

Children, Young People and the Built Environment

Aboriginal Affairs NSW Responses

Question 1

To what extent, if at all, do you consider that the built environment contributes to problems identified as being faced disproportionately by Aboriginal children and young people in NSW, e.g. involvement in the juvenile justice system? Is the department involved in any specific programs to address issues relating to the built environment?

Studies have shown that changes to public spaces, such as improved lighting and increased open space, may discourage antisocial juvenile behaviour in that specific location. However, such innovations typically only displace the problem to adjoining locations.

Improvements in the built environment have the potential to support activities which offer an alternative to antisocial behaviour for young people, for example increased and upgraded recreation facilities. However, it should be noted that such initiatives in isolation are unlikely to reduce offending rates. Environmental improvements need to be introduced in conjunction with a range of initiatives which address broader Aboriginal disadvantage, for example, in relation to education, employment, health, transport and social engagement.

Environmental improvements also need to be developed in consultation with Aboriginal young people. This is the best way to ensure that facilities are culturally appropriate, and so that a sense of community ownership is fostered.

Through the Partnership Community Program, Aboriginal Affairs NSW is working in partnership with Aboriginal Communities to improve governance and leadership and address disadvantages faced by Aboriginal people. Through community governance structures established under the Partnership Community Program, Aboriginal people, including children and young people, will be in a position to inform future planning and service provision in their communities.

The Greater Mt Druitt Area, Campbelltown/Macarthur, Redfern/Waterloo and La Perouse are all Partnership Communities under the Partnership Community Program.

Question 2

The NSW Aboriginal Housing Office noted in its Annual Report that the average age of Aboriginal people living in NSW is 21 and that 26% of Aboriginal people live in social housing. Do you consider that this creates particularly pressing issues for Aboriginal children and young people in respect of their built environment?

Where social housing is located in low socio-economic areas with restricted access to transport, health facilities, green areas and facilities that promote social participation, this can pose significant issues for Aboriginal children and young people, and more broadly create situational cycles of poverty.

It is noted that both the NSW and the Australian Government have a commitment to social inclusion. This recognises that local communities need to be given a voice and that in some cases, place based work is required to address the barriers to people participating fully in society. Within a NSW context, the *Two Ways Together* Partnership Community program provides an example of how this place based work can occur.

Question 3:

Can you explain to the Committee the operation of the Aboriginal Communities Development Program (ACDP)? Has there been any research undertaken, or are you aware of any anecdotal evidence, as the extent to which this program had ameliorating problems for children and young people in Aboriginal communities?

Aboriginal Communities Development Program (ACDP) is a \$240M housing and environmental health program delivered in selected, priority Aboriginal communities throughout NSW. The ACDP commenced on 1 July 1998 and is in its final stages. With the exception of a few communities and final adjustments, the majority of ACDP works are expected to be completed by June 2010.

The ACDP has four main components:

- Priority Communities (supply of new housing and repairs and maintenance)
- Water and Sewerage
- Housing for Health
- Enterprise Development / Employment and Training.

Aboriginal Affairs NSW is responsible for coordinating the delivery of the ACDP. The NSW Department of Services, Technology and Administration (DSTA) have project management responsibilities for the Priority Communities and Water and Sewerage sub program. NSW Health is responsible for the Housing for Health sub program and NSW TAFE provides employment and training.

Anecdotal evidence suggests there is a direct link between housing quality and quality of human health. Poor quality housing and physical environment contributes to low self esteem, diseases, family violence and generally opportunities for better life.

Impacts of particular relevance to youth are the employment and training program which was delivered to most Priority Communities. Consultation with ACDP participants have said that skills learnt through the employment and training program had enabled young people to be more competitive when looking for work and better able to manage work commitments.

In Brewarrina, it was noted by community members that young people have been helped away from generational unemployment through the provision of training. Many trainees have gone on to a range of jobs including building, property management, shearing and wool classing and permanent jobs with the Shire Council.

Question 4

The **Housing for Health** program, which is delivered in partnership by **Aboriginal Affairs NSW** and the **Department of Health** aims to assess, repair or replace health hardware so that houses are safe and the occupants have the ability to carry out healthy living practices in a safe environment. To what extent do you consider this has had a positive impact on the physical environment of Aboriginal children and young people?

Over the last 10 years, NSW Health in partnership with Aboriginal Affairs NSW, has been delivering *Housing for Health* projects in the Aboriginal community housing sector across NSW.

The *Housing for Health* Program has undertaken repairs and maintenance of Aboriginal community housing with specific focus on improving safety and health for the residents in those homes. The program engages the community to assist in identifying required works, and prioritises all work using evidence-based criteria called healthy living practices.

Since the first trial project in 1997, *Housing for Health* projects have been conducted in 2230 houses across 71 communities around NSW. The program has benefited 9258 people and well over 51,700 items that specifically relate to improved safety and health have been fixed in those houses.

This has led to clearly measurable and demonstrable changes in the condition of those houses to support healthy living. By delivering immediate and tangible improvements to housing, the program has built a bridge of goodwill between communities and public health units across which other public health programs have been run. These "value-add" projects have included: injury prevention; fire education; electrical safety education; health screening; community clean-ups; vermin reduction, water monitoring; and service improvement.

A recent evaluation of the program undertaken by NSW Health has shown very positive health outcomes as a result of the program. Residents of houses where the *Housing for Health* intervention was implemented had a significantly reduced rate of hospital separation for infectious diseases – 40% lower than for the rest of the rural NSW Aboriginal population where *Housing for Health* interventions were not implemented.

Public health evidence clearly demonstrates a link between the high burden of infectious diseases, particularly in children, and chronic diseases in later life. This program is not only contributing in the short term to reduced hospital separations for infectious diseases, but also in the long term to addressing in part, the epidemic of chronic disease in the Aboriginal population.

Question 5

Does the built environment of large urban areas raise particular issues for Aboriginal children and young people living in metropolitan Sydney? If so, are there any programs to improve the built environment for city-based Aboriginal children and young people?

The demographics of the Aboriginal urban communities of Sydney have particular implications for its built environment.

The profile of Aboriginal people and communities living in Sydney metropolitan areas can be described as a young population, in comparison to the non-Aboriginal ageing population of Sydney. The make up of an average Aboriginal family in Metropolitan Sydney includes young parents and a large number of children under the age of 15. Population trends produced by the ABS indicate that the trend in large young Aboriginal families living in urban areas will continue and will increase particularly in the Blacktown Local Government Area (LGA).

Many of the children and young people living in Sydney belong to families from low socio-economic backgrounds and live in areas where there is limited access to:

- transport,
- affordable and appropriate housing (to accommodate larger families), affordable and culturally competent child care or early childhood learning experiences, and
- services and facilities for young people, not just recreation and social, but employment, training, health, drug and alcohol and case management.

Many Aboriginal children and young people living in Sydney are housed in high density public housing estates.

The built environment of Sydney's Aboriginal communities must be able to provide adequate public amenities and services to support their specific needs.

Local Councils play an important role in ensuring the built environment meets local needs. Section 94 of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* (the Act), enables local councils to levy contributions for public amenities and services required as a consequence of development. In short, the Act ensures that the existing community is not burdened by the provision of public amenities and public services required as a result of future development.

Developer contributions are essential in maintaining access to the facilities and services that support the local residents. In communities serviced by the City of Sydney and Blacktown Local Governments, the provision of adequate childcare facilities has been a significant focus of local planning and development. These LGAs continue to struggle to provide accessible and affordable child care for Aboriginal families.

The unique characteristics of the Sydney metropolitan area mean that the existing per capita rates of provision of many facilities and services, especially parks and childcare facilities, are already low. In an area of slow-growth, the gradual intensification of demand would not have a significant impact. This is not the case in areas of high growth which include a significant number of Sydney inner-city and

metropolitan areas. The cumulative impact of the loss of amenities and increased competition for facilities and amenities is significant, with consequential impacts on the quality of people's lives, including their work-life balance and, ultimately, on economic development.

There are a number of initiatives operating in Sydney which address some of the impacts that high density housing has on families, specifically children and young people. For example, the Partners in Employment (PIE) is an initiative of the people of Campbelltown, the residents, the workers, Government and non-government organisations and the community sector. Campbelltown has significant pockets of disadvantage around the five areas of public housing concentration, many are excluded from participating in mainstream activities.

In 2004, an alliance was formed with a specific focus on addressing the needs of those communities in relation to learning and employment. PIE has a steering committee represented by a wide range of agencies and it has a strategic plan. PIE hold forums four times a year to discuss specific issues of concern and exploring solutions. It provides a strategic framework for many of the activities targeting Airds, Rosemeadow, Macquarie Fields, Minto and Claymore.

Question 6

Are children and young people formally or informally involved in the Two Ways Together Partnership Community Program?

Young people are formally involved in the *Two Ways Together* Partnership Community Program.

Under Principle Two (Diversity and Inclusivity) of the Draft Partnership Community Program Governance Framework, the community governance body in each Partnership Community is required to ensure that its membership reflects the diversity in the community including young people as well as demonstrating links to young people.

Question 7

What, if any, lines of communication and collaboration currently exist between Housing NSW and the Commission on Children and Young People? Could the Department benefit from increased input from the Commission, in order to develop its current range of programs for children and young people?

This question should be referred to Housing NSW and the Commission on Children and Young People for a response.