

19th November 2005

**Parliamentary Inquiry
Inquiry - Children, Young People and the Built Environment.**

Please accept my submission for the Inquiry - Children, Young People and the Built Environment.

1. - Trends - changes - issues for children and young people - implementation - coordination of policy - design and planning for the built environment.

The Commission for Children and Young people prides itself on their policy of communicating with young people so that they can provide the things the young people say they need. The problem associated with this policy is that children and young people are not always consistent with what they believe they need. What one group of young people believe is essential for their well being can be considered obnoxious to another group of young people. The differences in age from a child to a young person will also add to the problem of what is considered essential for the well being of those in need. Safety - security - a sense of being loved and cared for does not depend on the latest and greatest possession or building but on the adults who should be a part of the life of the children and young people.

2. - Mechanisms available - monitoring - reporting on planning processes - decisions - concerning the built environment - relate to and impact upon children and young people.

New housing estates are under the control of the councils that manage the suburbs where the estates are planned. Information concerning building designs, street planning, nature areas, parks and sports fields would be obtainable from the relevant councils. From this information gathered from the councils better facilities could be included for the benefit of the children and young people who will eventually live with their parents in the new estates. There has to be consideration given to the fact that in the new estates homes are built too close to each other, back yards are non existent in comparison to the back yards of yesterday, where children could play in safety. Now children and young people are expected to use the streets for playing and congregating, they are now placed in a dangerous position of competing with the traffic for the use of the streets.

3. - Strategies - to ensure built environment issues - affecting children and young people - readily identified - receive coordinated attention across portfolios - different levels of government.

As stated in - 2. - essential information can be obtained from the councils concerning new housing estates. This information should be assessed and the results of that assessment can be used to formulate a policy that will be of benefit to children and young people who will live in the new estates. Modern housing estates follow the same formula - large imposing houses, an excuse for a back yard, small front yard taken up by large drive ways, narrow streets, green areas that can include a water fountain and lake that is not fenced. Most parents are away from the home for long periods with their work commitments, children become latch key children left to their own devices. Young people face boredom and can be led into the drug - gang - vandalism mentality. The need is for strategies to be formulated that will provide the areas that will include the different forms of youth clubs and gathering areas where the young people can meet and associate without the fear of the danger that can be associated with street gangs. The built environment can provide schools, homes, shopping centres, sports grounds, clubs etc, but it will not provide the most important ingredient that every one needs. That is to be honestly loved and cared for. No government or Children's Commission can provide that it has to come from the family.

4. - Role of the Commission for Children and Young People - giving input to the Government - Non Government Sectors - inclusive and integrated planning - policy making - for children and young people in the built environment.

The Commission for Children and Young People is funded by the NSW Government via the tax paying NSW public, who expect to see children protected from those who set out to abuse them. That is the role that the public expect of the Commission. Instead we have seen those who have been convicted of abusing children allowed to work again with children. We now see the Commission concerned about the built environment and its effect on the children and young people. No amount of providing playing fields, clubs etc will keep our children safe from those who prey upon children while abusers know that the law can be

manipulated to suit their needs. The Commission can talk to Local Councils and the Government about the built environment and its effect on children and young people and also provide for the Government and Non Government departments the necessary information to benefit the children and young people that will live in those new areas. The main agenda should be that the safety of the children and young people from all forms abuse, from street crime, from drugs, from convicted offenders will be upheld and enforced.

5. - Other matters considered relevant to the inquiry.

Issue Paper 3 - Channel 7, This Day Tonight program, revealed an ongoing youth problem in Dubbo. Drugs, drunkenness, vandalism, destruction of property, bad language, every night occurrence that the people of some areas in Dubbo have to live with. Page 4 of the Issue Paper shows a different side of Dubbo, the Dubbo City Youth Council reaches out to the young people of Dubbo and allows them to have a say about issues that are affecting them in Dubbo. It would appear there is a break down in communication between the Dubbo Youth Council and the troubled youths that are causing the problems of a night in Dubbo.

page 8 - Young People and Shopping Centres -

It is difficult not to be on edge when you are in a shopping centre and confronted by a noisy, rough housing vocally aggressive group of young people who do not seem to realise that you do have the right to slowly walk along the shop fronts minding your own business. It is compounded when you are a walking disabled person and cannot proceed fast enough to escape the rough housing or abusive language.

It is a pleasure to walk past and also beside young people that are going about their business without annoying or upsetting other people. People judge you on your behaviour not on your age. Being abusive, does not only belong to young people, abusive adults can be just as intimidating as abusive young people. To push the fallacy that young people are not wanted in shopping centres because they are young is doing a disservice to the youth of Australia that respect the rights of others. The acknowledgment and appreciation they deserve for being civic minded and responsible in their behaviour should be noted and accepted by those who seem to always look for every chance to push the line "children and young people aren't wanted" . Children and young people can and do enjoy themselves without being unruly or destructive.

page 10 -11 - School Buildings.

The NSW Commission for Children and Young People consulted with children and young people concerning their thoughts on their schools. - "looks like a jail" - "All concrete and bars". Was there a reason given to the children and young people why their schools must be surrounded by high fences, some windows with bars on them, or did the Commission remain silent about the on going destruction of schools by the very pupils that attend such schools. That schools are being vandalised by children and young people. Were they told that a certain section of children and young people take great pleasure in the destruction of a school knowing they are hurting other children and young people who lose the hard work they have put into their learning. Schools at one time were free of "jail like appearances" now unfortunately schools have changed. To have schools open without high fences and security guards there will have to be a change in the way some children and young people think and react to authority. This can only happen if the parents of those children and young people take on and appreciate the responsibility of being parents and care for their children. It will not be brought about by fancy buildings.

Yours Sincerely

Mrs Patricia Wagstaff.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "P. Wagstaff". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping tail on the final letter.