

**NSW Parliamentary Committee on Children and Young People
Children, Young People and the Built Environment**

**Indicative questions not asked at the hearing on 31 March 2010 of the
Parliamentary Committee on Children and Young People**

1. The Department's 2008/09 Annual Report notes that one of the planned activities under the community regeneration plans involves developing and implementing a youth engagement plan and upgrading the Lethbridge Park area in Mount Druitt. What does the youth engagement plan involve and is it also being implemented in other areas?

All the Building Stronger Communities regeneration partnership plans include strategies focusing on children and young people.

In the Mount Druitt Building Stronger Communities location, youth strategies have a particular focus on employment and skills development.

The Aboriginal Training and Employment Strategy is a key component of the Mt Druitt Youth Engagement Plan to address the significant barriers to employment faced by Indigenous young people in Mount Druitt.

The strategy involves identifying opportunities for employment and developing projects to provide local young people with access to these training and employment opportunities. Partnerships with key government, non government and community stakeholders have been critical to the achievements to date, which include over 60 local young people completing TAFE qualifications in construction.

The Mt Druitt Community Regeneration Team is developing and providing project development, coordination, facilitation and overall management for these projects.

Other actions under the youth engagement plan in Mt Druitt are:

- developing partnerships with local employers who have the capacity to directly employ individuals or subcontract to a locally developed social enterprise;
- providing extensive training, mentoring and coaching support for people who have little or no employment history in conjunction with a range of partners; and
- developing employment opportunities in the priority locations of Lethbridge Park, Willmot and Shalvey through traineeships, apprenticeships and subcontracting work.

A range of other initiatives under the Mt Druitt Youth Engagement Plan are under development.

In Lethbridge Park, Housing NSW is undertaking consultations and finalising plans for a physical renewal project drawing on Design out crime principles.

These physical works will include improving the amenity and design of public housing homes, increased safety and security measures, and aesthetic improvements surround shops and public spaces in the Lethbridge Park precinct.

Work is scheduled to commence in July 2010 after plans have been finalised and the community engagement phase completed.

2. The Committee's 2006 Report recommended that the Commission 'monitor the consequences of recent housing policies on children and young people across New South Wales' [Rec 3(m)]. With reference to this, how would you suggest that the extensive loss of traditional low-cost housing stock has affected children and young people in NSW?

For a growing number of people, housing affordability issues have become a problem. While this is particularly acute in Sydney, some rural and regional locations also experience significant shortages of affordable accommodation.

Housing affordability stress can have significant impacts on families, including children and young people.

Low income households experiencing housing affordability stress may not have enough money left after paying for housing costs to cover other necessities of life.

- This increases the probability of financial hardship which can result in a wide range of negative outcomes for children and young people - such as missing out on school activities, being unable to participate in sporting or community activities, or going without healthy meals.
- Financial hardship can also create stress that contributes to health problems and impacts on family relationships, which in turn can impact on child health and safety.

Households experiencing affordability stress can be forced into frequent moves, which can be disruptive to children and young people's participation in education and training.

A lack of affordable accommodation options increases the risk of homelessness for low income and vulnerable households. Young people living in households that are experiencing housing instability or homelessness are at high risk of low educational achievement.

In many cases, low income and vulnerable households face limited options.

- The trade offs made by households when attempting to secure affordable housing may impact on children and young people's access to education, employment, and services.
- In some cases, vulnerable households have no choice but to live in a location where disadvantage is concentrated. This can reinforce patterns of inter-generational transmission of disadvantage – which is of particular concern in relation to children and young people in jobless households.

3. In accordance with Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, how are children encouraged to participate in Housing NSW's decision-making processes?

Housing NSW is committed to supporting the participation of young people in its decision-making processes.

Tenant participation into the decision-making processes of Housing NSW is facilitated through a range of structures, including local advisory and project groups and the state-wide Social Housing Tenants Advisory Committee.

Social Housing Tenants Advisory Committee

This Committee consists of 12 social housing tenants and an independent Chair. Two members are selected from the geographic area of each of the four Housing Services Divisions, one tenant with the NSW Aboriginal Housing Office and three tenants with community housing providers.

Subject to appropriate applications, the Committee includes two young people (aged 18 to 25 years), tenants with disability, older tenants, tenants from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and regional and remote communities. At least one tenant from both Housing NSW and a Community Housing Provider is to be of an ATSI background.

Housing Service Divisions actively target and encourage young people to apply for membership of the Committee, using local officers and contacts to identify and support interested young people to apply.

There are currently two youth members, David Wassink and Lee Edwards, who actively contribute to committee business across a diverse range of housing and tenancy issues.

Lee in particular was able to provide the Committee with the benefit of her practical experience in working with homeless people and people with low incomes whilst employed with Mission Australia.

David is a member of several committees in the Illawarra that also provides support services to the local community. He was able to provide valuable input to discussions from a support service and educational perspective, having also recently completed Primary School Teaching qualifications.

The youth members provide invaluable perspectives and information in relation to young people's issues.

Local youth engagement

One example of a local youth participation initiative is the Minto Kids Council. This group provides a forum within which children can actively participate in decisions relating to the Minto community and a mechanism for capturing input and feedback from children regarding the Minto Renewal Project. It is also a developmental opportunity for the children to enhance their problem solving, decision making, interpersonal and public speaking skills.

Tenant Participation Framework

A tenant participation framework for Housing NSW is currently under development. The framework is expected to provide a structured approach to tenant participation across the social housing system, including participation by young people.

Consultation with young people's organisations

In addition, to direct involvement of young people in tenants' advisory groups, Housing NSW consults with key stakeholder groups representing young people.

For example, in developing the Housing NSW Youth Action Plan, consultations were undertaken with young people living in social housing and organisations representing young people – in particular the peak Youth Accommodation Service of NSW.

4. The recent Legislative Council Report on Homelessness and low-cost rental accommodation notes that the NSW Government is progressing its efforts to integrate public housing into local communities, with specific initiatives identified in its submission to the inquiry, including new public housing which aims for mixed communities wherever possible. What effect does the policy of developing 'mixed communities' have on children and young people in these areas? What measures are put in place to ensure their welfare?

HNSW is pursuing redevelopments in some areas where social housing is concentrated, particularly focusing on estates with high levels of disadvantage and stigma.

Evidence tells us that living in areas where disadvantage and social exclusion is concentrated can magnify the effects of that disadvantage.

For example, children growing up in areas of high unemployment, poor literacy, violence and deprivation may have poor educational attainment, truancy and poor literacy and numeracy.

These 'area effects' are linked to the intergenerational disadvantage and unemployment among some groups of social housing residents. In some locations.

The overall impact on young people can be limited horizons and a lack of opportunity to learn, engage and fulfill their potential.

Tenure diversification is one mechanism for transforming disadvantage in social housing communities. However, tenure change itself may not improve life outcomes, including for children and young people.

Housing NSW supports a whole of place and whole of government approach as a key strategy to address entrenched social disadvantage in concentrated social housing areas. This involves physical redevelopment supported by community and government partnerships and strong community engagement.

As the Building Stronger Communities and Minto examples demonstrate – a whole of place regeneration or redevelopment initiatives can have significant benefits for young people through fun and meaningful activities for children and young people.

HNSW is interested in understanding demography in order to target strategies and engagement appropriately. We are seeking to identify the most effective ways to work with young people as well as those who work with young people to understand their views and aspirations

The Building Stronger Communities initiative has in place a rigorous evaluation framework which includes measures of key results areas. Key youth-related measures include community perceptions about recreational opportunities for children and young people and educational achievements and local training and employment opportunities.

Through a rigorous evaluation framework, the Building Stronger Communities initiative will contribute to our ongoing learnings about effective community regeneration practice and how to best deliver lasting outcomes for young people in disadvantaged communities.

Questions Taken on Notice

1. During the hearing Mr McIntyre noted that there are a number of examples of Housing NSW partnering with other agencies to ensure that young people can access support when needed. Mr McIntyre identified the Young People Leaving Care trial as one example; can you provide some further examples?

Further examples of Housing NSW partnering with other agencies to ensure that young people can access support when needed are:

Juniperina Housing and Support Project - a joint project under the NSW Homelessness Action Plan between Housing NSW, Juvenile Justice, Community Services and Justice Health which aims to provide stable housing and support to young female offenders, formerly (or at risk of becoming) a client of Juniperina Juvenile Justice Centre and who are at risk of homelessness. Aboriginal young women are a priority group within this project.

Young People Leaving Care-Nowra – developed under the NSW Homelessness Action Plan. Community Services is the lead agency in this project which aims to provide accommodation and support to Aboriginal young people aged 16 to 25 years.

South West Sydney Youth Hub – a foyer-type model of supported housing for homeless young people, young people at risk of homelessness and those exiting Juvenile Justice facilities, delivered in partnership with a community provider. This also has an emphasis on education and training.

Tamworth Partnership for Vulnerable Youth – a partnership with Community Services assisting young people at risk of homelessness to access housing and support.

Young People with a Disability Leaving Care project - a partnership with Ageing, Disability and Home Care which assists young people who may be at risk of homelessness.

Keep Them Safe – Housing NSW is a partner in several initiatives to develop support for young people as part of the KTS Action Plan.

2. How many children, compared with adults, are currently on the waiting list for public housing?

At 30 June 2009 there were 39,509 households on the Housing Register, totalling 86,574 people. Of these, 38.2% (33,026) were under 18 years.

3. What amount of funding would be needed to seriously reduce that waiting list?

The Housing Register currently has about 48,000 households waiting for housing assistance.

It is noted that housing assistance can take a variety of forms, and that providing a house is not the only way to resolve a person's housing issues.

In respect to the cost of providing new housing, this is dependent on the size, configuration and location of the houses required. As an example, the Nation

Building Economic Stimulus Plan has provided an additional \$1.76 billion to NSW providing to increase the supply of social housing for vulnerable households. Around 6,000 new dwellings will be delivered in NSW over three years under this program. The average unit cost per dwelling under this program is \$300,000.

4. The statistics on the number of homeless children are frightening, especially when we hear about homeless children the age of 12. Are you able to indicate a reason for it?

The Australian Government White Paper, *The Road Home* outlines the primary reasons for homelessness in Australia. The vast majority of children who are homeless are with their parents, although single young people experiencing homelessness is also a significant group. Key reasons for homelessness include:

- Escaping domestic and or family violence
- Family or relationship breakdown
- Inability to find and / or maintain secure accommodation after leaving out of home care or juvenile detention centre,
- Declining housing affordability and financial stress
- Poor mental health
- Substance abuse

The New South Wales Government Homelessness Action Plan 2009-14, *A Way Home: Reducing Homelessness in NSW* notes that anyone can become homeless. It can happen because a person has lost their job and is struggling financially or because a relationship has ended. A person may become homeless because they are leaving a violent or abusive relationship. They may have physical or mental health issues. They may find themselves unable to afford rising rents or mortgage payments or they may have a drug or alcohol problems.

On the night of the 2006 Census, 19 per cent of homeless people in NSW were in SAAP accommodation. The main reasons cited for requiring a SAAP service were:

- Domestic and family violence (20%)
- Relationship and family breakdown (12%)
- Problematic alcohol and substance use (12%)
- Time out from family (9%)
- Financial difficulty (10%) and
- Emergency / previous accommodation ended (8%).

5. What percentage of new dwellings constructed by Housing NSW accommodate families with children, that is, dwellings of three bedrooms or more?

In the period 1 April 2009 to 31 March 2010 a total of 642 new dwellings (27.6%) were completed with 3 or more bedrooms. Of our existing occupied dwellings, 46.5% have 3 or more bedrooms.

The greatest housing need on a statewide basis is currently for 1 and 2 bedroom dwellings to meet the needs of smaller households, which represents approximately 74% of the total number of households on the housing register.