our learning. Lifelong learning is the focus at our school.⁴⁰⁹

Introduction

- 5.1 While communications technology provides many educational and entertainment benefits for young people in the middle years, access is not always equitable. This is particularly the case for young people in disadvantaged families or for those who live in regional or remote areas. The media, internet and other communications technologies are a primary influence on the behaviour and values of children approaching adolescence. This chapter considers some of the issues relating to responsible use of communications technology and the important role of schools in guiding young people in avoiding the pitfalls. The chapter also discusses the future introduction of a dedicated free-to-air children's television channel which can provide appropriate programs for specific age groups of children and young people.

The impact of technology

- 5.2 Technology clearly plays an increasingly important role in the life of children and young people aged 9-14 years: it is used as a tool to support learning, to facilitate communication and for recreational purposes. Technology is also constantly changing and children and young people rapidly embrace new forms as they come onto the market, often acquiring skills hitherto unknown to previous generations, particularly their parents:

We need to acknowledge and accept that young people operate out of a completely different paradigm to any other generation. This is the first generation that has known nothing by [but] hyper speed change. Older generations tend to not cope well with change, but for young people, change is a given. The result of this difference in generations is that neither group feels like the other understands them. Older generations should make every effort to completely engage and consult with young people.⁴¹⁰

The use of technology

- 5.3 The NSW Commission for Children and Young People (the Commission) discussed children's relationship with technology in its submission:

Today children in the middle years are living in a world markedly different to that of ten years ago, let alone the world their parents grew up in... Many children in the middle years are likely to use mobile phones, MP3 players, instant messaging or online social networking sites such as Myspace and Facebook almost everyday. Children have greater access to information, as well as a broader range of influences and more opportunities to communicate, through the internet and globalisation of the media.⁴¹¹

⁴⁰⁹ Submission no. 96, Hebersham Public School, pp. 1-2.

⁴¹⁰ Submission no. 22, The Youth Unit of the NSW Synod of the Uniting Church in Australia, p. 2.

⁴¹¹ Submission no. 90, NSW Commission for Children and Young People, p. 3.

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- 5.4 In its research report *Click and connect: young Australians' use of online social media*, the Australian Communication and Media Authority (ACMA) noted that Children and young people aged eight to 17 use the internet to find information, for academic purposes and social networking. Exposure to the internet and social networking services increases with age, starting predominantly with game-related websites at younger ages, leading into regular and proficient use of social networking services from high school age upwards (12+ years).⁴¹²
- 5.5 A 2007 ACMA report, *Media and communications in Australian families*, noted that many of the technologies now used by young people - the internet, email, instant messaging, chat rooms, video sharing, mobile phones, and portable music players - were barely present in the home a decade ago, if at all. Traditional services of television, radio, and video games remained central to families' media use today, but the biggest change to children's and teenagers' discretionary activities had been the internet.⁴¹³
- 5.6 The NSW Department of Education and Training (DET) also noted in its strategy paper entitled *Our Middle Years Learners – Engaged, Resilient, Successful, An Education Strategy for Years 5 - 9* that:
- For many students the use of mobile phones, MP3 players, video games and the Internet are not just tools, but a way of life. Through technology, many have developed their own language and social networks. The role and importance of technology in learning will be a major factor in the way Middle Years' students learn and define themselves.⁴¹⁴
- 5.7 Whilst many parents recognise the benefits of technology for their children, the rapid uptake of the new technology has brought with it several challenges in terms of equitable access and the need for controls, either parental or regulatory, to minimise potential harm. Concerns were raised in evidence to this Inquiry about safety issues arising from exposure to inappropriate content on the internet and television, and the possible impact that these may have upon children's behaviour and sexualisation. Other concerns were raised about the lack of access to technology for children from lower socio-economic backgrounds or those living in rural and remote areas.

Access to technology for families from low socio-economic backgrounds

- 5.8 According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), in the 12 months to April 2006:
- 96.6 per cent of 9 to 11 year olds and 98.1 per cent of 12 to 14 year olds had used a computer; and
 - 75.6 per cent of 9 to 11 year olds and 88.7 per cent of 12 to 14 year olds had accessed the internet either during or outside of school hours.⁴¹⁵
- 5.9 The majority of children who accessed a computer did so either at their school or at home:⁴¹⁶

⁴¹² Australian Communication and Media Authority. 2009. *Click and connect: young Australians' use of online social media, 01: Qualitative research report*, pp. 5-6.

⁴¹³ Australian Communications and Media Authority, 2007. *Media and communications in Australian families 2007, report of the media and society research project*, p. 1.

⁴¹⁴ NSW Department of Education & Training. 2006. *Our middle years learners – engaged, resilient, successful*, p. 2.

⁴¹⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006. *Children's participation in cultural and leisure activities, Australia 4901.0*, p. 46.

Location of usage	9 to 11 year olds	12 to 14 year olds
at school	93.5 %	94.8%
at home	89%	92%
at someone else's home	38.8%	46.9%
a public library	12.9%	17.1%
at another place	2.5%	3.5%

5.10 A 2008 ABS study revealed that domestic internet access was dependent on a range of factors such as affordability, service reliability and socio-economic characteristics, including family composition, educational attainment and income. The study also found that higher levels of income were associated with higher rates of household internet access, whereas people in households in the lowest income quintile were the least likely to have access.⁴¹⁷

5.11 Similarly, ACMA research indicates that home internet access appears to be correlated to household income:

...broadband internet is present in 91 per cent of households with incomes of more than \$100,000, down to 50 per cent of those on less than \$35,000. Similar trends are seen with households where the parent did not finish secondary school, and with single parents.⁴¹⁸

5.12 Evidence to the Inquiry also raised the problem of lack of access to technology for children from disadvantaged communities. For example, the City of Fairfield in Western Sydney has one of the lowest take-ups of home computer usage and internet usage in Sydney,⁴¹⁹ and only about one third of the students in stage 2 at Hebersham Public School had access to a computer at home:

The only access at the moment is Mount Druitt library and they have 10 computers with internet access ... They are having 20 put in in the next couple of weeks and we are starting to do a program for five weeks where parents can go and get support in technology and their children go with them to learn how to use the computers and how to search the library. It is a joint venture, which is really exciting for us.⁴²⁰

5.13 Moreover, the cost associated with accessing the internet in venues such as libraries is an additional problem for low-income families.⁴²¹

Rural, regional and remote communities

5.14 According to the NSW Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Broadband in Rural and Regional Communities (the Broadband Committee), large parts of rural and regional New South Wales do not have access to broadband at the same speeds

⁴¹⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006. *Children's participation in cultural and leisure activities, Australia 4901.0*, p. 47.

⁴¹⁷ Australian Bureau of Statistics. 2008. *Australian social trends 4102.0*.

⁴¹⁸ Australian Communications and Media Authority, 2007. *Media and communications in Australian families 2007, report of the media and society research project*, p. 5.

⁴¹⁹ Ms Carolyn Bourke, Fairfield City Library Service, Transcript of evidence, 8 August 2008, p. 15.

⁴²⁰ Miss Betty Papandreou, Hebersham Public School, Transcript of evidence, 2 July 2008, p. 9.

⁴²¹ Ms Tairyn Vergara, Parks Community Network, Transcript of evidence, 8 August 2008, p. 10.

Technology

and for the same price as people in the city.⁴²² Similar concerns were raised in several submissions to the Inquiry:

The tyranny of distance is of particular concern for young people in areas where there is no broadband internet access. Communication, lifestyle and education are all adversely affected for these young people; they grow up in a different era to their city peers.⁴²³

5.15 Brewarrina Shire Council commented that, although the internet has made the world a smaller place, youth in rural and remote communities where average wages are lower than the Australian average, do not generally have domestic internet access, and so access the internet at youth centres, libraries and schools.⁴²⁴

5.16 The ABS notes that the internet has become increasingly important in recent years as a way of accessing information, communicating and buying goods and services,⁴²⁵ with many support services now delivered via technology. However, families in rural, regional and remote communities continue to have limited access to such on-line services. The Northern Territory Government noted that this results in limited usage of online education, health services and other general information-based services which contribute positively to the development and wellbeing of children and young people.⁴²⁶

5.17 Indigenous families living in rural and remote communities face particular problems, as outlined by BoysTown in its submission:

The issues that have been identified through the calls from Indigenous children in NSW highlight the need for parent support and access to services to improve the quality of life for children in these communities. It is essential that mainstream services such as Parentline provide culturally appropriate health, counselling and parenting support. The lack of telecommunication and online infrastructure is a barrier to access these support services for parents as well as young people in rural and remote communities in NSW.⁴²⁷

5.18 Problems of lack of access to technology in some regional areas are being addressed at the local level. For example, Port Stephens Council advised the Committee of a range of services and programs put into place specifically aimed at enhancing the social, emotional and cultural wellbeing of children and young people. These included library services, which provided equitable access to technology and online resources including play stations, internet and email facilities; and the Port Stephens Telecentre, where users could access high-speed broadband in an internet café environment.⁴²⁸

5.19 Access to digital education services is particularly important for children and young people in rural, regional and remote areas, as primary and secondary education services are now delivered through video streaming as an extension of the old school

⁴²² Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Broadband in Rural and Regional Communities. 2009. *Key issues for further investigation: discussion paper*, p. vi.

⁴²³ Submission no.14, Richmond Valley Council, p. 3.

⁴²⁴ Submission no. 67, Brewarrina Shire Council, p. 4.

⁴²⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics. 2008. *Australian social trends 4102.0*.

⁴²⁶ Submission no.104, Northern Territory Government, p. 1.

⁴²⁷ Submission no. 65, BoysTown, p. 5.

⁴²⁸ Submission no.10a, Port Stephens Council, pp. 8 & 10.

of the air. Students who cannot access particular subjects in their local school attend classes at another school by video link, and study materials are distributed online.⁴²⁹

- 5.20 The Committee notes that the Commonwealth Government has recently announced several initiatives to improve internet access across Australia, including the *Digital Regions Initiative*, which will co-fund innovative digital enablement projects with state, territory and local governments to improve the delivery of education, health and emergency services in regional, rural and remote communities.⁴³⁰ Central to the implementation of these projects is the *National Broadband Network*, which aims to deliver superfast broadband to Australian homes and workplaces.⁴³¹ However, as the Broadband Committee notes, although the roll-out of the *National Broadband Network* is meant to bring high-speed broadband services to 98 per cent of the population, gaps will still remain in rural and regional New South Wales.⁴³²
- 5.21 Other positive developments include the Commonwealth Government's *National Secondary School Computer Fund* to provide for new or upgraded information and communications technology for secondary schools with students in Years 9 to 12 (the *Digital Education Revolution Initiative*);⁴³³ the *Fibre Connections to Schools* program, which will provide access to reliable, affordable, high-speed broadband connections for students, parents and teachers;⁴³⁴ and the NSW Government's announcement that \$11.6 million will be spent over five years in the *Community Broadband Development Fund* to develop community based wireless networks for small communities in rural and remote New South Wales.⁴³⁵
- 5.22 The Committee considers that Commonwealth government initiatives such as the *National Broadband Network* will assist in making the internet more accessible to children and young people in rural, regional and remote areas. Nonetheless, some disadvantaged families will still face access problems in their homes, due to the cost.
- 5.23 The Committee considers that the provision of computer and internet services should be an essential component of the funding for NSW Government programs that reach children and young people in the middle years, such as programs provided by neighbourhood centres, youth services and Indigenous organisations. The Committee believes that children and young people should also be consulted to determine other appropriate venues.

⁴²⁹ Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Broadband in Rural and Regional Communities. 2008. *Key issues for further investigation: discussion paper*, p. 11.

⁴³⁰ Commonwealth Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy website. *Digital regions initiative fact sheet*.

⁴³¹ Commonwealth Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy website. *National broadband network: 21st century broadband*.

⁴³² Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Broadband in Rural and Regional Communities. 2009. *Beyond the bush telegraph: meeting the growing communications needs of rural and regional people*, p. v.

⁴³³ Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations website. *Digital education revolution overview*.

⁴³⁴ Submission no. 88, Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, p. 8; Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations website, *Fibre connections to schools*.

⁴³⁵ Mr Phillip Costa MP, NSW Minister for Regional Development and Rural Affairs. 2008. *Building the country: filling country broadband gaps*, media release, 1 November 2008.

Safety

- 5.24 While the use of technology can have many benefits for children and young people, it also brings with it the potential for harm through exposure to 'predation' or 'cyber-bullying'. Statistics from the National Association for the Prevention of Childhood Abuse and Neglect (NAPCAN) highlighted the potential dangers in using the internet and mobile phones:
- 50 per cent of young people surveyed had been approached by someone they felt was not who they said they were;
 - 71 per cent reported receiving messages online from someone they don't know;
 - 45 per cent have been asked for personal information by someone they don't know;
 - 30 per cent have considered meeting someone that they've only talked to online; and
 - 1 in 7 young internet users received unwanted sexual solicitations.⁴³⁶
- 5.25 Cyber-bullying was identified as an area of particular concern.⁴³⁷
- 5.26 Recent research by ACMA found that children and young people have a high awareness of cybersafety risks and can identify risky behaviour, and that children and young teenagers were more inclined to identify contact with a predator as an online risk than older teenagers. ACMA felt that this was the result of parents identifying and discussing this risk with younger children, as well it being a focus of school cybersafety educational programs.⁴³⁸
- 5.27 The research also indicated that the way in which parents monitored online use and discussed risks with their children varied with age. Younger children were watched more closely, whereas parents were relatively trusting for older teenagers and often relied at most on filters and occasional monitoring. Parents of eight to 10 year olds focused their discussions with them on the risks of viruses and unsuitable content. When children began to use social networking websites, at around 11 years, parents discussed not giving personal details to others and avoiding contact with those they did not know, reiterating this as the children grew older.⁴³⁹
- 5.28 According to the Commission, there are social, peer and educational pressures on children to use technology, which then translate into pressures on parents to buy that technology. Many parents are concerned that their own unfamiliarity with the new technology limits their ability to limit or guide their children's usage.⁴⁴⁰ The Commission also noted that technology gives children and young people the opportunity to be the expert at something, to show or teach their parents something they don't know:
- It can also be a great opportunity for parents to take the time to 'share the learning' so they can better understand the technology in their kids' lives.

⁴³⁶ Submission no. 79, NAPCAN, pp. 7-8.

⁴³⁷ Submission no. 79, NAPCAN, p. 7.

⁴³⁸ Australian Communication and Media Authority. 2009. *Click and connect: young Australians' use of online social media, 01: Qualitative research report*, p. 6.

⁴³⁹ *ibid.*, p. 11.

⁴⁴⁰ NSW Commission for Children and Young People website. *A new year brings new technologies – a time for a new approach?*

At the same time, kids can be a bridge or pathway for their parents to overcome their own inhibitions around the challenges presented by the rapidly changing nature of new technologies.⁴⁴¹

- 5.29 Apart from parental control, there are also other ways of managing inappropriate use of technology. NAPCAN uses the internet to capture the attention of children and young people, through the *Smart Online Safe Offline* initiative <www.soso.org.au>. The initiative is embedded in popular networking sites, and uses children's language to raise awareness about online threats such as predation, grooming, cyber-bullying and identity theft. The first campaign in late 2008, focused on predation and reached 1.7 million children and young people between 9 and 15 years. An evaluation of the program indicated that:
- 96 per cent of kids said they now would not meet an online stranger;
 - 87 per cent said they are more aware of dangers of giving personal information;
 - 83 per cent of kids surveyed said they understood the message clearly that giving too much information may put you at risk; and
 - 60 per cent said they are more aware of the dangers of meeting online strangers because of the campaign.⁴⁴²
- 5.30 ACMA also manages the *Cybersmart* program <www.cybersmart.gov.au>, as part of the Commonwealth Government's commitment to promoting online safety for children and young people. *Cybersmart* is a national cybersafety education online program that aims to enable children, parents, carers, teachers and library staff to manage online risks, so that the experiences of children and young people are safe and positive.⁴⁴³
- 5.31 The Committee notes that the school curriculum also provides an opportunity for teaching children and young people about inappropriate technology use. In its submission, the Regional Youth Development Officers Network supported implementation of safety education in the use of internet and technology as part of the school curriculum in the subject areas of Information Technology and Personal Development, Health and Physical Education for years K to 12.⁴⁴⁴
- 5.32 The Catholic Education Commission also commented on the importance of school programs as facilities for guiding the use of technology by children and young people:
- Schools are increasingly becoming involved in providing guidance to young people through the development of policies addressing issues such as cyber bullying and sexualised behaviours. Often such guidance is provided through programs in pastoral care, values education and financial literacy.⁴⁴⁵
- 5.33 While evidence to the Inquiry has identified some benefits of increased access to technology for children and young people, there are also risks including through exposure to cyber-bullying and predation. The Committee considers that programs which educate children, young people and their parents in the safe use of technology through schools should be encouraged. In particular, teachers could encourage

⁴⁴¹ NSW Commission for Children and Young People website. *A new year brings new technologies – a time for a new approach?*

⁴⁴² NAPCAN. 2009. *Safety online - its child's play*, media release, 8 February 2009.

⁴⁴³ Australian Communications and Media Authority website, *About cybersmart*.

⁴⁴⁴ Submission no. 48, Region Youth Development Officers Network (RYDON), p. 8.

⁴⁴⁵ Submission no. 81, Catholic Education Commission, p. 2.

students to use websites such as <www.soso.org.au> or <www.cybersmart.gov.au> to further enhance their understanding about the need for online safety.

RECOMMENDATION 16: The Committee recommends that, pursuant to s 11(d) of the *Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998*, the Commissioner for Children and Young People consult with the Department of Education and Training to ensure schools are providing adequate safety education for middle years students in the use of internet and other technology.

Children's television

- 5.34 Despite the increase in media choices, television (free-to-air and subscription) remains the most time-consuming leisure activity for children and young people, with an average time spent watching television of just under two hours per day.⁴⁴⁶
- 5.35 The need for a dedicated children's television channel was noted in evidence to the Inquiry. Specific concerns related to current program scheduling practices by free to air channels at times when children were most likely to be watching television, which is between five pm and eight p.m. The Australian Children's Television Foundation (ACTF) advised the Committee that much of the existing free to air television programming at this time is inappropriate for children.⁴⁴⁷ The ACTF supported the introduction of a dedicated children's television channel, because it considers that providing children with audiovisual media created especially for them has a number of benefits:
- educational programming can prepare children for different stages of school. Film and television can be powerful learning tools as they teach while engaging viewers' minds, senses and emotions;
 - children's film and television are effective ways of studying sensitive issues such as puberty, bullying and conflict with parents. Children are willing to openly discuss what is happening to a television character without feeling exposed to their peers;
 - children's programming has proven to be an effective way of connecting with otherwise unengaged students; and
 - children's programs with pro-social messages can increase social capacities such as cooperation and tolerance of others.⁴⁴⁸
- 5.36 According to the ACTF, a dedicated children's channel would also supplement the Commonwealth Government's *Digital Education Revolution Initiative*:
- ... when you have a children's channel and a lot of content being created, a use for that content ... would be to make it available to schools in an ongoing way so that they are able to use that content but also for children to expand their own skills and develop

⁴⁴⁶ Australian Communications and Media Authority. 2007. *Media and communications in Australian families 2007, report of the media and society research project*, p. 3.

⁴⁴⁷ Ms Jennifer Buckland, Australian Children's Television Foundation, Transcript of evidence, 11 June 2008, p. 40.

⁴⁴⁸ Submission no. 31, Australian Children's Television Foundation, p. 1.

content and send that to the children's channel to showcase their work and their expertise.⁴⁴⁹

- 5.37 The Committee welcomes the Commonwealth Government's recent announcement that it will provide the Australian Broadcasting Corporation with \$136.4 million in new funding to support an advertising-free, digital children's television channel. This channel will offer high-quality educational, commercial-free viewing options for Australian families and will provide a high level of age-appropriate, Australian entertainment and educational material during peak television viewing times and online.⁴⁵⁰

Sexualisation

- 5.38 Concern was also expressed to the Inquiry about the sexualisation of children in the media. According to the Network of Community Activities:

This marketing is often intrusive and stereotypes teenagers and the image they should try to maintain.

Other more overt marketing often sexualises children and the presence of products on the market that influence negatively the innocence of childhood need to be addressed by Government. Network believes that unless this is addressed we as a State are contravening one of the recognized human rights of children.⁴⁵¹

- 5.39 The Committee notes that Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communications and the Arts recently conducted an *Inquiry into the sexualisation of children in the contemporary media*. The Senate Committee considered that the inappropriate sexualisation of children in Australia is of increasing concern, and that the onus is on broadcasters, publishers, advertisers, retailers and manufacturers to take account of these community concerns and take steps to address this issue.
- 5.40 The Senate Committee made a number of recommendations, including:
- the establishment of a dedicated television children's channel;
 - the need for the Commonwealth to commission a major longitudinal study into the effects of premature and inappropriate sexualisation of children; and
 - a review of the effectiveness of the operation of the Australian Association of National Advertisers *Code for Advertising and Marketing Communications to Children*.⁴⁵²
- 5.41 The Senate Committee also recommended that state and territory governments, not only consider the introduction into all Australian schools of comprehensive sexual health and relationships education programs which are inclusive of both young people and parents, but also of adopting a consistent national approach to the question.⁴⁵³ The Committee notes that students in NSW high schools already study a

⁴⁴⁹ Ms Jennifer Buckland, Australian Children's Television Foundation, Transcript of evidence, 11 June 2008, pp. 41-2.

⁴⁵⁰ Hon Stephen Conroy, Commonwealth Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy. 2008. *Budget 2009: More Australian stories from ABC and SBS*, media release, Canberra, 12 May 2009.

⁴⁵¹ Submission no. 49, Network of Community Activities, p. 12.

⁴⁵² Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communications and the Arts. 2008. *Sexualisation of children in the contemporary media*, pp. v-vi.

⁴⁵³ *ibid.*, p. vii.

Technology

Personal Development, Health and Physical Education syllabus in Years 7 to 10 that includes sexual health issues.⁴⁵⁴

Committee comment

- 5.42 It is evident that telecommunications technology has an important and essential role to play in the lives of children and young people in the middle years in the 21st Century. This technology has numerous benefits, but also some associated risks. The Committee considers that greater access to technology is of particular importance for children and young people from disadvantaged families as well as those who live in rural, regional and remote communities.

⁴⁵⁴ NSW Board of Studies. 2007. *Years 7–10 syllabus course descriptions*, p. 28.

Chapter Six - Transport

Public activities for kids are needed and changing the activities so they do not seem to be not cool. Number two is transport, the ability to get to places and home, that is very important.⁴⁵⁵

Introduction

- 6.1 While children and young people 9-14 years continue to travel with their family, friends or other people, they often begin to travel more independently. Much of this travel is to attend secondary schools, which are further away from home than their local primary schools. When young adolescents begin to travel more independently they generally rely on public transport, and the need for increased public transport availability, or the limited access to public transport, was noted in a considerable number of submissions to the Inquiry.
- 6.2 This chapter considers the provision and cost of public transport used by young people in travelling to activities and events. It examines those difficulties experienced by young people highlighted in evidence, and considers available assistance schemes. Some innovative transport programs for young people within particular local communities are also discussed.

Availability of transport

- 6.3 Limited access to transport has an impact on entire families, and is a particular issue in rural areas and outer metropolitan areas. In some locations there is no public transport other than school buses. RYDON's submission noted that in places such as the Upper Hunter, Port Stephens, Cessnock, East and West Lake Macquarie, and Dungog there is limited or no access to public transport.⁴⁵⁶ In other cases the services are infrequent and poorly coordinated:

Bus services are quite limited in terms of frequency and routes. Port Stephens is serviced by three separate private bus operators, which due to their respective contractual agreements with the NSW Ministry for Transport, bus routes and timetables are quite disjointed. This not only impedes upon being able to adequately access education, training and employment, it also has implications on the safety of children and young people. For instance, some school children and young people who have to travel to/from school on more than one bus... are accustomed to waiting at the roadside in remote locations to board the next bus service to reach their destination.⁴⁵⁷

- 6.4 The lack of transport linkages in regional areas impacts on the ability of children and young people to access social and recreational activities; education, training and employment options; and support services.⁴⁵⁸ Indeed, Richmond Valley Council argues that access to transport is so important to this age group, that where it is unavailable young people are not able to fully participate as members of society.⁴⁵⁹

⁴⁵⁵ Mr Ahri Tallon, Young People Big Voice, Centre for Children and Young People, Transcript of evidence, 6 August 2008, p. 9.

⁴⁵⁶ Submission no. 48, RYDON, p. 4.

⁴⁵⁷ Submission no. 10a, Port Stephens Council, p. 2.

⁴⁵⁸ Submission no. 48, RYDON, p. 4.

⁴⁵⁹ Submission no. 14, Richmond Valley Council, p. 2.

Transport

- 6.5 Lack of suitable transport to access before and after school care may also be a problem, especially where there are few school-based venues.⁴⁶⁰ The NSW Teachers Federation submission identified that this is particularly relevant in the outer suburbs of Sydney and other large regional centres, as well as in more isolated rural areas.⁴⁶¹
- 6.6 Evidence to the Inquiry identified that there are difficulties in relation to the school bus pass system, as it does not cover the cost of transport from school to after-school care:
- If the out-of-school-hours service or after-school activity is not on [the school route], the child cannot use the school bus pass. To go to an after-school-care program many parents have to pay extra to get the children transported on the school bus route... it is not only child unfriendly but also family unfriendly. That bus pass system is one issue. The other issue is that there is no transport subsidy for places that are a little bit off the beaten track that needs to be accessed.⁴⁶²
- 6.7 The Committee considers that the school bus pass system should be altered to include free transportation from the school to an out-of-school hours care service. A provision could be introduced which is similar to that which allows for children of separated parents with dual custody to travel to two different home addresses. In this case, it would be the address of the out-of-school hours provider and the home address. As parents are required to collect their children from out of school hours care, there would not be any additional free travel from an out-of-school hours care venue to the home.

RECOMMENDATION 17: The Committee recommends that, pursuant to s 11(d) of the *Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998*, the Commissioner for Children and Young People consult with the Minister for Transport about changing the conditions of use of the school bus pass system to allow children and young people to use their bus pass to travel free of charge to out of school hours care.

- 6.8 Children and young people may also experience difficulties accessing vacation care or activities during school holidays due to lack of suitable affordable public transport. Public transport is often an unrealistic alternative for young people in rural and regional areas, so that attending social events is simply not possible:
- Disadvantage is ... far worse for young people who live in isolated areas. There are young people who are members of local sports and social clubs who cannot attend meetings due to transport concerns and cannot know what happened at meetings because they do not have access to the internet to receive minutes/ photos etc.⁴⁶³
- 6.9 The lack of safe, regular and affordable transport for young people was stressed as an important issue for this age group, especially those in high school. The Committee

⁴⁶⁰ Brown, M. 2005. *The Better Futures Inner and Eastern Sydney pre-teen research report*, Waverley Council, p.10.

⁴⁶¹ Submission no. 68, NSW Teachers Federation, p. 4.

⁴⁶² Ms Robyn Monro-Miller, Network of Community Activities, Transcript of evidence, 17 March 2009, p. 13.

⁴⁶³ Submission no. 14, Richmond Valley Council, pp. 3-4.

See also, Submission no. 22, Youth Unit of the NSW Synod of the Uniting Church in Australia, p. 5.

is particularly concerned that, as those in the age group 9-14 have to rely on others for transport in rural areas, they often resort to hitchhiking between social events. There is a growing population of children, particularly young girls, in this age group who hitchhike alone, or with just one other person.⁴⁶⁴

- 6.10 Mr Ahri Tallon, of the Centre for Children and Young People, discussed the importance of transport to get to places and home again:

In years 8 and 9 I went through a stage where I was a bored youth. I am now in year 12. There was not much to do in Lismore so I hitchhiked to Byron and stayed overnight and probably got into trouble. I would have slept somewhere not very nice. Basically it has to do with bored youth, that is number one. Public activities for kids are needed and changing the activities so they do not seem to be not cool. Number two is transport, the ability to get to places and home, that is very important.⁴⁶⁵

- 6.11 The submission from Gloucester Youth Advisory Service also identified the danger posed to young people in the 9-14 age group travelling unsupervised with older friends who are inexperienced drivers.⁴⁶⁶

Cost of transport

- 6.12 In addition to unavailability, costs associated with travel to activities and events can be prohibitive. When travelling with adults, the cost of transport and access to suitable venues can make out of school hours recreation unaffordable in parts of rural and regional areas such as the NSW North Coast:

Hon Catherine Cusack MLC: You really do live an hour away from the best beaches in the world. How would a kid in that age group be able to get to the beach?

...

Ms Caldwell: They used to go down by train or we would try to organise a bus to take get them down. But then we would all put together and throw in, but you know, it comes back to that funding again. A lot of kids love to go to the beach. When kids say they are going to the beach they all want to go, you know.

Hon Catherine Cusack MLC: But they cannot get there. Is it right to say that they just cannot get there?

Ms Caldwell: That is right and some of the parents that have not got cars, you know, other parents will take them. This is a big thing in Casino we have not got a vehicle or a bus to do that, even to get our kids over there to Lismore to go indoor sports, bowls or whatever.⁴⁶⁷

- 6.13 These problems have been exacerbated by the high cost of petrol. Mr Jeffrey Richardson, of the Dharah Girinj Aboriginal Medical Service commented that:

...we do not have the money to put petrol in cars. Once again, this is not just for Aboriginal kids. That whole lower socioeconomic group approached me and say they

⁴⁶⁴ Submission no. 64, Centre for Children and Young People, Southern Cross University, p. 3.

⁴⁶⁵ Mr Ahri Tallon, Young People Big Voice, Centre for Children and Young People, Transcript of evidence, 6 August 2008, p. 9.

⁴⁶⁶ Submission no. 71, Gloucester Youth Advisory Service, p. 2.

⁴⁶⁷ Ms Elizabeth Shelley, Casino Youth Services & Ms Nora Caldwell, Junbung Elders, Transcript of evidence, 5 August 2008, p. 11.

Transport

have economic problems where it is just very difficult to whip over to Ballina with the kids for the weekend.⁴⁶⁸

6.14 Cost also has a detrimental impact upon the ability of children and young people to access quality vacation programs and other activities:

Our vacation programs... are hard for a lot of families to access... Non-working parents are lowest priority so it goes working parents, studying parents then non-working. Therefore we very seldom have any children from non-working families so therefore those children miss out on all the activities, excursions and learning activities and social activities that the others are getting at our vacation care program. That is a concern because the parents cannot afford to take them to things, even as simple as the zoo or the aquarium or sometimes even on a train. We have a lot of children who have never been on a train and would not know how to catch a train. So we try to do that for the older children rather than take them on a bus.⁴⁶⁹

6.15 Lack of appropriate transport options negatively impacts on children and young people's opportunities to develop resilience through connections with other people, to expand their experiences in the broader world and to try out new social and recreational activities. It limits their opportunities to develop lifelong skills such as social skills, and their opportunities to achieve in areas outside of the formal education process.

6.16 Several submissions proposed the development of a school holiday travel pass similar to a Seniors Card, to improve access of children and young people to school holiday activities. Network of Community Activities provided the most detail in its submission:

Transport accessibility could be supported and enhanced with the introduction of a "Juniors Card" for 9-16 year olds available for use during the school holiday periods. The card would provide the same style of service as the Seniors Card currently offers - a flat rate low cost fee for transport and discounted access to exhibitions and displays. Its aim would be to encourage children to use public transport during their holiday periods in order to access local and city events and to develop confidence and independence.⁴⁷⁰

6.17 Likely benefits to accrue to children and young people using a Junior Card would be the development of self-help skills as they independently accessed public transport, and a reduction in feelings of isolation.⁴⁷¹

6.18 The NSW Department of Ageing Disability and Home Care administers the NSW Seniors Card, a state-wide concession scheme designed to promote healthy ageing and encourage older people to lead active lifestyles. It offers a range of NSW government-funded transport concessions and private sector discounts. Included in this is a pensioner excursion fare that entitles NSW Seniors Card holders to all day travel on the Sydney suburban transport network for \$2.50. This Seniors Card scheme raises revenue for the NSW Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care, in 2006-07 the revenue from advertising and other sources totalled \$1.5 million.⁴⁷²

⁴⁶⁸ Mr Jeffrey Richardson, Dharah Girinj Aboriginal Medical Service, Transcript of evidence, 5 August 2008, p.15.

⁴⁶⁹ Ms Dale Donadel, Chester Hill Neighbourhood Centre, Transcript of evidence, 8 August 2008, p. 11.

⁴⁷⁰ Submission no. 49, Network of Community Activities, p. 8.

⁴⁷¹ Ms Robyn Munro-Miller, Network of Community Services, Transcript of evidence, 17 March 2009, p.13.

⁴⁷² NSW Department of Ageing Disability and Home Care. 2007. *Annual report 2006-2007*, p. 18.

- 6.19 In July 2009 Arts NSW introduced the *Kids' Adventure Passport*,⁴⁷³ which offers primary school children free entry to a select number of participating museums, galleries and cultural institutions on weekends and school holidays. The *Kids Adventure Passport* scheme will continue until January 2010.
- 6.20 The Committee considers that the *Kids' Adventure Passport* scheme could be expanded to offer a greater range of public transport concessions and discounted activities on weekends and school holidays. A nominal flat rate for travel on public transport by children and young people, similar to that offered to Seniors Cardholders, would be a welcome addition to the scheme. Discounts for additional public and private sector attractions and activities should be pursued, and the scheme should be expanded to include children and young people in the early years of high school.

RECOMMENDATION 18: The Committee recommends that the NSW Government expand the *Kids' Adventure Passport* scheme to include children up to the age of 15 and offer greater public transport concessions and greater access to discounted activities in school holiday periods.

The Committee further recommends that the Commissioner for Children and Young People be consulted on any proposed expansion of the *Kids' Adventure Passport* scheme.

Existing programs

- 6.21 The NSW Government advised in its submission that a range of its programs recognise that particular groups require assistance to access the transport system, or that the public interest is served by supporting particular groups. Young people are a key target of these endeavours.⁴⁷⁴ There is already a range of benefits for children of various ages, including free travel for under-4s, and half fare concession for under-16s. When travelling to and from school, students can receive free public transport based on their age and distance (either radial or by best walking route) from home, and the *Private Vehicle Conveyance Scheme* can provide a subsidy to parents for transporting children to school in cases where there is no public transport.⁴⁷⁵
- 6.22 Other programs that may directly or indirectly affect children and young people include:
- travel concessions;
 - the *Community Transport Program*;
 - the *Area Assistance Scheme*; and
 - regional transport coordinators.
- 6.23 The *Area Assistance Scheme* is administered through the NSW Department of Community Services, facilitates and supports community development and the integrated provision of services in regions undergoing rapid urban growth or change.

⁴⁷³ Arts NSW website.

⁴⁷⁴ Submission no. 87, NSW Government, p. 53.

⁴⁷⁵ *ibid.*

Transport

The Ministry of Transport is involved in evaluating projects under the program, and in funding successful transport projects. Indirect benefits to children in the target age group come through improved community and neighbourhood facilities.⁴⁷⁶ Currently the scheme operates in the Western Sydney, Macarthur, Hunter, Central Coast, Illawarra and North Coast Regions of New South Wales.⁴⁷⁷

- 6.24 Eleven regional transport coordinators work on practical and viable transport solutions aimed at addressing local transport disadvantage. According to the NSW Government submission, many of the recent grants have targeted youth in rural, regional and remote communities such as the Far West, Orana and North Coast, enabling them to travel to a range of activities.⁴⁷⁸
- 6.25 The *Community Transport Program* aims to address transport disadvantage at the local level through community transport solutions and particularly focuses on people or communities who experience disadvantage as a result of mobility, age or isolation. This includes young people up to 17 years of age who need to travel more than 1.6 km to community facilities and resources which are not available within the hours of conventional public transport operation.⁴⁷⁹
- 6.26 However, the Committee notes that the *Community Transport Program* has not received growth funding for many years,⁴⁸⁰ is unable to meet community demand,⁴⁸¹ and much of the funding is directed towards providing assistance to frail older people, younger people with disabilities and their carers, as well as non-emergency health-related transport services,⁴⁸² rather than funding youth transport projects.⁴⁸³
- 6.27 The NSW Ministry of Transport funds some innovative programs for young people through its *Local and Community Transport Program*, including youth transport schemes on the Far North Coast of New South Wales. One of these, *Tweed, Byron and Ballina Community Transport BAT Bus*, provides affordable transport to the youth of Byron Shire, and has been operating for approximately 17 years. The program operates under the auspices of Tweed Byron and Ballina Community Transport. Currently, the service also has some funding from the Ministry of Transport to assist young people to attend sports events, although this is not currently ongoing funding. In the last three years the service has transported between 2,500 and 3,000 people per annum. This translates as 5,000 to 6,000 passenger trips, as most outings are return travel.⁴⁸⁴
- 6.28 The service does not own a bus, and consequently does not have to fund the purchase, maintenance and insurance of a vehicle. Instead, BAT Bus hires different types of vehicles to suit the size of the group of young people. Over 50 per cent of

⁴⁷⁶ Submission no. 87, NSW Government, p. 53.

⁴⁷⁷ NSW Ministry of Transport website. *Area assistance scheme (AAS)*.

⁴⁷⁸ Submission no. 87, NSW Government, p. 54.

⁴⁷⁹ *ibid.*, p. 53.

⁴⁸⁰ NSW Ministry of Transport website. *NSW Community Transport Program*.

⁴⁸¹ NSW Government. 2003. *Ministerial Inquiry into sustainable transport in New South Wales: options for the future*, conducted by Professor Tom Parry, p.154.

⁴⁸² Funding from the NSW Department of Ageing Disability and Home Care and NSW Health funding is provided to these elements of the Community Transport program.

⁴⁸³ NSW Government. 2003. *Ministerial Inquiry into sustainable transport in New South Wales: options for the future*, conducted by Professor Tom Parry, p.153.

⁴⁸⁴ Tweed, Byron and Ballina Community Transport BAT Bus, Correspondence in response to questions, 9 April 2009, p. 2.

passengers must be 12-25 year olds, with a minimum of eight people for a local trip and 10 people for longer distances. The service will go to venues such as movies, theme parks, alcohol free concerts, whale watching, bushwalking and canoeing, youth group outings and other places, and is well-used by sporting groups.⁴⁸⁵

- 6.29 A similar innovative youth transport service called *Youth on Wheels Ink* (YOWI) operates in the Lismore, Kyogle and Richmond Valley Shires. In the 2008 financial year YOWI provided 5,260 trips, of which 1,118 trips were for Aboriginal youth. YOWI has informed the Committee of the number of benefits of such youth transport services in the region:

To begin with, availability of travel, as taken for granted in non rural areas, is highly valued by rural youth and their families. Where parents' vocations already require long distances be covered it is often the youth who will miss out due to time, vehicle and financial restraints on parents...The long distances needing to be traversed are prohibitive also, particularly due to the rise in fuel prices resulting in families prioritizing youth sporting and social commitments at the bottom of the scale. Equity for country areas to be well represented in sporting endeavours will often result in participants earning recognition for skills that would otherwise go unnoticed. The other issues include safe travel on country roads; it is much safer for groups of youth to travel to and from events in the comfort of a bus, there have been too many youth deaths on country roads.⁴⁸⁶

- 6.30 Evidence to the Inquiry identified benefits in having youth transport officers and Aboriginal Transport Development Officers (ATDO) co-located in Community Transport Organisations. BAT Bus informed the Committee of the benefits of working with ATDOs:

...transport is an essential service for Aboriginal people to have equity in our society. It makes sense to co-locate service providers so that they can share resources and information. Having an ATDO available to support the provision of information out to Aboriginal youth in the region, assist in developing culturally relevant services, educate staff and volunteers, nurture fledgling projects, support Aboriginal volunteer programmes and assist to troubleshoot complex transport issues (funeral transport, homework clubs, young mothers groups, mens groups) is invaluable in redressing community disparity.⁴⁸⁷

- 6.31 BAT Bus also noted that as many Aboriginal people on the NSW North Coast do not have driver's licenses, or cars, and there is very limited public transport available, many Aboriginal people rely on Community Transport to be able to access basic, day-to-day needs.⁴⁸⁸

- 6.32 The Committee has been informed that, in some cases, although *Home and Community Care* (HACC) funded buses are not being used on weekends, the buses are not currently available for general community use, thereby under-utilising a potentially valuable resource for the 9-14 year age group. Ms Alison Peters of the Council of Social Service of New South Wales (NCOSS) discussed this problem with Committee:

...the local Aboriginal community in Kempsey had organised to have a local surf life saving club train young people for their bronze medallion. Everyone thought that was a

⁴⁸⁵ Dusseldorp Skills Forum, *Transport for youth in rural and regional Australia*.

⁴⁸⁶ YOWI (Youth on Wheels Ink), Correspondence in response to questions, 22 April 2009, p.4.

⁴⁸⁷ Tweed, Byron and Ballina Community Transport BAT Bus, Correspondence in response to questions, 9 April 2009, p. 3.

⁴⁸⁸ *ibid.*, p. 4.

Transport

fantastic idea. It was all lined up but, of course, the beach is 40 kilometres from Kempsey and they had no capacity to get there. A community transport bus was locked up in a yard every weekend, but because that bus was provided under the Home and Community Care [HACC] program, which is for older people or people with a disability, it was not available for a more general community use.⁴⁸⁹

- 6.33 Some services have identified that they do access HACC funded buses during low use periods, with BAT Bus noting that that doing so is one of the ways in which the service keeps its operating costs low. However, YOWI has noted that the youth service is still required to pay the standard bus hire fee of 90 cents a kilometer to covers repairs, petrol and bus replacement. According to YOWI, this can be a prohibitive cost for a youth group with no income, even if volunteer drivers are used.⁴⁹⁰
- 6.34 Evidence to the Committee suggested that, in some cases, *Home and Community Care* (HACC) funded buses are not being used by this program on weekends, yet are not currently available for general community use, including youth transport. The Committee considers that allowing community transport buses under the HACC program to be used for youth transport initiatives at low use times is an appropriate use of scarce resources in rural and regional New South Wales.

RECOMMENDATION 19: The Committee recommends that, pursuant to s 11(d) of the *Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998*, the Commissioner for Children and Young People consult with the Minister for Ageing and Disability Services about reviewing policies to allow community transport buses under the *Home and Community Care* program to be available for youth transport initiatives on weekends and other low use times.

Committee Comment

- 6.35 The Committee considers that innovative youth transport programs such as the *Tweed, Byron and Ballina Community Transport BAT Bus* provide a valuable service to young people in areas with limited public transport at a minimal cost, and would strongly support an expansion of such programs across New South Wales. The Committee also sees benefits in expanding the provision of Aboriginal Transport Development Officer positions to service Aboriginal communities.
- 6.36 The provision of adequate transport for young people, particularly in rural and regional areas enables young people to participate in sport and recreation activities and access relevant services. Improved access to transport is relevant to a number of Government Departments including Health, DoCS, Department of the Arts, Sport and Recreation and the Attorney-General's Department. The Committee considers that there is a need for a whole-of-government approach to improving access to public transport for young people.

RECOMMENDATION 20: The Committee recommends, that pursuant to s 11(d) of the *Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998*, the

⁴⁸⁹ Ms Alison Peters, Council of Social Service of NSW, Transcript of evidence 17 March 2009, p. 22.

⁴⁹⁰ YOWI (Youth on Wheels Ink), Correspondence in response to questions, 22 April 2009, p. 3.

Commissioner for Children and Young People consult with the Minister for Transport about making provision for:

- additional innovative youth transport programs across New South Wales;
- adequate long-term funding for existing youth transport programs;
- allowing existing youth transport programs to be extended to include a younger age group where appropriate; and
- Aboriginal Transport Development Officers in all Community Transport Organisations based in areas with Aboriginal communities.

RECOMMENDATION 21: The Committee recommends that the Ministry of Transport work with other government departments to ensure a whole-of-government approach to youth transport, in consultation with relevant non-government organisations.

The Committee further recommends that the Commissioner for Children and Young People be consulted on the proposed whole-of-government approach to youth transport.

Chapter Seven - Mental Health

I think it is true that we are recognising depression and anxiety in particular, as well as other mental health problems in younger children than was the case previously. There is a worldwide trend towards mental health problems becoming the number one burden of disease, which means that many, many people are affected by mental health problems. The implication of that trend is that we actually need to start building resilience and mental health at a much earlier age than we have been.⁴⁹¹

Introduction

- 7.1 The transition from childhood to adolescence can be a time of significant emotional distress for many young people. Responsive intervention to help young people experiencing prevalent age-related mental health problems such as anxiety and depression can prevent complications in later years. This chapter considers the types of mental health disorders experienced by young people, as well as those groups who are most vulnerable.
- 7.2 To date, mental health services for young people have mainly given priority to crisis cases. This chapter considers the availability of counselling services for all vulnerable young people, both in and outside of school. It also looks at the types of programs and services which would be user-friendly for 9-14 year olds and best suit their needs.

Extent and type of mental health issues

- 7.3 In 2004-05, seven per cent of children aged less than 15 years were reported to have some form of mental or behavioural problem as a long-term health condition, with rates rising from very low levels among children aged under five years, to 10 per cent of children aged 10-14 years.⁴⁹²
- 7.4 The prevalence of mental health problems rises substantially during adolescence. For young people aged from 12 to 17 years, estimates have been shown to be as high as 20-25 per cent.⁴⁹³ Data on the social and emotional characteristics of more than 10,000 Australian students spanning thirteen years of schooling reveal large percentages of students experiencing social and emotional difficulties:
- four in ten students say they worry too much;
 - three in ten students say they are very nervous/stressed;
 - two in ten students say they have felt very hopeless and depressed for a week and have stopped regular activities;
 - a third of all students say they lose their temper a lot and are sometimes quite mean to other people;
 - four in ten students say they have difficulty calming down.⁴⁹⁴
- 7.5 High levels of emotional distress are evident among school students accessing school counselling services. The NSW Government submission referred to evidence

⁴⁹¹ Professor David Bennett, NSW Centre for the Advancement of Adolescent Health, Transcript of evidence, 17 March 2009, p. 8.

⁴⁹² Australian Bureau of Statistics. 2007. *Health of children in Australia: a snapshot, 2004-05*, p. 3.

⁴⁹³ Submission no. 87, NSW Government, p. 7.

⁴⁹⁴ Bernard, M. et al. 2007. *ASG student social and emotional health report*, Australian Council for Educational Research, p. 5.

in the *National Survey of Mental Health and Well-being* that indicated that 70 per cent of the clients attending school-based counselling services were experiencing high or very high levels of emotional and behavioural problems.⁴⁹⁵

- 7.6 This aligns with the findings from a 2008 Mission Australia survey which noted issues of concern to Australian 11-14 year olds including bullying/emotional abuse, alcohol use, family conflict and physical/sexual abuse. All of these concerns have the potential to directly impact on mental health.⁴⁹⁶

Issues of Concern to Young People, 11-14 Years

	Indigenous %	Non Indigenous %
Body Image	28.4	23.4
Alcohol	29.0	22.4
Bullying/ emotional abuse	25.4	23.6
Drugs	28.6	31.3
Family conflict	24.3	26.6
Suicide	23.3	25.3
Physical/ sexual abuse	25.8	22.9
Personal safety	18.5	23.6
The environment	21.2	20.0
Coping with stress	14.3	17.2
School or study problems	15.2	17.5
Sexuality (relationships, health, identity)	14.5	11.6
Depression	13.7	14.8
Self Harm	14.0	13.3
Discrimination	12.0	11.5

- 7.7 The submission from Mission Australia identified an increasing number of children presenting with mental-health related problems:

We have seen an increase in the number of children who present with low self-esteem, mental health problems, and the desire to inflict harm upon themselves. Research indicates that there has been an increase of children and young people experiencing anxiety and depression, correlating with a rise in the rates of adolescent suicide, and substance abuse. This trend is reflected in our Adolescent and Family Counselling Program which has seen an increase in the number of referrals for children as young as 9 years old experiencing family breakdowns, withdrawal from support networks, and displaying risky behaviours such as sexual activity and alcohol and drug use.⁴⁹⁷

- 7.8 Mission Australia identified a number of risk factors that, in their experience, significantly relate to mental health problems in young people. These include:

- low self-esteem;
- depression and mental health problems;
- lack of social skills;
- isolation as a result of a lack of family and social support;
- peer pressure;

⁴⁹⁵ Submission no. 87, NSW Government, p. 7.

⁴⁹⁶ Mission Australia. 2008. *National survey of young Australians 2008*, Mission Australia, p. 25.

⁴⁹⁷ *ibid.*

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- conflicts with peers;
- smoking;
- substance use and abuse;
- suicide and self-harming practices;
- complex sexual situations involving pressure, drinking and drug use, relationships that are moving too fast for them to handle; pregnancy, and sexual abuse;
- violence and assault;
- lack of resilience.⁴⁹⁸

- 7.9 According to the *beyondblue* submission, family risk factors such as poor parenting, family conflict and marriage breakdown strongly influence children's risk of developing mental health problems. The submission noted specifically that the lack of a warm positive relationship with parents; insecure attachment; harsh, inflexible or inconsistent discipline practices; inadequate supervision of and involvement with children; marital conflict and breakdown; and parental psychopathology (particularly maternal depression) increase the risk that children will develop major behavioural and emotional problems, including depression and conduct problems.⁴⁹⁹
- 7.10 A number of submissions discussed the types of mental health problems experienced by children and young people in this age group. These included anxiety, depression, suicide, drug and alcohol misuse.
- 7.11 According to Mental Health Association NSW, studies show that approximately 10 per cent of children experience serious difficulties with anxiety to the point where it begins to interfere in their school, social and family life. Other studies indicate that children who struggle with anxiety perform less well in their academic and social life, than other children, despite having the ability to do well. Without treatment, up to 50 per cent of anxious children continue to experience severe difficulties 2-8 years after their symptoms first appeared.⁵⁰⁰
- 7.12 Children and adolescents with anxiety disorders are at risk of developing other problems, such as depression and substance abuse.⁵⁰¹ Anxiety is closely related to the development of depression in adolescence, as is discussed in the submission from *beyondblue*:
- Anxiety experienced by young people in their early and middle years is a pathway to depression in later adolescence. The school arena is a key setting for social and emotional development. Anxiety can increase dramatically during the transition from primary school to secondary school, and is a known marker for a large increase in emotional problems. Furthermore, recurrent bullying or victimisation in Year 8 also predicts symptoms of depression and anxiety in Year 9, especially for girls.⁵⁰²
- 7.13 Low self-esteem is also predictor of adolescent depression. Research shows that children who perceive themselves as academically, socially, or physically incompetent are more vulnerable to depression than are children who perceive

⁴⁹⁸ Submission no. 83, Mission Australia, pp. 1-2.

⁴⁹⁹ Submission no. 72, *beyondblue*, p. 1.

⁵⁰⁰ Submission no. 39, Mental Health Association NSW Inc., p. 2.

⁵⁰¹ Submission no. 87, NSW Government, p. 7.

⁵⁰² Submission no. 72, *beyondblue*, p. 2.

See also, Submission no. 39, Mental Health Association NSW Inc., p.2.

themselves as competent. Such beliefs develop during middle childhood and early adolescence and arise from feedback children receive from their parents, teachers and peers.⁵⁰³

- 7.14 Life events involving loss are specifically associated with depression. Depressing life events can include exposure to family or community violence, chronic poverty, child physical and sexual abuse, bereavement, or parental divorce or separation.⁵⁰⁴
- 7.15 Adolescent depression is one of the most frequently reported mental health problems in Australia. Depression has its peak incidence in mid-to-late adolescence. Therefore, significant investment is required in the prevention of depression, anxiety and emotion problems in the 9-14 year age group.⁵⁰⁵
- 7.16 Brother Peter Carroll of Trinity Catholic College, Lismore told the Committee about the increasing prevalence of depression at younger ages, and noted the essential need to support students develop the ability to cope with setbacks and to cope with transitions in life and challenges.⁵⁰⁶

Access to Services

- 7.17 The unmet demand for mental health and counselling services for children and young people as well as gaps in services, has been widely identified. For example, the 2006 Senate mental health report noted as follows:

Only one in four young people with mental health problems receive help and even among those with most severe mental health problems, only 50 per cent receive professional help. Family doctors, school-based counsellors and paediatricians provide the services that are most frequently used by young people with mental health problems but even then young people are under-represented in the number of general practice visits as a percentage of the population. Of greater concern, they are also under-represented in visits for mental health issues, even though this issue provides the highest morbidity in this age group.⁵⁰⁷

- 7.18 Data from Kids Helpline, a national telephone and online counselling service for children and young people between the ages of five and 25 reveals a large underlying level of demand for counselling. During 2007, Kids Helpline spoke with almost 310,000 children and young people, responding to 290,835 calls and 19,112 web contacts. This represented 59 per cent of all attempts to reach Kids Helpline, and included more than 48,000 in-depth counselling sessions.⁵⁰⁸
- 7.19 Many submissions and some evidence given to the Inquiry identified gaps in counselling services outside of schools and/or mental health service provision for this age group. Gaps in counselling in this age group were identified in the Hunter,⁵⁰⁹ the Blue Mountains⁵¹⁰ and the Northern Rivers.⁵¹¹

⁵⁰³ Submission no. 72, *beyondblue*, p. 1.

⁵⁰⁴ *ibid.*, p. 2.

⁵⁰⁵ *ibid.*, p. 1.

⁵⁰⁶ Brother Peter Carroll, Trinity Catholic College, Transcript of evidence, 6 August 2008, p. 18.

⁵⁰⁷ Senate Select Committee on Mental Health. 2006. *A national approach to mental health – from crisis to community, first report*, Canberra, section 15.7.

⁵⁰⁸ Boystown, 2008. *Boystown annual report 2008*. p. 12.

⁵⁰⁹ Submission no. 48, RYDON, p. 7.

⁵¹⁰ Submission no. 74, Blue Mountains City Council, p. 4

⁵¹¹ Brett Paradise, Northern Rivers Social Development Council, Transcript of evidence, 6 August 2008, p. 24.

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- 7.20 For example, the submission from the Blue Mountains City Council commented on the lack of counselling for children over 12 outside the school setting:

Youth suicide is an issue for over 12 year olds. There is lack of counselling for children that age outside school setting, and adolescent and family counselling services are only available for young people aged 12 years and older. There are only two services in the Blue Mountains LGA to cover the whole area and this does not offer an adequate spread. Allied health services offering counselling are still not affordable for young people even after the introduction of the Medicare mental health scheme (counselling practitioners charge over the scheduled fee). There needs to be free or low cost access to psychological counsellors.⁵¹²

- 7.21 In its submission, the Richmond Valley Council expressed a need for counsellors for local young people:

...access to a counsellor would increase resilience amongst these young people and decrease crime rates. A number of young people in this town have expressed the need to have access to a counsellor. There have been some deaths amongst the young people but there was little to no formal and ongoing counselling offered and there are extremely limited counselling options available externally for these young people.⁵¹³

- 7.22 The need for counselling services was also reflected in a submission from St Luke's Grammar School:

The majority of students (72%) said they thought the government should introduce more resources or organisations to help young people cope with anxiety and 58% said they felt that more government counselling services were needed in the local area. 44% of students surveyed thought there should be more promotion of government helplines and counselling services for young people, in the local area.⁵¹⁴

- 7.23 Service provision for non-emergency situations was identified as a particular gap in several submissions. Barnardos Australia identified a lack of targeted and preventative mental health services, noting that many children over 12 are reporting anxiety and available mental health counselling is reserved for extreme cases.⁵¹⁵ In its submission, Saint Mary's High School also noted that children and young people between 9-14 years of age on the NSW North Coast do not receive the support they need to *prevent* them from reaching crisis point.⁵¹⁶

- 7.24 In discussing the lack of family counselling services, Community First Step made the following comments about making referrals to service providers with long waiting lists:

Many young people are unable to access counselling services within the required time, or at all, unless it is deemed an emergency. As a result, youth workers are required to take on the role of crisis counsellors, placing extra strain on staff and resources.⁵¹⁷

- 7.25 Community First Step identified an opportunity to provide more counselling services to deal with serious cases that are not emergencies. Such services are in a position

⁵¹² Submission no. 74, Blue Mountains City Council, p. 4.

⁵¹³ Submission no. 14, Richmond Valley Council, p. 2.

⁵¹⁴ Submission no. 91, St Luke's Grammar School, p. 1.

⁵¹⁵ Submission no. 21, Barnardos Australia, p. 6.

⁵¹⁶ Submission no. 106, St Mary's High school, p. 2.

⁵¹⁷ Submission no. 98, Community First Step, p. 3.

to identify issues early and to provide support for children dealing with family and youth issues.⁵¹⁸

- 7.26 Ms Louise Voigt of Barnardos Australia discussed with the Committee the inadequacy of mental health service provision for Aboriginal people in general and for children in particular:

There is a whole range of reasons why there are very poor services. One is cultural appropriateness. Many Aboriginal people feel alienated from a system. They also have serious difficulties of transport, of getting there. Outpatient appointments are hard to make if you do not have a working car and you live a long way away...There is the issue of adults and their parents but there is also the real issue for children. Many medical health services find it very difficult to work with acting out children in particular, conduct disorder children...In this State we need to have a closer relationship between, for example, the Department of Community Services and mental health services for children because it is too simple to say, "We can't do anything for this child. They have conduct disorder."⁵¹⁹

- 7.27 The submission from *beyondblue* also commented on the limited services provided for Indigenous children:

The depression, anxiety, and substance use problems encountered in remote communities and cities represent a significant challenge for all governments and service providers. Complex and endemic social problems (e.g. unemployment, poverty, lack of education) coupled with limited service delivery approaches warrants urgent work into the mental health needs of Indigenous children.⁵²⁰

- 7.28 A substantial gap in counselling service provision for children who have experienced domestic violence was identified in the submission from NSW Women's Refuge Child Support Workers:

Currently it is virtually impossible to secure counselling for this age group unless the parent has the means to pay for it. It is a major oversight by the Department of Health that children do not have counseling available for the trauma that is due to their experience of domestic violence. The Department of Health is more likely to send mothers to groups that are expected to assist her to modify her children's unacceptable behavior and ignore the fact that children want to be heard.⁵²¹

- 7.29 The Youth Unit of the NSW Synod of the Uniting Church in Australia also identified the need for counselling and support groups to be readily available to any disadvantaged young person, particularly young people from broken families and young people questioning their sexuality.⁵²²

Types of programs and services required

- 7.30 There was some evidence given to the Committee about the types of counselling and other mental health services required for this age group. One possibility would be to train people in the community who are close to young children, rather than limit the process to professional counsellors:

Mr R: I also think that with little issues or small, overwhelming incidents a person may think it is not necessary for them to see a counsellor and that they are wasting that

⁵¹⁸ Submission no. 98, Community First Step, p. 3.

⁵¹⁹ Ms Louise Voigt, Barnardos Australia, Transcript of evidence, 11 June 2008, p. 8.

⁵²⁰ Submission no. 72, *beyondblue*, p. 2.

⁵²¹ Submission no. 19, NSW Women's Refuge Child Support Workers, p. 11.

⁵²² Submission no. 22, Youth Unit of the NSW Synod of the Uniting Church in Australia, p. 8.

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person's time. So it may be better if money spent on training counsellors is spent on training people in the community who are close to young children to have a small amount of counselling so that they know what to do and how to help them. So instead of making it a big deal and going to see a certain person, young people can talk to someone they know and it will make them feel like they are not interfering with everyone and make them feel a bit better.⁵²³

7.31 The submission from Freeman Catholic College noted the importance of anonymous counselling services such as Kids Helpline, as many students feel confident that they are anonymous and can seek help without serious repercussions.⁵²⁴ Similarly, UnitingCare Burnside noted the importance of offering counselling services not only at school, within a family-based framework, but also in community locations, easily accessible for students by public transport.⁵²⁵

7.32 The submission from St Mary's High School proposed a model for counselling centres within local neighbourhoods, which children and young people could 'drop in' to seek support from qualified counsellors on their way home from school and on the weekends:

Such centres would aim to be the equivalent of the 'wise old man or woman' that children and young people may have once visited in their local neighbourhood, when families were more community orientated and not so obsessed with individualism and independence.⁵²⁶

7.33 UnitingCare Burnside identified the middle years as a key early intervention period for mental health issues. Their submission also noted that the middle years are an effective early intervention period for improving immediate and future mental health and substance abuse outcomes.⁵²⁷ This is of particular importance given that the rate of mental health problems increases substantially during adolescence.

7.34 Practically, Mission Australia suggested that a review of the age criteria, for services such as the *Adolescent and Family Counselling Program*, to expand the client group to include 9-16 year olds could be beneficial. Implementing early intervention strategies for children and young people at an earlier age may reduce risky behaviour and mental health problems.⁵²⁸

7.35 The submission from *beyondblue* discussed the need for early intervention based on shifting modifiable risk and protective factors:

This approach may target individual factors, but usually aims to influence broader social determinants, specifically the settings in which young people spend their time. *beyondblue* supports strong school based, parenting, family and community connections throughout its prevention and early intervention projects. For example, the KidsMatter initiative provides a capacity for schools to engage in preventative strategies to support the specific mental health and wellbeing needs of their student population.⁵²⁹

7.36 Evidence to the Inquiry commented on the need to increase access to mental health early intervention for this age group. In addition, the importance of anonymous

⁵²³ Mr R., Luke's Grammar School, Transcript of evidence, 2 July 2008, pp. 16-17.

⁵²⁴ Submission no. 97, Freeman Catholic College, p. 2.

⁵²⁵ Submission no. 76, UnitingCare Burnside, p. 14.

⁵²⁶ Submission no. 106, St Mary's High school, p. 2.

⁵²⁷ Submission no. 76, UnitingCare Burnside, p. 9.

⁵²⁸ Submission no. 83, Mission Australia, p. 2.

⁵²⁹ Submission no. 72, *beyondblue*, p. 2.

counselling services such as Kids Helpline was noted. It was also suggested that people in the community who are close to children and young people could be trained to have some counselling skills and to provide assistance. The Committee considers that the provision of a range of mental health and counselling services is essential to increase access of children and young people to support.

Policy and funding

7.37 *The National Action Plan on Mental Health 2006-2011*, agreed to by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) identifies a series of initiatives to be developed over a five-year period, comprising significant investment from state, territory and Commonwealth Governments. COAG has committed \$56.9 million to funding telephone counselling, self-help and web-based support programs through non-government organisations that run similar services. Importantly, the Plan echoes the significance of prevention:

Promotion, prevention and early intervention are critical to enabling the community to better recognise the risk factors and early signs of mental illness and to find appropriate treatment. Growing evidence suggests that when identified and treated early, mental illnesses are less severe and of shorter duration, and are less likely to recur.⁵³⁰

7.38 The Commonwealth Government is in the process of developing a fourth national mental health plan which will be an agenda for action in mental health from 2009-2014. A draft of the whole-of-government plan contains a focus on prevention and early intervention which includes children and young people.⁵³¹

7.39 One of the major funding commitments for New South Wales is the expansion of early intervention services for youth aged 14-24 years (\$28.6 million) as well as the expansion of community-based professional mental health services, including child and adolescent services (\$14.3 million).⁵³² Early intervention services for youth were recently piloted in the Northern Sydney/Central Coast region,⁵³³ and have been progressively implemented in all NSW Area Health Services.

7.40 In its submission, the NSW Government provided details of 14 national and state policy and planning frameworks for mental health that also make reference to addressing the needs of child and adolescent mental health.⁵³⁴ However, the Committee notes that the last NSW child and adolescent mental health strategy was drafted ten years ago.⁵³⁵ The NSW Department of Health has recognised in its recent *NSW Community Health Strategy 2007-2012* that there is no consistent approach to child and adolescent mental health programs across all New South Wales. Services have instead developed *ad hoc* to address local needs. In response to this, the NSW Department of Health has developed MH-Kids, a state-wide unit of the new Mental

⁵³⁰ Council of Australian Governments. 2006, *National action plan on mental health 2006-2011*.

⁵³¹ Fourth National Mental Health Plan Working Group. June 2009. *Fourth national mental health plan (draft)*. p.4.

⁵³² Council of Australian Governments. 2006. *National action plan on mental health 2006-2011*, p. 12.

⁵³³ Special Commission of Inquiry into Acute Care Services in NSW Public Hospitals. 2008. *Final report of the special commission of inquiry: acute care services in NSW public hospitals*, conducted by Peter Garling SC, vol. 1, p. 103.

⁵³⁴ Submission no. 87, NSW Government, p. 24.

⁵³⁵ NSW Health. 1999. *NSW strategy: making mental health better for children and adolescents*. Reprinted April 2002.

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Health Drug and Alcohol Office responsible for developing child and adolescent mental health service policies.⁵³⁶

7.41 A *NSW Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) Plan* is currently being developed for the enhancement of child and adolescent mental health services in New South Wales. According to the NSW Government submission, the Plan should improve the mental health of children and adolescents, to help them, their families and others caring for them to optimise their development and to build a secure base for their futures. The Plan acknowledges:

- the growing prevalence and complexity of mental health problems in children and adolescents;
- the earlier age of the onset of disorders;
- opportunities to minimise multi-risk trajectories and adverse outcomes; and
- historic barriers and over-emphasis on adult mental health services, as well as Area versus state-wide priorities for limited resources.⁵³⁷

7.42 The 2008 *Report of the Special Commission of Inquiry into Child Protection Services in NSW* (the Wood Inquiry Report) has made recommendations regarding the establishment of integrated, multi-disciplinary and co-located services, wherever practicable. The report states that the types of services provided should include counselling and school counsellors.⁵³⁸ The NSW Government has supported the recommendation of the Wood Inquiry Report regarding such integrated and co-located services.⁵³⁹

7.43 In relation to funding, the Special Commission of Inquiry into Acute Care Services in NSW Public Hospitals (the Garling Inquiry) identified that the treatment of mental illness in children and young people in New South Wales is an area that is grossly under-resourced. The Inquiry's 2008 report states that each of the Area Health Services should be spending 15 per cent of their mental health budget on child and adolescent health. However, in practice, child and adolescent mental health gets, at best, only four per cent.⁵⁴⁰

7.44 Ultimately, the Garling Inquiry recommended the establishment of a children and young people's health authority – 'NSW Kids' - and that one of the principal purposes of this authority would be to ensure that there are adequate services and facilities for the provision of mental health care for children and young people.⁵⁴¹

⁵³⁶ Special Commission of Inquiry into Acute Care Services in NSW Public Hospitals. 2008. *Final report of the special commission of inquiry: acute care services in NSW public hospitals*, conducted by Peter Garling SC, vol. 1, p. 103.

⁵³⁷ Submission no. 87, NSW Government, p. 23.

⁵³⁸ Special Commission of Inquiry into Child Protection Services in NSW. 2008. *Report of the special commission of inquiry into child protection services in NSW*, conducted by Hon James Wood, vol. 1, p.385.

⁵³⁹ NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet. 2009. *Keep them safe: a shared approach to wellbeing*, p. 64.

⁵⁴⁰ Special Commission of Inquiry into Acute Care Services in NSW Public Hospitals. 2008. *Final report of the special commission of inquiry: acute care services in NSW public hospitals*, conducted by Peter Garling SC, vol. 1, p. 102.

⁵⁴¹ The NSW Government has given in principle support to this recommendation: NSW Department of Health. 2009. *Caring together: the health action plan for NSW*, p.14.

Committee comment

- 7.45 Evidence to the Inquiry has identified that the mental health of children and young people 9-14 years is an area of major concern. Investment in quality early intervention and service provision for this age group is critical, particularly as rates of mental health problems rise substantially during adolescence. However, there are substantial areas of unmet demand for services and gaps in services, which reflect an area of health that has been under-resourced.
- 7.46 The Committee considers that an expansion of counselling services and early intervention programs for this age group is required. Additional programs and services for children and young people 9-14 years should be established in a range of locations including: conveniently located youth-friendly environments (such as youth health services and youth mental health services); as part of child and family services; and as part of the NSW Government's commitment to developing integrated co-located child and family centres as proposed in the Wood Report.
- 7.47 Evidence to the Inquiry also suggests that there is a need for a variety of models of service delivery, ranging from more informal support, through, for example, peer support and mentoring to formal counselling services. The Committee also notes the importance of anonymous services such as online and telephone counselling, given barriers to accessing counselling services such as fear of repercussions and concerns about confidentiality. In planning for additional service delivery, children and young people in this age group should also be consulted about appropriate venues and models of service delivery.
- 7.48 The Committee considers that providing counselling services and early intervention programs in areas where there are high numbers of Indigenous children and young people should be a priority.

RECOMMENDATION 22: The Committee recommends that NSW Health expand the provision of counselling services and mental health early intervention programs for children and young people, with services for Aboriginal children and young people as a priority.

The Committee further recommends that the Commissioner for Children and Young People be consulted on any proposed expansion.

Chapter Eight - Alcohol and Other Drugs

Many young people are first exposed to alcohol, tobacco and illicit drugs at this age. It is known that smoking, drinking alcohol and cannabis use increase with age from 12 years onwards. For some, the habits picked up at this age can have devastating and long-term effects.⁵⁴²

Introduction

8.1 Health damaging behaviours such as drug and alcohol misuse are a very significant risk for young people during the middle years. Relationships with parents, school and peers are critical in helping young people to be responsible. This chapter examines the main risk and protective factors causing and preventing inappropriate use of drug and alcohol by young people. As well, it considers the availability of prevention, early intervention and treatment programs suitable for 9-14 year olds and their families.

Extent of the problem

8.2 Data from the 2007 NSW School Students Health Behaviours Survey indicated that, of students aged 12-15, in 2005:

- 79 per cent reported having ever had an alcoholic drink;
- 55.9 per cent reported having had an alcoholic drink in the previous 12 months;
- 31.4 per cent reported having had an alcoholic drink in the previous 4 weeks; and
- 19.7 per cent reported having an alcoholic drink in the previous 7 days.⁵⁴³

8.3 Amongst those school students who had consumed alcohol in the seven days prior to being surveyed, 29.3 per cent had done so at a party; 26.7 per cent at their own home; 15.6 per cent on school grounds after hours; 8.5 per cent at a beach park or recreational area; and 7.4 per cent at a friend's home.⁵⁴⁴ While there has been a decrease in recent years in the prevalence of alcohol use within this age group, there has been a significant increase in harmful drinking, with 21 per cent of drinkers consuming harmful amounts. About one-third of 12-15 year olds reported drinking in the month prior to being surveyed.⁵⁴⁵

8.4 The survey also found that among students aged 12-15 years, 19.5 per cent were considered to be risk drinkers according to the Australian Alcohol Guidelines, and, of that, 2.9 per cent were considered to be high-risk drinkers.⁵⁴⁶ The submission from Clarence Valley Council linked increasing alcohol use with crime. It noted a growing incidence of alcohol abuse by young people, in particular binge drinking. According to the submission, "The abuse of alcohol exacerbates street vandalism and poor behaviour, further damaging the perception of young people by others in the community."⁵⁴⁷

⁵⁴² Submission no. 16, Council of Social Service of NSW, p. 2.

⁵⁴³ Centre for Epidemiology and Research. 2007. *New South Wales school students health behaviours survey 2005 report*, NSW Department of Health, pp. 141-164.

⁵⁴⁴ *ibid.*

⁵⁴⁵ Submission no. 87, NSW Government, p. 7.

⁵⁴⁶ Centre for Epidemiology and Research. 2007, *New South Wales school students health behaviours survey 2005 report*, NSW Department of Health, pp. 141-164.

⁵⁴⁷ Submission no. 84, Clarence Valley Council, p. 3.

- 8.5 The Brewarrina Shire Council submission commented about the acceptance and accessibility of alcohol within the family.⁵⁴⁸ Disturbingly, the submission from the Federation of Parents and Citizens' Associations of NSW stated that children arrive at parties with a six-pack at 15 years of age.⁵⁴⁹ Barnardos Australia also noted that alcohol is sometimes supplied by parents and alcohol is often consumed at friends' houses with parents present.⁵⁵⁰
- 8.6 This observation is reflected in the research conducted by the NSW Commission for Children and Young People, who surveyed young people aged 13-20. Many of the young people said they obtained alcohol through their parents, older siblings or friends, or by stealing it (either from their parents or from shops). Young people also said it was common to ask older strangers to buy alcohol for them,⁵⁵¹ The Federation of Parent and Citizens' Associations of NSW similarly noted that children under age can easily obtain alcohol by simply asking someone over 18 to purchase it for them.⁵⁵²
- 8.7 Research clearly illustrates a much higher risk for young people who misuse alcohol with respect to antisocial delinquent or criminal behaviours, either as victims or perpetrators.⁵⁵³ Harms associated with alcohol misuse can also include travelling with an intoxicated driver, conflicts with parents, suffering injury, getting into fights and unwanted/unsafe sex.⁵⁵⁴ Moreover, due to its availability, alcohol is the main substance abused by children and young people.⁵⁵⁵ Longitudinal data from New Zealand demonstrate that the commencement of alcohol use in early adolescence increases the likelihood of the subsequent development of high risk use, independent of other influences.⁵⁵⁶

Illicit drugs

- 8.8 Mission Australia's 2008 *National survey of young Australians* found that drugs were a major concern for young people 11-14 years in New South Wales, with about one third of the group indicating it was a concern, compared with less than 20 per cent of 15-24 year olds. In addition, 22.7 per cent of 11-14 year olds in New South Wales were concerned about alcohol.⁵⁵⁷
- 8.9 The NSW Government submission refers to Australian data indicating that 15 per cent of secondary school students aged 12 to 15 reported trying at least one illicit drug.⁵⁵⁸ In 2005 amongst 12-15 year olds from New South Wales, 16.9 per cent had

⁵⁴⁸ Submission no. 67, Brewarrina Shire Council, p. 4.

⁵⁴⁹ Submission no. 36a, Federation of Parents and Citizens' Associations of NSW, p. 3.

⁵⁵⁰ Submission no. 21, Barnardos Australia, p. 4.

⁵⁵¹ NSW Commission for Children and Young People. *Ask the children: young people talk alcohol*, Surry Hills NSW, p. 2.

⁵⁵² Submission no. 36a, Federation of Parent and Citizens' Associations, p. 4.

⁵⁵³ NSW Health. 2002. *Youth alcohol action plan 2001-2005*, p.15.

⁵⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p. 21.

⁵⁵⁵ Andrew McCallum, Association of Children's Welfare Agencies, Transcript of evidence, 11 June 2008, p. 3.

⁵⁵⁶ Hayes, L., Smart, D., Toumbourou, J. & Sanson A. 2004. *Parenting influences on adolescent alcohol use*, p. 14.

⁵⁵⁷ Mission Australia. 2008. *National survey of young Australians 2008*, pp. 46-47.

⁵⁵⁸ Submission no. 87, NSW Government, p. 7.

used inhalants in the previous 12 months; 8.3 per cent had used marijuana or cannabis; 6.7 per cent had used sedatives or tranquillisers; and 2.3 per cent had used amphetamines. Smaller numbers had used ecstasy, hallucinogens, cocaine, steroids or heroin.⁵⁵⁹ However, there have been reductions in the use of substances over time by this age group.⁵⁶⁰

- 8.10 The prevalence of drugs was commented upon in evidence to the Committee. Casino Family Support Service informed the Committee that among its clients are 11 and 12 year olds who are binge drinking, and using marijuana and heroin.⁵⁶¹ The Committee also heard that there is a substantial drug culture in the NSW Northern Rivers region:

Lots and lots of people do recreationally use marijuana and other illicit drugs. I think it is pretty obvious why that has a negative effect."⁵⁶²

Tobacco use

- 8.11 New South Wales data indicates that amongst school students aged 12-15 years, 26.1 per cent had ever smoked tobacco; 16.2 per cent had smoked in the 12 months prior to being surveyed; while 8.3 per cent had smoked in the previous 4 weeks. Of the students surveyed, 3.3 per cent said they were current smokers; 4 per cent were occasional smokers; and 3.1 per cent were ex-smokers.⁵⁶³

- 8.12 Trends in tobacco smoking indicate that there has been a reduction in smoking amongst this age group:

In 1984, 65.6 per cent of 12-15 year old students had ever smoked tobacco compared to 26.1 per cent in 2005. In 1984, 25.7 per cent of students 12-15 years were current smokers compared to 7.3 per cent in 2005.⁵⁶⁴

- 8.13 However, high smoking rates are found amongst disadvantaged groups, including single mothers (46 per cent), Aboriginal people (50 per cent), young vulnerable people (65 per cent), and people with schizophrenia (62 per cent).⁵⁶⁵ Accordingly, children and young people living in these environments are at an increased risk of exposure to environmental tobacco smoke. Most people who become long-term smokers start smoking in their teenage years, with earlier uptake statistically associated with heavier smoking and greater difficulty in quitting.⁵⁶⁶

See also White, V., & Hayman, J. 2006. *Australian secondary school students' use of alcohol in 2005. Monograph Series No.58*, Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing, Canberra,.

⁵⁵⁹ Centre for Epidemiology and Research. 2007. *New South Wales school students health behaviours survey 2005 report*, NSW Department of Health, p. 239.

⁵⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p.257.

⁵⁶¹ Mr Tony Butcher, Casino Family Support Service, Transcript of evidence, 5 August 2008, p. 14.

⁵⁶² Mr Ben Cooper, Young People Big Voice, Centre for Children and Young People, Transcript of evidence, 6 August 2008, p. 9.

⁵⁶³ Centre for Epidemiology and Research. 2007. *New South Wales school students health behaviours survey 2005 report*, NSW Department of Health, pp. 165-199.

⁵⁶⁴ *ibid.*, p.170.

⁵⁶⁵ Note: Some of this data is taken from research or intervention studies with specific groups of this population. In these cases the smoking rates quoted are indicative and cannot be assumed to apply to the population group as a whole.

Cancer Council NSW. 2008. *Addressing smoking in community service organisations: a policy toolkit*, report prepared by O'Brien, J. & Oakes, W., p. 4.

⁵⁶⁶ Griffin, M and Eyeson-Annan, M. 2008. 'Tobacco smoking among secondary school students in NSW', *NSW Public Health Bulletin*, vol. 19, no. 3-4, p. 75.

Risk and protective factors

- 8.14 According to the Australian Drug Foundation submission,⁵⁶⁷ social disadvantage such as unemployment, poverty, homelessness or insecure housing are strongly linked to health damaging behaviours, including alcohol and drug use. There is also a whole raft of factors that act as risk or protective factors for harmful alcohol or drug use. More specifically, the key risk factors for children in the 9-14 years age group have been identified as:
- parenting style;
 - relationships with teachers;
 - adjustment to school; and
 - experience with peers.⁵⁶⁸
- 8.15 Environmental risk factors for drug and alcohol misuse include growing up in a community in which there is a high level of drug use, community disadvantage and disorganisation, ready availability of drugs, and positive media portrayal of drugs.⁵⁶⁹
- 8.16 In contrast, protective factors include attachment to family, parents who are involved with their children, as well as good inter-family communication. School retention, success at school and involvement in sport are also recognised as protective factors.⁵⁷⁰ Professor David Bennett of the NSW Centre for the Advancement of Adolescent Health informed the Committee that there is strong evidence that happy and well-functioning families are protective against potential drug and alcohol misuse. Moreover, as schools are “the ideal place to have young people feel connected and valued”, they have a significant protective role to play as well.⁵⁷¹
- 8.17 The role of peers in adolescent alcohol initiation is generally accepted as crucial, as alcohol consumption remains a group activity.⁵⁷² There is evidence of significant peer pressure placed upon Australian children and young people in respect of the uptake of drinking, and equally strong pressure on parents to condone this.⁵⁷³ Indeed, the role of parents is vital in establishing healthy attitudes amongst young people towards the use of both alcohol and tobacco.⁵⁷⁴ Accordingly, as the Australian Drug Foundation noted, “Resourcing and supporting parents and families to be positive role models, and to provide supportive environments for their children in relation to drug use is essential.”⁵⁷⁵
- 8.18 Parenting programs for parents of children and young people may have a positive impact on alcohol and other drug use by this age group. Some parent or parent and child intervention programs have had positive long-term outcomes in relation to

⁵⁶⁷ Submission no. 41, Australian Drug Foundation, p. 5.

⁵⁶⁸ *ibid.*

⁵⁶⁹ *ibid.*

⁵⁷⁰ *ibid.*

⁵⁷¹ Professor David Bennett, NSW Centre for the Advancement of Adolescent Health, Transcript of evidence, 17 March 2009, p. 8.

⁵⁷² NSW Health. 2002. *Youth alcohol action plan 2001-2005*, NSW Health Department, p. 20.

⁵⁷³ Ministerial Council on Drug Strategy. 2006. *National alcohol strategy 2006-2009*, Commonwealth of Australia, p. 26.

⁵⁷⁴ Submission no. 87, NSW Government, p. 10.

⁵⁷⁵ Submission no. 41, Australian Drug Foundation, p. 6.

alcohol and other drug use,⁵⁷⁶ and the role of parent education was discussed in a 2004 review of parenting influences on adolescent alcohol use in Australia:

Parent education and family intervention programs should be supported in Australia to assist parents to gain skills for encouraging their adolescents to delay initiation to alcohol use and to adopt less harmful patterns of use. Intervention and prevention programs should receive best practice evaluations.⁵⁷⁷

8.19 In relation to alcohol, the impact of broader societal acceptance of its use and abuse alcohol was also raised with the Committee:

If you come from a family that uses alcohol regularly, frequently and to excess, it is very difficult to tell a child from such a family that that is not a decent way to behave. So... the issue of alcohol use amongst young people is really an issue of alcohol use amongst adults, and how to use it in responsible and safe ways.⁵⁷⁸

8.20 The *National Alcohol Strategy 2006-2009* refers to the cultural acceptability of alcohol. The Strategy suggests that there are lessons to be learnt from other fields, such as the cultural changes that have accompanied a reduction in smoking in Australia, the acceptance of compulsory seat-belt wearing, and support for random breath testing.⁵⁷⁹

Access to prevention, early intervention and treatment

8.21 A number of submissions discussed the limited availability of alcohol and other drug services for this age group. For example, the Federation of Parents and Citizens' Associations noted that almost all drug and alcohol services in the Lismore area are aimed at young people over 18.⁵⁸⁰ Similarly, the RYDON submission comments that there are no youth specific drug and alcohol detoxification or rehabilitation services in the Hunter region, the closest being a service based in Newcastle which supports young people aged 10-18 years who have a parent(s) with a drug and/or alcohol dependency.⁵⁸¹

8.22 Some evidence to the Committee stressed the importance of the dissemination of appropriate drug and alcohol-related information.⁵⁸² As the Australian Drug Foundation noted, while information may not necessarily result directly in behaviour change, it is nonetheless "a critical element that feeds the process of change."⁵⁸³ Ku-ring-gai Council also commented on the need for information:

The content of information changes as children move through the 9-14 year age timeline and their levels of independence, freedom and problem solving increases with their age.

Education on Drug and Alcohol and Nutrition and Health is useful to be started early, so children are informed about issues that will confront them now and in the near future.⁵⁸⁴

⁵⁷⁶ Hayes, L., Smart, D., Toumbourou, J. & Sanson A. 2004, *Parenting influences on adolescent alcohol use*, p. 75.

⁵⁷⁷ *ibid.*, p. xv.

⁵⁷⁸ Ms Louise Voigt, Barnardos, Transcript of evidence, 11 June 2008, p.10.

⁵⁷⁹ Ministerial Council on Drug Strategy. 2006. *National alcohol strategy 2006-2009*, Commonwealth of Australia, p. 26.

⁵⁸⁰ Submission no. 36a, Federation of Parents and Citizens' Associations of NSW, p. 4.

⁵⁸¹ Submission no. 48, RYDON, p. 5.

⁵⁸² See, e.g. Ms Louise Voigt of Barnardos Australia, Transcript of evidence, 11 June 2008, p. 10.

⁵⁸³ Submission no. 41, Australian Drug Foundation, p. 6.

⁵⁸⁴ Submission no. 57, Ku-ring-gai Council, p. 4.

8.23 The Committee notes that the Centre for Youth Drug Studies conducts research into factors that influence young people's drinking and drug use, the findings of which feed directly into developing more effective responses.⁵⁸⁵ However, in the course of gathering material relevant to alcohol and other drug use, the Committee also identified a lack of research emphasis on lower age groups, including 9-14 year olds.

Government responses

- 8.24 The Mental Health and Drug and Alcohol Office of the NSW Department of Health has lead responsibility (including from a whole-of-government perspective), to develop, coordinate and monitor health policy and strategy and to prevent and manage alcohol and drug-related harm. The *Youth Action Plan* notes that a Youth Alcohol Action plan is to be developed.⁵⁸⁶
- 8.25 Currently, education about alcohol and other drug issues is provided through NSW schools. Results from the 2005 NSW *School Students Health Behaviours Survey*, indicate that 91.7 per cent of 12-15 year olds had a lesson or part of a lesson about drinking.⁵⁸⁷
- 8.26 The NSW Government submission identified a number of tobacco programs such as the *Smoking. Don't be a sucker* program, which integrates non-smoking messages with a physical activity program, and is designed specifically for students in junior secondary schools. In 2006-07, this program was delivered to 51 schools in rural and metropolitan New South Wales. Another such program is the *Car and Home: Smoke Free Zone* marketing campaign, aimed at reducing the exposure of children and young people to environmental tobacco smoke.⁵⁸⁸
- 8.27 NSW Health also released *Protecting children from tobacco: a NSW Government discussion paper on the next steps to reduce tobacco-related harm*, which has a focus on protecting children from taking up smoking as well as from involuntary exposure to environmental tobacco smoke.⁵⁸⁹ The Committee also notes that the *Public Health (Tobacco) Act 2008* provides for:
- a ban on smoking in cars carrying children under 16 years from 1 July 2009;⁵⁹⁰ and
 - with effect from 1 July 2010, tobacco products, non-tobacco smoking products and smoking accessories cannot be displayed where members of the public can see those products, from inside or outside the premises.⁵⁹¹

⁵⁸⁵ Submission no. 41, Australian Drug Foundation, p. 4.

From 1995 to 2008 the Centre for Youth Drug Studies was the Australian Drug Foundation's research unit. In 2008, the Foundation reviewed its strategic plan and identified a need to focus on research to practice and knowledge transfer. As such the Foundation ADF is currently working towards integrating research into its programs and policies across the organisation: see <www.cyds.adf.org.au/>.

⁵⁸⁶ Youth NSW website, *Youth action plan*, p. 11.

⁵⁸⁷ Centre for Epidemiology and Research. 2007. *New South Wales school students health behaviours survey 2005 report*, NSW Department of Health, p.138.

⁵⁸⁸ Submission no. 87, NSW Government, p. 21.

⁵⁸⁹ NSW Health website.

⁵⁹⁰ *Public Health (Tobacco) Act 2008* (NSW), s 30.

⁵⁹¹ *Public Health (Tobacco) Act 2008* (NSW), s 9.

Committee comment

- 8.28 Evidence to the Inquiry indicates that there have been substantial reductions in the use of some substances such as tobacco and marijuana amongst 12-15 year old students over time. However, alcohol misuse is still a major concern for this age group, as is substance misuse amongst disadvantaged children and young people. The middle years is a critical time as many young people are first exposed to alcohol, tobacco and illicit drugs at this age, and early uptake of some substances can be associated with more detrimental patterns of use subsequently.
- 8.29 Knowledge about risk and protective factors in relation to alcohol and other drug use can be used to inform interventions. For example, the influence of parents as role models in relation to alcohol and other drug use, as well as the risk and protective factors associated with parenting, points to the potential of parenting programs to have an impact on alcohol and other drug use by children and young people.
- 8.30 Evidence to the Inquiry also suggests that investment in well-designed and positively evaluated interventions that strengthen protective factors such as school connectedness/retention, and participation in sport should be a priority. The Committee notes that many of the protective factors in relation to alcohol and other drug use have been found to have an impact on outcomes in other areas such as involvement in crime, education and child protection. Common risk and protective factors in relation to health outcomes and implications for service delivery are discussed in detail in Chapter 9.
- 8.31 As risk factors such as unemployment, poverty, homelessness and insecure housing are strongly linked to health damaging behaviours including alcohol and other drug use, interventions in disadvantaged communities should be prioritised.

Chapter Nine - Other Health Issues

While parents have the primary responsibility for children's health, the middle years are often when children become more active in choosing foods, getting involved in physical activities and have direct encounters with health care professionals. The middle years are the ideal time in which to develop positive eating, health habits and help seeking behaviours.⁵⁹²

Introduction

- 9.1 A range of other health issues were raised in submissions and evidence to the Inquiry including sexual health and sexuality, overweight and obesity, unintentional injury and access to health services by this age group. There is an array of Commonwealth and state health plans relating to different aspects of health of children and young people aged 9-14 years.
- 9.2 This chapter examines barriers to healthy living, and discusses deficiencies in services which were identified in evidence. It highlights the importance of helping young people at the key transition point of the middle years to adopt and maintain healthy lifestyles to enhance their present and future quality of life. The chapter also considers the need for closer co-ordination between providers and for more strategic planning of programs and services.

Sexual health and sexuality

- 9.3 In relation to young people and sexuality, the submission from the Youth Unit of the NSW Synod of the Uniting Church in Australia commented on the importance of learning how to have a healthy and mature understanding of what it means to be a sexual being.⁵⁹³ This is not confined to the older part of the 9-14 age range, as several submissions identified that children and young people at the younger end of the 9-14 age range are sexually active. The Mt Druitt Blacktown Youth Service Network submission noted that some under twelve year-olds display adolescent behaviours, including being sexually active and taking drugs.⁵⁹⁴
- 9.4 The need to start sexuality education at a young age was noted by Rosemount Good Shepherd Youth and Family Services:
... Rosemount staff across programmes have seen 12 and 13 year old children who have not had exposure to sex education programmes, yet in some cases are already sexually active. Where programmes are available, there are concerns about how adequately they deal with contemporary issues. For example, staff are aware of quite young males having access to pornography via the internet.⁵⁹⁵
- 9.5 The submission from the Northern Territory Government provided details of *Mooditj Program*, a sexual health and positive lifestyle program for Indigenous youth aged 8-14 years, run by a core group of about fifteen women in Maningrida. The Bawinanga

⁵⁹² Submission no. 90, NSW Commission for Children and Young People, pp. 8-9.

⁵⁹³ Submission no. 22, Youth Unit of the NSW Synod of the Uniting Church pp. 3-4.

⁵⁹⁴ Submission no. 80, Mt Druitt Blacktown Youth Service Network, pp. 1-2.

⁵⁹⁵ Submission no. 85, Rosemount Good Shepherd Youth and Family Services, p. 2.

Other Health Issues

Aboriginal Corporation receives funding from the NT Department of Health and Families to provide the Mooditj Program.⁵⁹⁶

- 9.6 Evidence to the Inquiry suggests that strengthening the provision of sexual health and positive lifestyle programs at a younger age may be appropriate, particularly in disadvantaged communities if it is identified that a number of children and young people are sexually active at a young age.

RECOMMENDATION 23: The Committee recommends, that pursuant to s 11(d) of the *Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998*, the Commissioner for Children and Young People consult with the Minister for Health and the Minister for Education and Training, about increasing the availability of age-appropriate sexual health programs that encompass the 9-14 age group, particularly in disadvantaged communities.

- 9.7 Coming to terms with their sexuality is often a major issue for young gay men and lesbians. Several submissions discussed difficulties that can be encountered by young people with an alternative sexuality, and the need for support was raised in the submission of the Youth Unit of the NSW Synod of the Uniting Church in Australia:

Although we use the term homosexual, we use it as an umbrella term to incorporate lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, intersex and other sexual orientations. It can be particularly hard for people who identify in one of these ways to feel like they fit in or belong. Sadly, young people who identify in one of these ways are three times more likely to commit suicide. This is a problem that needs urgent attention.⁵⁹⁷

- 9.8 Other research has identified that depression, self-harm, suicide and homelessness is significantly higher among young gays and lesbians than the general youth population.⁵⁹⁸

- 9.9 Mr Ben Cooper of the Centre for Children and Young people, Southern Cross University gave the Committee first-hand evidence of his experiences as a young gay man, and the need for support groups:

Also, being a gay man I found it very difficult growing up in the Northern Rivers. There are no youth groups. There are no groups for gay people to meet other gay people outside Sydney, Newcastle and Wollongong.⁵⁹⁹

- 9.10 The submission from RYDON also pointed to the need for support in the Hunter region, both for young people and their families/parents. The submission noted that the AIDS Council of NSW [ACON], Hunter Youth Education Officer position is currently funded for only seven hours per fortnight. Although ACON Hunter provides services for the Newcastle, Central Coast and Hunter Regions, there is no other organisation in the Hunter Region providing support specifically to young gay and lesbian people. The RYDON submission recommended that the Hunter Youth

⁵⁹⁶ Submission no. 104, Northern Territory Government, p. 5.

⁵⁹⁷ Submission no. 22, Youth Unit of the NSW Synod of the Uniting Church in Australia, p.5.

⁵⁹⁸ Youth Action and Policy Association & the Nepean Access Project Reference Group. 2006. *Opening the doors*, NSW Department of Community Services.

⁵⁹⁹ Mr Ben Cooper, Young People Big Voice, Centre for Children and Young People, Transcript of Evidence, 6 August 2008, p. 9.

Education Officer position be fully-funded and the submission also recommended increased support for parents and families of children and young people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer.⁶⁰⁰

- 9.11 The Children's Hospital at Westmead and the Australasian Faculty Rehabilitation Medicine also noted that it is during this transition period of adolescence that the impact of sexual development and disability can become a concern for children, families, school and community:

...for some children physical, cognitive, psychological, emotional and behavioural changes or difficulties may impact on sexual development or behaviour and their families, peers, school and community may require information and specialist support to help the young person make positive adjustments to these changes.⁶⁰¹

- 9.12 Evidence to the Inquiry suggests that there is a need for additional programs to support gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender young people, particularly in areas outside of the Sydney metropolitan area. This is of particular importance, given the high rates of mental health issues reported amongst these young people.
- 9.13 The Committee also considers that it is important that education and support is readily available for children and young people with a disability and their friends/family and peers about issues to do with sexuality.

RECOMMENDATION 244: The Committee recommends that, pursuant to s 11(d) of the *Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998*, the Commissioner for Children and Young People consult with the Minister for Health about funding for non-government organisations providing support services for young people with sexuality/gender issues and young people with a disability.

Oral health

- 9.14 Dental decay has been estimated to be Australia's most expensive diet-related disease and dental caries is the single most common chronic disease among children. Although children in Australia have better oral health than children in many other countries, due largely to fluoridated water,⁶⁰² oral health problems in children are still evident. A recent report by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) found that:
- when visiting a dentist, approximately 8% of 5-11 year olds had a tooth extracted. Among 12-17 year olds, prevalence fluctuated between a high of 15% in 1994 to a low of 9% in 2005;
 - about 30% of children aged 5-11 years and 25% of children aged 12-17 years had a filling.⁶⁰³

⁶⁰⁰ Submission no. 48, RYDON, p. 7.

⁶⁰¹ Submission no.77, The Children's Hospital at Westmead and the Australasian Faculty Rehabilitation Medicine, p. 3.

⁶⁰² Australian Dental Association website. 2008. *National dental health update 2008, September*.

⁶⁰³ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. 2009. *8 out of 10 children visit dentist regularly*, media release, 12 August 2009.

- 9.15 Evidence to the Committee suggested that dental problems for Indigenous children are particularly pressing. Mr Jeffrey Richardson of Dharah Girinj Aboriginal Medical Service informed the Committee of the impact of poor oral health:
- The other thing is, to be able to walk in and be confident about getting a job you need a set of teeth; you need to be able to smile at the world in that respect. Little kids are having full extractions; that is, full extractions in their mouth for the rest of their lives. People think that they are only baby teeth and they will grow back. They do grow back, but the jaw does not grow. It is a disfigurement for the rest of their lives. We have a school dental program that gets some of the kids. I have a dentist here who works two days a week, and we cover from here to Ballina. We are booked out till Christmas.⁶⁰⁴
- 9.16 The submission from RYDON noted the that poor oral health exacerbates the disadvantage experienced by homeless young people, “limiting their social networks due to shame and embarrassment, damaging their self-esteem and limiting their ability to secure meaningful employment.”⁶⁰⁵
- 9.17 As at December 2008, there were 25,439 children on waiting lists in the public dental system, with 18,353 on the waiting list for assessment and 7086 on the waiting list for treatment.⁶⁰⁶ Thus, while full-time students under the age of 18 years are eligible for public dental services in New South Wales the long waiting lists mean that prevention services are neglected, with a concentration on problems at the crisis stage, which escalates oral health problems associated with otherwise treatable conditions.⁶⁰⁷
- 9.18 Children from lower socio-economic groups experience almost twice as many caries - holes in the teeth caused by tooth decay - as children in higher socio-economic groups.⁶⁰⁸ The NSW Commission for Children and Young People commented on cost as a barrier to children visiting the dentist, noting that in the *2005-2006 NSW Population Health Survey Report on child health* of those children aged 9-15 years who had an oral health problem, 13.7 per cent of parents said their child did not visit a dentist due to cost.⁶⁰⁹

Access to dental care among Australian children⁶¹⁰

Performance indicator	Affluent	Health card holders
Perceived need for treatment	12.2 %	33.6 %
Experienced a toothache in the last 12 months	3.9 %	8.4 %
Visited dentist 2+ years ago	1.7 %	7.6 %
Last visit was for a problem	18.5 %	30.2 %
Avoided or delayed because of cost	5.2 %	11.8 %
Waited more than 6+ months for appointment	-	-
Cost prevented recommended treatment	4.5 %	3.8 %
Received extraction in last 12 months	18.8 %	33.6 %

⁶⁰⁴ Mr Jeffrey Richardson, Dharah Girinj Aboriginal Medical Service, transcript of evidence, 5 August 2008, p.7.

⁶⁰⁵ Submission no. 48, RYDON, p. 5.

⁶⁰⁶ NSW Department of Health website.

⁶⁰⁷ Submission no. 16, Council of Social Service of NSW, p. 3.

See also Ms Amanda Bray, Fairfield City Council, Transcript of evidence, 8 August 2008, p.10.

⁶⁰⁸ Legislative Council Standing Committee on Social Issues. 2006. *Dental services*, p. 112.

⁶⁰⁹ Submission no. 90, NSW Commission for Children and Young People, p.11.

⁶¹⁰ Legislative Council Standing Committee on Social Issues. 2006. *Dental services*, p. 112.

Received filling in last 12 months	4.3 %	8.9 %
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- 9.19 Children from disadvantaged population groups, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, those with disabilities and specific diseases, those living in rural areas and the children of refugees or migrants have more limited access to dental services and often lack the support and education programs necessary to develop skills in oral self care.⁶¹¹
- 9.20 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have around twice the caries rate seen in non-Indigenous children.⁶¹² The Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council reported to the Legislative Council Inquiry about dental services in New South Wales that during a recent oral health check in one small town in the far west of New South Wales, 90 per cent of the mostly Aboriginal children had dental caries, and for most it was their first dental visit.⁶¹³
- 9.21 Rural children are over three times more likely to be admitted to hospital for dental care compared with their metropolitan counterparts.⁶¹⁴ Evidence given to the NSW Legislative Council Standing Committee on Social Issues confirmed that children in rural areas have poorer oral health; that cases of extractions are higher in rural areas; and that the children are often on a waiting list for up to one year, resulting in many of them needing specialist treatment involving travel to the nearest regional centre.⁶¹⁵
- 9.22 A range of initiatives and programs has been developed in relation to improving oral health. Fluoridation of the water supplies is a preventative dental health strategy that includes all members of the community that have access to fluoridated water. In New South Wales, 94 per cent of children have access to fluoridated public water supply.⁶¹⁶ Rates of hospitalisation for dental treatment under general anaesthetics for children living in unfluoridated parts of New South Wales are three times as high as those for children living in fluoridated areas.⁶¹⁷
- 9.23 The public dental system provides dental services to children and young people. All children aged 0-5 years and those children less than 18 years of age involved in full time study, or who hold a concession card in their own right, are eligible for free public dental care on a needs basis.⁶¹⁸
- 9.24 There are also a number of oral health programs that focus on school aged students in New South Wales, including dental therapists employed to provide general treatment in schools.⁶¹⁹ However, with the difficulties faced by the dental therapist profession and an insufficient number of dental therapists, adequate and on-going

⁶¹¹ Legislative Council Standing Committee on Social Issues. 2006. *Dental services*. p. 37.

⁶¹² Every Kid Campaign website. *Every kid needs healthy...teeth*, p. 1.

⁶¹³ Legislative Council Standing Committee on Social Issues. 2006. *Dental services*, p. 113.

⁶¹⁴ Every Kid Campaign website. *Every kid needs healthy...teeth*. p. 1.

⁶¹⁵ Legislative Council, Standing Committee on Social Issues. 2006. *Dental services*, p. 112.

⁶¹⁶ Submission no. 87, NSW Government, p. 25.

⁶¹⁷ Every Kid Campaign website. *Every kid needs healthy...teeth*, p. 1.

⁶¹⁸ Submission no. 87, NSW Government, p. 26.

⁶¹⁹ Submission no. 87, NSW Government, p. 26.

general treatment within the schools program is becoming less frequent, and a trend towards longer waiting lists for children is starting to emerge.⁶²⁰

- 9.25 The Committee notes that in March 2008, the Commonwealth Government announced that it will invest up to \$360 million over three years in a *Teen Dental Plan* to make it more affordable for families to keep their children's teeth in good health. The Plan aims to assist one million Australian teenagers between the ages of 12-17 with dental costs, as eligible families will be able to spend up to \$150 towards the cost of an annual dental preventative check for each of their teenage children.⁶²¹
- 9.26 While the *Teen Dental Plan* may be used to obtain a dental check-up it does not provide a full course of treatment, which may lead to teenagers who require treatment having to move back on to public sector dental waiting lists.⁶²² Moreover, it has been estimated that the fee for a comprehensive dental check-up is \$290, significantly higher than the maximum rebate of \$150 proposed under the scheme. Although the plan will allow dentists to bulk bill, it is not clear how many would chose to use this option.⁶²³
- 9.27 According to Fairfield City Council, the *Teen Dental Plan* is a 'bandaid solution', as the cost of treatment and the long waiting lists will continue to makes dental care beyond the reach of most children and young people aged 9-14 years.⁶²⁴ The council called on both the NSW and Commonwealth Governments to increase dental funding.⁶²⁵
- 9.28 Indeed, many of the submissions to the 2006 NSW Legislative Council Standing Committee on Social Issues inquiry about dental services in New South Wales noted that New South Wales has the lowest per capita spending on oral health care out of all of the states and territories, being less than half that in Queensland and the Northern Territory.⁶²⁶

Committee comment

- 9.29 Data from the NSW Department of Health indicates there are substantial number of children on waiting lists for assessment and treatment through the public health system. Evidence to the Inquiry has identified that children from disadvantaged groups such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, children in rural areas, and the children of refugees and migrants, have more limited access to dental services, contributing to poor oral health.
- 9.30 The Committee notes that the Commonwealth Government has recently established the *Teen Dental Plan*⁶²⁷ and has committed to funding the *Commonwealth Dental Health Program*. However, given the waiting lists for children and young people in the public dental system, the Committee considers that substantial additional resources

⁶²⁰ Legislative Council, Standing Committee on Social Issues. 2006. *Dental services*, p. 113.

⁶²¹ Hon Nicola Roxon MP, Commonwealth Minister for Health and Ageing. 2008. *One million Australian kids to benefit from Teen Dental Plan*, media release, Canberra, 2 March 2008.

⁶²² Commonwealth Department of Parliamentary Services. 2008. 'Dental Benefits Bill 2008.' *Bills Digest*, no.135, p. 9.

⁶²³ *ibid.*, p.10.

⁶²⁴ Submission no. 35, Fairfield City Council, p. 5.

⁶²⁵ *ibid.*

⁶²⁶ Legislative Council Standing Committee on Social Issues. 2006. *Dental services*, p. 25.

⁶²⁷ Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing website. *Medicare Teen Dental Plan - fact sheet*.

should be provided to improve access to public dental health services and programs for both children and young people.

RECOMMENDATION 25: The Committee recommends that, pursuant to s 11(d) of the *Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998*, the Commissioner for Children and Young People consult with the Minister for Health about expanding innovative strategies to provide oral health prevention and treatment for disadvantaged children and young people.

Overweight and obesity

9.31 Australia is one of the most overweight developed nations, with overweight and obesity affecting about half of Australian adults, and up to one in four children.⁶²⁸ According to NCOSS, the prevalence of overweight and obesity peaks in the middle years:

The onset of puberty has significant impacts on the children and young people's health needs. In particular, the prevalence of overweight and obesity has increased markedly in school-aged children over the last 20 years. The NSW Schools Physical Activity and Nutrition Survey (SPANS) conducted in 2004 showed that ... The prevalence of overweight and obesity peaked in the middle years. Among boys, the prevalence of overweight and obesity rose from 15.0% in Kindergarten to 31.6% in Year 6 before declining to around 26% in Years 8 and 10. There was a similar pattern in girls, but the peak of 30.1% appeared in Year 4 before declining to 18.9% in Year 10.⁶²⁹

9.32 There are a number of health impacts of being overweight or obese on children and young people, ranging from psycho-social problems, asthma, sleep apnoea and early development of risk factors for heart disease such as raised blood pressure. It has been noted that Type 2 diabetes, a chronic disease which has traditionally diagnosed only among adults, is now increasingly being detected among Australian children.⁶³⁰ Moreover, obese children have a 25-50 per cent chance of progression to adult obesity and it may be as high as 78 per cent in older obese adolescents.⁶³¹

9.33 Weight gain and obesity develop when the energy intake from food and drink exceeds energy expenditure from physical activity and other metabolic processes.⁶³² The importance of physical activity is noted in the Strathfield Council submission:

One of the contributing causes of obesity is lack of regular physical activity and increased amount of sedentary activities e.g. internet, online games, videos etc. There are many factors which discourage children and young people from regular involvement in physical activity such as fear of crime and safety reduces physical activities such as walking or cycling to school, shops or libraries, restricted private open spaces and lack of access to recreation and open spaces.⁶³³

⁶²⁸ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Health and Ageing. 2009. *Weighing it up: obesity in Australia*, Canberra, p. 1.

⁶²⁹ Submission no. 16, Council of Social Service of NSW, p. 2.

⁶³⁰ Submission no. 87, NSW Government, p. 19.

⁶³¹ NSW Department of Health. 2003. *Prevention of obesity in children and young people: NSW Government action plan 2003-2007*, p. 1.

⁶³² *ibid.*

⁶³³ Submission no. 69, Strathfield Council, p. 3.

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- 9.34 Parental obesity can increase the risk of adult obesity among their children, as parents and carers exert significant control over a child's food intake and activity levels.⁶³⁴ Young people may not be inclined to participate in physical activity or eat well if their parents are not modelling healthy lifestyle behaviours themselves. Thus, targeting parental behaviours is an important aspect of promoting positive health behaviours and resilience in young people. This can include developing programs aimed at adults, such as diabetes prevention programs that support and empower adult participants to make positive changes to their diet and increase their amount of physical activity.⁶³⁵
- 9.35 The submission from the Children's Hospital at Westmead and the Australasian Faculty Rehabilitation Medicine commented that levels of obesity are higher in the population of young persons with a disability, which has a negative impact on their body image, physical participation in the community and associated morbidity, i.e., high cholesterol and type II diabetes.⁶³⁶

Barriers to healthy living

- 9.36 Cost has also been identified as a barrier to appropriate nutrition and levels of physical activity. Thus, Mr Jeffrey Richardson of Dharah Girinj Aboriginal Medical Service told the Committee:

You feel so hypocritical when you go to a community and talk about eating five serves of vegetables a day. In most remote localities I can bet you that the price of fruit and vegetables is a lot higher than in the town. I can also bet you also that the price of cigarettes or a bottle of Coke or those sorts of things will be the same price as in the city. I will bet you that I can buy a Chiko roll cheaper than I can buy bananas.⁶³⁷

- 9.37 In relation to physical activity, the Blue Mountains City Council submission commented that access to sporting facilities is often limited by the high cost of fees, and recommended subsidising such activities for low-income families.⁶³⁸
- 9.38 The built environment can also impact on opportunities for physical activity. The submission from the NSW Government noted that research has been conducted examining the links between the built environment, nutrition and physical activity.⁶³⁹

Policies and programs

- 9.39 At the Commonwealth level, the Preventative Health Taskforce recently provided the National Preventative Health Strategy to the Minister for Health and Ageing. This Strategy will provide a blueprint for tackling the burden of chronic disease currently caused by obesity, tobacco, and excessive consumption of alcohol. It will be directed at primary prevention and address all relevant arms of policy and all available points of leverage, in both the health and non-health sectors, in formulating its recommendations.⁶⁴⁰

⁶³⁴ Submission no. 87, NSW Government, p. 9.

⁶³⁵ *ibid.*, p. 20.

⁶³⁶ Submission no. 77, The Children's Hospital at Westmead and the Australasian Faculty Rehabilitation Medicine, p. 3.

⁶³⁷ Mr Jeffrey Richardson, Dharah Girinj Aboriginal Medical Service, Transcript of evidence, 5 August 2008, p.6.

⁶³⁸ Submission no. 74, Blue Mountains City Council, p. 5.

⁶³⁹ Submission no. 87, NSW Government, p. 22.

⁶⁴⁰ Preventative Health Taskforce website. *National Preventative Health Strategy*.

- 9.40 In November 2008, the states and the Commonwealth agreed to the *National Partnership Agreement on Preventative Health*, with funding of \$448 million over four years, and \$872 million over six years, starting from 2009-10. The Agreement will contribute to the following medium to long-term outcomes:
- increase in the proportion of children and adults at healthy body weight by three percentage points within ten years; and
 - increase in the proportion of children and adults meeting guidelines for healthy eating and physical activity by 15 per cent within six years.⁶⁴¹
- 9.41 The Committee also notes that the recent House of Representatives Standing Committee on Health and Ageing inquiry into obesity in Australia has made a number of recommendations in relation to prevention and treatment for obesity, including that the Minister for Health and Ageing commission research into the effect of the advertising of food products with limited nutritional value on the eating behaviour of children and other vulnerable groups.⁶⁴²
- 9.42 At a state level, improved health through reduced obesity is a priority in the NSW State Plan, with a target to stop the growth in childhood obesity at the 2004 level of 25 per cent by 2010, then reducing levels to 22 per cent by 2016.⁶⁴³
- 9.43 In June 2009, the NSW Government released the *NSW Government Plan for Preventing Overweight and Obesity in Children, Young People and their Families, 2009-2011*, which is an across-government plan that enlists a range of agencies to tackle the problem of overweight and obesity, including health, education, planning, transport, children's services and sport and recreation. The plan represents only a snapshot of activity to be undertaken between 2009-2011. Over the next two years the initiatives in the plan will be extended in innovative ways as funding from the Commonwealth/state prevention initiative creates new opportunities.⁶⁴⁴
- 9.44 The NSW Government submission outlined a number of initiatives aimed at addressing childhood obesity. These include the Childhood Obesity Summit in 2002. One of the initiatives emerging from the Childhood Obesity Summit was the establishment of the NSW Centre for Overweight and Obesity⁶⁴⁵. This collaboration between public health research groups addresses the growing and serious problem of overweight and obesity, with particular emphasis on children and young people.⁶⁴⁶
- 9.45 One of the major NSW Government initiatives is the *Live Life Well@School* initiative, a coordinated physical activity, healthy eating and sedentary activity program in NSW Government primary schools targeting students 5 to 12 years of age. This initiative is a joint initiative between the Department of Health and the Department of Education and Training Curriculum K-12 Directorate. The program adopts a whole-of-school approach; has a professional development component; incorporates community links; and provides strategies and resources for parents/carers.⁶⁴⁷

⁶⁴¹ Council of Australian Governments website. *National partnership agreement on preventive health*.

⁶⁴² House of Representatives Standing Committee on Health and Ageing. 2009. *Weighing it up: obesity in Australia*, Canberra, pp. iv-xvii.

⁶⁴³ NSW Government. 2008. *State Plan - A New Direction for NSW, 2008 Annual Report*.

⁶⁴⁴ NSW Department of Health. 2009. *NSW Government plan for preventing overweight and obesity in children, young people and their families 2009-2011*, p. 2.

⁶⁴⁵ Now called the Physical Activity Nutrition and Obesity Research Group (PANORG)

⁶⁴⁶ Submission no. 87, NSW Government, p. 19.

⁶⁴⁷ Submission no. 87, NSW Government, p. 19-20.

- 9.46 According to the NSW Centre for Overweight and Obesity, the balance of evidence currently suggests that to be effective, obesity prevention programs need to be comprehensive and aim to influence individual behaviour and lifestyle, as well as the broader social and environmental factors that affect health. These might include the legal and regulatory environment such as standards for nutrient content, portion size and marketing of products to children; economic factors, such as subsidies to make fruit and vegetables more available; and prevention and treatment programs.⁶⁴⁸

Committee comment

- 9.47 The Committee welcomes the additional funding allocated to address overweight and obesity through the *National Partnership Agreement on Preventative Health*. Given the major health implications of overweight and obesity and the increasing prevalence of overweight and obesity amongst children and young people 9-14 years, the Committee considers that the Commonwealth and NSW Government should continue to prioritise a whole-of-government approach with a major focus on children and young people in the middle years.

Injury

- 9.48 Injury is a leading cause of death and hospitalisation for children and young people in early adolescence, or the middle years. Unintentional injury data indicates that, on average, 22 young adolescents aged between 10 and 14 years, die in New South Wales each year, and more than 7,000 are hospitalised as a result of serious injury. In addition, many thousands receive minor injuries that are treated at home or by medical or other health practitioners.⁶⁴⁹
- 9.49 Motor vehicle crashes account for about two-thirds of deaths, with those travelling as passengers and pedestrians particularly at risk. The next main mechanisms of fatal injury are drowning and suffocation.⁶⁵⁰ For those seriously injured, falls account for about 40 per cent of hospitalisations, with many of these injuries happening at school and while playing sport. On- and off- road motorcycle injury accounts for more than half of all motor vehicle transport injury hospitalisations. For this age group, bicycle injury increases greatly, with more young people being hospitalised as a result of bicycle injury than from passenger or pedestrian injury.⁶⁵¹
- 9.50 Injury risks associated with age do vary slightly within the 9-14 age group. According to the submission from Youthsafe, injuries occur more often outside of the home, and as children move through this age span. Passenger casualties actually decrease as a proportion of motor vehicle casualties, while pedestrian and cycle casualties increase. This reflects the fact that as children move into adolescence they look more for opportunities to be out and about and unsupervised; however, they are often underprepared for this and do not yet have the skills to be safe in the traffic environment without adult supervision. During adolescence children become much

⁶⁴⁸ Tumour, C., King, L., & Wise, M. 2006. *Mid-point evaluation of 'Prevention of obesity in children and young people: NSW government action plan 2003-2007'*, NSW Centre for Overweight and Obesity, Sydney, p. 13.

⁶⁴⁹ Submission no. 44, Youthsafe, p. 3.

⁶⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p. 3.

⁶⁵¹ *ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

more vulnerable to pedestrian injury, particularly during school travel times, and travel after school has proven particularly risky.⁶⁵²

- 9.51 Gender is an important risk factor in all the main settings in which children and young people are injured. Boys are about twice as likely to be fatally injured or hospitalised due to serious injury than are girls. Boys are very significantly overrepresented as cyclist casualties and, to a lesser extent, as pedestrian casualties. Boys also account for about two-thirds of drowning deaths. Research suggests that this overrepresentation is explained both by higher levels of exposure to risky activities, and a propensity among boys for risk taking behaviour.⁶⁵³
- 9.52 Research has long shown that socio-economic disadvantage is an important risk factor for injury, though the reasons for this are not yet fully understood. It is likely that children and young people in less affluent families may have less access to protective equipment, such as bike helmets, and use older equipment or equipment that may not be well maintained, and therefore less protective. A range of other possible factors are discussed in the Youthsafe submission, including the role of adult supervision which is the most important protective factor for reducing the risk of injury. Injury rates may be higher in sole parent families because there are fewer opportunities for parental supervision, and because support networks of family members and friends who can play a supervisory role tend to be less available.⁶⁵⁴
- 9.53 Adult supervision, especially from parents, is a very important factor in reducing risky behaviour and the likelihood of injury among young people. However, as the amount of time adolescents spend by themselves, or with their peers, increases so does the likelihood of serious injury.⁶⁵⁵ The Youthsafe submission elaborated further:
- It is important for parents to ensure that before children are independent of adults they have acquired and demonstrated the necessary skills to handle situations without supervision, for example, travelling alone on journeys for school or sport, taking up casual work, or supervising younger children. Adolescents often feel that there isn't anything much they cannot do and are therefore unlikely or reluctant to ask for help or advice.⁶⁵⁶
- 9.54 Youthsafe contends that, an important focus should be given to injury among older adolescents, when rates of injury, especially fatal injury, increase. However, it is also important that unintentional injury among young adolescents is addressed, as this is a time when many behaviours are established. From a prevention perspective, it is very important that these young people are adequately prepared, not just to deal with the injury risks to which young adolescents are vulnerable, but also are prepared for the risks that older adolescents face.⁶⁵⁷
- 9.55 In relation to the prevention of unintentional injury among this age group, Youthsafe identifies three main areas that should be addressed to help meet the needs of children and young people. These are:
- involvement of parents in young people's supervision and boundary setting at a time when levels of independence are increasing;

⁶⁵² Submission no. 44, Youthsafe, p. 7.

⁶⁵³ *ibid.*, p. 8.

⁶⁵⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

⁶⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p. 5.

⁶⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p. 5.

⁶⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p. 2.

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- greater awareness among parents and the wider community of how early adolescent characteristics are associated with increased injury risk; and
 - increased awareness of the role that researchers and practitioners can play in reducing early adolescent unintentional injury.⁶⁵⁸
- 9.56 Youthsafe noted that, by increasing the awareness of professionals working with adolescents about key risk factors for unintentional injury during adolescence, these professionals would be well placed to support young people and their families in recognising the injury risks associated with key adolescent transitions for this age group.⁶⁵⁹
- 9.57 Youthsafe also identified that evidence-based and coordinated initiatives, with appropriate funding, should be directed to this important area of injury prevention in young people. These initiatives could:
- build on existing school based health and safety strategies that are embedded in the education syllabus;
 - incorporate print and on line resources targeting families and professionals; and
 - support research into effective and evidence based interventions as to how injury prevention can best meet the needs of young adolescents.⁶⁶⁰
- 9.58 As bringing about changes in young people's attitudes and behaviours is a complex process, particularly given the range of risk factors that come with adolescence, a multi-strategic and coordinated approach is considered most likely to be successful here.⁶⁶¹
- 9.59 In its Annual Report 2007-2008, the NSW Commission for Children and Young People identified plans to facilitate and broker a multi-lateral agreement with relevant agencies to develop and implement a coordinated plan for reducing childhood injury from falls from a building or structure, and from off road use of motor cycles or other vehicles; as well as for improving safe socialising and transport options for young people.⁶⁶²
- 9.60 The Committee strongly supports a coordinated approach involving the Commission, government and non-government agencies to reduce childhood injury. The Committee also notes the importance of parents in supervision and boundary setting in relation to risk of injury and considers that there may be synergies with the provision of parenting programs that address parenting skills in general, which are discussed in Chapter 11. In relation to safe socialising and safe transport, a number of recommendations made in Chapter 6 of this Report are relevant.

Access to health services

- 9.61 Children and young people have specific healthcare needs and specific barriers to accessing health services. The submission from RYDON made the following comment about their health needs:

⁶⁵⁸ Submission no. 44, Youthsafe, p. 3.

⁶⁵⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

⁶⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p. 11.

⁶⁶¹ *ibid.*, p. 11.

⁶⁶² NSW Commission for Children and Young People. 2008. *Annual report 2007-2008*, p. 52.

It is important to remember that children and young people are a unique population with specific healthcare needs and... these needs are not being prioritised or recognised for their significance. Some of these include mental health and wellbeing, drug and alcohol, sexual health, reproductive health and dental health.⁶⁶³

- 9.62 The submission went on to note that the 9-14 year old age group have limited to no specific health services available to them in the Hunter region.⁶⁶⁴
- 9.63 Research conducted by the NSW Centre for the Advancement of Adolescent Health has identified a number of significant barriers preventing young people from seeking help with health concerns. A needs analysis based on interviews including groups of adolescents in-school and out-of-school (aged 12-14 years; 14-16 years; 16-17 years) found that:
- ... the most significant of young people's barriers to seeking help were concerns about confidentiality and trust in terms of the patient/provider relationship and having to deal with embarrassment and shame in disclosing concerns. Also significant were young people's lack of knowledge of what services were available, what they provided, the competencies/skills of the providers and how to access them. Socio-economic status appeared to be unrelated to the barriers identified except for cost of access in rural areas and the possibility of private access amongst private school young people.⁶⁶⁵
- 9.64 In relation to out-of-school adolescents, the researchers reported that:
- Out-of-school young people also chose not to access services unless they were in crisis or had heard 'positive word on the street' about the service, although they knew of more services than in-school young people. Their barriers to accessing services were the same as those expressed by in-school young people with additional reasons including: self-esteem; drug use; and being perceived by service providers as "street rats".⁶⁶⁶
- 9.65 Several submissions discussed the availability and/or funding of youth specific health services. The Canterbury City Council submission stated that there is a need to maintain youth health services locally.⁶⁶⁷
- 9.66 The NSW Centre for the Advancement of Adolescent Health has identified that most area health services have very few youth services, and some have no specific youth health services that are part of either Community Health or non-government services (including Headspace).⁶⁶⁸ Although the 1998 youth health policy recommended that all area health services create Youth Health Coordinator positions, this either did not occur or positions were subsequently lost.⁶⁶⁹ The RYDON submission also supported the creation and ongoing funding of permanent Youth Health Coordinator positions in all Area Health Services to assist in coordinating and developing youth-focused initiatives.⁶⁷⁰

⁶⁶³ Submission no. 48, RYDON, p. 5.

⁶⁶⁴ *ibid.*

⁶⁶⁵ NSW Centre for Advancement of Adolescent Health. 2002. *Access to health care among NSW adolescents, phase 1 final report*, p. 6.

⁶⁶⁶ *ibid.*, p. 7.

⁶⁶⁷ Submission no. 102, Canterbury City Council, p. 5.

⁶⁶⁸ NSW Centre for the Advancement of Adolescent Health. 2008. Submission to *Community health review 2008*, p. 2.

⁶⁶⁹ NSW Centre for the Advancement of Adolescent Health. 2008. Submission to *Community health review 2008*, p. 2.

⁶⁷⁰ Submission no. 48, RYDON, p.2.

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- 9.67 Research conducted by the NSW Centre for the Advancement of Adolescent Health in 2006 identified that, while Youth Health Coordinator positions were relatively new at the time of the research, initial achievements of these positions appear to have been the creation of new services and cohesive networks. This was the case in certain rural areas where geographically separated services, previously fragmented and working in isolation from each other, had developed valuable linkages and partnerships.⁶⁷¹
- 9.68 In New South Wales, most youth health services source their major funding from the NSW Department of Health and are managed through their local area health service as part of Community Health. The Innovative Health Services for Homeless Youth (IHSY) funding, which is a state and Commonwealth joint funding agreement, makes up a significant portion of this funding.⁶⁷²
- 9.69 The NSW Centre for the Advancement of Adolescent Health has previously noted that IHSY funding has eroded over time, and that there has been no significant injection of funds into youth health services managed by Community Health since they were established 10-15 years ago.⁶⁷³ Southern Youth and Family Services also discussed funding of adolescent health services in its submission:
- Adolescent health services also are inadequate and need urgent attention...The Commonwealth funded program Innovative Health Services for Homeless Youth (IHSY) is managed by the State Area Health Services. The Commonwealth State Agreement ran out in June 2007, was temporarily extended till October 2007, then to December 2007, then to June 2008 and now only till December 2008. This is highly unsatisfactory, shows no commitment whatsoever to disadvantaged young people and means a loss of staff and an inability to plan by community agencies. Adolescent health services in the area of primary health, dental health, mental health, sexual health, smoking, positive health behaviours and attitudes and many other areas of health must be funded and expanded.⁶⁷⁴
- 9.70 From 1 July 2009, funding from the IHSY program was to be rolled into a new broadbanded National Healthcare Agreement as part of COAG's National Healthcare Agreement.
- 9.71 Evidence was also given to the Committee about difficulties for children and young people needing access to allied health services in rural areas including access to speech pathology,⁶⁷⁵ occupational therapy⁶⁷⁶ and physiotherapy.⁶⁷⁷ Moreover, allied health services in rural areas tend to be "very inconsistent and spasmodic."⁶⁷⁸
- 9.72 Speech Pathology Australia discussed the need for state government funding for youth health and mental health services to employ speech pathologists specifically within those settings.⁶⁷⁹ According to their submission, in addition to students with

⁶⁷¹ NSW Centre for the Advancement of Adolescent Health. 2006. *Young people's access to health care*, p.23.

⁶⁷² NSW Centre for the Advancement of Adolescent Health. 2008. Submission to *Community health review 2008*, p. 1.

⁶⁷³ *ibid.*, p. 3.

⁶⁷⁴ Submission no. 54, Southern Youth and Family Services, p. 10.

⁶⁷⁵ Submission no. 10a, Port Stephens Council, p. 2

⁶⁷⁶ Submission no. 10a, Port Stephens Council, p. 2

⁶⁷⁷ Mr Ian Baker, Catholic Education Commission of NSW, Transcript of evidence, 2 July 2008, p.50.

⁶⁷⁸ Ms Annette Crothers, Catholic Education Commission of NSW, Transcript of evidence, 2 July 2008, p.50.

⁶⁷⁹ Submission no. 23, Speech Pathology Australia, p. 4.

communication disorders being at risk of mental health problems, there is also a high prevalence of language impairment for those students presenting for psychiatric treatment. NSW Youth Health and Mental Health services frequently do not have speech pathologists working within their teams, or at best have limited access to consultative services.⁶⁸⁰

- 9.73 Speech pathologists also have role in addressing communication disorders. As discussed in Chapter 15 there is a significant prevalence of communication disorders in primary and secondary school students in New South Wales,⁶⁸¹ and there are strong links between these disorders and literacy problems as well as learning difficulties.⁶⁸²
- 9.74 According to Speech Pathology Australia, best practice in supporting students with communication disorders is when speech pathology services are embedded in schools. However, they noted that embedded speech pathology services within schools in New South Wales are “extremely limited for upper-primary school students and are virtually non-existent in secondary school settings.”⁶⁸³
- 9.75 In addition, evidence to the Wood Inquiry also identified gaps in service provision, with access to allied health services, citing speech pathology amongst the services most frequently cited as deficient.⁶⁸⁴ The NSW Government has supported the recommendation of the Wood Inquiry regarding the establishment of integrated co-located services, which would include allied health services such as speech pathology and mental health services.⁶⁸⁵ This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 12, Safety and Security.
- 9.76 In rural areas, transportation issues also impede access to health services for children 9-14 years. The submission from Port Stephens Council noted that the combination of waiting lists, lack of proximity to services, inadequate public transport coupled with the costs of accessing this care are a major impediment to local young people and families in accessing appropriate health care.⁶⁸⁶
- 9.77 In terms of a model to address health issues for children and young people 9-14 years, RYDON has proposed a comprehensive one-stop shop children and youth health services. These would be strategically located in areas of need, or even co-located with schools and/or other youth services in areas such as Maitland, Muswellbrook, Port Stephens, Cessnock, and Lake Macquarie.⁶⁸⁷ The RYDON submission noted that such one-stop shop youth health services are currently in existence, such as the High Street Youth Health Service in Sydney. This is an integrated health service for young people who are at risk and homeless, within a

⁶⁸⁰ *ibid.*, p. 3.

⁶⁸¹ *ibid.*, p. 2.

⁶⁸² Submission no. 8, Discipline of Speech Pathology, University of Sydney, p. 1,

⁶⁸³ Submission no. 23, Speech Pathology Australia, p. 3.

⁶⁸⁴ Special Commission of Inquiry into Child Protection Services in NSW. 2008. *Report of the special commission of inquiry into child protection services in NSW*, conducted by Hon James Wood, vol. 1, p. 238.

⁶⁸⁵ NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet. 2009. *Keep them safe: a shared approach to wellbeing*, Sydney, p. 64.

⁶⁸⁶ Submission no. 10a, Port Stephens Council, p. 2.

⁶⁸⁷ Submission no. 48, RYDON, p. 5.

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primary health care framework which also develops, implements and evaluates a creative drop-in program, outreach and other community based activities.⁶⁸⁸

- 9.78 This type of facility is particularly important in socio-economically disadvantaged areas. As the NSW Government submission noted, young people in such areas are at greater risk of poor health outcomes both in the short and longer term:

Having a low income can affect a young person's access to nutritional food and medical care, increases their risk of injury, impacts on their level of stress and anxiety, and impacts on the quality and stability of their care. Each factor increases their risk of poor physical and psychosocial health outcomes.⁶⁸⁹

- 9.79 Given that young people have specific barriers to accessing services and particular health and developmental needs, the Committee considers that access to youth specific health services should be a priority, especially in disadvantaged communities. The limited access to allied health services such as speech pathology is of concern, particularly as problems in these areas can impact on a range of areas including literacy and learning difficulties.

RECOMMENDATION 26: The Committee recommends that the Department of Health establish additional youth health services across New South Wales and enhances the capacity of existing youth health services, with priority given to areas with a substantial Indigenous population.

The Committee further recommends that the Commissioner for Children and Young People be consulted on any proposed expansion of youth health services.

RECOMMENDATION 27: The Committee recommends that, pursuant to s 11(d) of the *Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998*, the Commissioner for Children and Young People consult with the Minister for Health about the feasibility of establishing youth health coordinator positions in each Area Health Service in New South Wales.

Co-ordination and planning

- 9.80 As identified previously in this section, there is an array of state and Commonwealth plans relating to different aspects of the health of children and young people 9-14 years. Some of these are specific to youth; some are general plans which focus on children and young people to varying degrees; some are whole-of-government plans; and some are plans for the health sector.
- 9.81 The NSW Centre for Advancement of Adolescent Health has been commissioned by the NSW Department of Health to develop a new youth health policy for New South

⁶⁸⁸ *ibid.*

⁶⁸⁹ Submission no. 87, NSW Government, p. 9.

Wales.⁶⁹⁰ The NSW Government through the proposed 'NSW Kids' has undertaken to develop a strategic service delivery plan for the health care of children and young people.⁶⁹¹

9.82 From a recent review of the literature, the NSW Department of Health identified a set of key principles for the development of strategies and services to improve the health outcomes of children and young people. These principles promote a focus on the following:

- a health and wellbeing perspective;
- enhancing protective factors and building resilience;
- population health approaches, which focuses on outcomes, influencing the determinants of health, and strategies that have wide population coverage;
- whole-of-government and community approaches where partnerships are fostered and responsibility is shared;
- equity and social justice with commitment, effort and strategies (universal and targeted) weighted to address the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and other priority groups;
- initiatives that are sustainable and have long term commitment; and
- age-appropriate evidence based strategies, based on the best available evidence, and where the strategies adopted are designed to address multiple health issues and determinants and result in multiple outcomes.⁶⁹²

9.83 In relation to the last principle, a range of evidence-based strategies may lead to multiple outcomes in health and other areas for children and young people. The NSW Centre for the Advancement of Adolescent Health advised the Committee about one such project, the Gatehouse Project, which had a dual focus on improving emotional wellbeing and learning outcomes:

This intervention comprised a school-based adolescent health team, the identification of risk and protective factors in each school's environment from student surveys and the implementation of strategies to address these factors. Strategies varied between schools according to the students' perception of need, but the curriculum generally included problem-solving training.⁶⁹³

9.84 The project resulted in improved outcomes, with lower rates of substance use, antisocial behaviour and early initiation of sexual intercourse reported four years after the beginning of the intervention:

Marked health risk behaviours were reported by approximately 15% of students in the intervention school group after the intervention, compared with 20% of those in the control group, an overall reduction of a quarter. This difference arose from lower rates of substance use, antisocial behaviour, and early initiation of sexual intercourse by students in the intervention schools.⁶⁹⁴

⁶⁹⁰ Ms Fiona Robards, NSW Centre for the Advancement of Adolescent Health, Transcript of evidence, 17 March 2009, p. 6.

⁶⁹¹ NSW Department of Health. 2009. *Caring together: the health action plan for NSW*, p. 15.

⁶⁹² Submission no. 87, NSW Government, p. 6.

⁶⁹³ Gatehouse Project website.

⁶⁹⁴ NSW Centre for the Advancement of Adolescent Health, Questions answered after hearing, 17 March 2009, p. 5.

Committee comment

- 9.85 The previous three chapters have shown that the middle years are an important period with regard to a range of health issues. Mental health problems may become apparent in this age range and their prevalence continues to rise substantially throughout adolescence. Many young people are first exposed to alcohol and tobacco at this age. It is also a period when young people may become sexually active for the first time. Among school-aged children, the prevalence of overweight and obesity peaks in the middle years. However, evidence to the Inquiry indicates that children in this age group have limited or no specific youth health services available to them in many regions of New South Wales.
- 9.86 Evidence to the Inquiry indicates that there are individual programs/approaches designed to impact on multiple outcomes that have been effective in improving a number of health outcomes. In line with the principles developed by NSW Health, the Committee considers that a whole-of-government approach where the strategies adopted are designed to address multiple health issues and determinants, and result in multiple outcomes is of utmost importance.
- 9.87 This is reflected in the Committee's recommendation in Chapter 19 to develop a whole-of-government planning process that would identify key programs/approaches that are likely impact on multiple outcomes for children and young people 9-14 years, such as health and educational outcomes.

Chapter Ten - Homelessness

The housing situation has had a huge impact on people... Some families are coming in who are paying more rent than they are actually getting in income because they have nowhere to live other than what is available. That has a huge impact on a family, how they function and survive.⁶⁹⁵

Introduction

- 10.1 The majority of homeless children and young people in this age group are homeless due to the homelessness of their parents. Alternatively, they become homeless after leaving their family or state care. According to census data, homeless families make up one quarter of the homeless population. On census night 2006, there were 7,483 homeless families with children comprised of 26,790 people (10,608 parents and 16,182 children).⁶⁹⁶ Disturbingly, the recorded number of homeless families with children increased by 16.8 per cent from the 2001 census to the 2006 census.⁶⁹⁷
- 10.2 The *Supported Accommodation Assistance Program* (SAAP) is the major nationwide program providing support to people in the community who are homeless or at risk of imminent homelessness. SAAP data indicate that 14,200 10-14 year olds made up 20.6 per cent of accompanying children using SAAP services in 2006-07.⁶⁹⁸
- 10.3 This chapter examines recent Commonwealth and state initiatives to reduce homelessness and considers, in particular, the implications of homelessness for young people who leave home because of family problems, or who are in out-of-home care. The chapter considers some deficiencies in service provision identified in evidence and suggests how these needs might be addressed in future service planning.

Causes of homelessness

- 10.4 A major cause of homelessness for families is domestic violence. SAAP data from 2006-07 indicates that the most common reason why SAAP clients with children seek assistance is to escape domestic violence.⁶⁹⁹ According to the submission from the Immigrant Women's Speakout Association, one of the most devastating consequences of domestic violence is that the woman's home becomes the unsafe place for her and often for her children, forcing them to leave the home. As a result many women and their children become homeless in order to access safety. The experience of domestic violence and is inextricably linked to women's homelessness.⁷⁰⁰
- 10.5 The submission from the NSW Women's Refuge Child Support Workers points out the risk of homelessness and impact of domestic violence on families with children:
- It means families are likely to have very poor physical and mental health whether or not it is diagnosed. They need to know they are likely to have no personal belongings or

⁶⁹⁵ Ms Noeline Olive, Casino Neighbourhood Centre, Transcript of evidence, 5 August 2008, p. 11.

⁶⁹⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics. 2006. *Australian Census analytic program: counting the homeless*, report prepared by Chamberlain, C. & MacKenzie, D., Canberra, p. viii.

⁶⁹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 11.

⁶⁹⁸ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. 2007. *Homeless people in SAAP: SAAP national data collection annual report 2006-07*, Canberra, p. 22.

⁶⁹⁹ Webb, H. 2008. 'Children in SAAP: behind the headline figures', *Parity*, vol. 21, no. 8, p. 9.

⁷⁰⁰ Submission no. 62, Immigrant Women's Speakout Association, p. 6.

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necessities to establish a new home. That they are likely to have severe disruption to education as children may have been to 8 or more schools in the past as their situation proved unsafe or unaffordable. That they have little or no family support due to the violence they experience being a risk for extended families if they remain involved. That they have no long-term links into any community and often this prevents children from being involved in sports or activities that assist their well being and development. Those women who have no links into a particular community, rarely take advantage of the resources available or even learn what is available to assist them or their children.⁷⁰¹

10.6 Other reasons for families becoming homeless include increasing difficulty in finding accommodation in the private rental market, lack of sufficient income and lack of access to employment. In its submission, NCOSS noted that problems in school and other areas of a child or young person's life may be compounded by a lack of stable affordable housing. Stability is vital for children in the middle years to maintain schooling, develop community connections, and retain access to support networks. Stability in accommodation is threatened by:

- falling affordability and the consequent movement of people to less expensive areas;
- short term leases in the private rental market; and
- mortgage stress where it leads to repossession.⁷⁰²

10.7 Children and young people in the 9-14 age group may become homeless after leaving their family or state care. In 2002-03, 1800 children aged under 15 years presented unaccompanied at a SAAP service. Among these, 24.9 per cent indicated that the most common reason for seeking assistance was relationship/family breakdown. For a further 17.1 per cent, the main reason for seeking assistance was time out from a family or other situation, and for another 10.7 per cent it was domestic violence.⁷⁰³

10.8 The Gloucester Youth Advisory Committee submission described negative family situations that can lead to homelessness:

...vulnerable young people beginning adolescence...may actually have parent/s residing in a house, often find themselves in a dysfunctional family situation such that these young people would rather wander the streets for a large proportion of the day and evening rather than be at home.

They have a house that is not really a home, lacking a place of love, care, safety, support, comfort, food and respect for each other.⁷⁰⁴

At Risk Groups

10.9 Types of young people who are at increased risk of homelessness, are Indigenous young people, young people leaving juvenile justice institutions and young people who are, or have been, in state care.

10.10 Children and young people in care are at increased risk of homelessness. In the 2006 census of homeless school students, some 15 per cent of students had been in care and protection. Forty three per cent of people who became homeless before the age of 18 had been in state care. A RMIT study found that 42 per cent of young

⁷⁰¹ Submission no. 19, NSW Women's Refuge Child Support Workers, p. 11.

⁷⁰² Submission no. 16, Council of Social Service of NSW, p. 3.

⁷⁰³ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. 2005. *A picture of Australia's children 2005*, p. 62.

⁷⁰⁴ Submission no. 71, Gloucester Youth Advisory Committee, p. 2.

adults and other adults in SAAP had been in care and protection.⁷⁰⁵ Moreover, there is evidence that youth homelessness can be the beginning of long-term homelessness. A 2008 analysis of 4000 people who experienced homelessness in Melbourne found that more than 1600 had been homeless before they turned 18. Of these, 40 per cent had spent time in state care.⁷⁰⁶

- 10.11 In 2005-6, 12 per cent of SAAP clients reported they had spent time in the criminal justice system. Young adults are particularly vulnerable as they may not have completed their education before imprisonment and may lack skills to obtain paid work.⁷⁰⁷
- 10.12 Indigenous Australians continue to have higher rates of juvenile detention and placement in out-of-home care, and are also more likely to experience homelessness than other Australians. Overall, 2.4 per cent of people were identified as Indigenous at the 2006 Census, but nine per cent of the homeless were Indigenous.⁷⁰⁸ As NCOSS noted, Indigenous young people have worse health, lower educational attainment, greater rates of incarceration and greater rates of homelessness than non-Indigenous young people.⁷⁰⁹

Impact of Homelessness

- 10.13 The negative impact of homelessness on children and young people has been well-documented. A review of a well-established body of research reveals a profound and cumulative effect on the development of children, leading many to repeat the cycle of homelessness as adults.⁷¹⁰
- 10.14 Children are particularly vulnerable to the traumatic effects of homelessness. It disrupts schooling and other important opportunities to build resilience that come, for example, from participation in sporting and cultural activities. Poor education is a risk factor in the future episodes of homelessness. Children who have been homeless are more likely to experience emotional and behavioural problems such as distress, depression, anger and aggression.⁷¹¹
- 10.15 Family homelessness has a negative impact on the capacity of parents to care for, and meet the needs of their children.⁷¹² The NSW Government commented about the importance of housing stability for children in its submission:

Housing stability and the conditions in which children live can have a life-long impact on their experiences as a consequence of such things as academic achievement and mental health. A safe environment provides the much needed stability that assists

⁷⁰⁵ Commonwealth Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. 2008. *Which way home: a new approach to homelessness*, p. 28.

⁷⁰⁶ *ibid.*

⁷⁰⁷ *ibid.*

⁷⁰⁸ Australian Bureau of Statistics. 2006. *Australian Census analytic program: counting the homeless*, report prepared by Chamberlain, C. & MacKenzie, D., Canberra, p. ix.

⁷⁰⁹ Submission no. 16, Council of Social Service of NSW, p. 4.

⁷¹⁰ Hart-Shegos, E. 1999. *Homelessness and its effects on children*, Family Housing Fund.

⁷¹¹ Commonwealth Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. 2008. *The road home: a national approach to reducing homelessness*, p.10.

⁷¹² Wright-Howie, D. 2008. 'Introduction: homelessness and children - a brief overview', *Parity*, vol. 21, no. 8, p.6.

young people to work through complex emotional and physical changes, and changing social needs that arise during their middle childhood.⁷¹³

Existing programs

10.16 As noted earlier, Australia's primary policy and program response to homelessness is the *Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP)*. SAAP is a national system of homelessness services that was conceived as, and continues to be, a last resort safety-net for homeless Australians or those at risk of homelessness. It is jointly funded by the state/territory and Commonwealth Governments, as shown in the table below.⁷¹⁴

2007-08 Government funding for homelessness programs

	\$ million
Commonwealth SAAP contribution	186
State and territory SAAP contribution	184
Commonwealth: other initiatives specifically targeting homelessness, including Reconnect, HOME Advice	91
State and territory: other initiatives specifically targeting homelessness ¹	179
Total	640

10.17 In December 2008, the Commonwealth Government released a White Paper, entitled *The Road Home: a National Approach to Reducing Homelessness*, outlining a national approach to reducing homelessness. The White Paper identified that the new *National Affordable Housing Agreement* provides \$6.1 billion over the five years from 2008–09 on measures including social housing; assistance to people in the private rental market; support and accommodation for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness; and assistance with home purchasing. Under this agreement, COAG has approved additional funding of \$1.2 billion over the next four years as a down payment on the 12-year reform agenda outlined in this White Paper.⁷¹⁵ The White Paper sets goals and targets that are highly relevant to children 9-14 years, including:

- the number of people exiting care and custodial settings into homelessness be reduced by 25 per cent;
- the number of families who maintain or secure safe and sustainable housing following domestic or family violence be increased by 20 per cent;
- the number of people exiting from social housing and private rental to homelessness be reduced by 25 per cent;
- the number of young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness with improved housing stability and engaged with family, school and work be increased by 25 per cent; and

⁷¹³ Submission no. 87, NSW Government, p. 9.

⁷¹⁴ Commonwealth Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. 2008. *Which way home: a new approach to homelessness*, p. 31.

⁷¹⁵ Commonwealth Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. 2008. *The road home: a national approach to reducing homelessness*, p. ix.

- the number of children who are homeless or at risk of homelessness provided with additional support and engaged in education be increased by 50 per cent.⁷¹⁶

10.18 The NSW Government released *A way home: reducing homelessness in NSW; NSW Homelessness Action Plan 2009-2014* [NSW Homelessness Action Plan] in August 2009.⁷¹⁷ The plan sets the direction for state-wide reform of the homelessness service system to achieve better outcomes for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The Plan includes actions funded through the NSW Implementation Plan for the *National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness*.

Deficiencies in service provision

- 10.19 While there are a range of programs in place to address family and individual homelessness, a number of submissions to the Inquiry identified deficiencies. According to the Public Interest Advocacy Centre (PIAC), there are inadequate accommodation options for children and young people involved in the court system:
- Detention should not be used as crisis accommodation. The best interests of the child will rarely dictate that a child should be held in custody. Accommodation, including crisis accommodation, is needed for young people leaving court in circumstances where medium- or long-term accommodation is not available. Accommodation should provide the young person and carers with an opportunity to assess their care needs and arrange access to a range of services, e.g., education, mental health, or drug and alcohol services.⁷¹⁸
- 10.20 The Queensland Commission for Children and Young People noted that its monitoring activities had shown that there are children and young people aged between 9-14 years who are homeless and unable to access essential support mechanisms. The Commission conducted a Self-Placement Audit of children and young people who had left home or an approved alternative placement without obtaining permission between 1 July 2007 and 31 December 2007. The audit provided insight into young people's experiences of homelessness and revealed that the age threshold is a particular barrier for some vulnerable young people trying to access support services. This is an essential service gap for this age group.⁷¹⁹
- 10.21 Many children and young people come to the attention of SAAP youth services in the 9-14 age group. However, these services are not funded to provide support to children and young people of this age. According to the report of the National Youth Commission Inquiry into Youth Homelessness, relevant sections of the Commonwealth *Supported Accommodation Assistance Act 1994* imply that homeless young people below school leaving age are not the responsibility of SAAP funded organisations, but are the responsibility of state and territory governments' child protection authorities.⁷²⁰
- 10.22 Anecdotal evidence indicates that many of these young people have come to the attention of the DoCS, and may have been supported in the OOH system, but for various reasons their placements have failed. For others, the SAAP service may be

⁷¹⁶ Commonwealth Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. 2008. *The road home: a national approach to reducing homelessness*, pp. viii - xiii.

⁷¹⁷ NSW Government. 2009. *A way home: reducing homelessness in NSW*.

⁷¹⁸ Submission no. 13, Public Interest Advocacy Centre, p. 7.

⁷¹⁹ Submission no. 103, Queensland Commission for Children and Young People, p. 2.

⁷²⁰ National Youth Commission. 2008. *Australia's homeless youth: a report of the National Youth Commission inquiry into youth homelessness*, p. 128.

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the first organisation to bring to the attention of the DoCS that a young person is at risk. However, as NCOSS noted:

...when SAAP workers contact DoCS seeking assistance and support for under age children and young people they are met a lack of support from the departmental officers. The National Youth Commission Inquiry into Youth Homelessness cited evidence from SAAP services that lower priority is given to children and young people in a SAAP service because they are not at immediate risk. The SAAP service becomes the only option available.

Clearly, there is a need for a new approach to homeless children and young people who are not eligible for SAAP support without an accompanying adult (parent or carer).⁷²¹

10.23 There is added pressure on the SAAP system, as many young people who should be in the Out-of-Home Care (OOHC) system cannot access it due to inadequate assessment, and therefore remain in SAAP unnecessarily. Whilst SAAP services do a good job of bolstering the OOHC system, SAAP is not designed to meet the needs of this younger and more vulnerable target group.⁷²² Both ACWA and Network of Community Activities identified the need for refuges for this age group, with ACWA suggesting considering extending SAAP and *Reconnect* programs to include 9-14 year olds.⁷²³

10.24 The impact of homelessness on children and young people 9-14 years who have left home can be exacerbated by lack of income. In its submission, Southern Youth and Family Services comment on this issue:

Regardless of whether a young person aged 14 years should be out of home or not, the reality is there are many who are out of home, and to deny them adequate income support measures only pushes them into other lifestyles which are unacceptable eg crime such as stealing, prostitution etc. Income levels for young people are too low for them to be able to meet even their basic needs if not residing in the family home.⁷²⁴

10.25 According to the National Youth Commission *Inquiry into Youth Homelessness*, a youth protocol sets down who is responsible for the homeless young people under the age of 15. But, in practice, many 12-15 year olds do not receive priority attention from their state or territory care and protection services, and duly turn up in SAAP services. The only income support from Centrelink for young people aged under 15 years of age is Special Benefit, which is even more difficult to obtain than Youth Allowance or Newstart.⁷²⁵

10.26 The National Youth Commission Inquiry recommended that the emergency special benefit be payable to young people under the age of 15 years and their carers, until a determination of child protection issues and placement can be made and as well as decisions about the most appropriate place for that young person.⁷²⁶

⁷²¹ Submission no. 16, Council of Social Service of NSW, p. 8.

⁷²² See Submission no. 54, Southern Youth and Family Services, p.13.

⁷²³ Submission no. 17, Association of Child Welfare Agencies, p.4.

⁷²⁴ Submission no. 54, Southern Youth and Family Services, p.9.

⁷²⁵ National Youth Commission. 2008. *Australia's homeless youth: a report of the National Youth Commission inquiry into youth homelessness*, p. 305.

⁷²⁶ National Youth Commission. 2008. *Australia's homeless youth: a report of the National Youth Commission inquiry into youth homelessness*, p. 313.

Committee comment

10.27 Evidence to the Inquiry indicates that the existing systems are not adequately catering for children and young people 9-14 years who are homeless due to leaving home or out-of-home care. The Committee notes that the NSW Government has committed to implement many of the recommendations of the Wood Report which aims to enhance the ability of the child protection system to work with children and young people and their families, across the continuum from early intervention to out-of-home care. However, there is a need to ensure that there is an adequate focus on 9-14 year olds and that there is appropriate accommodation and support for those members of this age group who are currently accessing SAAP services.

RECOMMENDATION 28: The Committee recommends that pursuant to s 11(d) of the *Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998*, the Commissioner for Children and Young People consult with the Minister for Community Services, the Minister for Housing and the relevant Commonwealth Ministers about strategies to address the need for appropriate accommodation and support for children and young people under fifteen years who are currently accessing SAAP services.

Early intervention programs for young people at risk of homelessness

10.28 Some early intervention programs have been found to be particularly effective in preventing individual homelessness amongst children and young people. In particular evidence was provided about the *Reconnect* program, which is an early intervention program for children and young people aged 12-18 who are at risk of homelessness. This federal government initiative works to reconnect children and young people with their families, with school, work and with the community.⁷²⁷

10.29 The submission from Southern Youth and Family Services considered the *Reconnect* program to be a good model:

Reconnect funding from the Commonwealth also provides an excellent example of a model program for early intervention with young people. It provides funding to support families and young people to remain at home, or to re-engage them at home, or in education, training and community at the earliest opportunity. Services such as Reconnect could be increased and engaged at the assessment stage to reduce the need for court involvement.⁷²⁸

10.30 Program evaluations, sector studies and data analysis demonstrate that the program is meeting its key outcomes to improve the capacity and resilience of young people and their families and to increase the social and economic participation of young people. For example, in 2005–06:

- the program supported 5,040 young people;
- more than 90 per cent were in stable accommodation at the end of the intervention;

⁷²⁷ Submission no. 54, UnitingCare Burnside, p. 16.

⁷²⁸ Submission no. 54, Southern Youth and Family Services, p. 11-12.

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- 79 per cent of young people reported that their overall situation had improved; and
 - 69 per cent reported improvements in their family relationships.⁷²⁹
- 10.31 The number of homeless youth aged 12 to 18 (alone) decreased from 22,600 in 2001 to 17,891 in 2006, a decrease of 21 per cent.⁷³⁰ Chamberlain and MacKenzie in their analysis of census data conclude that early intervention accounts for most of the decrease in youth homelessness since 2001. Chamberlain and MacKenzie noted that early intervention included the establishment of the *Reconnect* program in 1999. By 2003, there were 98 Reconnect services across the country, most with two or three early intervention workers.⁷³¹
- 10.32 Chamberlain and Mackenzie also commented that since the late 1990s most state and territory governments have expended additional funds to increase the number of welfare staff in schools and to improve assistance to young people and families in crisis. In many schools welfare staff use early intervention strategies to facilitate family reconciliation. Many youth SAAP services also contribute to early intervention and there are significant state-funded early intervention programs in both Victoria and Queensland.⁷³²
- 10.33 *Reconnect* programs only cover the age range of 12 to 18 years. Several submissions commented about extending the program to include a younger age group.⁷³³ Other evidence to the inquiry,⁷³⁴ expressed reservations about extending this program to a younger age group.
- 10.34 The Commonwealth Government's White Paper on homelessness entitled *The Road Home: a National Approach to Reducing Homelessness* notes that the *Reconnect* program is an effective early intervention model. The White Paper includes a commitment to providing additional services for up to 9000 young people aged 12 to 18 years at risk of homelessness to remain connected with families, education, training and employment. The Committee strongly supports this expansion of services in the area of early intervention.

Committee comment

- 10.35 Evidence to the Inquiry indicates that the *Reconnect* program is a particularly effective early intervention program. There was some support in evidence to the Inquiry for extending the *Reconnect* program to work with children in late primary school. The Committee considers that consultations should be conducted with key stakeholders to assess whether *Reconnect* and other early intervention programs for young people at risk of homelessness should be extended to a younger age group or if other models would be more appropriate.

⁷²⁹ Commonwealth Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. 2008. *Which way home: a new approach to homelessness*, p. 38.

⁷³⁰ Chamberlain, C. & MacKenzie, D. 2006. 'Homelessness 2006' *Parity*, vol. 21, no. 8, p. 4.

⁷³¹ *ibid.*

⁷³² *ibid.*

⁷³³ Submission no. 17, Association of Child Welfare Agencies, p. 4; and Submission no. 76, UnitingCare Burnside, p.16.

⁷³⁴ Ms Louise Voigt, Barnardos Australia, Transcript of evidence, 17 March 2009, p. 39; and Mr Dev Mukherjee, Council of Social Service of NSW, Transcript of Evidence, 17 March 2002, p. 22.

RECOMMENDATION 29: The Committee recommends that, pursuant to s 11(d) of the *Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998*, the Commissioner for Children and Young People consult with key stakeholders to assess the appropriateness of extending early intervention programs for young people at risk of homelessness to a younger age group.

- 10.36 The Committee notes that, since the commencement of its Inquiry, initiatives at a Commonwealth level have provided a substantial focus on homelessness, with the release of *The Road Home: a National Approach to Reducing Homelessness*, and with increased funding through the *National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness*. *The Road Home* has set targets in a number of areas that are highly relevant to children and young people in the middle years, whilst enhanced funding has been committed at the Commonwealth level to expand early intervention programs for young people, including the *Reconnect* program.
- 10.37 The recently released *NSW Homelessness Action Plan*⁷³⁵ includes a focus on providing safe, appropriate long-term accommodation and support to people experiencing domestic and family violence, relationship and family breakdown. The Committee notes that the plan is designed to be flexible and that there is scope for new projects and ideas as well as for learning from each year of the plan to the next. Thus the Committee anticipates that the evidence provided in this Inquiry can be used to inform future planning for homelessness services for children, young people and their families at a state level.

⁷³⁵ NSW Government. 2009. *A way home: reducing homelessness in NSW*.

Chapter Eleven - Parenting Support and Early Intervention

Parents tend to be isolated when they have trouble with their children and do not speak to other people about their problems fearing being labelled as “bad parents.”⁷³⁶

Introduction

11.1 Parents and carers of children and young people in the middle years may face a range of issues for which they require support. The Parent Line telephone counselling service ranked the main issues of concern to parents of 9-14 year olds in New South Wales in the following order:

1. study/education (including bullying);
2. violent behaviour of child;
3. parent conflict (including separation issues);
4. adolescent developmental issues (including running away and sexuality);
5. general discipline and developmental issues.⁷³⁷

11.2 Other issues of concern to parents may include basic difficulties communicating with their children:

I think that some adults are really scared to talk to young people...What do you talk about to young people? It is okay to have conversations with a young person about themselves, about their own self-image, about what is going on for them and kids need to feel safe that it is okay to have those conversations.⁷³⁸

11.3 This chapter examines the need which parents may have for formal, structured support in raising their 9-14 year old children, and looks at a range of programs which are currently available. It then considers how early intervention when problems arise with children and young people in this age group can be an effective means of building resilience and ensuring that these problems do not have long term adverse impacts on children and their families.

Parenting programs and parenting support

11.4 The importance of giving more support to parents trying to cope with difficult early adolescent behaviour was raised by a range of organisations.⁷³⁹ Ku-ring-gai Council has experienced a high level of interest from parents of teenagers seeking more information to help them improve their parenting competence.⁷⁴⁰

⁷³⁶ Submission no. 57, Ku-ring-gai Council, p. 7.

⁷³⁷ Submission no. 26, Parent Line, p. 8.

This data is based on an analysis of calls to the service from 2001-2008 that were received from parents in NSW relating to children aged 9-14 years.

⁷³⁸ Ms Lee-Ann Emzin, Lismore City Council, Transcript of evidence, 6 August 2008, p. 21.

⁷³⁹ Submission no. 57, Ku-Ring-Gai Council, p. 7;

Mr Roberto Kenk, Ballina Shire Council, Transcript of evidence, 6 August, p. 18.

⁷⁴⁰ Submission no. 57, Ku-ring-gai Council, p. 7.

- 11.5 In some circumstances parents lack the skills required to assist their children, a particular cause for concern in families which are already seriously disadvantaged:
In terms of families that come from a great deal of disadvantage, there is such a gap between the adults and the children now because the children are so knowledgeable and the parents feel they do not have a lot to offer. So that skills gap has an impact on those relationships and the seeking out of advice and support.⁷⁴¹
- 11.6 Parenting programs are particularly required for parents of children and young people who are eight years and over. The Committee heard evidence that most parents are frightened of the changes brought about by adolescence:
They go from having a child who will generally follow directions to suddenly having a teenager who will say no and dig in their heels ... We need something for the age group eight to 16 or 24, depending on the definition of a young person. Most parents lap up the information. Most parents—even those struggling with mental health or drug and alcohol issues—want the best for their young people.⁷⁴²
- 11.7 Parenting education has great potential to give much needed help to parents who have particular difficulties, especially young parents, single parents and parents of children with behavioural problems.
- 11.8 Single parents are also likely to face specific parenting challenges. Barnardos Australia informed the Committee that many parents in its programs feel that they have no control and influence over their own children, for example children taking no notice of curfew times. A significant percentage of their clients come from single female headed families and lack positive male role models, at a critical time for boys in the 9-14 age group in developing their identity and acceptable behaviour.⁷⁴³
- 11.9 Parents of children with behavioural problems are also likely to benefit from parenting education and support.⁷⁴⁴ The submission from Lake Macquarie Adolescent Support (L.M.A.S.) identified that parenting styles employed by the parents of their students with special education needs⁷⁴⁵ have a significant impact on the children's needs and the level of assistance they require from teachers.⁷⁴⁶
- 11.10 Parents from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds may face particular parenting issues, such as intergenerational conflict when young people raised in Australia reject the traditional cultural values of their parents.⁷⁴⁷ Parents in these circumstances may feel powerless, especially as their children reach adolescence. Helping parents explore constructive ways to manage conflicting values within the family is key focus for community support services.
- 11.11 The need for parenting support for Indigenous families was raised in the submission from BoysTown, which provides national telephone counselling for the 5.38 million Australian children and young people between the ages of 5 and 25 years through Kids Helpline. According to the Boystown submission:

⁷⁴¹ Ms Frances Trimboli, YWCA, Transcript of evidence, 6 August 2008, p. 24.

⁷⁴² Ms Julie Robinson, Marrickville Youth Resource Centre, Transcript of evidence, 11 June 2008, p. 55.

⁷⁴³ Submission no. 21, Barnardos Australia, p. 3.

⁷⁴⁴ Wood C. & Davidson J. 2003 'Helping families cope', *Family Matters*, no. 65, Australian Institute of Family Studies.

⁷⁴⁵ In relation to emotional and behavioural problems.

⁷⁴⁶ Submission no. 59, Lake Macquarie Adolescent Support, p. 5.

⁷⁴⁷ Submission no. 62, Immigrant Women's Speakout Association, p. 16.

...calls from Indigenous children in NSW highlight the need for parent support and access to services to improve the quality of life for children in these communities. It is essential that mainstream services such as Parentline provide culturally appropriate health, counselling and parenting support. The lack of telecommunication and online infrastructure is a barrier to access these support services for parents as well as young people in rural and remote communities in NSW.⁷⁴⁸

11.12 Some of the evidence given to the Inquiry identified the type of issues that could be addressed in parenting programs. For example, Ku-ring-gai Council's submission expressed the view that parent education could usefully cover topics such as youth services, teenage development, parenting workshops, statistics on young people and empowerment of parents.⁷⁴⁹

11.13 Ms Julie Robinson of the Marrickville Youth Resource Centre also commented on the content of parenting programs:

...The programs I have been involved in have also looked at how do you survive having an adolescent, because it is challenging. Also, how do you communicate to the adolescent? Sometimes what happens with some parents is that they feel like they suddenly do not know what to say, and we talk to them about just asking questions.

...It is about talking to parents about how do you survive, how do you keep your sanity, how do you put things in place, because I think building resilience comes also from parents at times.⁷⁵⁰

11.14 Specific content may be required in parenting programs for parents from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Mr Jorge Aroche works with people who have been exposed to torture and trauma. He explained that, while parents are the primary source of support for refugee children, they have also been affected by trauma and torture, and are also dealing with the difficult process of linking into a new society. He considered that:

...programs that can assist parents to understand some of the concepts, which we often take for granted and on which our society and educational system are based, are really important. Some of the assumptions are quite different, and therefore that often translates into problems in supporting kids in the best way, and the best ways to discipline kids and to help in what is a very difficult transition process.⁷⁵¹

11.15 Parent education can provide the opportunity for parents from culturally and linguistically diverse communities to exchange views about the difficulties they encounter raising children in their new country, and help prepare them for the new challenge of communicating with adolescents well before that stage occurs.⁷⁵²

11.16 Parenting groups and programs provide a vital opportunity to connect with other parents:

... If you are not connected into a school environment or you do not have friends who have teenagers around the same age as your own kids, you can kind of feel a bit isolated, so that was one of the things that they talked about; having someone else just

⁷⁴⁸ Submission no. 65, BoysTown, p. 5.

⁷⁴⁹ Submission no. 57, Ku-ring-gai Council, p. 7.

⁷⁵⁰ Ms Julie Robinson, Marrickville Youth Resource Centre, Transcript of evidence, 11 June 2008, p. 59.

⁷⁵¹ Mr Jorge Aroche, STARTTS, Transcript of evidence, 8 August 2008, p. 18.

⁷⁵² See, e.g., Ms Vivienne Martin, Marrickville South Interagency, Transcript of evidence, 11 June 2008, p. 59.

to talk about "Hey, that is actually normal. What my child is doing is normal" was really quite affirming...⁷⁵³

- 11.17 The Committee notes that parenting programs may also provide an opportunity to educate parents about potential risk and protective factors. For example, Youthsafe's submission referred to the need for parents to undertake boundary setting, be involved when difficult decisions have to be made, and to help young people organise their time and priorities, in relation to injury prevention.⁷⁵⁴ These parenting strategies may also be effective in countering risks and strengthening protective factors in other facets of a child or young person's life.

Existing Programs

- 11.18 Strategies for supporting parents have to date largely consisted of parenting courses, parent help-lines and more intensive early intervention for families identified as at risk. In the main, these approaches are directed towards parents of young children, and there are few supports specifically designed to assist parents through their children's adolescence.⁷⁵⁵

- 11.19 Evidence to the Inquiry from Professor Matthew Sanders identified that the transition to high school period provides an opportunity to engage parents:

Having said that, I think there is clear evidence that there is another window of opportunity in engagement for parents around promoting good healthy, positive relationships with their children, and it is in the transition to the adolescent years. You can have parents who have been parenting their children well, with no major difficulties, and still go into a tailspin at the prospect of puberty and moving into adolescence, and there is another spike in interest by parents in accessing parenting programs. That window closes rapidly after probably the first or second term of high school.⁷⁵⁶

- 11.20 Information about existing parenting programs and support such as *Teen Triple P* and Parent Line, was provided to the Committee. Parent Line has operated in New South Wales since 1994, operated by Centacare Sydney and funded by the NSW Department of Community Services. It is staffed by skilled, professionally qualified counsellors and operates on a 24-hour 7 days per week basis.⁷⁵⁷

- 11.21 Some non-government organisations provide parenting support. For example, Barnardos Australia has trialled parenting groups for families with children in the 9-14 age group. Responses received from participants demonstrated the beneficial impact of parent education on parent/child relationships:

The feedback we received from both parents and co-facilitators indicates that the program is very effective. The material offers constructive parenting support through hints, tips and ideas and enables parents to feel more confident about their parenting skills and the changes they can implement. It develops a sense of empathy between parents and their teenagers and provides insight and understanding into adolescent

⁷⁵³ Ms Julie Ann Robinson, Marrickville Youth Resource Centre, Transcript of evidence, 11 June 2008, p. 59.

⁷⁵⁴ Submission no. 44, Youthsafe p. 6.

⁷⁵⁵ Commonwealth Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. 2003. *I'm looking at the future: evaluation report of reconnect - final report*.

⁷⁵⁶ Professor Matthew Sanders, Parenting and Family Support Centre, University of Queensland, Transcript of evidence 17 March 2009, p. 34.

⁷⁵⁷ Submission no. 26, Parent Line p. 6.

behaviour. It also guides parents to reflect on their own behaviour and the impact this has on their relationships and parenting styles.⁷⁵⁸

- 11.22 In relation to particular parenting programs, the Committee received most evidence about the *Triple P* program. According to the NSW Department of Community Services, the *Triple P* program for 3-8 year olds is being rolled out across New South Wales as part of an election commitment by the government.⁷⁵⁹
- 11.23 The *Teen Triple P* program is an extension of the *Triple P* program, developed as a multilevel system of intervention. When delivered as a transition to high school program, *Teen Triple P* would have a media and communications strategy, brief with tip sheets and videos that parents could access to do with common developmental, behavioural and emotional issues of teenagers.⁷⁶⁰
- 11.24 According to Professor Sanders, there is a more intensive group and individual program where the parenting difficulties experienced are more complex. The most intensive form of intervention would be to families where parenting problems are complicated by other forms of adversity, such as depression and other mental health problems in the parent, drug and alcohol problems, marital discord, or relationship breakdowns. The level of intensity of the intervention is related to the level of need that that family has, as well as their interest and capacity to engage in what is being offered.⁷⁶¹

Evidence for 0-12 years

- 11.25 The effectiveness of parenting programs was discussed in evidence to the Inquiry. In particular, substantial evidence is available in relation to the effectiveness of the *Triple P* program. Associate Professor Alan Ralph of the Parenting and Family Support Centre, provided a short summary of the types of outcomes that have been achieved through *Triple P* programs for the parents of 0-12 year olds:
- significant decreases in disruptive child behaviour difficulties;
 - significant improvements in parenting practices;
 - improvements on measures of parental adjustment such as low parenting self-efficacy, depression, stress and marital conflict, as well decreasing couple conflict, including for parents going through divorce;
 - reducing child problems for parents at risk of child maltreatment,
 - reducing in childhood overweight and obesity; and
 - reducing child behaviour problems and increase parenting competence in a range of cultural contexts, including Hong Kong, Japan, Germany, Switzerland, and New Zealand.⁷⁶²

⁷⁵⁸ Submission no. 21, Barnardos Australia, p. 3.

⁷⁵⁹ See Mr Paul Murphy, NSW Department of Community Services, Transcript of evidence, 2 July 2009, p. 30.

⁷⁶⁰ Professor Matthew Sanders, Parenting and Family Support Centre, University of Queensland, Transcript of evidence, 17 March 2009, p. 34.

⁷⁶¹ Professor Matthew Sanders, Parenting and Family Support Centre, University of Queensland, Transcript of evidence, 17 March 2009, p. 34.

⁷⁶² Parenting and Family Support Centre, University of Queensland, Questions answered after hearing, 17 March 2009, p. 4.

11.26 An economic evaluation has been conducted of the *Triple P* program, for parents of children up to the age of 12. Professor Sanders advised the Committee that the cost offsets are enormous when effective parenting programs are implemented:

...you need to reduce one problem by only 1.5 per cent, which is a conduct disorder, and the whole multilevel system is paid for. The cost offsets are enormous when effective parenting programs are implemented.

Stephen Scott from the London Institute of Psychiatry estimated... that the costs of a child developing a serious antisocial behaviour problem or conduct disorder are 10 times greater to government - that is, the direct costs - than they would be for a child without such a disorder. We are talking about an investment in parenting that could lead to cost offsets to government of multiple millions of dollars. The economic analyses have been done.⁷⁶³

Evidence for teen programs

11.27 Although there has been much less research in the area of teen parenting programs compared to parenting programs for parents of younger children, there are nonetheless a number of programs that have been trialled and shown to be effective. Examples given to the Committee by Professor Sanders are the *Adolescent Transitions Program* at the University of Oregon, and the *Strengthening Families Program* at the University of Iowa. There are also other programs which deal with complex problems where children and young people have become involved in the juvenile justice system.⁷⁶⁴

11.28 Associate Professor Ralph identified that developments in prevention research suggest that a single well-designed intervention targeting risk factors and strengthening protective factors will significantly reduce the prevalence of a number of negative outcomes, particularly if they can be addressed earlier in adolescent development, such as the transition to high school. He noted that decreases in the occurrence of modifiable risk factors such as inconsistent parenting; harsh punishment; poor communication; inadequate parental monitoring and high family stress have been shown to be linked to less association with deviant peers, less antisocial behaviour, and less substance abuse.⁷⁶⁵

11.29 Associate Professor Alan Ralph of the Parenting and Family Support Centre also commented on the importance of evaluating programs such as *Teen Triple P*:

The gathering of data to confirm the benefits of adopting a program such as Teen Triple P is critical to the decision-making that should accompany discussions about whether to continue or discontinue such a program. It is therefore strongly recommended that an evaluation component be built in to the adoption of a program such as Teen Triple P.⁷⁶⁶

Effectiveness of Triple P for Teens

11.30 Professor Sanders informed the Committee that - consistent with other evidence relating to the outcomes with *Triple P* - the outcomes of the teen version are that when parents learn to parent more positively, there are fewer behavioural and emotional difficulties with their children, and there is less coercive parenting taking

⁷⁶³ Professor Matthew Sanders, Parenting and Family Support Centre, University of Queensland, Transcript of evidence, 17 March 2009, p. 37.

⁷⁶⁴ *ibid.*, p. 36.

⁷⁶⁵ Parenting and Family Support Centre, University of Queensland, Questions answered after hearing, 17 March 2009, p. 1.

⁷⁶⁶ *ibid.*, p. 3.

place in the home. Thus, there is less day-to-day conflict between parent and adolescent. There is also some evidence relating to improved mental health outcomes in the parent, particularly in the area of stress and depression.⁷⁶⁷

11.31 Professor Sanders also noted that the other important piece of relevant evidence relates to the effects of parenting programs on parents' capacity to work. Interventions that have included both parents of teenagers and parents of young children have shown that if working parents are able to leave for work without having had significant conflict with a child about getting up, getting out and getting organised, they are significantly less likely to have a conflict interaction in the workplace.⁷⁶⁸

11.32 A recent study with teachers as parents has demonstrated that when parents learn to parent positively their job satisfaction increases, and the level of occupational stress and burnout decreases. In other words, delivering *Triple P* can operate as an effective work-life balance strategy.⁷⁶⁹

Lack of programs for parents of this age group

11.33 Teen parenting programs are much less widely available than parenting programs for the parents of younger children. Professor Sanders suggested to the Committee that this is partly based on a set of assumptions relating to where investment in parenting is likely to lead to the greatest benefit to children, that being the early years.⁷⁷⁰

Committee comment

11.34 The Committee notes that the transition to adolescent years provides another window of opportunity to engage parents about promoting good healthy, positive relationships with their children. However, unlike programs for parents of younger children, teen or 'tween' parenting programs are not widely available. There is a substantial body of evidence about the effectiveness of parenting programs for parents of 0-12 year olds, and a body of evidence is starting to develop in relation to the effectiveness of teen parenting programs in improving a range of outcomes for both young people and their parents.

11.35 From the evidence provided, the Committee considers that well-designed parenting programs have an enormous potential to impact on the health and wellbeing of children and young people. It is important, however, to continue to build the evidence base about teen parenting programs through research and evaluation and to assess the most appropriate approaches for parenting interventions for different groups of parents, such as parents from low-socio-economic backgrounds.

11.36 The Committee notes that parenting programs are a component of the *Brighter Futures* program for children 0-8 and considers that parenting programs could potentially be incorporated into a *Better Futures*-type program for 9-14 year olds.

<p>RECOMMENDATION 30: The Committee recommends that, pursuant to s 11(d) of the <i>Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998</i>, the</p>
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⁷⁶⁷ Professor Mathew Sanders, Parenting and Family Support Centre, University of Queensland, Transcript of evidence, 17 March 2009, p. 35.

⁷⁶⁸ *ibid.*, p. 35.

⁷⁶⁹ *ibid.*, p. 35.

⁷⁷⁰ *ibid.*, p. 34.

Commissioner for Children and Young People consult with the Minister for Community Services about conducting a review of parenting programs/interventions for parents of teenagers, with a view to identifying and making available a range of programs for parents and carers of 9-14 year olds.

RECOMMENDATION 31: The Committee recommends that, pursuant to s 11(d) of the *Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998*, the Commissioner for Children and Young People consult with the Minister for Community Services about the possibility of including parenting programs as a core component of a *Brighter Futures*-type program for children and young people 9-14 years.

Early intervention

Peer Support

11.37 A number of submissions and other evidence to the Inquiry discussed peer support and mentoring programs. The term 'peer support' was often used to refer to older children and young people offering support to their younger peers. 'Mentoring' generally referred to adults giving guidance to children and young people.

Rationale

11.38 School peer groups can be a powerful protective factor for young people. Over 96 per cent of young people believe that being connected to peers is an important protective factor in their own lives, and that friendships and socialising are the most important factors in enjoying their time at school. This suggests that, for young people who are alienated from their families, peer connectedness may be the most important protective factor.⁷⁷¹

11.39 The resilience literature has examined friendships and peer relationships in more depth. Feeling 'connected' is one factor shown to be prevalent amongst resilient students. Research has found that these students were not necessarily the most popular, but were good at developing and maintaining a few very close friends. Research has also found that informal relationships are the most significant ones in developing resilience: interactions with peers, teachers, relatives and other important adults in students' lives support the development of resilient characteristics.⁷⁷²

Disability

11.40 Peer support may be particularly relevant to particular groups of children and young people, including those with a disability. Children and young people with a disability have the same basic needs to belong, to have friendships, to grow independence and to be valued. While they often need additional support to meet those needs, ideally some of that support should be provided by peers.⁷⁷³ This is to avoid the

⁷⁷¹ Submission no. 5, Peer Support Australia, p. 8.

⁷⁷² Submission no. 5, Peer Support Australia, pp. 7-8.

⁷⁷³ Ms Belinda Epstein-Frisch, Institute for Family Advocacy and Leadership Development, Transcript of evidence, 11 June 2008, p. 23.

social isolation which can occur at school if a young person with a disability has to rely on the assistance of an adult carer:

We have become very used to using an adult as support and as the teacher's aide and they provide an important role for many children. Sometimes they can also add a barrier to the real participation of children and young people because at that age if you have an adult velcroed to your side it can isolate you in the community. There are lots of examples of proper support for peer processes that bring other children from the class or older children in the school system to build a school community where the child with a disability is more supported.⁷⁷⁴

11.41 In its submission, the NSW Government similarly emphasised the importance of positive support networks for 9-14 year olds:

The time of change during the target age group can be more profound socially for children with a disability. The need for both belonging and independence can strain interpersonal relationships and lead to children with disabilities being marginalised. Positive support is important as well as relationship guidance to help navigate this period.⁷⁷⁵

11.42 The Committee notes that the NSW Department of Ageing Disability and Homecare has allocated funding to three demonstration projects to establish peer support networks for children and young people with a disability including those with autism. These projects will focus on building social skills for effective interaction.⁷⁷⁶

11.43 The middle years is a time when children and young people are gaining increased independence from their parents, and when peers correspondingly become very important. Children and young people with a disability may experience fewer opportunities to interact with peers due to difficulties accessing age-appropriate sport and recreational activities, as is discussed in Chapter 3. In some cases there may be barriers to interacting with peers due to the presence of an adult carer.

11.44 Thus the Committee considers that the provision of different models of peer support for children and young people 9-14 years with a disability should be strongly encouraged. The Committee notes that it has recommended in Chapter 3 that the NSW Department of Ageing, Disability and Homecare continue to work with other government departments to develop appropriate new service models for children and young people 9-14 years with a disability.

RECOMMENDATION 32: The Committee recommends, that pursuant to s 11(d) of the *Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998*, the Commissioner for Children and Young People consult with the Minister for Ageing, Disability and Homecare on evaluating its demonstration projects establishing peer support networks for children and young people with a disability.

⁷⁷⁴ Ms Belinda Epstein Frisch, Institute for Family Advocacy and Leadership Development, Transcript of evidence, 11 June 2008, p. 24.

⁷⁷⁵ NSW Government, Submission no. 87, p. 52.

⁷⁷⁶ *ibid.*

Effectiveness of programs

- 11.45 Some peer support programs have been positively evaluated. Evidence presented to the Committee indicates that participation in the *Peer Support Program*, developed by Peer Support Australia and funded over time within New South Wales by the NSW Department of Health, improved students' feelings about themselves, their ability to cope with pressure, their relationships with their peers and changed their attitudes towards bullying. A longitudinal study by the University of Western Sydney, published in 2003, assessed the efficacy of the secondary schools *Peer Support Program*, and the development of the key concepts espoused by Peer Support Australia. This research indicated that the *Peer Support Program* has positive long term benefits for both students and school communities.⁷⁷⁷
- 11.46 This research involved 2,300 secondary students across New South Wales during 2001-2002. Some of the findings demonstrated that the *Peer Support Program*:
- assists students to successfully negotiate transition from primary to secondary school;
 - improves relationships with others - peers and teachers; and
 - successfully changes attitudes toward bullying behaviours.⁷⁷⁸
- 11.47 Peer Support Australia suggests that these results indicate, in particular, the value of peer support as a means of countering aggressive behaviour, decelerating anger arousal and reducing bullying in schools.⁷⁷⁹

Examples of peer support programs

- 11.48 A number of examples of programs utilising peer support both within and outside of schools were provided to the Committee. Peer support is used in public schools as part of the NSW Department of Education and Training (DET) *Middle Years Strategy*. Ms Robyn McKerihan of DET told the Committee that the peer support of younger students by more senior students is a key factor for success:

Through the middle years strategy there is a very strong mentoring program where students from SRCs in their partner high school will go in and work very closely with years 5 and 6 students in their partner primary schools to provide them with the assurance that when they make that transition from primary school to high school all those horrible things they have heard along the way will not happen to them. So the mentoring support for 9 to 14—our experience shows that support by peers, older peers, is very often much more successful than support from elsewhere.⁷⁸⁰

- 11.49 The *Peer Support Program* is operated by Peer Support Australia in over 1,400 primary and secondary schools in New South Wales, Australian Capital Territory, Queensland and Tasmania.⁷⁸¹ Peer Support Australia provides:
- training and professional development for teachers and parents;
 - student leadership training and resources; and

⁷⁷⁷ Submission no. 5, Peer Support Australia, p. 14.

⁷⁷⁸ *ibid.*

⁷⁷⁹ *ibid.*

⁷⁸⁰ Ms Robyn McKerihan, NSW Department of Education and Training, Transcript of evidence, 2 July 2008, p.35.

⁷⁸¹ Peer Support Australia website, *Peer Support Program, Infosheet*.

- learning modules for students focusing on orientation, relationships, optimism, resilience, anti-bullying and values.⁷⁸²
- 11.50 One of the distinctive features of the *Peer Support Program* is that it is an early intervention and prevention program which provides learning modules linked to various components of the curriculum. It promotes learning which is peer-led, skills-based and experiential and which can be targeted to both children and young people.
- 11.51 In primary schools, peer groups are facilitated by two Year 6 students with small multi-age groups from Kindergarten to Year 5. In secondary schools, the traditional approach is for Year 10 students to facilitate small groups for Year 7, to support them through their transition phase to secondary school. Both primary and secondary students are trained as peer leaders through a two-day leadership training program. Peer leaders work with students for approximately 30 minutes per week for eight sessions using *Peer Support Australia* modules.⁷⁸³
- 11.52 Peer support programs are used in many New South Wales schools to build resilience. A student representative of Ashbury Public School described for the Committee how the program works at his school:
- We have a number of programs... designed specifically for building up resilience in children. First and foremost, we have the peer support program. This is run by year 6 students. The peer support program teaches children how to deal with social and family problems -for example, how to deal with bullying, not only as a victim but also as a witness. The peer support program is also used to build up relations between students of different ages, kindergarten to year 6.⁷⁸⁴
- 11.53 Peer support may also take the form of 'school mediation' between students themselves. At Ashbury Public School, peer mediation is "where Year 5 students sort out minor problems in the playground."⁷⁸⁵
- 11.54 Peer support programs can also be provided by organisations such as youth centres and community groups. The Committee heard that *Kyogle Youth Ventures*, a program in which high school students mentor senior primary school students, came about in the wake of a tragic car accident in which three high school students were killed:
- Some people who were mentors in that project were young people at risk who have gone on to really good professions and given them confidence to do that. Also, they target other young people at risk in primary school. They are all at-risk young people, but through the guidance and through the structured program they can work together, giving confidence to the older at-risk, and giving skills to the younger.⁷⁸⁶
- 11.55 Young people with behaviour issues are selected to take part in the program, which includes a youth camp with a program of rigorous physical activities. The program clearly has an important role to play in supporting young people in the local community, and in helping parents and schools to manage difficult behaviour issues occurring in the adolescent years:
- ...parents report that children who have had incredible social problems, after that time have much more esteem. That is the primary school aged children. They have a lot

⁷⁸² Peer Support Australia website.

⁷⁸³ Submission no. 5, Peer Support Australia, p.11.

⁷⁸⁴ Mr L. M., Ashbury Public School, Transcript of evidence, 2 July 2008, p. 3.

⁷⁸⁵ Submission no. 92, Ashbury Public School, p. 5.

⁷⁸⁶ Ms Margo Rutledge, Kyogle Council, Transcript of evidence, 5 August 2008, pp. 7-8.

more focus and a lot more self-restraint in a way. They have also teamed up with high school senior- or even middle-year high school students. So when they go to the high school they already know people, people who they can look up to. It works very well.⁷⁸⁷

11.56 Peer Support is also fundamental to the way in which the scouting movement operates. Over the past 100 years the scouting movement in Australia has taught millions of young people resourcefulness, self-reliance, leadership, decision making and concern for their community and environment through peer-to-peer learning and support. There are 60,000 members Australia-wide between the ages of six and 26, including 17,000 children and young people in New South Wales.⁷⁸⁸

11.57 Peer support lies at the heart of the Scouts Australia leadership and teamwork programs. As Mr Grant de Fries, Chief Commissioner, Scouts Australia, NSW explained to the Committee:

The peer support relates to the fact that Scouts teach other Scouts their skills. The program is graded, particularly in this age group, in three different levels. It is a requirement that the people in the top two levels teach the people in the lower levels the skills they have learnt themselves. These are their peers and this is how they are taught.⁷⁸⁹

11.58 The Scouts Australia approach to youth development is particularly relevant to 9-14 year olds, because it provides peer-to-peer support across the transition from childhood to young adulthood, through its Cubs (ages 7-10) and Scouts (10-15 years) programs. Ms Susan Metcalf of Scouts Australia NSW pointed out that:

...one of the things that Scouts provides that is unique is an opportunity for mixed-age children to work together outside the school environment, so they are not in an age group team, they are not in an under-14s or an under 10s. They are in a group potentially of children between 8 and 11 and 10 and 15. That not only bridges appropriate age groups but also goes across the transition from primary to high school. It means that children have connections in their community and support outside their school environment across that transition.⁷⁹⁰

11.59 Opportunities for young people to learn and develop socially as well as spiritually through peer support activities are often available through churches, across the denominations. In its submission to the Inquiry, Singleton Seventh Day Adventist Church noted that its *Pathfinders* program exposed children and young people to a range of fun and educational activities, similar to those provided by the scouting movement:

An important aspect of Pathfinders is that of peer mentoring. Peer mentoring involves older group members assisting younger members with issues and decisions which are important to them. Studies have shown that mentoring is a successful and positive way to help young people in society.⁷⁹¹

Funding

11.60 Non-government organisations struggle to obtain the resources to provide and sustain worthwhile out of school activities such as peer support programs for young people. *Kyogle Youth Ventures* is an example of a youth program which owes its

⁷⁸⁷ Ms Margo Rutledge, Kyogle Council, Transcript of evidence, 5 August 2008, pp. 7-8.

⁷⁸⁸ Mr Grant de Fries, Scouts Australia, Transcript of evidence, 11 June 2008, p. 44.

⁷⁸⁹ *ibid.*, p. 45.

⁷⁹⁰ Ms Susan Metcalf, Scouts Australia, Transcript of evidence, 11 June 2008 p. 45.

⁷⁹¹ Submission no. 55, Singleton Seventh Day Adventist Church, p. 8.

existence to dedicated local community effort, and a small amount of formal support, such as from various levels of government. Margo Rutledge of Kyogle Council told the Committee that:

Every year that group is struggling for money. They get \$1,000 from council, they hold lamington stalls on the street, they have people knitting beanies. They really struggle to keep that program going, though it is recognised as a very valuable program that has been going for about five years. But they cannot get any funding that has longevity.⁷⁹²

11.61 Evidence to the Inquiry indicates that well-designed programs providing peer support can be effective and can have a range of positive outcomes. For example the *Peer Support Program* assists students to successfully negotiate transition from primary to secondary school, improves relationships with others - peers and teachers; and successfully changes attitudes toward bullying behaviours. The Committee considers that peer support programs for children 9-14 years should form an essential part of early intervention programs developed for this age group.

Mentoring programs

11.62 There are evaluations of individual mentoring programs that indicate that well-designed mentoring programs can have an impact on outcomes for children and young people, such as use of illegal drugs or alcohol and truancy.⁷⁹³ Research, however, points to the fact that the structures and processes implemented to deliver mentoring have a significant impact on the quality of outcomes achieved.⁷⁹⁴

11.63 The rationale for mentoring of school students at risk derives from the research on the importance of the development of a sense of connectedness and resilience in maintaining adolescent wellbeing, which in turn appears to be a strong indicator of personal and academic success. There is a significant body of research that demonstrates the importance of connectedness between young people and at least one person.⁷⁹⁵ For example, Hamilton and Darling (1989) found that 82 per cent of the adolescents in their study identified at least one unrelated adult as an important person in their lives. This attachment is important, because adolescence is a time when young people begin to seek to differentiate themselves from their parents, and so are more open to the influence of others.⁷⁹⁶

11.64 Mentors ideally bring children and young people the opportunity to observe and practice other ways of relating to adults than their family or school has previously provided. Positive relationships are powerful in assisting in the development of qualities such as a positive outlook, high self-esteem, strong problem-solving skills and a sense of humour.⁷⁹⁷

11.65 In a seminal longitudinal study into youth resilience, Werner and Smith (1982) found that youth who showed an ability to locate an adult, in addition to their parents, who

⁷⁹² Ms Margo Rutledge, Kyogle Council, Transcript of evidence, 5 August 2008, p. 7.

⁷⁹³ Grossman, J. 1998. 'Does mentoring work? An impact study of the Big Brothers, Big Sisters Program', *Evaluation Review*, vol. 22, no. 3, pp. 403-426.

⁷⁹⁴ NSW Department of Education and Training. 2007. *Evaluation of the plan-it youth program*, report prepared by Erebus International, Sydney, p. 26.

⁷⁹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 21.

⁷⁹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 21.

⁷⁹⁷ NSW Department of Education and Training. 2007. *Evaluation of the plan-it youth program*, report prepared by Erebus International, Sydney, p. 21.

could help them cope with the world, were much better equipped to successfully overcome adversity.⁷⁹⁸

- 11.66 Programs which include mentoring are particularly desirable for 9-14 year olds and their parents, as it is at this time that inappropriate behaviour begins to be an issue. The Committee was told that mentoring should be available in order to support the many sole parents who often find it difficult to deal with the inappropriate behaviour issues arising for boys and girls in this age group.⁷⁹⁹
- 11.67 The important contribution mentoring can make to young people's education was acknowledged in submissions by major non-government welfare organisations. UnitingCare Burnside noted the vital role mentors can play in the lives of children and young people who are at risk of disengaging from school, by providing an advocacy and mediation role on behalf of students between parents and teachers.⁸⁰⁰ Mission Australia identified that programs such as *Big Brothers Big Sisters* are of benefit to complement services such as their *Adolescent and Family Counselling Program*.⁸⁰¹ As the Association for Children's Welfare Agencies (ACWA) pointed out:
- It is particularly important for children who experience social isolation due to disability, mental illness, developmental issues, or other factors, to have access to an adult they can trust and look up to, if such role model figure is not available within their natural environment.⁸⁰²

Need for Role Models

- 11.68 Mentoring can occur formally through mentoring programs or informally through relationships with other people. Young people need guidance in order to mature into responsible adjusted adults. They need role models to look up to, and heroes, both real and fictional, in whose footsteps they wish to follow.⁸⁰³
- 11.69 The Committee heard from young people themselves about their interest in being guided by role models in the wider community. Having opportunities to listen to motivational speakers headed the list of recommendations by students of St Francis de Sales Primary School, Woollooware:
- Motivational speakers are used widely in the corporate world to achieve results. We also found they are commonly used amongst athletes to inspire success. Although these companies and athletes are dealing with different issues to those we have highlighted, they are trying to achieve the common goal of resilience and persistence to achieve or overcome a great challenge. From our research we have discovered that motivational speakers create a better understanding among students by sharing experiences that can be compared to those commonly experienced by young children. They also encourage children to develop positive character traits by motivating them to set high standards for themselves by detailing how they overcome difficulties in their lives.⁸⁰⁴

⁷⁹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 21.

See also Werner, E.E., & Smith, R.S. 1982. *Vulnerable but invincible: a longitudinal study of resilient children and youth*, New York, McGraw-Hill.

⁷⁹⁹ Noeline Olive, Casino Neighbourhood Centre, Transcript of evidence, 5 August 2008, p. 4.

⁸⁰⁰ Submission no. 76, UnitingCare Burnside, p.18.

⁸⁰¹ Submission no. 83, Mission Australia, p. 2.

⁸⁰² Submission no 17, Association for Children's Welfare Agencies (ACWA), p. 4.

⁸⁰³ *ibid.*, p. 3.

⁸⁰⁴ Miss Y, St Francis de Sales Primary School, Transcript of evidence, 2 July 2008, p. 20.

Examples of mentoring programs

- 11.70 Mentoring programs have been initiated by Commonwealth, state and local government, non-government organisations and the private sector, and can be implemented in different settings such as school and out of school hours care. At a state government level, for example, DET has a variety of mentoring programs that are being implemented in schools.
- 11.71 The *Plan-It Youth Community Mentoring Program* (Plan-It Youth) is a school-based program for students who are potential early school leavers. The program links community members with young people who may need extra support to continue at school, or to prepare for transition from school to work or further education.⁸⁰⁵ *Plan-It Youth* was initiated as a pilot program by the Dusseldorp Skills Forum in some secondary schools in 1999. DET assumed funding responsibility in 2002, and the program now operates in 77 schools in eight of the 10 DET regions across New South Wales.⁸⁰⁶
- 11.72 Various mentoring programs for smoother transition to high school have been developed. The submission from Waverley Council outlined a number of such programs:
- One excellent program at Millers Point Youth Service had Lend Lease workers teamed with year 6 primary school students soon going to Sydney Secondary College to assist with their transition to high school. Another developed at Pagewood OOSH, run by Botany Bay Council, has high school students, who were former OOSH participants, return to the service on set days to assist staff with running activities. They also are given encouragement to talk of their high school experience with the older OOSH children. AASC are working with Better Futures and two high schools to have their supervisor training occur in one of their schools for appropriate students over 16 in 2008.⁸⁰⁷
- 11.73 Evidence to the Committee showed that mentoring relationships can develop in programs run by community organisations, even though they are not mentoring programs as such. The Marrickville South Interagency *8-12 school holiday program* provides an example:
- This program has a positive impact on the community of offering children and families an alternative to spending time on the streets and from boredom at home and providing activities that engage them and are fun. The program also helps them learn how to share, respect one another and adults, honour boundaries and guidelines, through fun activities and games and interaction with young adult volunteers and community service workers. It is often a mentor relationship that is one of the most vital parts of growing up. There was evidence of these types of relationships throughout the week, in particular between the girls and some of the young women volunteers.⁸⁰⁸
- 11.74 One of the well-known best practice programs is *Big Brothers Big Sisters*, provided in New South Wales through YWCA NSW. This is a nationally accredited program providing children and young people with positive adult role models who offer support

⁸⁰⁵ NSW Department of Education and Training. 2007. *Evaluation of the plan-it youth program*, report prepared by Erebus International, Sydney, p. 6.

⁸⁰⁶ *ibid.*

⁸⁰⁷ Submission no. 53, Waverley Council, p. 4.

See also Submission no. 10a, Port Stephens Council, p. 3, for mentoring programs in the Port Stephens region.

⁸⁰⁸ Submission no. 30, Marrickville South Interagency, p. 4.

and friendship, achieved through a trusting relationship with a professionally trained adult volunteer.⁸⁰⁹

- 11.75 Police and Community Youth Clubs (PCYCs) also provide mentoring to young people. The submission from Newcastle PCYC described the role which mentoring programs may play when there are communications difficulties between parents and their children:

...parents become vital actors in mentoring and assisting their child with common problems arising during adolescence, including peer pressure and self-esteem issues. For many parents this is a daunting experience, often feeling inadequately equipped or trained to provide the help and support their child needs. This is often picked up on by the child, which in turn makes them either embarrassed or unable to talk to their parent. This is when organisations such as the Newcastle PCYC provide youth with the mentoring facility to talk about issues or problems they are unable to speak about with peers or parents... this process can be made more effective and beneficial in assisting the needs of the child if parents are more actively involved.⁸¹⁰

- 11.76 Mentoring has a special role to play in the transition from primary to high school and the support that young people need when moving to a new school. In some cases non-government organisations work with local schools to develop mentoring programs for students transitioning to high school. Ms Frances Trimboli, Regional Manager of YWCA New South Wales explained how such a partnership might work:

In our role in the community, we are doing some scoping consultation around in-school mentoring programs. We have done mentoring previously, but we feel it is paramount—and from the evidence we are gathering now we would like to have a program to start in years 5 and 6 and transit the kids through to years 7 and 8. In year 8 the wheels tend to fall off. We will have that relationship with those students, instead of it being part-time counsellors or a counsellor who has to work with hundreds of children. If we have a presence we can work with the school counsellor and with the support of the school staff, we can identify the kids that potentially will have challenges with that transition. We can work with them in the longer term during the transition period when they do reach high school years.⁸¹¹

- 11.77 Intergenerational mentoring is now widely recognised as a valuable intervention strategy in the early years to give children and families support and promote wellbeing. Volunteers who are older people not connected to the immediate family can often give valuable support to young people in safe environments. Such mentors can provide opportunities to strengthen children's links with their parents' or grandparents' cultures.⁸¹²

- 11.78 The Commonwealth Government has recently acknowledged the value of encouraging intergenerational skills transfer. The *Golden Guru* mentoring concept of retired people acting as mentors in economic and social life arose out of the Prime Minister's *2020 Summit* in 2008. The Commonwealth Government has committed \$5 million over four years to establish a pilot volunteer mentoring program. This program

⁸⁰⁹ YWCA NSW website. *About Y Big Brothers Big Sisters NSW*.

⁸¹⁰ Submission no. 15, Police and Community Youth Club Newcastle, p. 4.

⁸¹¹ Ms Frances Trimboli, YWCA, Transcript of evidence, 6 August 2008, p. 21.

⁸¹² NSW Commission for Children and Young People & Commission for Children and Young People (QLD) 2004. *A head start for australia: an early years framework*.

will give recently retired professionals and tradespeople the chance to pass on their knowledge and skills to secondary students in Australian schools.⁸¹³

Funding

- 11.79 Access to funding for mentoring programs is a major issue which has been identified in Australian-based research, and in evidence to the Inquiry. In 2007, the Youth Mentoring Network surveyed the 107 programs registered with the Network. Based on responses received from 62 programs, over three quarters of programs that responded to the survey involve children aged 13 to 15 years old being mentored. This is followed by young people aged 16 to 18 years old (62 per cent), 19 to 24 years old (24 per cent) and children 0 to 12 years old (22 per cent).⁸¹⁴
- 11.80 More than a third of mentoring programs had annual funding which ceased on 31 December 2007. Only two per cent of programs had access to an ongoing funding arrangement. The majority of program practitioners believed that there were not enough resources and services accessible in their community for children and young people (74 per cent). Funding was the largest factor identified to assist in developing mentoring programs (26 per cent); followed closely by professional development and training (21 per cent); networking (13 per cent); and promotion of mentoring, including sponsorship (11 per cent).
- 11.81 Evidence to the Inquiry indicates clearly that the funding situation for mentoring programs continues to be tenuous. For example, the Committee was told that that the *Aunties and Uncles* program in Lismore requires ongoing reliable and recurrent funding to ensure ongoing delivery of the program in local communities.⁸¹⁵
- 11.82 *Aunties and Uncles* has operated in New South Wales since 1974 as an early intervention mentoring program which aims to build a better life for children who face social or emotional challenges, by linking them to volunteer 'aunts' and 'uncles' who provide friendship and mentoring. In 1979 the program began receiving funding from the DoCS. Today it receives some funding from DoCS, but relies primarily on community groups, clubs and individuals for the balance of its funding requirements.⁸¹⁶
- 11.83 The submission from RYDON outlined the impact of time-limited funding on the viability of a mentoring program, using the example of MADMAP, a mentoring project servicing the Maitland and Cessnock Local Government Areas. This project built positive relationships between young people aged 9 to 18 (who are at risk, have no significant adult in their lives, are carers of the adult in their lives etc) and a community mentor offering opportunity to engage in recreation and lifeskills activities, as well as to receive support from local youth services and MADMAP coordinator. This was a three year funded project through *Area Assistance Scheme* funds. However, according to RYDON, there is no other service in the Local Government Areas to replace it.⁸¹⁷

⁸¹³ Commonwealth Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. 2009. *Responding to the Australia 2020 summit*, p. 16.

⁸¹⁴ Youth Mentoring Network. 2007. *Mentoring Matters: YMN registered programs national survey findings 2007*.

⁸¹⁵ Submission no. 25, Lismore DGO Group.

⁸¹⁶ Aunties and Uncles website. *The history of aunties and uncles*.

⁸¹⁷ Submission no. 48, RYDON, p. 10.

Committee comment

- 11.84 A significant body of research indicates the importance of a connection between young people and at least one person. Having an unrelated adult as an important person in a young person's life may be particularly important as this is an age when young people separate out from their parents. Well-developed mentoring programs have been successful in helping young people at risk to achieve a range of personal, social and economic outcomes.
- 11.85 However, the funding situation for mentoring programs is particularly problematic, with extremely limited access to ongoing funding. There is a need for recurrent funding to allow for the sustainability and expansion of well-formulated and positively evaluated mentoring programs that include children and young people in the middle years.
- 11.86 In relation to peer support, evidence to the Inquiry indicates that well-designed programs providing peer support can have a range of positive outcomes. The Committee considers that peer support programs for children 9-14 years should form an essential part of early intervention programs available for this age group.
- 11.87 The Committee notes the importance of providing early intervention programs for the 9-14 age group and this is further discussed in Chapter 19 of this Report. In Chapter 20, the Committee recommends developing a whole-of-government plan that includes key programs/approaches that are likely impact on multiple outcomes for children and young people 9-14 years and that the plan should also include a focus on early intervention. The Committee also recommends that the NSW government provide a state-wide funding stream for programs and services for 9-14 year olds that would complement the focus on 9-14 year-olds within the whole-of-government plan.⁸¹⁸

Better Futures

- 11.88 *Better Futures* is an early intervention program for children and young people 9-18 years.⁸¹⁹ The program is in the process of being rolled out in a number of areas across the State, with a 2007/08 budget of \$4.6 million.⁸²⁰ Currently, about 50 projects are funded across various regions in New South Wales. Mr Paul Murphy of DoCS described the program to the Committee:

... early intervention means early in the transition or early in the life of a problem—it has a focus on transitions in this age range—the transition from primary to high school, the transition from childhood to adulthood, and the transition from secondary school either to work or to further training and education. In essence, the focus of the program is to reduce risk factors during these transition periods and to enhance protective ones. In doing this we have a particular focus on promoting direct participation from young people.⁸²¹

⁸¹⁸ See Chapter 21 of this report.

⁸¹⁹ The Committee notes that DoCS was responsible for *Better Futures* until August 2009, when the NSW Minister for Youth announced that the *Better Futures* program would be managed by the NSW Commission for Children and Young People. Hon Graham West MP, NSW Minister for Youth, 2009. *New Commissioner for Children and Young People Appointed*, media release, 5 August 2009.

⁸²⁰ Special Commission of Inquiry into Child Protection Services in NSW. 2008. *Report of the special commission of inquiry into child protection services in NSW*, conducted by Hon James Wood, vol. 1, p.1006.

⁸²¹ Mr Paul Murphy, NSW Department of Community Services, Transcript of evidence, 2 July 2008, p. 26.

- 11.89 One of the roles of the program is to build an evidence base about what is effective for this age group, with the ultimate aim of guiding other funding programs, as well by trialling particular models of service delivery, whether with young people as individuals or in the context of their families.⁸²²
- 11.90 The *Better Futures Regional Strategy* has used the evidence about factors known to enable children and young people to attain the requisite resilience to identify three fields of activity:
- keeping young people at school and improving their educational attainment;
 - strengthening key protective factors for young people and reducing risks; and
 - supporting young people at very high risk.⁸²³
- 11.91 Evidence to the Inquiry discussed both the strengths and weaknesses of *Better Futures*. Several submissions from organisations that had received *Better Futures* funding expressed support for the program:
- Better Futures has provided our council with funding to do some capacity building across the whole service sector working with schools and out-of-school-hours [OOSH] providers, which has been very useful. We have done some great integrated planning ... With a fairly minimal amount of funding we have achieved some excellent outcomes by adopting an integrated planning approach to activity provision across a whole bunch of sectors that never really communicated that well with each other before.⁸²⁴
- 11.92 Strong support for the program was expressed to the Committee by Professor Bennett of the NSW Centre for the Advancement of Adolescent Health, who noted that *Better Futures* is:
- ...based on the evidence that keeping kids connected with school is important to building resilience and wellbeing; a focus on positive youth development, which is about engaging young people in meaningful activity within their communities, but also within their school; and it also mentions the importance of responding better and in a more coordinated way to the health needs of young people at risk. The most disadvantaged young people have the least access to health and supportive care.⁸²⁵
- 11.93 Professor Bennett also noted that, *Better Futures* is the only program of which he was currently aware that supports youth development activity out of school hours.⁸²⁶
- 11.94 However, Mr Reynato Reodica of Youth Action and Policy Association suggested that it is difficult to discern the overall effectiveness of *Better Futures*:
- ...it is difficult to get a real picture of Better Futures across the board. Our feedback is that in certain regions, it works better than in others. If some of the intentions around good participation of young people, and participation through the creation and design of Better Futures funded projects occur, that tends to improve service generally across the

⁸²² *ibid.*, p. 28.

⁸²³ NSW Centre for the Advancement of Adolescent Health, Questions answered after hearing, 17 March 2009, p. 8.

Also, see Wise, M., Bennett, D. L., Alperstein, G. & Chown P. 2003. *Better Futures for Young People: A discussion paper*. NSW Centre for the Advancement of Adolescent health.

⁸²⁴ Ms Margaret Brown, Waverley Council, Transcript of evidence, 17 March 2009, p. 1.

⁸²⁵ Professor David Bennett, NSW Centre for the Advancement of Adolescent Health, Transcript of evidence, 17 March 2009, p. 6.

⁸²⁶ *ibid.*, p. 8.

board ... a lot of my comments come from piecemeal anecdotes of different people who have engaged in different projects.⁸²⁷

11.95 Evidence to the Inquiry identified difficulties associated with the funding of the *Better Futures* program. According to Southern Youth and Family Services the program is poorly funded. Funding has been frozen since approximately mid-2006 and no additional funding has been provided (other than for the larger recurrent funded services) since early 2007.⁸²⁸ Similarly, NCOSS suggested that the limitations in the funding and scope of *Better Futures* lead to a lack of focus and comprehensiveness.⁸²⁹

11.96 Indeed, Ms Pauline O’Kane of Network of Community Activities commented that “compared to Families First, which is the under-8 program, *Better Futures* is almost the Cinderella of funding.” She also suggested that since responsibility for *Better Futures* was relocated from the Premier’s Department to the Communities Division of DoCS it has diminished in both priority and importance, and that there are difficulties in the coordination of the program across New South Wales.⁸³⁰

11.97 In addition to the level of funding, the Committee was also informed that non-recurrent nature of much of the funding of *Better Futures* projects inevitably impacted negatively on their effectiveness.⁸³¹ Ms O’Kane expressed similar concerns to the Committee:

...there are a lot of pilot projects and they are almost like pilots to nowhere. There is minimal funding to do a very low-cost project and three years down the track it is non-existent again. If there is a real commitment to this age group...there needs to be a commitment to the coordination and the funding that goes with it in the same way that Family First and a lot of under-8 projects have with those programs.⁸³²

11.98 In its submission, Southern Youth and Family Services also expressed its concerns about cumbersome planning processes of *Better Futures*:

The emphasis on local planning and whole-of-government involvement quite simply worked against developing services and improved responses for adolescents. Government Departments were meant to improve and demonstrate improved early intervention for adolescents in their Departments. Very little data or evidence was ever provided.⁸³³

Committee comment

11.99 The Committee strongly supports the emphasis in the *Better Futures* program on addressing risk and protective factors and its focus predominantly on the 9-14 age group. Evidence to the Inquiry suggests that some of the *Better Futures* funded projects have resulted in positive outcomes. However, the scale of the program precludes addressing the need for programs for this age group in any systematic manner, and there is a pressing need for funding for projects for this age group.

⁸²⁷ Mr Reynato Reodica, Youth Action and Policy Association, Transcript of evidence, 17 March 2009, p. 26.

⁸²⁸ Submission no. 54, Southern Youth and Family Services, p. 11.

⁸²⁹ Ms Alison Peters, Council of Social Service of NSW, Transcript of evidence, 17 March 2009, p. 21.

⁸³⁰ Ms Pauline O’Kane, Network of Community Activities, Transcript of evidence, 17 March 2009, p. 14.

⁸³¹ See, e.g. Submission no. 54, Southern Youth and Family Services, p. 7.

⁸³² Ms Pauline O’Kane, Network of Community Activities, Transcript of evidence, 17 March 2009, p. 14.

⁸³³ Submission no. 54, Southern Youth and Family Services, p. 11.

- 11.100 The Committee considers that a genuine commitment to children and young people aged 9-14 years requires coordination and funding. Given that one of the aims of the *Better Futures* program is to provide evidence and research to guide other funding programs, and given the paucity of evaluative data in relation to such programs for this age group, the Committee also considers that it is essential that *Better Futures* programs are evaluated and that the results of the evaluations are made publicly available.
- 11.101 Such a review should include evaluation of individual projects, an assessment of the co-ordinating mechanisms and the appropriateness of the model. It should be informed by a review of recent literature, input from stakeholders and recommendations for a 'way forward'.

RECOMMENDATION 33: The Committee recommends that, pursuant to s 11(d) of the *Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998*, the Commissioner for Children and Young People consult with the Minister for Community Services about conducting a comprehensive publicly available evaluation of the *Better Futures* program.

Chapter Twelve - Safety and Security

Child protection

Introduction

12.1 In November 2008, the *Report of the Special Commission of Inquiry into Child Protection Services in NSW* (the Wood Inquiry Report) was released. As that report comprehensively examined the child protection system in New South Wales, this chapter will only focus on the major themes that arose in the course of that Inquiry, particularly as they relate to 9-14 year olds. It will address early intervention and gaps in service provision for this age group, as well as outcomes for children and young people in out-of-home care.

Statistical overview

12.2 In 2007-08 the NSW Department of Community Services (DoCS) received 303,121 child protection reports. This represents an increase of about 90 per cent over the 159,643 reports received in 2001-02.⁸³⁴ The Wood Inquiry Report provided data on the number of NSW child protection reports by age. According to preliminary data for 2007-08, 24 per cent of child protection reports were for young people aged 12-15 years:

Child protection reports by age, 2006-07 and 2007-08⁸³⁵

Age group	2006-07	2007-08 <i>preliminary</i>	Per cent of total
<1 year	26,853	30,432	10%
1-2 years	33,072	35,778	12%
3-4 years	32,995	34,804	11%
5-11 years	106,710	112,959	37%
12-15 years	70,978	73,207	24%
16-17 years	11,983	12,778	4%
Not stated	3,442	3,019	1%
Total	286,033	302,977	100%

12.3 Information about the most common reported issues was provided in the Wood Inquiry Report. In 2007/08 (preliminary) the seven most common primary reported issues in order were domestic violence, followed by neglect, physical abuse, carer drug and alcohol issues, psychological abuse, carer mental health and sexual abuse.⁸³⁶ From 2005-06 to 2007-08 domestic violence consistently accounted for one quarter of all reports made to DoCS. Just over one third of all child protection

⁸³⁴ Special Commission of Inquiry into Child Protection Services in NSW. 2008. *Report of the special commission of inquiry into child protection services in NSW*, conducted by Hon James Wood, vol. 1, p.119.

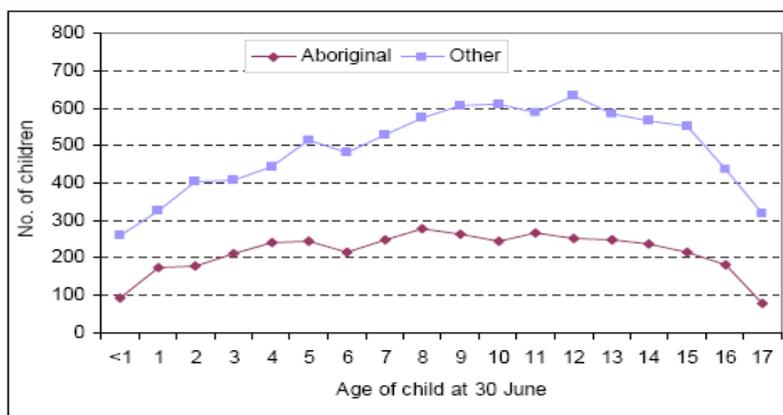
⁸³⁵ *ibid.*, p. 123.

⁸³⁶ *ibid.*, p. 170.

reports during this period have had domestic violence listed as at least one of the reported issues.⁸³⁷

- 12.4 Data is also available about children in out-of-home care. As at March 2008, 43.4 per cent (6,182) of children in out-of-home care were aged 5-11 years and 25.7 per cent (3,657) were aged 12-15 years. The pattern of children and young persons in care by age does not appear to differ greatly by reference to Aboriginality, as shown in the graph below. The numbers for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children and young persons in out-of-home care tend to increase with age until around seven years, and then flatten out until 15 years when a sharp decrease occurs.⁸³⁸

Figure 16.1 Number of children and young persons in OOHC by age and Aboriginality as at 30 June 2007⁵⁰⁰



Note: 'non-Aboriginal' includes 'not stated'

- 12.5 Aboriginal children and young people are over-represented in the child protection system. The submission from the Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care State Secretariat (NSW) commented that, although a complete statistical breakdown by age of the number of Aboriginal children and young people in care is unavailable, it can be assumed that the numbers this age group would be similar to the overall statistics available for children and young people 0-18 years.⁸³⁹
- 12.6 An Aboriginal child or young person is 15 times more likely to be the subject to a child protection report than a non-Aboriginal children or young person; and 10 times more likely to be placed in the out-of-home care system than a non-Aboriginal child or young person.⁸⁴⁰
- 12.7 Aboriginal children and young persons also continue to be over-represented in reviewable deaths and, more broadly, feature disproportionately in the deaths of all children in New South Wales. In 2006, the deaths of 123 children were reviewable; twenty-five were Aboriginal children.⁸⁴¹

⁸³⁷ Special Commission of Inquiry into Child Protection Services in NSW. 2008. *Report of the special commission of inquiry into child protection services in NSW*, conducted by Hon James Wood, vol. 2, p.698; based on preliminary figures for 2007-08.

⁸³⁸ *ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 598.

⁸³⁹ Submission no. 86, AbSec, p. 5.

⁸⁴⁰ *ibid.*

⁸⁴¹ Special Commission of Inquiry into Child Protection Services in NSW. 2008. *Report of the special commission of inquiry into child protection services in NSW*, conducted by Hon James Wood, vol. 2, p.744.

Early Intervention

- 12.8 A number of submissions noted the need for early intervention initiatives for children and young people. Barnardos Australia commented that to prevent entry into out-of-home care, young people need changes to legislation and administrative arrangements to ensure that adequate helpful services reach the families of children 'in need'. Barnardos Australia noted that families need locally provided services instead of a "forensic investigative child protection approach where resources are absorbed in classifying not assisting."⁸⁴²
- 12.9 The Wood Inquiry Report noted that in an ideal world, early intervention services for vulnerable children would "form the greater proportion of the child and family welfare service provided by the State."⁸⁴³
- 12.10 In its submission NAPCAN noted the funding imbalance between the prevention of child abuse and neglect compared with remedial statutory intervention in the following stark figures:
- Currently in Australia for every \$300 spent on remedial statutory intervention for children who have already been harmed, only \$1 is spent on prevention of child abuse and neglect.⁸⁴⁴
- 12.11 The NSW Commissioner for Children and Young People agreed that the current system in New South Wales overemphasises the statutory response:
- We do not have a public health approach to child protection at the moment ... A public health approach shifts that and says that we need to look at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels of protecting children. At the moment I think we probably look a bit at the secondary prevention levels and primarily at the tertiary levels.⁸⁴⁵
- 12.12 She went on to describe primary, secondary and tertiary levels of protecting children:
- By that I mean primary prevention being promoting wellbeing ... and generally trying to grow up children and support families in a wellbeing way. So, that would be providing child and maternal support services, providing paid maternity leave that enabled mothers to look after their infants and so on. The secondary prevention level is trying to identify families or children where risk is beginning to emerge and to reduce that vulnerability. So, that would be services like sustained nurse home visiting or, in the case of the nine to 14 year old it might be the drug and alcohol services that work with parents and children to reduce alcohol abuse and so on. Then, there is the tertiary level, which is the statutory child protection service and treatment services and the out-of-home care services that are available.
- So, to shift our system from what we have currently to a public health model requires much greater investment in the primary and secondary levels of protecting children. That also means whole population measures with primary prevention and also quite targeted levels with disadvantaged groups or high-risk groups.⁸⁴⁶
- 12.13 In its submission, NAPCAN reported on a Victorian study which found that as it was underlying problems such as low income, substance abuse or mental health issues

⁸⁴² Submission no. 21, Barnardos Australia, p. 3.

⁸⁴³ Special Commission of Inquiry into Child Protection Services in NSW. 2008. *Report of the special commission of inquiry into child protection services in NSW*, conducted by Hon James Wood, vol. 1, p.207.

⁸⁴⁴ Submission no. 79, NAPCAN, p. 16.

⁸⁴⁵ Ms Gillian Calvert, Commission for Children and Young People, Transcript of evidence, 2 July 2008, p.45.

⁸⁴⁶ *ibid.*

which brought families repeatedly to the attention of child protection authorities, a more effective response was to address those problems at an earlier stage:

The report noted that helping families to deal with these problems required more sustained and less intrusive support than the services usually provided by child protection authorities. It highlighted the need for strengthened prevention and early intervention services as well as improved service responses for children and young people with longer-term involvement in the child protection system.⁸⁴⁷

12.14 A particular issue for children in the middle years is the lack of availability of services, including prevention and early intervention programs. Ms Jane Woodruff of UnitingCare Burnside highlighted this in evidence to the Committee:

This age group is the group for which there are almost no formal services ... In many areas we just have either nothing or we have so few people on the ground that effectively it makes very little difference. It is a little bit like the home support workers in education you were referring to earlier. If the numbers are so great in their caseloads or the people they have to work with, then they make very little impact indeed.⁸⁴⁸

12.15 The Wood Inquiry Report also noted that currently there is no integrated, evidence-based, state-wide, targeted early intervention program for the 9-14 age group.⁸⁴⁹

12.16 A number of submissions discussed the applicability of the *Brighter Futures* program to children and young people in the middle years. *Brighter Futures* is a voluntary, targeted program designed for low- to medium-risk families who are encountering problems impacting on their ability to care for their children. It provides a differential entry point for lower risk families with children aged under nine years. In practice, however, the DoCS generally limits entry to families with children aged under three years.⁸⁵⁰

12.17 The aims of *Brighter Futures* are to:

- reduce child abuse and neglect by reducing the likelihood of family problems escalating into crisis within the child protection system;
- achieve long term benefits for children by improving intellectual development, educational outcomes and employment chances;
- improve parent-child relationships and the capacity of parents to build positive relationships and raise stronger, healthier children;
- break inter-generational cycles of disadvantage; and
- reduce demand for services that otherwise might be needed down the track such as child protection, corrective or mental health services.⁸⁵¹

12.18 Families must have at least one vulnerability that, if not addressed, is likely to escalate and impact on a parent's or care-giver's capacity to parent, or on the wellbeing of the child or children. Family vulnerabilities include:

- domestic violence;

⁸⁴⁷ Submission no. 79, NAPCAN, pp. 7-8.

⁸⁴⁸ Ms Jane Woodruff, UnitingCare Burnside, Transcript of evidence, 11 June 2008, p. 15.

⁸⁴⁹ Special Commission of Inquiry into Child Protection Services in NSW. 2008. *Report of the special commission of inquiry into child protection services in NSW*, conducted by Hon James Wood, vol. 1, p.252.

⁸⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p. 234.

⁸⁵¹ *ibid.*, p. 233.

- parental drug and alcohol misuse;
- parental mental health issues;
- limited extended family or social support;
- parent(s) with significant learning difficulties and/or intellectual disability;
- child behaviour management problems; and
- lack of parenting skills/adequate supervision.⁸⁵²

12.19 Families participating in *Brighter Futures* are assessed as likely to need services of approximately two years duration and to require case management and at least two of the following services:

- quality children's services which include any of the services that are licensed under the *Children's Services Regulation 2004*, such as long day care, preschools, and family day care;
- parenting programs which are designed to assist parents to enhance their parenting competencies by increasing their knowledge of child development and parenting practices;
- home visiting, which is a structured support program to help parents develop coping and parenting skills. This includes: both professional and volunteer home visiting; providing information, practical support and advice about the care of babies and children; modelling good parenting practices; and assisting families to develop supportive networks.⁸⁵³

12.20 There are currently three entry pathways to the *Brighter Futures* program. The first involves a report of risk of harm to, or a request for *Brighter Futures* assistance from, DoCS. The second pathway is via a referral from a community agency or individual to a Lead Agency.⁸⁵⁴ A third, currently being trialled, is a direct referral of families from the *Aboriginal Maternal and Infant Health Strategy* to this program. Regardless of the pathway into the *Brighter Futures* program, it is DoCS that makes the eligibility decision.⁸⁵⁵

12.21 About \$260 million has been committed to expanding the New South Wales early intervention system with the establishment of the *Brighter Futures* program. This has included an additional 350 caseworkers within DoCS Community Service Centres, and the provision of \$150 million to Lead Agencies and their partners to provide these services.⁸⁵⁶

⁸⁵² Special Commission of Inquiry into Child Protection Services in NSW. 2008. *Report of the special commission of inquiry into child protection services in NSW*, conducted by Hon James Wood, vol. 1, p.234.

⁸⁵³ *ibid.*, p. 234.

⁸⁵⁴ Lead Agencies are contracted by DoCS to facilitate and manage the provision of *Brighter Futures* services in a nominated area. The Lead Agency undertakes referral, assessment and ongoing case management of families in the program; and also oversees and coordinates the delivery of *Brighter Futures* funded service options within a planning area.

See NSW Department of Community Services. 2007. *Brighter Futures caseworker manual, abridged version*, p. 12.

⁸⁵⁵ Special Commission of Inquiry into Child Protection Services in NSW. 2008. *Report of the special commission of inquiry into child protection services in NSW*, conducted by Hon James Wood, vol. 1, p.234.

⁸⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p. 231.

Safety and Security

- 12.22 In response to the recommendations of the Wood Inquiry, the NSW Government will provide an additional 200 places in the *Brighter Futures* program immediately, with further extension dependant on the outcomes of the current evaluation.⁸⁵⁷
- 12.23 The external evaluation of the efficacy of *Brighter Futures* commenced in 2006 and will continue until 2010. An interim evaluation provided some initial data but did not draw any conclusions. Initial data indicated that as at October 2007, 975 families had participated in the program, with 882 families continuing to participate, while 93 had left the program.⁸⁵⁸ Of those 975 families, 780 (including 1,711 children) had been reported to DoCS, with a total of 6,976 reports received by the Helpline within 24 months prior to entering the program. Of those reports, the most frequent primary reported issues were domestic violence (30 per cent), disability of carer (15 per cent) and risk of physical, psychological or sexual harm/injury (13 per cent). While inadequate clothing, nutrition, shelter or supervision made up 12 per cent of the reported issues.⁸⁵⁹
- 12.24 Although *Brighter Futures* is yet to be fully evaluated, there have been initial positive reports of the program's operation,⁸⁶⁰ including in evidence given to the Wood Inquiry by the Benevolent Society of NSW:
- Brighter Futures really lays out that concern and they have a well designed program in terms of its components. It has set a benchmark in Australia about setting out provisions of childcare in terms of an early intervention and prevention project. They have really led the way on that. It is a long term project that has sustainability and tries to meet those needs long term, and a lot of thought and good research has gone into it.⁸⁶¹
- 12.25 The potential benefits of the expansion of *Brighter Futures* to an older age group were referred to in evidence given to the Inquiry by service providers, such as Mid Richmond Neighbourhood Centre,⁸⁶² UnitingCare Burnside,⁸⁶³ and NCOSS.⁸⁶⁴ Southern Youth and Family Services also commented that the design of such a program would require some modifications and suggested obtaining input from youth services into the program design.⁸⁶⁵
- 12.26 DoCS has also recommended the establishment of a targeted early intervention program with recurrent funding for vulnerable families with children aged 9-14 years,

⁸⁵⁷ NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet. 2009. *Keep them safe, a shared approach to child wellbeing*, p. 65.

⁸⁵⁸ Special Commission of Inquiry into Child Protection Services in NSW. 2008. *Report of the special commission of inquiry into child protection services in NSW*, conducted by Hon James Wood, vol. 1, p.236.

⁸⁵⁹ *ibid.*, p. 237.

⁸⁶⁰ See, e.g., Ms Noeline Olive, Casino Neighbourhood Centre, Transcript of evidence, 5 August 2008, p. 10.

⁸⁶¹ Special Commission of Inquiry into Child Protection Services in NSW. 2008. *Report of the special commission of inquiry into child protection services in NSW*, conducted by Hon James Wood, vol. 1, p.237.

⁸⁶² Ms Gretchen Young, Mid Richmond Neighbourhood Centre, Transcript of evidence, 5 August 2008, p. 15.

⁸⁶³ Submission no. 76, UnitingCare Burnside, p. 15.

See also Ms Jane Woodruff, CEO UnitingCare Burnside, Transcript of evidence, 17 March 2009, p. 21.

⁸⁶⁴ Ms Alison Peters, Council of Social Service of NSW, Transcript of evidence, 17 March 2009, p. 21.

⁸⁶⁵ Southern Youth and Family Services, Correspondence in response to questions, 4 May 2009, p. 1.

with priority access to Aboriginal children and their families.⁸⁶⁶ The Wood Inquiry agreed with this recommendation, but noted that any extension to this age group is currently unfunded. The report stated that evidence about what works from research, the literature and similar effective programs in other jurisdictions should determine program settings. It goes on to recommend that *Brighter Futures* be extended progressively to provide services to children aged 9-14 years, with priority of access to services for Aboriginal children and their families.⁸⁶⁷

12.27 In its response to the Wood Inquiry Report, the NSW Government has undertaken to consider the extension of *Brighter Futures* for children aged 9-14. However, the NSW Government notes that further examination of the evidence base is required before an appropriate evidence-based model for this group can be developed.⁸⁶⁸

Committee Comment

12.28 The Committee considers that the establishment of a *Brighter Futures* type program for 9-14 year-olds should be a priority, given the lack of services for this age group and the difficulty experienced by the DoCS in prioritising this age group. There is evidence of support from non-government organisations, DoCS and the Wood Inquiry Report for an expansion of this program.

12.29 The Committee agrees that consideration should be given to an appropriate evidence-based model for this program. Given the extent of evidence to the Committee's Inquiry supporting the need for after school activities/care for this age group, facilitating access of children and young people to activities and care after school should be considered as a potential component of the model. The Committee believes that consideration should be given to appropriateness of providing parent education (see Chapter 11), school holiday programs/vacation care (see Chapter 4) and homework support/tutoring as core components of this program (see Chapter 13).

RECOMMENDATION 34: The Committee recommends that the Minister for Community Services facilitate the development of a *Brighter Futures*-type model to be extended progressively to provide services to children aged 9-14 years, with priority of access to services for Aboriginal children and their families.

The Committee further recommends that the Commissioner for Children and Young People be consulted on the development of the proposed *Brighter Futures*-type model.

⁸⁶⁶ Special Commission of Inquiry into Child Protection Services in NSW. 2008. *Report of the special commission of inquiry into child protection services in NSW*, conducted by Hon James Wood, vol. 1, p.252.

⁸⁶⁷ Special Commission of Inquiry into Child Protection Services in NSW. 2008. *Report of the special commission of inquiry into child protection services in NSW*, conducted by Hon James Wood, vol. 1, p.386.

⁸⁶⁸ NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet. 2009. *Keep them safe: a shared approach to child wellbeing*, p.8.

Domestic Violence

12.30 Domestic violence can have a major impact on children and young people. The impact of domestic violence on children and young people 9-14 years was starkly described in the submission from NSW Women's Refuge Child Support Workers:

In some ways the needs of this target group have been neglected to the point that some may never recover from their experience of domestic violence and some will remain dysfunctional to a greater or lesser degree than is satisfying for themselves in their adult lives or for the community. Their rights to safety, a secure, safe home, health and an education has been disrupted and denied so that it is essential that any supports must address these vital areas before we can give a new view other than a day to day existence for children who experience domestic violence. We want children to have a worthwhile future but children themselves need to believe there is a tomorrow that is not without hope. Not all children are resilient and many need substantial support to flourish. Those children who do have a measure of resilience should not be left to depend on their own resources.⁸⁶⁹

12.31 Links have been drawn between experiences of domestic violence and youth suicide. The submission from NSW Women's Refuge Child Support Workers argued that addressing the experience of domestic violence and child sexual assault in the age group 9-14 will ultimately reduce youth suicide rates.⁸⁷⁰ The submission also commented on the impact of exposure to domestic violence on school performance, identifying need for educational support such as tutoring:

This should not be seen as another role for teachers but rather, engaging professionals through negotiation with the business world or engaging teachers in their final year of training. Such a scheme would need to ensure that such tutors are trained to work with children who have or are experiencing trauma. There may be different approaches required and different achievement levels for children who experience domestic violence. It must also be a requirement that any person working with children must have a police check.⁸⁷¹

12.32 The submission further noted that Aboriginal children's needs should be a high priority, given the prevalence of domestic violence experienced in many of their communities.⁸⁷²

12.33 Ms Ricci Bartel from Fairfield Migrant Resource Centre told the Committee about the lack of services for children affected by domestic violence:

In a family violence situation there are no services. We have a domestic violence support program, but there are no services that look after the children that are in that kind of a setting, and they are the ones that are going to grow up and either be very introverted and socially not very apt or confident or they are going to be victims themselves or they are going to be perpetrators. Yet we do not have anything that looks at that age group, and again, if such services get created there has to be a different layer of people of a core background.⁸⁷³

12.34 The Wood Inquiry recommended integrated models of service provision for women and children who experience domestic violence, concluding that:

⁸⁶⁹ Submission no. 19, NSW Women's Refuge Child Support Workers, p.6.

⁸⁷⁰ *ibid.*, p. 11.

⁸⁷¹ *ibid.*, p. 12.

⁸⁷² *ibid.*, p. 7.

⁸⁷³ Ms Ricci Bartel, Fairfield Migrant Resource Centre, Transcript of evidence 8 August 2008, p. 14.

...integrated services which are built on evidence based casework, clear guidelines for intervention, quality training and supervision and effective interagency collaboration form the basis of the appropriate response to domestic violence in the child protection context.⁸⁷⁴

- 12.35 Integrated models, may include any or all of the following: domestic and family violence services, child protection agencies, housing services, police, correctional services, community, women and child support agencies and schools. Domestic and family violence is also often just one 'problem' in the lives of these families who may require the resources of multiple services.⁸⁷⁵
- 12.36 Benchmarks against which proposed interventions are tested include that wherever possible services should be co-located or operated from a 'hub'; and that any response should be integrated and coordinated and involve - at least - NSW Police, Department of Housing, Department of Health and relevant non-government organisations.⁸⁷⁶
- 12.37 In its response to the Wood Inquiry, the NSW Government has supported the recommendation regarding integrated and co-located services;⁸⁷⁷ and the Wood Inquiry's recommendation for the development of co-located child and family services servicing Aboriginal communities involving health and education services.⁸⁷⁸ The NSW Government has committed the following amounts to specific domestic and family violence projects over four years (2007 to 2011):

NSW Government domestic and family violence projects

Domestic Violence Court Intervention Model	\$8.4 million
Integrated Case Management	\$12.0 million
Non-government Sector Grants	\$8.0 million
Staying Home Leaving Violence	\$5.1 million
Court Assistance Scheme	\$2.6 million
Indigenous Programs (to be announced)	\$3.6 million
Police Equipment	\$0.5 million
Total	\$40.2 million

- 12.38 In addition, \$8 million will be spent on remote witness facilities that are expected to assist victims of domestic and family violence when giving evidence in prosecutions of perpetrators.⁸⁷⁹

⁸⁷⁴ Special Commission of Inquiry into Child Protection Services in NSW. 2008. *Report of the special commission of inquiry into child protection services in NSW*, conducted by Hon James Wood, vol. 2, p.712.

⁸⁷⁵ Special Commission of Inquiry into Child Protection Services in NSW. 2008. *Report of the special commission of inquiry into child protection services in NSW*, conducted by Hon James Wood, vol. 2, p.711.

⁸⁷⁶ *ibid.*, p.733.

⁸⁷⁷ NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet. 2009. *Keep them safe: a shared approach to child wellbeing*, p.64.

⁸⁷⁸ *ibid.*

⁸⁷⁹ Special Commission of Inquiry into Child Protection Services in NSW. 2008. *Report of the special commission of inquiry into child protection services in NSW*, conducted by Hon James Wood, vol. 2, p.715.

12.39 The NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet is developing a strategic framework to underpin state-wide responses to family and domestic violence.⁸⁸⁰ The Commission has recommended to the Committee that the *NSW Framework on Family and Domestic Violence* specifically address the needs of children and young people, including better integration of criminal and support services and the removal of the offender rather than the child in violent situations.⁸⁸¹ For example, interventions that remove the offender from the home - rather than the mother and child - enable the child to continue schooling, an important source of support.⁸⁸²

Committee comment

12.40 Evidence to the Inquiry indicates that there is a gap in service provision for children and young people who have been exposed to domestic violence, which addresses their needs separately from those of their mother. Particularly, there is a requirement to ensure their educational and health needs are addressed.

12.41 The Committee notes that domestic violence is a major factor for families currently participating in *Brighter Futures* for 0-8 years. Accordingly, an extension of the *Brighter Futures* program to include 9-14 year olds would increase service provision to children and young people in this age group who have been exposed to domestic violence.

RECOMMENDATION 35: The Committee recommends that the Department of Premier and Cabinet ensure that strategies to address the needs of children and young people exposed to domestic violence are included in the *NSW Domestic and Family Violence Framework*.

The Committee further recommends that the Commissioner for Children and Young People be consulted on the development of any such strategies.

Services and interventions for this age group

12.42 An expansion of the *Brighter Futures* model to include 9-14 year olds would address some of the gaps in service provision to this age group. Evidence given to the Inquiry suggested that DoCS does not prioritise this age group,⁸⁸³ and there are difficulties in getting DoCS to respond to reports of risk of harm relating to 9-14 year olds.⁸⁸⁴

12.43 Southern Youth and Family Services made similar comments:

...the Department of Community Services is unable to provide the necessary case management and casework interventions to adequately support and address the issues for the young person and the family. This has led to groups such as the "under one year olds" being prioritised. While we accept the higher level of vulnerability of babies, we believe that all children and young people deserve to be prioritised with regard to need

⁸⁸⁰ Office for Women's Policy. 2008. *Discussion Paper on NSW Domestic and Family Violence Strategic Framework*, NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet.

⁸⁸¹ Submission no. 90, NSW Commission for Children and Young People, p. 13.

⁸⁸² Commission for Children and Young People, Questions answered after hearing, 15 April 2009, p. 5.

⁸⁸³ See, e.g., Submission no. 14, Richmond Valley Council, p. 2; Submission no. 21, Barnardos Australia, p. 4; and Ms Elaine Hirst, Community First Step, Transcript of evidence 8, August 2008, p. 14.

⁸⁸⁴ Ms Julie Ann Robinson, Marrickville Youth Resource Centre, Transcript of evidence, 11 June 2008, pp. 52-53.

and it is unacceptable that adolescents are not considered a high priority. There are many unallocated cases in DoCS and these are mainly young people and again we are referring to young people aged thirteen and fourteen years.⁸⁸⁵

- 12.44 Evidence to this Inquiry suggests that many children and young people in this age group are not receiving formal DoCS intervention. In their submission, Southern Youth and Family Services provided data that showed an increase in the proportion of their clients for whom the DoCS has no formal responsibility:

This year 26% of our clients were under 16 year[s] but only 10% had involvement with DoCS. In 2005/2006 33% were under 16 years and only 14% involved with DoCS In 2004/2005 31% were under 16 years and 13% were involved with DoCS. In previous years 50% were under 16 years but half were involved with DoCS.⁸⁸⁶

- 12.45 Inadequate service provision can have a profound impact on the lives of children and young people. A case study provided in the submission from Central Illawarra Youth Services illustrated the impact of inadequate service provision:

Graham is a young man who is now 14 years old. I have been working with Graham and his mum Sandy for around 6 years. Graham has grown up in the most horrific domestic violence ...

Graham and Sandy were well known to our local DoCS office. In fact I eventually learnt that DoCS had closed Graham's case file because Sandy was not able to get Steve (her violent partner) to leave. So DoCS apparently simply decided it was too hard. My understanding is that Graham was around 7 years old when DoCS closed his case.

As I got to know Graham and Sandy better, I learnt more about what Graham had been through. There are at least three occasions that Graham saved his mothers life, where Sandy was being beaten by Steve and Graham would attack him to turn the attention on himself. Graham has been programmed from an early age in the 'fight or flight' reflex. This has played out negatively in most school settings where Graham would either be fighting teachers or other school students.

... After making numerous notifications to DoCS, as I learnt more about what Graham had lived through, I eventually rang my local member to complain I couldn't get Graham's case allocated in order to get DoCS to make a referral to specialist DV counsellor (that could only be accessed through a DoCS referral). This worked and we got our referral.

This referral was the first successful concrete step, and over time Graham started to trust the counsellor and open up to her ... However, the counsellor ended up leaving her job ... so Graham was left hanging once more.

... Graham is now at the age where it's almost impossible to get him to consider any interventions. Graham now smokes dope, drinks alcohol, and is increasingly getting more and more involved with crime and other anti-social activities.

I believe if there were a wider range of educational options for Graham, we could have kept him engaged in education (Graham affectively stopped going regularly to school around the age of 7-8). Even if Graham had received one on one teaching while he received intensive DV counselling, with well thought through return to normal class plans, this would have been cheaper than the costs Graham will inevitably cause the state now and into the future.⁸⁸⁷

⁸⁸⁵ Submission no. 54, Southern Youth and Family Services, p. 12.

⁸⁸⁶ Submission no. 54, Southern Youth and Family Services, p. 5.

⁸⁸⁷ Submission no. 47, Central Illawarra Youth services, pp. 1-2.

Safety and Security

- 12.46 Several submissions identified a need for increased services for children and young people who have experienced abuse or neglect. According to NSW Women's Refuge Child Support Workers, this is a particular problem in rural and remote areas:
- As health issues are currently causing concern in isolated communities and regional towns any initiatives that address the adult population's health needs should be matched with services for children who have been victims of domestic violence or child sexual assault.⁸⁸⁸
- 12.47 With respect to northern New South Wales, Clarence Valley Council informed the Committee that there is also only one sexual assault worker for the entire Clarence Valley. As the service operates only during office hours, a young person who is sexually assaulted outside of office hours must be transported to Lismore Base Hospital for care. Also, child victims of sexual assault are required to wait at least 6 months to access the Coffs Harbour-based Child Sexual Assault Service, by which time the benefits of early counselling are lost.⁸⁸⁹
- 12.48 Even within the Sydney Metropolitan region, there is a lack of specialised child protection services and as a result:
- ...there have been many incidents of anti-social behaviour carried out by children as young as eight years old. Many of these episodes occur after business hours and during weekends when support agency services are closed due to a lack of available funding. The local Police have advised that in many instances, when a child is returned home, they would find their parents or carers inebriated or absent.⁸⁹⁰
- 12.49 Other evidence to the Inquiry commented about the lack of services for children affected by domestic violence. Services for children affected by domestic violence are discussed in more detail in the previous section about domestic violence.
- 12.50 Gaps in the service system were also identified in the report of the Wood Inquiry. According to the report the services most frequently cited as deficient were mental health, drug and alcohol, sexual assault services, PANOC (Physical Abuse and Neglect of Children) services, medical forensic services, counselling services for families and children (including domestic violence counselling), allied health services especially speech therapy, services for men, services for perpetrators, and assessment and treatment services for children in out-of-home care.⁸⁹¹
- 12.51 The Wood Inquiry also heard of the poor availability of parenting interventions in some parts of the State, including a lack of culturally specific parenting programs for Aboriginal people, despite courts requiring some Aboriginal parents to attend such courses. There were also greater difficulties in accessing health services of these kinds in regional New South Wales.⁸⁹²
- 12.52 Ultimately, the Wood Inquiry recommended the establishment of integrated, multi-disciplinary and co-located services, wherever practicable. These services should cover the continuum of universal, secondary and tertiary services and target

⁸⁸⁸ Submission no. 19, NSW Women's Refuge Child Support Workers, p. 7.

⁸⁸⁹ Submission no. 84, Clarence Valley Council, p. 3.

⁸⁹⁰ Submission no. 46, Randwick City Council, p. 3.

⁸⁹¹ Special Commission of Inquiry into Child Protection Services in NSW. 2008. *Report of the special commission of inquiry into child protection services in NSW*, conducted by Hon James Wood, vol. 1, p.238.

⁸⁹² *ibid.*

transition points for children and young people providing assistance in the following circumstances:

- where a report to the NSW Department of Community Services does not meet the statutory threshold, but it is considered that the child or young person is in need of assistance and the child or young person or family is referred to the newly created Regional Intake and Referral Service;
- where families are assessed by the Helpline as meeting the criteria for Brighter Futures; or
- where children and young persons who are assessed as in need of a response within 72 hours with a risk assessed as less than high, or as in need of a response within less than 10 days and who do not meet the criteria for Brighter Futures.⁸⁹³

12.53 The Wood Inquiry also recommended the development of co-located child and family centres servicing Aboriginal communities, involving health and education.⁸⁹⁴

12.54 Some guidance in developing an appropriate model of service is offered by elements of UnitingCare Burnside's Family Learning Centre at Ermington and services provided by organisations such as Barnardos Australia and Southern Youth and Family Services. Ms Louise Voigt of Barnardos Australia discussed the benefits of co-located services with the Committee:

I fully support the need for such centres, particularly for this age group. A number of children who come to notice during this age group do not come to notice when they are much younger, often because of antisocial behaviour, or they have been picked up by schools because of a lack of supervision or a lack of attention by their families.

Therefore, it is important to have a range of service provision for children. Co-location is one of the good ways of ensuring that that happens.⁸⁹⁵

12.55 Southern Youth and Family Services also commented on some of the benefits and limitations of a co-located model:

This type of model may work well in some areas but not all. For example it may work well in larger cities because of the numbers of clients in the same location but may not work as well in rural areas where transport is a problem and the clients are scattered over a larger area.

Our Organisation presents a good example of an amalgamated model that operated on various sites. Clients can access any of our programs along the continuum and may only have to undergo one assessment. The benefit of this is that if young people do not feel comfortable attending one site for whatever reason they may be able to receive a service at another location. Some of our services also operate under a flexible outreach model where families and young people can be seen in their own homes or other such

⁸⁹³ The services would include programs (amongst others), such as parenting education; routine screening for domestic violence; breakfast programs; parenting education; counselling services; school counselling; the Home School Liaison Program; accommodation and rental assistance; drug and alcohol counselling and rehabilitation services; sexual assault counselling; allied health services such as speech pathology and mental health services.

Special Commission of Inquiry into Child Protection Services in NSW. 2008. *Report of the special commission of inquiry into child protection services in NSW*, conducted by Hon James Wood, vol. 1, p.385.

⁸⁹⁴ Special Commission of Inquiry into Child Protection Services in NSW. 2008. *Report of the special commission of inquiry into child protection services in NSW*, conducted by Hon James Wood, vol. 1, p.386.

⁸⁹⁵ Ms Louise Voigt, Barnardos Australia, Transcript of evidence, 17 March 2009, p. 38.

non threatening environments. It is our belief that there needs to be a range of options and flexibility within these.⁸⁹⁶

12.56 They also stressed that the model would need to be tailored to 9-14 year olds, including provision for after hours operations, late closing times, meal programs, food services, be in central locations, need close access to transport, have group rooms, meeting rooms and lots of spaces.⁸⁹⁷ The experience of Southern Youth and Family Services is that, otherwise, these children and young people will avoid large co-located services and continue to seek out youth specific services.⁸⁹⁸ On this point, the Committee notes that youth services provide an existing service model which is appealing to many young people and consultation and involvement of youth services in the planning and development of co-located services could result in a shared model of service delivery.

Committee comment

12.57 Evidence to the Inquiry has identified gaps in service provision for this age group in relation to child protection, including difficulties encountered by services in getting DoCS to respond to risk of harm reports for this age group as well as unallocated case within DoCs mainly among young people. Evidence has also identified gaps in services for children and young people who have experienced abuse and neglect, including domestic violence, which is also reflected the findings of the Wood report.

12.58 The Committee notes that the NSW Government has committed to investing \$750 million over five years to implementing *Keep Them Safe: a shared approach to child wellbeing* plan, in response to the Wood inquiry.⁸⁹⁹ In its response to the Wood Inquiry the NSW Government has supported the recommendations regarding the development of integrated, multi-disciplinary and co-located services.⁹⁰⁰ The Committee also supports these initiatives and considers that it is crucial that these co-located services include a range of services for children and young people 9-14 years and their parents/carers.

RECOMMENDATION 36: The Committee recommends, that pursuant to s 11(d) of the *Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998*, the Commissioner for Children and Young People consult with the Minister for Community Services about including a range of services for children and young people 9-14 years in the proposed integrated, multi-disciplinary and co-located services (one stop shops).

Out-of-home care

12.59 The issues most commonly raised in evidence to the Inquiry about out-of-home care related to the health, education and wellbeing of children and young people therein.

⁸⁹⁶ Southern Youth and Family Services, Correspondence in response to questions, 4 May 2009, p. 2.

⁸⁹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 3.

⁸⁹⁸ Southern Youth and Family Services, Correspondence in response to questions, 4 May 2009, p. 3.

⁸⁹⁹ NSW Government website. *Budget 2009-10*.

⁹⁰⁰ NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet. 2009. *Keep them safe: a shared approach to child wellbeing*, p.64.

This is of particular concern as children and young people in out-of-home care experience poor outcomes across a range of important developmental areas:

Children who go into long-term out-of-home care perform extremely badly on all the indicators—and, most tellingly of all, on health indicators and education indicators.... They tend to have babies very young, they tend to have mental health issues, they tend to be self-harming and suicide is higher among that group. They are more likely to end up in the criminal justice system. That is the research.⁹⁰¹

12.60 Ms Jane Woodruff from UnitingCare Burnside discussed the health issues for this group with the Committee:

Recent research by the Sydney Children's Hospital has shown that children in care under the age of 12 have high rates of physical, developmental and emotional health problems when compared to other children of their age. They have a poor uptake of immunisation and inadequate dental care.⁹⁰²

12.61 Some evidence to the Committee identified poor outcomes in the area of education. For example, research shows that while 80 per cent of children and young people living at home with their families in New South Wales complete their Higher School Certificate, less than 36 per cent of young people in care complete this critical educational milestone.⁹⁰³ This may be due to a disrupted educational experience caused by relocation or exclusion, which can in turn result in poor levels of educational attainment and impact negatively on the child or young person's access to protective factors such as quality relationships with peers and teachers⁹⁰⁴

12.62 In 2008, the NSW Ombudsman conducted a review of a group of children aged 10 to 14 in out-of-home care and under the parental responsibility of the Minister.⁹⁰⁵ The review identified shortcomings in areas such as:

- documenting in departmental case files of relevant health screening;
- documenting in departmental case files of children's health and developmental progress; and,
- meeting educational needs.⁹⁰⁶

12.63 A case file audit in relation to the needs of children aged between 9 and 14 years in out-of-home care was also conducted by the Office for Children-Children's Guardian in 2006-07.⁹⁰⁷ The audit monitored the provision of out-of-home care by designated agencies by focusing on the extent to which case management and casework practice is compliant with the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998* (and its Regulations and relevant NSW out-of-home care standards).⁹⁰⁸

⁹⁰¹ Louise Voigt, Barnardos Australia, Transcript of evidence, 11 June 2009, p. 10.

⁹⁰² Ms Jane Woodruff, UnitingCare Burnside, Transcript of evidence, 11 June 2009, p. 12.

⁹⁰³ See UnitingCare Burnside, Questions answered after hearing, 11 June 2008, p. 1.

⁹⁰⁴ Submission no. 76, UnitingCare Burnside, p. 19.

⁹⁰⁵ This included interviews with children's caseworkers and/or casework managers, children's carers and other relevant service providers. Where appropriate children were offered the opportunity to be involved in the review.

NSW Ombudsman. 2009. *Review of a group of children aged 10 to 14 in out-of-home care and under the parental responsibility of the Minister of Community Services*, p. 4.

⁹⁰⁶ NSW Ombudsman. 2009. *Review of a group of children aged 10 to 14 in out-of-home care and under the parental responsibility of the Minister of Community Services*, pp. 8-11.

⁹⁰⁷ In 2006-07 the Case File Audit program was representative of the out-of-home care population in NSW.

⁹⁰⁸ Submission no. 111, NSW Office for Children- Children's Guardian, p. 4.

Safety and Security

- 12.64 According to the submission from the NSW Office for Children/Children's Guardian, of particular concern was non-compliance in relation to health records, particularly immunization details and consent arrangements for the use of psychotropic medications; education records; review of behaviour management issues; and the participation of children and parents in case conferences. An emerging pattern also showed that non-compliance in these areas was generally greater for Indigenous children than non-Indigenous children.⁹⁰⁹
- 12.65 The Committee is pleased to note that in 2008-09, the Children's Guardian conducted a targeted audit to examine practice related to meeting the health needs of children and young people in out-of-home care.⁹¹⁰
- 12.66 Access to services is a major issue for children and young people in out-of-home care, as is identified in the submission from UnitingCare Burnside:
- There are 10,623 children and young people in out-of-home care in New South Wales. We know that children and young people in care often have difficulty in accessing health, education, housing, welfare services and employment. They may experience significant medical, psychological, developmental, educational and behavioural problems. Reduced and interrupted access to services means that early intervention and effective delivery of services may not take place, with an impact on both their immediate needs and long-term outcomes.⁹¹¹
- 12.67 There are a number of mechanisms that have been put in place in relation to access to services. The NSW Department of Health has worked collaboratively with DoCS to develop a *Memorandum of Understanding* aimed at securing priority access to the NSW Department of Health's services for children and young people who fall within the target client group.⁹¹²
- 12.68 A Mental Health Addendum to the *Memorandum of Understanding* is being developed to strengthen the arrangements as set out in the *NSW Government Interagency Guidelines for Child Protection Intervention*. The addendum will focus specifically on the mental health needs of this vulnerable group of children and will provide a guide for appropriate referrals, ascertainment of need and jointly planned intervention.⁹¹³
- 12.69 There is also a *Memorandum of Understanding* between the DoCS and the NSW Department of Education and Training in relation to educational services for children and young persons in out-of-home care. The objectives of this *Memorandum of Understanding* are to:
- clarify the roles and responsibilities of the two departments in meeting the needs of children and young people in out-of-home care who are attending a NSW Government school;
 - ensure that children and young people in out-of-home care receive appropriate support at those stages, or in those circumstances in their school life, where coordinated service delivery through information sharing, or case planning or management is beneficial.

⁹⁰⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

⁹¹⁰ Submission no. 111, NSW Office for Children- Children's Guardian, pp. 12-13.

⁹¹¹ Submission no. 76, UnitingCare Burnside, p. 44.

⁹¹² Submission no. 87, NSW Government. p. 24.

⁹¹³ *ibid.*, p. 24.

- provide for the development of individual education plans on a case-by-case basis, as appropriate; and for responding to requests from DoCS, an authorised carer, or a child, or young person in care, for learning support, based on identified need.⁹¹⁴

12.70 The Wood Inquiry examined the literature about outcomes for children and young people in out-of-home care and their access to services in some depth and made a number of recommendations that relate to improving access to services for children and young people in out-of-home care. These include:

- recommendation 16.3. Within 30 days of entering out-of-home care, all children and young persons should receive a comprehensive multi-disciplinary health and developmental assessment. A mechanism for monitoring, evaluating and reviewing access and achievement of outcomes should be developed by the NSW Department of Health and the NSW Department of Community Services.
- recommendation 16.4. NSW Health should appoint an out-of-home care coordinator in each Area Health Service and at The Children's Hospital at Westmead.
- recommendation 16.5. The Department of Education and Training should appoint an out-of-home care coordinator in each region.
- recommendation 16.6. The NSW Government has the responsibility to ensure that all children and young persons removed from their parents and placed in its care receive adequate health treatment. Thus, there should be sufficient health services including speech therapy, mental health and dental services to treat, as a matter of priority, children and young persons in out-of-home care.⁹¹⁵
- recommendation 16.8. Within 30 days of entering out-of-home care, all pre-school and school aged children and young persons should have an individual education plan prepared for them which is reviewed annually by the Department of Education and Training and by the responsible caseworker. A mechanism for monitoring, evaluating and reviewing access and achievement of outcomes, should be developed by the Department of Education and Training and the NSW Department of Community Services.⁹¹⁶

12.71 In its response to the Wood Inquiry Report the NSW Government supported all of the above recommendations.⁹¹⁷

⁹¹⁴ Special Commission of Inquiry into Child Protection Services in NSW. 2008. *Report of the special commission of inquiry into child protection services in NSW*, conducted by Hon James Wood, vol. 2, p.670.

⁹¹⁵ Special Commission of Inquiry into Child Protection Services in NSW. 2008. *Report of the special commission of inquiry into child protection services in NSW*, conducted by Hon James Wood, vol. 2, p.689.

⁹¹⁶ Recommendation 16.8 was supported in part. The Government will support individual education plans for children in all Government schools and will further examine appropriate measures to support children in out-of-home care that attend preschools and non-government schools.
NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet. 2009. *Keep them safe: a shared approach to child wellbeing*, p.82.

⁹¹⁷ NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet. 2009. *Keep them safe: a shared approach to child wellbeing*, pp. 80-82.

Committee comment

- 12.72 The issues most commonly raised in evidence to the Inquiry about out-of-home care related to the health, education and wellbeing of these children and young people. There is substantial evidence that children and young people in out-of-home care have very poor outcomes, including in health and education.
- 12.73 This has been recognised in the NSW Government's commitment to implementing the recommendations of the Wood Inquiry Report relating to the health and education of children and young people in out-of-home care. The Committee considers that it is essential that the implementation and outcomes of these recommendations are monitored, evaluated and reviewed and made publicly available, to ensure that services are being provided in a timely manner and that they are making a difference.
- 12.74 The Committee also sees a continued role for the NSW Ombudsman in reviewing the health education and other needs of a group of children and young people in the middle years and for the Office for Children/Children's Guardian to undertake case file audits in relation to these needs. The Committee considers that these two agencies should, in communication with each other, undertake such reviews/audits once the relevant recommendations stemming from the Wood Inquiry have been implemented for a reasonable period. If possible, these should also examine access to social and recreational activities.

RECOMMENDATION 37: The Committee recommends that, pursuant to s 11(d) of the *Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998*, the Commissioner for Children and Young People consult with the Minister for Health and the Minister for Community Services about the feasibility of establishing a mechanism for reviewing and assessing access of children and young people in out-of-home care to health services.

Access to social and recreational activities and tutoring

- 12.75 The submission from UnitingCare Burnside recommended that the NSW Government adopt the *NSW Guarantee for Kids in Care* (the Guarantee). The Guarantee includes areas such as education, health, transition to independence and interests and opportunities,⁹¹⁸ and would give a commitment to all children and young people in the care of the Minister for Community Services that the NSW Government would prioritise their needs, health and development and ensure that important services are appropriately available up to the age of 25.
- 12.76 One area identified in the Guarantee, but not addressed by the Wood Inquiry, is the access of children and young people in care to social and recreational activities. Evidence to the Committee's Inquiry has identified the importance of participation in sport and recreational activities as being critical to the development of children 9-14 years, especially disadvantaged children. The Guarantee also identifies a need for extra support for children and young people in out of school hours care in relation to tutoring and access to activities.

⁹¹⁸ Submission no. 76, UnitingCare Burnside, p. 21 & p 44.

Committee Comment

12.77 The Committee notes that the importance of access to sport and recreational activities and homework support for disadvantaged children and young people in this age group has been documented elsewhere in this Report. Given the poor outcomes of children and young people in out-of-home care the Committee considers that ensuring access for children and young people in out-of-home care to social and recreational activities as well as tutoring is essential.

RECOMMENDATION 38: The Committee recommends that, pursuant to s 11(d) of the *Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998*, the Commissioner for Children and Young People consult with the Minister for Community Services about strengthening provisions for children and young people in out-of-home care to participate in social and recreational activities and in tutoring.

Juvenile justice

Children whose first juvenile justice supervision order occurs before the age of 15 ... represent a particularly disadvantaged and high-risk group of the Australian population, characterised by high levels of socioeconomic stress, low levels of educational attainment, significant physical and mental health needs, and a history of drug and alcohol abuse, physical abuse and childhood neglect.⁹¹⁹

Introduction

12.78 The reverse side of keeping children and young people safe from mistreatment is where their own anti-social or criminal behaviour requires some form of juvenile justice intervention. These typically involve the NSW Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ), which shares responsibility for addressing juvenile offending with other agencies such as Justice Health, DoCS and DET.

12.79 This section looks at the extent to which children and young people in the middle years experience some form of juvenile justice intervention. However, the Committee notes the recent announcement of a strategic review of juvenile justice policy and practice in New South Wales to ensure that DJJ is able to provide the best possible ways of reducing recidivism among young offenders. This review will focus on “a system wide audit of current juvenile justice policy, practice and strategies in New South Wales to reduce juvenile re-offending rates”.⁹²⁰ Accordingly, the Committee does not intend to examine the issue of offending among 9-14 year olds in great detail. Nonetheless, there were a number of significant issues relating to juvenile justice in New South Wales which the Committee considered warranted highlighting in the Report.

⁹¹⁹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. 2009. *A picture of Australia's children 2009*, Canberra, p. 117.

⁹²⁰ See NSW Department of Juvenile Justice website.

The Committee also notes that the NSW Government has developed a *Crime Prevention Framework* to refocus strengths and coordinate activities at both State and local levels which aim to reduce crime levels, deter criminal activities, increase community safety and minimise the occurrence of anti social behaviour.

Who is in the juvenile justice system?

12.80 During 2006–07 throughout Australia, a total of 2,337 children aged 10-14 years were under some form of juvenile justice supervision at some time.⁹²¹ Of these, the great majority – some 80 per cent - were boys. Most children under supervision were aged 14 years, and only 5 per cent were aged 10 or 11 years.⁹²² With respect to New South Wales, for every 1,000 children and young people aged between ten and seventeen:

- 11.6 had a criminal matter finalised in the Children’s Court;
- 9.0 were convicted and/or sentenced in these finalised matters;
- 3.0 were given sentences requiring the Department to supervise them in their community; and
- 0.8 were sentenced to detention.⁹²³

12.81 According to DJJ, young people in custody and on community service orders in New South Wales are predominantly young males aged between sixteen and seventeen years of age. Young women make up a small percentage of juveniles in custody, remaining stable at around six percent for several years. Children and young people less than 15 constitute about half the young people participating in youth justice conferences and on remand, and about a third of those under community supervision or sentenced to detention.⁹²⁴

12.82 The Committee notes that some sub-groups of particularly vulnerable children and young people are over-represented in the juvenile justice system. These are as follows:

- children and young with a disability. Approximately 88 percent of young people in custody and 40 per cent in the community reporting symptoms consistent with a psychiatric disorder;⁹²⁵
- Indigenous children: of the nine percent of children under juvenile justice supervision aged under 13 years, 60 per cent were Indigenous. Indigenous children were also more likely to be younger than non-Indigenous children when they received their first supervision order;⁹²⁶ and
- children not living at home: Bail provisions often include a condition that the child had somewhere to reside. The Committee heard evidence to the effect that some young people are detained due to a lack of appropriate placements.⁹²⁷

12.83 Research has identified issues to do with accommodation for children and young people involved in the juvenile justice system during the court process and the response of DoCS:

⁹²¹ This constitutes a rate of 1.7 per 1,000 children, which is approximately twice the rate of England and Wales, but only one fifth of that of the United States.

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. 2009. *A picture of Australia’s children 2009*, Canberra, p. 117.

Throughout Australia, the age of 10 is the youngest at which a child may enter the juvenile justice system.

⁹²² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. 2009. *A picture of Australia’s children 2009*, Canberra, p. 119.

⁹²³ NSW Department of Juvenile Justice. 2008. *Annual Report 2007-2008*, p. 20.

⁹²⁴ *ibid.*, p. 22.

⁹²⁵ *ibid.*, p. 24.

⁹²⁶ Submission no. 13, Public Interest Advocacy Centre, p. 3.

⁹²⁷ Submission no. 54, Southern Youth and Family Services, p. 15.

... I'm not a cryer, but I cried last Friday at the bar table, because there were ten DoCS kids that were there and just had nowhere to go and there was one little kid was like, barely waist height ... hugging me all the time because I was the only person that was there to help. Like there was no-one there for him ...⁹²⁸

Committee comment

- 12.84 The *Children (Criminal Proceedings) Act 1987* sets out the principles applicable to all courts exercising criminal jurisdiction with respect to children. Important among these are that children who commit offences bear responsibility for their actions but, because of their state of dependency and immaturity, require guidance and assistance; and that it is desirable, wherever possible, to allow the education or employment of a child to proceed without interruption and to allow a child to reside in his or her own home.⁹²⁹ The Committee notes that there is evidence to show that lesser levels of juvenile justice intervention, such as youth justice conferencing, further these principles, and have led to reduced rates of re-offending in New South Wales.⁹³⁰
- 12.85 Moreover, there is considerable evidence to show that the use of focussed programs, such as specialist behavioural intervention, drug and alcohol services and mental health services, prior to any criminal behaviour is particularly effective in keeping children and young people from offending in the first place.⁹³¹ The Committee notes that some local government authorities, such as Albury City Council and Port Stephens Council, have an impressive array of services available for children and young people aged 9-14 years.⁹³² Similarly, organisations such as the Police Community Youth Clubs have an important role to play in focussing children and young people in this age group on positive behaviours, thereby operating as a protective factor.⁹³³
- 12.86 There is also now in place in New South Wales a range of innovative programs focused on Indigenous children and young people. These include Youth Crime Camps, which aim to break down barriers between Aboriginal children, young people and police; and *Back on Track*, which is designed to direct Aboriginal young people at risk of offending away from committing crime and to assist youth to gain and develop skills needed to make informed decisions in their life.⁹³⁴
- 12.87 The Committee notes with concern that between 2007 and 2008, the NSW juvenile remand population grew by 32 per cent, from an average of 181 per day to 239 per day.⁹³⁵ It has been suggested to the Committee that some bail conditions are an

⁹²⁸ Submission no. 12, Ms Nicola Ross, p. 3.

⁹²⁹ Section 6 of the *Children (Criminal Proceedings) Act 1987*.

⁹³⁰ See, e.g. NSW Auditor-General. 2007. *Addressing the Needs of Young Offenders*.

⁹³¹ See, e.g. Community Services Commission. 1996. *The drift of children in care into the juvenile justice system: turning victims into criminals*, p. 42.

⁹³² An example is the Port Stephens Independent Youth Network, which offers an operating structure that is contemporary, relevant to current community needs and will ultimately ensure a high level of youth participation in all aspects of community life: youth participation is the "key for turning on" this approach.

⁹³³ See Submission no. 15, Newcastle PCYC, p. 3.

⁹³⁴ Submission no. 87, NSW Government, pp. 50-51

⁹³⁵ Over the same period, the annual recurrent financial cost of keeping juveniles on remand rose by 29 per cent from approximately \$36.7 million to \$47.2 million.

NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research. 2009. 'Recent trends in legal proceedings for breach of bail, juvenile remand and crime', *Crime and Justice Bulletin*, May 2009, p. 1.

attempt to address the failure of support and care services, particularly with respect to children in out-of-home care.⁹³⁶

12.88 The Committee encourages the Departmental strategic review of juvenile justice policy and practice in New South Wales to bear in mind the core principles of the *Children (Criminal Proceedings) Act 1987*, especially that children who commit offences bear responsibility for their actions but, because of their state of dependency and immaturity, require guidance and assistance. To ensure the best results for young offenders, their families and the wider community, the Committee considers that the review will need to:

- promote the use of early intervention strategies for at-risk children and young people;
- address the over-representation in the juvenile justice system of children with disabilities, Indigenous children, and children in out-of-home care;
- strike the right balance between dealing with young offenders as individuals, while having a family focus on the reasons behind offending; and
- encourage practices to assist young people to meet bail conditions, establish stable housing and allow them to continue to attend school and maintain community contacts; and
- urge appropriate funding of relevant services targeted to areas of need, based upon better cooperation and coordination between DoCS, DJJ and other relevant agencies.

⁹³⁶ Submission no. 13, Public Interest Advocacy Centre, p. 7.

PIAC also notes that such practices may be in breach of Article 37(b) of the UN *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, which provides for detention for children as a last resort.