

Submission

No 2

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

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Date Received: 1/04/2008

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**30/3/2008**

**The Committee Manager  
Committee on Children and Young People  
Parliament House  
Macquarie Street  
SYDNEY NSW 2000**

**Dear Sir/Madam,**

**I am so thrilled that there is something being done for the children aged 9-14 years. This is a passion of mine and I have felt very alone with my ideas.**

**I opened an Outside School Hours Childcare Service in Warialda, New South Wales, in mid 2006. We were registered for 5-12 year old children. Warialda has a population of 1200 people and there isn't anything for the older children to do except go to the park or the pool, if they are not playing sport in the afternoons.**

**As our service operated, the children over 12years of age, would hang at the door, watching the younger children with envy. I was afraid to let them in, in case we had a spot check and they were caught.**

**Vacation care was particularly bad, as there was not any organized sport during the holidays, and parents were at work. The teenagers were bored and looking for fun.**

**On one particularly fateful morning, six 14 year old children sat on the verandah of my service and asked if they could please come in and play pool. I apologized and told them that I was unable to let them in because I was not licensed for people their age.**

**An hour later, three of these children were dead, two were in a critical condition and one was facing life in jail.**

**They had walked from our service to the local park, one block away. They had begun talking to an intellectually disabled man, whom they had befriended previously, and persuaded him to take them for a driving lesson. They walked across the creek and met him on a rarely used dirt road. They piled onto the back of his utility and took turns to drive. One young lady, lost control of the vehicle and tipped it over and ran into a tree. Her best friend was killed on impact by breaking her neck. One boy and another of her friends broke their necks and the town waited for three days to hear whether they were dead or not. They were! My best friend's 14y.o boy, a champion footballer, with Brad Pitt looks, had the top of his scalp, removed completely. Luckily it was just skin, but we didn't know that for several hours. He lived, but now has a ring around his head just above ear level, that does not grow hair. He suffers from terrible pain in his shoulders. He went head first into the branch of a tree, which broke off, and was forced under his scalp. Another friend was pinned underneath the utility, by a mutilated right leg. He has just begun to walk again, after twelve months in a wheelchair. The owner of the vehicle lost his left eye and broke**

his arm. The only person uninjured was the driver, who walked away with only a scratch. She suffers terrible anxiety and wakes during the night screaming and crying. Her life is ruined!

I don't think that there could be a stronger case, as to why we need to cater for older children with our childcare.

I tried, unsuccessfully, to become a PCYC, after the incident, as I felt that I could service our community with more flexibility. I was determined to provide a service for all children. PCYC advised me that we already had a PCYC in Moree, the nearest large town and that our children could use that facility. Moree is 75 kilometers away. I don't know how 14 y.o children were supposed to get there for the afternoon.

I then made application to FACSIA. They could not find anything in their rules to state that we could not provide a service for children over 12y.o, as long as they were still attending school. They then allowed me to provide the service to older children, as long as they did not take a position from a younger child, requiring care.

This worked quite well, but there was occasionally a conflict in care as the younger children would want us to take them to the park to play football, whilst the older children would want to play the Nintendo W11 on the movie screen. We compromised by having set times for outdoor games and free play. We were forced to staff the centre with two people, even though our largest afternoon on record had only 16 children attend. As many of the children were there to keep off the street, and their parents weren't working, the parents didn't pay. I made a \$22,000.00 loss for the year and had to sell a block of land, to pay the bills. I closed the Warialda Respite Centre, outside school hours care service, on the 23/8/2007.

The children have pestered me to re-open, constantly. I re-established as a Not-for-Profit society, to allow more interaction from parents. I had been a sole proprietor last year. The parents are still not interested, but the teenage children are my best friends. We have just been given the go-ahead to re-open next week. They have been helping me mow lawns and weed gardens. They are full of bright ideas and enthusiasm. They are asking that, if their parents are unable to pay, could they please work off their childcare fees by mowing lawns for me, each weekend and delivering pamphlets. We do the town pamphlet delivery, as part of the supported employment service that I also run. The teenagers need the service more than any other age group and they are willing to help in whatever way they can. We are having a committee meeting tomorrow and organizing some fundraising events. We are also starting a native tree nursery. We will have excursions during vacation to collect seed in local bushland. This will assist children to identify plants and to take notice and pride in their natural environment. Hopefully, we will make profit from sales of trees to local farmers that I have organized to become a landcare group.

Can anyone please give me some other tips to help us financially, to keep providing a quality service, in what is probably an unviable, but still much needed, situation?

Many of the children that I had been caring for last year, suffer from behavioral problems. I didn't realize what a difference we were making for their families, until we stopped.

I had a call from our local doctor on the weekend, asking if I could take a young boy with ADHD, oppositional defiance disorder and schizophrenia. I am a registered foster parent. She said that the mother had been hospitalized due to exhaustion from trying to provide for this "extremely" trying child.

When we were operating, this little 9yo would go home exhausted each day, and sleep well. He was doing well at school and the local principal used to tell me what a great program he had in place, for children with behavioral difficulties. This year, when we have not been there as a back-up for him, and support for his mother, he is now on his third warning and looking at being expelled from school.

I feel that we are greatly disadvantaged, here in the bush. Our town's population is not large enough to support childcare services, but we still require them. I would greatly appreciate more financial incentive. Maybe 100% coverage with CCB, in rural and remote areas, would allow all families access to the care that children need, from birth to 18yo.

I am happy to discuss this with anyone who is interested

Yours Faithfully

Bronwyn Sargeant