



Submission

Parliamentary Inquiry into Children, Young People and the Built Environment

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY

CHILDREN YOUNG PEOPLE AND THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

INTRODUCTION

Campbelltown City Council welcomes the opportunity to make a formal submission to the Legislative Assembly inquiry conducted by the NSW Parliamentary Committee on Children and Young People.

This submission responds to two of the terms of reference for the Inquiry into Children, Young People and the Built Environment. Council's Community Resources and Development Section has prepared this submission, which particularly focuses on the trends and issues affecting young people in the planning and provision of the built environment at a local level and incorporates the views of other sections within Council including Technical Services and Library Services.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Strategies to ensure that built environment issues affecting children and young people are readily identified and receive coordinated attention across portfolios and different levels of Government:

Getting the built environment 'right' is a task of great complexity, which can be further compounded by factors such as technology, consumerism and advertising. Whilst the interests of young people have changed over time in response to social trends, the need and ability to ensure wellbeing and quality of life remains a central issue in the objectives of youth service providers.

Campbelltown City Council in partnership with local youth services and young people are currently undertaking a Review of Youth Services and Facilities within the Campbelltown LGA in recognition of the need to respond to both economic and environmental changes within the sector. This Review is one of the objectives of the *2002 – 2004 Campbelltown City Youth Strategy* and aims to assess the vulnerabilities of the area over the next five to ten years.

The *Campbelltown City Youth Services & Facilities Review* is one of numerous initiatives currently being undertaken by Council's Youth Development Unit that will address built environment issues. Other reviews include the Campbelltown City Social Plan 2004 – 2009, Campbelltown City Cultural Plan 2004 – 2008, the draft

Recreational Facilities Needs Analysis and the Safer Town Program (Crime Prevention Plan) 2005 – 2008. Extensive community consultation processes have been undertaken for the development of these plans, to ensure that they address and respond appropriately to local needs and to also encourage the active participation of the general community and other services providers in the implementation of the recommended strategies.

The *Campbelltown City Youth Services & Facilities Review* addresses eight key priority areas including: awareness; utilisation; safety & accessibility; programming; new and/or restructured services; new and/or restructured facilities; development opportunities and management. A key outcome of this Review is the development of an action plan, which sets concise strategies to address key local issues and areas of improvement in relation to the built environment.

Examples of the strategies that will address local issues affecting young people and the built environment are:

Awareness – Increased awareness will in fact be a by-product of the successful implementation of strategies that are to be implemented to address the 'other' key areas (as detailed below) The strategies instigated to address the issues identified under the other key priority areas (as detailed below) will assist in addressing a key issue which is the lack of awareness of services and opportunities available to young people.

Utilisation – Research has shown that the furniture and spatial layout of an environment shapes behaviour, making the environment an important part of any building design. The physical design of youth centres and youth orientated facilities can be utilised to promote positive behavioural choices and prevent inappropriate behaviour within these environments¹.

The 2002 NSW Youth Services Census conducted by the Youth Action Policy Association NSW (YAPA) found that 95% of respondents nominated 'funding for the youth sector' as a top priority currently facing the youth sector. The lack of an increase to core funding affects a service's ability to maintain a suitable environment that can also foster appropriate behaviour, poor design and condition of furniture and

¹ Dimoulas, Katina (2005) Physical design of youth centres – link to behaviour. YAPRap Newsletter of the Youth Action and Policy Association NSW Inc. Vol 15. No 9.

equipment is also cited as a reason for not accessing the existing service by local young people themselves. This supports feedback from local young people, common reasons for not accessing existing services is influenced by the condition of furniture and equipment.

Safety & Accessibility – Another factor that has been found to impact upon utilisation and accessibility is the actual location of the youth services and recreational facilities. Young people living on the urban fringe are locationally disadvantaged and this has direct consequences on young people's well being². Not only does location of the service affect young peoples ability to access recreational youth services and facilities but it also impacts upon their independence. The young are further disadvantaged by a lack of transport options, which also places restrictions on employment and study options as well as social opportunities. Isolation has been found to negatively impact upon a young person's physical safety and feeling of safety e.g. waiting for public transport for long periods of time.

In response to transport being seen by the whole community as an important issue, Council has commenced the preparation of an Integrated Transport Strategy, in conjunction with Camden Council, to address a range of access issues across the region, including the provision of accessible transport, and barriers to effective use of public transport.

In response to safety issues identified locally, Macarthur Square Shopping Centre in collaboration with local young people, shopkeepers and local youth services has developed a protocol outlining expected behaviour for people wanting to use the shopping centre. *The Square Handshake* launched in April 2005 was based on the YAPA shopping centre protocols document and initiated in response to a locally identified issue between security and young people at this shopping centre.

The development of communication that helps address safety issues and alert young people to their rights and responsibilities when accessing both private and public spaces will assist in creating safer community spaces. Communities need good public spaces for purposes including essential activities e.g. buying food, medical and banking services; optional services e.g. recreation (cinemas, bowling alleys); and social activities e.g. meeting, watching and engaging.

² Youth Affairs Council of Victoria. (2005) Snapshots from the Edge: Young people and service providers on the urban fringe of Melbourne.

Macarthur Square Shopping Centre in Campbelltown has become a 'hot spot' for young people particularly on a Thursday night. The main reasoning for the influx of young people at this particular time and day is a combination of a lack of alternative youth specific services and other youth friendly facilities that are open at this time, and a general 'youth' interest in being able to socialise and to 'hang out' in an unstructured capacity. This is combined with the general feelings of safety perceived by both young people and their parents due to the assumed sense of safety brought about by the high volume of traffic, the confines of the centre itself and the presence of security.

Programming – Following on from the popularity of Shopping Centres as social 'hubs' for youth and further strengthening the precedent set forth in the user protocol for Macarthur, Council is developing a localised *Youth Entertainment Plan* to address issues including the lack of social and recreational opportunities especially those open evenings and weekends for young people. Children and young people's environment is connected to their experiences of interaction. Access to good public spaces is essential to establish healthy lifestyles and ensure quality of life. The *Youth Entertainment Plan* aims to map existing opportunities, share resources, support young people in coordinating their own events e.g. band nights, and provide a program of entertainment targeting areas with a high youth population and specific crime areas.

Part of the *Youth Entertainment Plan* includes programming for the City's regional skate facility. Council together with Campbelltown PCYC, NSW Police and Campbelltown Youth Services Inc. has been working with regular users of the Campbelltown Skate Park to establish a regular program of activities and events at the Park. These include quarterly competitions, coaching clinics and training as well as opportunities for input into the design and location of future local skate park developments. This youth leisure space is accessed daily by a large number of local youth, representing a wide mix of cultural backgrounds, ages and interests. The popularity of public skate parks is due largely to the fact that there is no admission cost, it is close to transport, and co-located with a number of fast food outlets.

Local youth services have realised the value in increasing 'outreach' services to spaces which youth regularly frequent, rather than relying on the 'build it and they will come' philosophy, as there are many competing factors including cost, transport,

access etc. that can prohibit youth access. By shifting service delivery methods e.g. through outreach to accommodate the contemporary shift in youth interests, impacted on by the built environment, a greater level of service access and utilisation by the intended audience can be achieved.

New and/or restructured services – In further support of outreach service delivery methods, this Review is investigating 'integrated service delivery' models and opportunities for the 'co-location' of services. This includes a review of youth centre service models. The majority of purpose built Youth Centres within Campbelltown City were built over 20 years ago and are located predominantly within public housing estates of which there remains a significantly high proportion of young people. However this does not cater for access from young people living in new growth suburbs on the local government area's fringe.

Newer suburbs may include increased consideration in the planning and provision of access to the natural environment including walking tracks, open spaces and cycle ways, however they lack community facilities which house or provide access to services and leisure based activities.

New and/or restructured facilities – The public housing estate of Minto is currently undergoing redevelopment, which has impacted upon local residents including children and young people. The Department of Housing has been proactive in working with local services to address the impact of this redevelopment; local initiatives include community cultural development programs and establishment of an advisory group including local residents to inform of the redevelopment process. The Department of Housing is currently undertaking the redevelopment of Minto and other public housing estates throughout Campbelltown City in an attempt to overcome issues brought about by the previously poor planning and design e.g. the Radburn designs.

Development opportunities – The consideration of children and young people's needs is essential to the long-term sustainability of cities and neighbourhoods. In order to ensure quality of life, the key issues are for young people's need to be heard and addressed. Youth participation and representation on advisory committees and youth councils is important to hearing and actively responding to local needs. An action of this Review is to map existing opportunities for youth participation, to identify gaps and to actively promote the various ways young people's voices can be

heard, by providing effective support whilst they are on such committees to enhance professional development and encourage continued participation.

Campbelltown currently has a Youth Advisory Sub Committee (YASC), which was established in 1998. This committee is made up of 20 young people who actively work across a range of community based committees including the Campbelltown City Community Safety Committee and the Main Street Association, and who are involved in a wide range of other services, programs and strategy development.

Management – The *Campbelltown City Youth Strategy* is developed in partnership with local services and young people to ensure that all Federal, State and Local Government departments and non-government agencies commit resources towards the outcomes of the plan. The plan is aligned to match State Government policies and reduce duplication in service delivery and programming.

Similarly Council's Library Services are responding to built environment issues affecting young people. Libraries in the Campbelltown area are regarded as a safe place for the local youth who appear to be high users in all libraries of the Campbelltown area. Attendance is ostensibly for study related purposes but socialising with peers is also part of the purpose of their visit³. Not only do teenagers socialise with their friends while studying, some use the library specifically to meet friends away from parental supervision, particularly for those who are not otherwise allowed to go out unsupervised. Thus the library acts as a safe haven to socialise. Parents also regard libraries as safe environments and have no hesitation in allowing their offspring frequent access. This, in turn, increases the young person's social network and provides opportunities to broaden contacts.

Libraries in the Campbelltown area are also highly accessible to teenagers in the area. There are five branches located across the Campbelltown LGA, all of which are close to public transport. All branches have nights where they are open late and all are open on Saturday mornings. The main branch is open for business seven days a week. For those teens who cannot physically attend the library they are able to access the library facilities via the libraries website. This web site provides links to the library catalogue, and the student resource page there is also provision for teenagers to access the Virtual Reference Desk, which offers access to online

³ Cox, Eva (2000) "*A safe place to go*": *Libraries and Social Capital*. University of Technology, Sydney. p15.

databases and reference material.

Campbelltown Library Service acknowledges the presence and library use of teenagers in the area and has recognised a need for programmes and services particular to youth. As a result of this need a section that covers the area of provision and implementation of services and resources specifically for youth in the Campbelltown area has been included in their Library Strategic Framework. The types of youth specific services and resources provided include the HSC resources, quiet areas in which to study, Youth Week and holiday programmes, delivery of HSC lectures, and access to resources on the youth section of the library website.

The role for the Commission for Children and Young People in responding to locally identified built environment issues for young people would be to increase the Commission's participation and contribution to local planning. The most effective strategy for the Commission in Campbelltown would be to work with the Campbelltown Coordination Group. This group consists of senior staff of federal, state and local government human service agencies that have responsibility for the Campbelltown area. This group has a direct link to the heads of state government agencies through the regional Senior Officers Group.

The role of the Commission for Children and Young People in giving input to the Government and non-Government sectors on inclusive and integrated planning and policy-making for children and young people in the built environment:

If the role of the Commission is to provide input into government and non-government sectors in relation to planning and policy making for children and young people on built environment issues, then it would be beneficial for the Commission to implement a more 'hands on' interaction with local sectors to ensure that the Commission is best prepared to advocate and represent such issues.

Local children, youth services and interagency networks would benefit from an increased level of direct contact with the Commission in providing assistance in developing local solutions and responses to pertinent local issues. A common problem of local interagency networks is their focus on information sharing and providing little attention to addressing issues at strategic level.

The Commission needs to improve its capacity to consult directly with young people and service providers. Annual forums are a suitable option, but within NSW there are numerous local government areas, services and young people who can not attend one off forums due to logistics including transport, cost, time etc.

Both the Commission and local services would benefit from holding more localised forums to allow a greater level of participation. A solution to minimise the possible effects of an increased workload generated by several forums would be to integrate these consultations into existing interagency networks and youth councils (as well as District School Representative Councils). This increased level of interaction would support the dissemination and response to information circulated by the Commission.

The Commission should become more involved on a local level in relation to addressing issues that relate to young people and shopping centres/ public and private spaces by becoming an active participant in the development of locally produced protocols/guidelines developed for specific uses of these areas. This level of support would greatly assist local service providers, young people and shopping centre management to develop a relevant protocol and provide the opportunity through active participation to increase the Commission's ability to provide useful feedback to other government departments.

Local Councils and local youth services would particularly benefit from active participation and partnership in local strategic development and planning for the sector from both the Commission and state Government Departments. This would ensure that relevant support and resources are assigned to address local issues and strategies.