

COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

THE DEVELOPMENT OF WELLBEING IN CHILDREN – SOME ASPECTS OF RESEARCH AND COMMENT ON CHILD AND ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT

**PROCEEDINGS OF A SEMINAR,
PARLIAMENT HOUSE, SYDNEY, 7 MARCH 2001**

**Report 3/52
ISBN 0 7313 5168 1
ISSN 1445-808X**

June 2001

This report may be cited as:

Committee on Children and Young People (Ed.)(2001). The development of wellbeing in children – some aspects of research and comment on child and adolescent development. Proceedings of a seminar, Parliament House, Sydney, 7 March 2001. Third report of the Committee on Children and Young People of the 52nd Parliament. Sydney, NSW: Parliament of New South Wales.

New South Wales Parliamentary Library cataloguing-in-publication data:

New South Wales. Parliament. Committee on Children and Young People
1999-2000 - Sydney, N.S.W. : The development of wellbeing in children – some aspects of research and comment on child and adolescent development, Proceedings of a seminar, Parliament House, 7 March 2001. Committee on Children and Young People, 2001. – 173 p. ; 30 cm. (Report /, ISSN 1445-808X; 3/52) June 2001.
Chair: David Campbell MP.

ISBN 0 7313 5168 1
ISSN 1445-808X

1. Children – New South Wales. (LCSH)
2. Youth – New South Wales. (LCSH)
- I. Campbell, David.
- II. Title. The development of wellbeing in children
- III. Title: Some aspects of research and comment on child and adolescent development
- IV. Title: Proceedings of a seminar, Parliament House, 7 March 2001
- V. Series: New South Wales. Parliament. Committee on Children and Young People. Report; no. 52/3 363.125 (DDC21)

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June 2001

Members of the Committee on Children and Young People

Mr David Campbell M.P. (Chair), Member for Keira

The Hon. Peter Primose, M.L.C. (Vice-Chair)

Ms Diane Beamer M.P., Member for Mulgoa

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Mr Stephen O'Doherty M.P., Member for Hornsby

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Chair's foreword

David Campbell MP, Member for Keira Chair, Committee on Children and Young People

On Wednesday 7 March 2001 the Committee on Children and Young People and the Commission for Children and Young People came together to host their first joint public event – a seminar examining research and comment on the well-being of children and child and adolescent development, held at Parliament House.

The Committee on Children and Young People was established under the same legislation which established the Commission for Children and Young People, and was given a role to monitor and review the work of the Commission.

Apart from overseeing the work of the Commission, the Committee also wants to engage in an equal partnership with the Commission, particularly in areas where we can both learn and exchange ideas. We consider that child development, as one of the primary areas of importance for anyone working with children, should be the starting point for our ongoing relationship of inquiry.

The seminar enabled the Committee, and the public, to understand better how health and other social and environmental issues can impact on a child during their transition to adulthood. The keynote speaker was Professor David Fergusson, Department of Psychological Medicine, University of Otago, and head of the 21-year ‘Christchurch Health and Development Longitudinal Study’, which has involved more than 1,000 children from birth, and focuses on how a child’s longer term health, behaviour, abilities, and opportunities can be affected by family breakdown, sexual and physical abuse, health, and unemployment. Other speakers included Professor Sven Silburn, Centre for Developmental Health, Curtin University, who will discuss the Western Australia Child Health Survey and the Aboriginal Child Health Survey; Dr Victor Nossar, Director of Community Paediatrics, South Western Sydney Area Health Service, and Ms Gillian Calvert, Commissioner for Children and Young People.

Long-term research on the development and wellbeing of children is very important for the development of health, social and other policies which affect children. As a Parliamentary Committee charged with the significant task of examining issues which affect children, we can only benefit from this seminar.

Acknowledgments

As I have noted in previous reports, with eleven Members the Committee on Children and Young People is one of the largest of Parliament's Committees, and also one of the most diverse in terms of Members interests and political affiliations. It is this mix of individual views and opinions which, when placed into the general environment of the deliberations of

the Committee, which will provide a strong basis, I think, for the future work of the Committee.

I am grateful for the assistance of the Committee Secretariat: the Manager, Mr Ian Faulks, Ms Violeta Brdaroska, Committee Officer, and Ms Carlyne Allen, Assistant Committee Officer.

I commend this report to Parliament.

CONTENTS

	Pages
Members of the Committee on Children and Young People	2-3
Chair's foreword	5-6
Gillian Calvert <i>Commissioner, Commission for Children and Young People</i> Welcome	9-10
David Campbell MP <i>Chair, Committee on Children and Young People</i> Introductory remarks	11-12
Professor David Fergusson <i>Department of Psychological Medicine, University of Otago</i> The Christchurch Health and Development Study	13-40
Questions from the audience	41-46
Annexes and Bibliographical References.....	47-124
Professor Sven Silburn <i>Centre for Developmental Health, Curtin University of Technology and TVW Telethon Institute for Child Health Research</i> Promoting developmental health in Western Australia: How can research inform across-government policy and practice?	125-150
(Paper prepared by Silburn S.R., Zubrick S.R. & Williams, A.)	

Dr Victor Nossar

Director of Community Paediatrics, South Western Sydney Area Health Service

The contribution of research to improvement in health and
wellbeing of children 151-154

General questions from the audience 155-164

Extracts of the Minutes of the
Committee on Children and Young People 165-171

WELCOME

Ms Gillian Calvert

Commissioner, Commission for Children and Young People

My name is Gillian Calvert, and I am the Commissioner for Children and Young People in New South Wales. On behalf of the Commission, I would like to welcome everyone to the "Well-being: Through a Child's Development Stages" Seminar. As some of you probably know, this seminar is part of the Commission's support for professional development and follows on from our Focussing on the Early Years series that we did last year that some of you in fact may have been at.

I am pleased to say that for the first time with this seminar we are co-hosting the seminar with the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Children and Young People. For those of you who do not know, the Committee was appointed by Parliament last year in August to oversee the work of the Commission. The Committee has a broader responsibility than just oversighting the Commission. It also has a remit to examine trends and changes in services and issues affecting children and young people in New South Wales, and I think this is a tremendous advance, because for the first time in the New South Wales Parliament we have a committee made up of parliamentarians whose specific task is to focus on children and young people, and I think that is a tremendous thing.

Shortly, I will be introducing the Chair of the Committee, David Campbell, who I am sure will have more to say about their work. I will just briefly turn to the work of the Commission itself. As many of you know, the Commission is an organisation that works with others to promote the interests of children and young people. Our priority is to work in areas that will have a genuine and long-lasting impact on the safety and wellbeing of children and young people in New South Wales. Those of you who do not know: when those bells ring faintly in the background it is not the church bells; it is actually the parliamentary bells calling members to the Chamber.

These seminars that we are presenting today are a valuable opportunity to contribute to this area of children's safety and wellbeing, and we are very pleased that speakers of the calibre of Professor Fergusson, Professor Sven Silburn and Dr Nossar have been able to come together to share their knowledge with us. As practitioners, policy-makers, researchers and people whose work involves children and young people, you will hear about some of their important research findings on a range of issues that affect children and young people, and what you will hear today builds on an established body of knowledge that we already have. And I think it is really important that the decisions that we make as a society, as practitioners and policy-makers are based on sound research evidence.

Tomorrow, the Commission is hosting our inaugural research forum, and this has been set up to provide researchers into children and young people with the opportunity to come together, share ideas and promote the importance of their work.

WELCOMING ADDRESS

Ms Gillian Calvert, Commissioner, Commission for Children and Young People

Research increases our knowledge, and the level of interest that you are showing in this seminar indicates that as professionals you appreciate how important it is to increase your knowledge and the impact that that can have on children's wellbeing.

So, welcome! We hope you enjoy today. You will see from the timetable what our projected timetable is. David Fergusson will talk this morning about the Christchurch Health and Development Study. Then we will have lunch. And then Sven will talk about the Western Australian Child Health Research Study and, in particular, his Aboriginal medical study that he commenced, which I think is very exciting, and his work with the interagency Committee on Children's Future, which is a fantastic title. Children's Present and Future I think probably is what we should call it. And then Victor will talk about how we can use research to promote children's wellbeing. As you can see, we are packing a bit of material into one day, so we will try to stick firmly to the timetable.

Because we are doing this jointly with the joint parliamentary committee, we do have the services of Hansard, so they will be recording the presentation today, and it will then be put on to the Commission's website, which is www.kids.nsw.gov.au, and also the Joint Parliamentary Committee's website as well.

There will be time for questions from the audience at each of those sessions, because I know people want to make it as interactive as we can. So it is with great pleasure that I would like to introduce David Campbell, who is the Chair of the Joint Parliamentary Committee.

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Mr David Campbell, MP

Chairman, Committee on Children and Young People

Mr CAMPBELL: Thanks very much, Gill, and good morning and welcome everybody. As Chairman of the new Joint Parliamentary Committee on Children and Young People, it is indeed my pleasure to open today's seminar on children's wellbeing. The seminar is the first of what I hope will be many collaborative ventures between the Committee and the Commission for Children and Young People. The Committee on Children and Young People may be an unfamiliar organisation to many of you here today. It is a new committee of Parliament, formed just over six months ago. It is based in the same Act of Parliament that formed the Commission for Children and Young People.

One of the Committee's primary roles is to review the work of the Commission and make suggestions for changes, as it thinks appropriate. The Committee must, for example, conduct a formal examination of every report issued by the Commission and report its findings to Parliament. Recently, the Committee reviewed the first annual report of the Commission, and we will report to Parliament soon on that review. Suffice it to say, though, that the Commission has hit the ground running, and I am confident that this report to Parliament will be a very positive one.

The Committee can also conduct its own inquiries into matters affecting children and young people in New South Wales, and to this end the Committee has just launched an inquiry into the use of prescription drugs and medications in kids and teenagers. The terms of reference for this inquiry and a call for written submissions are available on the registration desk outside in the foyer. The inquiry notice is printed on green paper by the Committee and, I am told, blue paper by the Commission, if you wish to look at a copy. There is no significance in that other than the fact that we are trying to work together but maintain separate identities, I guess, and the real fact is that it was just a bit of a lack of communication that we both did it and did not tell each other. I thought I would put the positive spin on it first and then 'fess up' and tell you the truth. The real message, though, is please have a look at that and if you feel that you would like to make a contribution to the inquiry, please do so. We certainly do invite and welcome your comments.

Finally, the Committee wants to work to publicise and debate the issues that affect children and young people in New South Wales. We can do that through meetings with organisations and individuals who work on these sorts of issues, we can do it through comment in the media, and we can do it through the kind of seminar or conference we are attending today. Can I just let you know that I am also a member of another parliamentary committee, the Staysafe Committee, which looks at road safety issues. There is a quote that that committee commonly uses that has a bearing, I think, on the approach of the Committee on Children and Young People.

The quote is from Dr William Haddon, a man who perhaps more than others laid down the foundations for the modern approach to injury prevention. He said:

WELCOMING ADDRESS

Ms Gillian Calvert, Commissioner, Commission for Children and Young People

First we need to have research or, as I prefer to put it, practical fact finding. The second thing we need to do is to get the facts to people in a position to use them.

This is, in other words, the same sentiment that Gillian expressed in her welcoming remarks, and that was:

It is also important that the decisions we make as a society and in our individual families, organisations and communities are based on sound research evidence.

That is what this seminar today is attempting to do: to look at what the research evidence is about children and their development, the influences of the family circumstance, society and culture on a child's health, personal and social development, and spiritual development — in short, those things that affect a child's wellbeing. Today's seminar is not just about research; it is looking at how that research can be applied in policies, programs, and practices.

I look forward to the presentations today by Professor David Fergusson, Professor Sven Silburn, and Dr Victor Nossar, and thank them in advance for their contributions. As Gill said, Hansard will be recording the issues, and I would just like to thank Norma and Di. Normally, Hansard are in the background and they do not have names or faces, but Norma and Di do a great job for committees, let me tell you. I would also like to point out, as Gill did, that both the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council are sitting today. During the day members of the Committee for Children and Young People will be attending the seminar, but individually they will be obliged to come and go according to their House duties and other commitments. As Gill pointed out, it is also likely that the division bells will sound at times during the day. They are division bells—not necessarily the fire alarm, is the way I put it. Gill referred to them as church bells, but sometimes they are referred to here as a school bell as well. They sort of remind you of those times at school when bells ruled your day.

This coming and going is an occupational hazard in this place, and we just have to cope, despite the inherent interest of the talk at the time. I apologise in advance to our speakers. Not only will members of the joint committee come and go through the day, but other members of Parliament—or all members of Parliament, I might say—have also been invited to today's activities and invited to pop in as their responsibilities allow them. I say to you all: I wish you a pleasant day, and I and my colleagues hope to have the opportunity to talk to you during lunch and during the breaks. It is with confidence and enthusiasm that I welcome you all to the Parliament today, and I take the greatest pleasure in declaring this first joint seminar involving the Committee and the Commission for Children and Young People open. I hand you back to Gillian.