

Submission

No 97

INQUIRY INTO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE 9-14 YEARS IN NSW

Organisation: Freeman Catholic College

Name: Student Submission

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Good morning parliamentary committee. My name is Robert and these are my fellow SRC members, Mitchell, Stephanie, Claudia and Alice. We represent students in grades seven to nine, at Freeman Catholic College. Today, we are going to speak about several issues including needs such as education, and support systems of 9-14 year old students. Also, how these needs vary according to age, gender, and socioeconomic status.

The youth of Australia are our country's future and in order for our future to be bright, we need to identify and address their needs of our most valuable resource: our youth. 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.

[Needs of Children and Young People – Question 1]

So, what do 9-14 year old children and young people view as needs in the 21st century? One of our many needs is education. What type of education we receive and how much effort we put in may very well decide the rest of our lives, and our quality of living. 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.

At school, we not only learn about history, maths, English, science and other necessary subjects but also social skills such as how to articulate your thoughts and how to relate to other people. We learn basic values such as gratitude and respect. All these lessons combine to form the building blocks of society. Without these, we would be helpless: unable to earn an income, or even complete the most simple of tasks, such as paying bills. Society would cease to advance and quickly degrade. When surveyed, the majority of Freeman students in year 7-9, i.e. students from ages 12-15, believed that education was a need for a variety of reasons. Most of these included gaining a good job, and a good quality of life. Some students also said that they felt education was a need as society could not advance and improve without it.

Another need that has become prevalent in society for this particular age group is the need for a strong support system which we can rely on. Especially as we enter into our teenage years, we find ourselves struggling with some issues that we feel uncomfortable talking about to parents, family members or even other friends. These issues may include body changes, bullying, stress and anxiety and family issues.

[Question 2]

- How old they are

As you grow older, your maturity level rises. As does the amount of work you are required to do. Students in, for example, grade four, at age 9, would not need to access resources which are available at the library. However students in grade nine would need to access these resources constantly to complete the barrage of assignments, assessments and to study for exams.

- Their gender

Gender is another factor that affects the needs of 9-14 year olds. Gender affects the need of education because each gender requires different programs on adolescents and physical and emotional development. These programs should be tailored to the most effective learning strategies for each gender.

- Their socioeconomic status

Needs of students aged between 9 and 14 vary heavily depending upon their socioeconomic status in society. Socioeconomic status is an individual's or group's position in society according to their social and financial status.

By having a higher socioeconomic status, a student may be able to access a variety of resources; therefore, they would not need to leave their house to go to a local library for information. A student of a higher socioeconomic status would require services that relieve stress. This is because people of a higher socioeconomic status may have a larger workload and be expected to do better in school.

If a student had a lower socioeconomic status, they would need a local library to find information. They would also need to have resources at their school made available so that they could work to the best of their ability.

[Services and Support – Question 3]

Above all, 9-14 year old children need support and strong support systems to develop resilience. These support systems may consist of family, relatives, friends or teachers. However, a support system that the students may be able to relate to better would consist of a group of peers that the student feels that they can trust. These peers would have to be on a similar maturity level and be able to take the students situation seriously.

By sharing their issues with this group of peers, students will be able to gain advice from a similar age group, who have had similar experiences and who will be able to relate effectively to each other. They will also be able to “bounce back” as students know that there is a group that they can turn to for support in difficult times.

A strong support group may be comprised of a group of peers of a similar maturity level, who are trusted by the student. Instead of “bottling up” your feelings, talking to a trusted group of people allows you not only a release, but also to possibly gain suggestions and advice on how to deal with the problem or issue.

This support group also allows students to get to know and understand their peers better, possibly resulting in a positive change of attitude towards working with different people in group work that you may not necessarily be friends with.

Counselling services, such as the Kids Help Line, are also useful in promoting resilience as many students feel confident that they are anonymous and can seek help without serious repercussions, whereas some students may feel that the school counsellors keep records of issues discussed and that they have no privacy.

Children may also need to be made more aware of these services through the use of advertising on television, the radio or through the use of print media. Advertisements for Kids Help Line, for example, are only shown at certain times of the year, which have been identified as busy times of the year for counsellors. If these advertisements were shown more often, more children would be aware of the services available to them in their times of need.

Schools also need to implement initiatives, specifically designed for 9-14 year olds, which develop resilience but are also interactive, interesting and informative. Initiatives that Freeman has introduced for senior students include afternoon classes, night study and teacher support before and during the HSC period. These activities help students to deal with stress, and to help them feel that they have sufficiently prepared for the exam.

[Other Issues - Question 7]

One of the major issues affecting children between the ages of 9 and 14 is illiteracy. In our generation, illiteracy is a direct consequence of the overuse of technology. Technology and programs such as MSN have caused a loss or degrade of comprehension, reading, speaking and writing skills, which will affect their grades and general understanding. Exercises which improve vocabulary and understanding such as reading and creative writing, have been forgotten and are considered “outdated” and “pointless” by some students.

If the issue of illiteracy is not dealt with immediately, our generation will grow up not knowing and not having the proper English skills needed to advance or even to fit into society. Literacy and numeracy tests such as ELLA, SNAP and NAPLAN, are often ineffective as they only assess levels of literacy and numeracy and do not help to improve them.

The amount of school work to be completed, i.e. homework, assignments, assessments and exams, is another issue currently affecting this age group. Stress levels in schools are rising due to the way the curriculum is taught and the way that assignments are distributed. Throughout most of the term, students are expected to complete a certain amount of homework per a subject. In addition to that, there is also a small period in the term, of two or three weeks, in which students are expected to complete a large number of assignments and assessments, normally with one from each subject. These assignments are generally given at the same time, with due dates also at similar times. Whereas, throughout the year, we have large periods of time, in which only homework is given. As a result, students may be forced to rush assignments that they view as less important in order to complete other assignments which are either worth more of their grade, or are more important.

To prevent this, the curriculum should be set out differently, enabling teachers to teach the necessary topics, and still spread out the assignments. This would give students more time to complete assignments, ensuring that they are of a better quality and standard.

University is an issue on the minds of many students as they begin to complete the school certificate course. Often, students are worried about getting a place at university, and actually paying for the course. Courses are often too expensive, thus

limiting the amount of people attending university. Scholarships are too few and far between for the majority of students, and many simply cannot afford to go to university.

University is an essential part of society as it promotes social development. Furthering your education allows students to gain the necessary qualifications so as to achieve a good job in the future. These students are often developing new technologies which benefit society in many ways and have positive repercussions. Going to university, and working for a degree should be a positive experience, without the stress of having to pay a massive debt.

After all the evidence that we have presented, the needs of 9-14 year old children must be obvious. This Student Representative Council requests that you take this information into consideration, with the intention of acting upon it. The youth are Australia's future: take care of our most valuable resource.