

COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE
Inquiry into Children, Young People and the Built Environment

ISSUES PAPER 3: Related Developments in New South Wales

Executive Summary

It is apparent that some exciting work is happening in relation to children, young people and the built environment nationally and internationally. The question now then, is how well is NSW 'performing' in comparison to these national and internal developments / projects? This question is not easily answered, as there are many (often disparate) developments in NSW worthy of recognition. The establishment of the Commission for Children and Young People, the NSW Youth Advisory Council, the NSW Youth Policy, design guidelines (including *Child-Friendly Environments* and *Urban Design Guidelines with Young People in Mind*, a recent half-day forum on child-friendly cities (sponsored by the Commission), the numerous local government youth advisory groups and specific developments in areas such as young people's access to shopping centres, are all consistent with key provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the 'child friendly cities' movement.

Relevant Developments in New South Wales

There are numerous developments relevant to the built environment as they relate to children and young people.

Participation

Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child has been the catalyst of considerable work to ensure that children and young people are involved in decisions that affect their lives. Article 12 states:

1. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child
2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly or indirectly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules or national law.

Numerous benefits are said to flow from involving children and young people in decisions that affect their lives:

- Increases a sense of being part of the community and builds ownership of solutions to particular problems / issues;
- Enhances capabilities of decision-making;
- Builds connections to other young people and adults;
- Helps young people learn;
- Improves financial outcomes; and
- Shows and promotes talent.¹

While “public participation in planning is universally acknowledged as a good thing by local government and planners ... children and young people have not generally been included as ‘public’ for purposes of participation even though they usually constitute between 30 and 40% of the population. Consideration of children and young people has tended to be confined to issues relating to allocating resources and developments, public services and facilities such as building schools and sports fields”.²

The following developments pertain to initiatives or policies consistent with the spirit of Article 12 of the Convention:

¹ Burfoot, D. (2003) ‘Children and young people’s participation: Arguing for a better future’, **Youth Studies Australia**, Vol. 22, No. 3, Tasmania.

² Freeman, C; Aitken-Rose, E. and Johnston, R. (2004) **Generating the Future? The State of Local Government Planning for Children and Young People in New Zealand**, Report on Research Findings.

- NSW Youth Advisory Council – established in 1989, the NSW Youth Advisory Council consists of 12 part-time members (aged between 12-24 years), who are responsible (amongst other things) for advising the Minister on the planning, development, integration and implementation of Government policies and programs concerning young persons and to consult with young persons, community groups and Government authorities on issues and policies concerning young persons.³
- Establishment of the Commission for Children and Young People in 1998. A central function of the Commission is promoting the participation of children and young people in the making of decisions that affect their lives.⁴ Various Commission resources and initiatives have been in response to this function, including the *Taking PARTicipation Seriously* Kit, the *Ask the Children* series, the establishment of a *Participation Advisory Service* and the *Speak up, Speak Out Program*, which gives young people the opportunity to develop and practice advocacy skills.⁵
- NSW Youth Policy 2002-2006 *Working Together, Working for Young People* – published in 2002, the NSW Youth Policy identified participation as one of six key strategies. Strategy 1 – being seen, heard and valued seeks to “increase participation of young people in our community, and involving them in the decisions and processes that impact on their lives”.⁶ This strategy identified various structures associated with the participation of children and young people (i.e. the 108 young people listed on the NSW Register of Boards and Committees, the 12,000 secondary school students involved in Student Representative Councils, local government youth councils) as well as proposing the re-development of the NSW Government’s Youth website, contributing to the National Youth Affairs Research Scheme and supporting the development of the Indigenous Youth Network (amongst other things).

Further to these developments, there has been growing interest in and use of youth councils across local government areas in New South Wales. Siggers, Palmer, Royce, Wilson and Charlton suggest that “virtually all councils have some formal youth governance structures such as youth advisory groups or councils” (2004: 2). Examples of operating youth councils in NSW include:

³ *Youth Advisory Council Act 1989*, S 11 (1)

⁴ *NSW Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998*

⁵ Roth, L. (2005) **Children’s Rights in NSW**, Background Paper No. 2/05, NSW Parliamentary Library Research Service, Sydney.

⁶ Pages 6 and 7, NSW Youth Policy 2002-2006.

- Albury City Youth Council has been set-up to provide opportunities for young people to achieve a sense of civic mindedness, leadership development, and personal achievement and have an active voice within Albury City Council and the Albury Community. Members of the Youth Council are nominated for a twelve month term with appointments being made in July of each year. Objectives of the Youth Council include:
 - Represent and raise the profile of the young people within the community.
 - Foster a sense of community to advance the needs of young people in the Albury area.
 - Identify gaps within the system in relation to existing youth services and assist to fill these gaps.
 - Assist the Albury City Council in the formulation of policy on youth affairs.
 - Provide a recognised link between young people, Albury City and the general community.
 - Provide and receive information through networks with local high schools, TAFE, University and existing youth services.
 - Create opportunities to generate civic mindedness amongst young people and provide opportunities to have fun.

- Dubbo City Youth Council has operated since 1994 and currently has an active Council comprising of 17 members aged between 12 and 25. Composition of the Youth Council includes representatives from each of the five high schools located within Dubbo, student representatives from the Dubbo Senior Campus, community representatives and there are also positions set aside to be filled by TAFE and Charles Sturt University. The Dubbo City Youth Council receives full support from Dubbo City Council whom provide secretarial, financial and management support to the operations of the Youth Council. The Youth Council allows young people to have a say about issues that are affecting them in Dubbo. Each year, Dubbo City Council refers its Draft Management Plan to the Youth Council for comment. The Youth Council has also been quite active in making submissions in regards to the Draft Management Plan on youth and environmental matters. This coming year the Youth Council has decided to focus on several issues including lobbying for an upgrade of the BMX track facilities and skatepark, raising the positive profile of youth in the community and organising a youth event.

- Forbes Council Youth Advisory Committee is currently being established to give young people in Forbes a voice to issues they feel are important in their community. It is open to all young people aged between 10 and 18 years who want to be actively involved in their community. Individuals do not need to be a member of the Youth Advisory Committee and can be involved just to work on specific youth projects. The committee consists of

- 10 members, six young people, two adult community members and two Forbes Shire councillors. The youth & community officer attends meetings in an ex-officio capacity. The objectives of the Advisory Committee include:
- Oversee the provision of services to Forbes Shire youth through the Forbes Youth and Community Centre.
 - The Youth Action Council is fun, interactive and encourages ideas from young people within the community.
 - To advise Forbes Shire Council on issues and solutions affecting young people within Forbes.
 - To promote young people in a positive manner.
 - To work on the development and implementation of the community projects that benefit the Forbes community.
- Newcastle Youth Council provides an opportunity for young people aged between fifteen and twenty five to participate. The group is supported by Newcastle City Council who have recognised the importance of providing young people with a suitable forum to encourage input into community issues. Youth Council also provides an opportunity for young people to develop leadership skills through planning and staging events during Youth Week each year and participating on Council committees such as the Community Safety Panel, Social Strategy Advisory Committee and the Australia Day Committee. The objectives of the Youth Council are to:
 - reflect the interests of young people
 - raise awareness on issues affecting young people
 - organise activities in which young people can participate
 - provide an advisory group for organisations wishing to develop programs and activities for young people
 - allow for interaction between people with diverse interests and backgrounds.
 - Shoalhaven Youth Advisory Committee was established in 1996. This was a result of Council's consultations with the community, including young people, who recommended that Council set up such a Committee to represent the interests & views of young people to Council & the community. Since 1996, over 60 local young people have participated in the Youth Advisory, both as nominated youth reps and as invited guests. So that young people from throughout the Shoalhaven can be involved, transport assistance is available & meetings can be held in various locations. Anyone aged 15 to 25 years living in the Shoalhaven region can be involved. Current activities include:

- Participation in Youth Week Steering Committee & the Safer Community Action Team
- The White Ribbon road safety campaign & other young driver safety strategies
- The development of a draft Youth Suicide Prevention Plan for the Shoalhaven
- Participation in the Nowra Skate Facility working group
- Consultations with various Government Departments and other agencies
- Youth Entertainment Project “Rock Fest” supporting local music & youth talent
- Attendance at various National and state-wide youth gatherings and the subsequent implementation of appropriate local area actions & strategies

While numerous benefits from these practices can be achieved, as highlighted previously, Saggars et al caution that “some believe that the practice of youth participation can be problematic and dominated by school leaders, or have a ‘hidden agenda’ about the need to create good citizens” (2004: 15). Moreover, as was identified by Tilberg Municipal Council (Netherlands), participation confined to youth councils and advisory groups can exclude hard to reach or marginalized groups, which can distort the nature of the advice and input provided.

As will be shown, participation of children and young people is highlighted in building and design guidelines, but the actual practice of such participation is questioned.

Building and Design Guidelines

Another set of developments linked to children, young people and the built environment pertains to building and design guidelines. The development of guidelines is one way to influence built environment projects. In the past 10 years, there have been a small number of key documents pertaining to the needs of children and young people in the built environment in New South Wales:

1. *Young People Today ... planning for their needs in public spaces* - The Department of Urban Affairs (now the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources) conducted research into the experiences of young people in Port Macquarie and facilitated a workshop with key local stakeholders. From this work, a set of urban design guidelines were recommended for use in Port Macquarie. These guidelines highlighted the need for accessible public transport, inclusive design, attention to surveillance and security and provision of public entertainment and expression.
2. *Urban Design Guidelines with young people in mind* - The Department of Urban Affairs and Planning and the Urban Design Advisory Service released

these guidelines in September 1999. These guidelines built on the previous work in Port Macquarie and highlighted a key consideration regarding young people's use of public space – “young people have needs in public spaces which are similar to other community members, and that they would prefer to share space with other people rather than be isolated from them”.⁷ These guidelines identified eight key principles for urban design with young people in mind:

- Getting there and around – maximising public transport routes and providing facilities for bike and skateboards will facilitate use of spaces by young people
- Designing in all users – integrate, rather than segregating young people through the provision of wide spaces, seating for ‘hanging out’ and involvement young people in design discussions
- Building liveliness – catering for a wide range of users through a mix of residential, retail, commercial and entertainment outlets / offers
- Making safe places – adoption of crime prevention through environmental design principles to enhance perceived safety and increase activation and utilization of areas
- The public stage – venues for self expression and public entertainment should be provided
- Keeping public space public – maintenance of public spaces and avoidance of over-management through security guards and CCTV are recommended to retain public amenities
- Separate but visible – provide conflict-generating activities separate, but within sight of other spaces
- Basic services – provide basic services (toilets, public telephones) for young people to utilise.

3. *Child-friendly Environments* – the NSW Department of Urban Affairs and Planning (in collaboration with the NSW Play Alliance) published this booklet in 1999, by way of an update on the previous, *Planning with Children in Mind* (1981) publication. This detailed document provides both research evidence and practical examples of numerous considerations in developing child-friendly environments. The book recognizes the developmental importance of play for children and the negative impacts of urbanization and high density housing on recreational options of children. Furthermore, attention is given to the need for stimulating, enjoyable and educational environments, as a means of assisting children with developmental tasks linked to balance, coordination, sight, hearing and understanding of the world.

⁷ Page 2, Urban Design Guidelines (1999)

Case Study – Young People and Shopping Centres

Shopping Centres have emerged in recent decades as venues for young people to congregate, socialize and recreate. Shopping Centres play a vital role in the lives of many young people. Employment, low-cost (or free) recreation, safety, peer interaction, romantic attachment and the purchasing and consumption of goods and services, are but some of the reasons why young people utilize and visit Shopping Centres.

However, young people are not alone in their use of these facilities. People from diverse backgrounds with diverse interests and expectations intersect in Shopping Centres. Shopping Centre Managers, retailers, security personnel and shoppers of all ages have differing needs and expectations of Shopping Centres. For some, maximizing profit is the key objective; for others, the provision of a safe environment to consume and purchase will be important; while for others an enjoyable, easy shopping experience will be the goal. Not surprisingly then, Turner and Campbell concluded from their consultations with young people and security personnel, that “different individuals and groups have varying perceptions about the purpose of a Shopping Centre”.⁸

These different opinions, perceptions and expectations have in recent years resulted in growing conflict in some Shopping Centres. In the report, *Hanging Out – negotiating young people’s use of public space*, it was suggested that adults who work in or use public space (such as Shopping Centres) were concerned about antisocial behaviour by young people and most adults believed that there were particular groups of young people who were not using public space in a suitable manner.⁹

White suggests that these observations and perceptions, coupled with wider demonisation of young people have resulted in young people being excluded from use of public space. Perceptions and “images of anarchy, ‘ethnic youth gangs’, juvenile crime waves and various moral panics over the state of youths today, have gone hand-in-hand with concerted campaigns to make young people unwelcome in our ... Shopping Centres”.¹⁰ The attention that young people receive due to their dress, behaviour, their limited consumption / spending and the perceptions of other users of Shopping Centres, has resulted in some young people being harassed or banned from Shopping Centres by security personnel and many young people feeling unwelcome in Shopping Centres.

⁸ Turner, S. and Campbell, S. (1999) *Consultation with Young People and Security Officers – Report*, Western Sydney Public Space Project, Youth Action and Policy Association.

⁹ National Crime Prevention (1999) *Hanging out – negotiating young people’s use of public space*, Report Findings, Commonwealth, Attorney General’s Department, Canberra.

¹⁰ White, R. (1997) *Regulating Youth Space – Are young people losing the struggle for a space of their own?*, *Alternative Law Journal*, Vol. 22, No. 1.

This growing conflict has proven unsatisfactory with key stakeholders and users of Shopping Centres. Retailers are concerned that fearful or unhappy shoppers will take their business elsewhere, resulting in a loss of income; Shopping Centre Managers are concerned about occupancy rates of the stores and the impact of reduced income for retailers on occupancy rates; security personnel, engaged by Shopping Centre management, are concerned with safety (and perceptions of safety) of shoppers and maintaining an atmosphere conducive to consumption and spending; while young people seek enjoyment and entertainment.

Conflict between these different stakeholders is detrimental to maintaining a (profitable) harmonious environment, which can have consequences for all stakeholders. In recognition of the need to promote a harmonious environment and to reduce this growing tension, numerous creative proactive measures have evolved in many Shopping Centres.

Some of the recent developments adopted in New South Wales to prevent conflict between young people and shopping centre security, centre management and other centre users have included:

- Development of *Creating the Space for Dialogue – the NSW Youth Shopping Centre Protocol*: this publication was designed to provide a framework for the development of local shopping centre protocols and was funded by the NSW Attorney General’s Crime Prevention Division and the Shopping Centre Council of Australia. Protocols seek to articulate conditions of entry, define acceptable and unacceptable behaviour and identify consequences for unacceptable behaviour. Various local protocols have been developed since the release of this document in 2003, including protocols in Penrith, Bondi Junction, Hurstville, Macarthur and Parramatta.¹¹
- Information for Shopping Centre Security Guards – through funding from the Western Sydney Area Assistance Scheme, a self-paced learning package has been developed for shopping centre security guards. This package was developed in 2004 to provide shopping centre security guards with some pertinent information on ways to prevent conflict with young people. This package is freely available from the Youth Action and Policy Association website.
- Forum on Young People and Shopping Centres – in February 2005 a forum was conducted for in excess of 150 shopping centre management, security, youth sector and police personnel. The forum provided opportunities to showcase numerous positive initiatives associated with young people’s

¹¹ Roth, L. ((2005) **Children’s Rights in NSW**, Background Paper No. 2/05, NSW Parliamentary Library Research Service, Sydney.

access and use of shopping centres. Presentations included: description of the new youth centre at Erina Fair shopping centre; discussion of the challenges in tackling media images and community perceptions that portray young people as threatening and violent; innovative approaches to shopping centre security and local projects increasing participation of young people in key decisions associated with the design and management of shopping centres.

Case Study – Public Private Partnership Approach to School Building

Nine new schools (seven primary, one secondary and one special needs) are to be built between 2007 and 2009 in locations across NSW (predominantly western and south-western Sydney, Central Coast and Maitland areas) in a public private partnership. NSW Treasury and NSW Department of Education and Training are jointly involved in the tendering process, which is due to be finalised in October 2005, with the contract being awarded in November-December 2005.

The construction of schools provides a primary opportunity to engage children and young people in relevant aspects of the design. Numerous publications have been developed reflecting the views of children and young people on good school designs. Two such publications include:

Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (2004) **Being Involved in School Design: a guide for school communities, local authorities, funders and design and construction teams**, London. This publication promotes the involvement of school communities in the design process. The publication cites key examples where positive outcomes were achieved through the meaningful participation of children and young people. Examples include:

- Westborough Primary School – “Like many schools it has been improved in an ad hoc manner over the years, with alterations often imposed rather than priorities by the school community. Legacies of this approach include uncoordinated development and poor use of funds”. To engage children (pupils) in aspects of the project, questionnaires were distributed to pupils; groups of pupils (aged 9-10 years) went on study visits to the architects offices to review models and discuss plans; and screens were erected during construction to enable pupils to observe stages of construction work.
- Wrockwardine Wood Junior School – “from the outset the school wanted to ... get children involved in the design and construction process”. Curriculum projects were developed to tie in with the design and construction of the new classrooms. Even school furniture designs involved the pupils.

- Kingsdale School – “Kingsdale School was in an advanced state of disrepair by the end of the 1990s. The buildings were handicapped by a lack of storage, narrow corridors, inadequate technological resources, and poor dining and staff facilities ... the new head teacher wondered how he could improve the school, whose poor physical condition reinforced the low morale of the pupils and staff. In spring 1998 ... the school’s aims [were re-written], focusing on the potential impact of environment improvements”. Every one of the pupils were consulted, which in part enabled “the design team to create a new kind of learning space, a more flexible education environment that combines inclusivity with spectacular architecture”

Department of Education and Skills (2003) **Schools for the Future: Exemplar Designs and Ideas**, London. This publication draws together 11 case studies which depict elements of key designs to promote learning. Learning clusters, outdoor classrooms, flexibility, adaptability, sustainability and inclusiveness are just some of the key principles canvassed in the publication.

The NSW Commission for Children and Young People undertook consultation with children and young people as part of the NSW Department of Education and Training’s *Future Project: Excellence and Innovation* in early 2005. This report suggested that some students had less than favourable views of their school environment:

“Looks like a jail. Makes you feel like you are locked up ... trapped inside”

“ All concrete and bars everywhere”

“At school we have no play equipment. Need playground equipment, slippery dip”

The report by the Commission notes comments made by Tony Vinson in the *Report of the Public Education Inquiry* (2005): “... when allowance has been made for other relevant factors, the physical state of a school is one effective predictor of student achievement. Research suggests that the quality of physical space affects self-esteem and student-teacher interactions, parental involvement, discipline and interpersonal relations”.