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

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Submission to the Parliamentary Committee on Children and Young People

Inquiry into children & young people aged 9 – 14 years

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Submission to the Parliamentary Committee for Children and Young People in response to the Inquiry 9-14 Years

NAPCAN welcomes the opportunity to submit to the NSW Parliamentary Committee Inquiry into Children and Young People 9 – 14 years.

There is growing evidence to suggest that, with the emphasis on early childhood and early intervention, children 8 and over are to some extent neglected and in fact, a growing concern that if a child, who is vulnerable and at risk, is not reached by age 5 there is little chance of building their resilience. Government and Sector emphasis on Early Years (0-5; 0-8), which NAPCAN both understands and supports, has to some extent left this 9-14 years cohort of children and young people "out in the cold".

For 20 years NAPCAN has represented the interest of young people from 0 – 18 years and has advocated a focus on the prevention of child abuse and neglect - before it reaches the crisis stage that requires statutory intervention. It has undertaken this task through a collaborative approach with child focussed organisations, professionals and practitioners, through provision of resources that support parents and carers, through media campaigns to raise community awareness and through encouraging sustainable community involvement.

There is now evidence that child friendly communities reduce and prevent the incidence of child abuse and neglect. NAPCAN passionately believes that by inspiring all Australians to take responsibility for children's wellbeing we can envisage a country where every Australian community is child friendly and every child is safe.

NAPCAN's primary mission is the **prevention** of child abuse and neglect and this is the focus of our submission to this Inquiry.

NAPCAN Principles

NAPCAN's work is underpinned by the principles of UNCROC; we believe that all children have the right:

- To be free from harm;
- To reach their potential;
- To live well; and
- To play a part.

However, the AIHW Child Protection statistics, especially in NSW, paint a different picture

Statistics

AIHW Child Protection Data for 2006-7 indicate that NSW DoCS received 189,928 notifications of which 114,254 were investigated and 37,094 substantiated. Children aged between 5 and 16 years were substantiated at a rate of 21.2 per 1000.[1]

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[1] AIHW CP Data 2006-7

Other statistical evidence shows that in Australia:

- 1 in 3 young people have experienced violence in their own relationships.
- 1 in 3 or 4 young women will be sexually assaulted by 18
- 1 in 6 young men will be sexually assaulted by 18
- 1 in 4 young people have witnesses DV in the home
- All rates are higher our Indigenous Communities[2]
- 1 in 2 marriages end
- During 2006 – 50,000 marriages ended. 50,000 children will be affected adding to the 1,000,000 already living with one parent.
- (why are we quoting these marriage statistics unless there is evidence it puts kids at risk – presumably ending a marriage of domestic violence increases a child's opportunities not decreases…
- 37% of separated men cease to have any connection with their biological children after 7 years [3]

Prevention Focus

NAPCAN believes it is time to draw a line in the sand and break the cycle of abuse of children and young people.

We submit that preventing abuse and neglect through a range of measures such as underpowering children and improving family support services is a key determinant to the wellbeing and safety of children of all ages.

There have been a number of surveys of children in broadly this age bracket that highlight common themes about what children themselves need in terms of empowerment, family, relationships, security,

Ask the Children, a study by the NSW Commission for Children and Young People and the University of Western Sydney, found that three fundamental themes making up children's own picture of well-being are:

- *Agency: having the agency or power to take independent action, leading to some control and capacity to act independently in everyday life;*
- *Security: having a sense of security to be able to engage fully with life and do the things that one needs to do; and*
- *Positive sense of self: having a positive sense of self, that is feeling you are an OK or good person, and being recognised as*

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[2] (Mulroney, 2003 Australian Statistics on Domestic and Family Violence ADFVCH)

[3] The Fatherhood Project

such by those around you – for who you are as well as what you do."[4]

A survey of children 10-14 years undertaken by the National Research Centre for the Prevention of Child Abuse at Monash University found that feeling positively connected to family and friends is a key determinant of happiness and wellbeing for children. It found that:

"Children's sense of their place in the world is under threat.

Children's sense of their community is under threat.

Children's sense of themselves is under threat.

.....Children and young people described their lives as stressful and held concern for their immediate and long term safety and wellbeing." [5]

This study reflects more formally, the informal feedback NAPCAN received through its "Ask Kids" campaign in 2006. (see Attachment 1)

Participation by children and young people has been accepted as an important principle in the policies of agencies whose work is focused on children. A recent project by Jan Mason and Annette Micheax (2005) identified some major aspects of hearing children's voices:

- Participation of children can contribute to promoting their best interests

- Participation of children challenges agency practice

- Hearing children may mean reflecting on assumptions

- The importance of systemic change towards participation.[6]

NAPCAN's KidsCAN Program, which is currently being evaluated by University of Western Sydney, was developed not only as a means of engaging children with their communities, but also as a positive model for cross-sectoral and cross agency collaboration in supporting this engagement. The KidsCAN program is described later in this submission.

RECOMMENDATION 1

Promote the development of programs and projects that link children 9-14 years with their communities.

Early Intervention

We note the NSW State Plan's commitment to the use of early intervention to tackle disadvantage by "embedding the principle of prevention and early

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[4] "Ask the children. Overview of children's understandings of Well-being, NSW Commission for Children and Young People

[5] Tucci J., Mitchell J., Goddard, C., Children's fears, hopes and heroes. Modern childhood in Australia. Australian Childhood Foundation, 2007

[6] Mason, J and Michaux, A (2005) The Starting Out with Scarba Project: Facilitating children's participation in child protection processes. Benevolent Society, Sydney, pp. 17-18.

intervention into Government service delivery in NSW" (Priority F4) and to "reduced rates of child abuse and neglect" (Priority F7). Embedding the principle of early intervention, according to the State Plan, will require that we "establish a sound prevention and early intervention policy framework to guide policy-makers, program designers and decision-makers" and "shift resources to support prevention and early intervention within our government agencies".[7]

This emphasis on early intervention through a universal focus on 4 year olds is vitally important to preventing child abuse and neglect. There are however older children potentially at risk who have not had the advantage of this policy and resources will need to be made available so that they are not overlooked.

The AIHW Report, *Young Australians: Their health and wellbeing 2007* reports that the leading cause of "burden of disease and injury" in 15 -24 year olds is anxiety and depression (males 17.4%, females 31.8%). This statistic in itself is a call for early intervention targeting the 9-14 year age bracket.

Early intervention aims to maximize resilience for vulnerable children. The research suggests that this involves participation and belonging, good relationships with peers and adults (especially one significant adult who thinks well of you) and high expectations. (Benard 1995).[8]

Early intervention should also focus on the communities which impact on children so that everyone takes responsibility for developing child friendly environments. This involves inclusive practices, championing child friendly policies, focusing on strengths and competencies, increasing the focus on the social and emotional learning that underpins healthy relationships, developing appropriately sensitive responses to challenging behaviour and providing opportunities to maximise wellbeing in developmental domains.

These types of intervention are aimed not only at improving the lives of children per se but also at reducing the cycle of child abuse as children and young people experience supportive relationships, learn that they matter, know they have choices and understand what is involved in maximising their own wellbeing and being part of a strong, healthy community.

The interventions are not necessarily discrete entities. There are greater benefits if early intervention happens early in a child's life and this is where the largest efforts need to be made. There is however, good evidence to suggest that it is not the only time it makes a difference.[9]

Early intervention is not just about individual families but is ecological. (Friesthler et. al. 2006).[10] It includes challenging community norms that tolerate violence towards children (and women) and belief that control is the

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[7]NSW Government (2006) A New Direction for NSW: State Plan p.34, p.37

[8] Benard, B (1995) Fostering resiliency in kids: Protective factors in the family, school and community. San Francisco: Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development

[9] School connectedness, health and education outcomes for teenagers. *Journal of School Health* September 2004

[10] Freisthler, B, Merritt, D.H, and LaScala, E.A (2006) Understanding the ecology of child maltreatment: A Review of the Literature and Directions for Future Research *Child Maltreatment* 11; 263 - 280

defining aspect of a child-adult relationship. It involves the development of social cohesion and social capital. (Vinson 2004).[11]

The importance of building resilience and a sense of wellbeing in children within the 9 – 14 age group cannot be overstated and to do so will require investment by Government.

Addressing the Specific Terms of the Inquiry

The needs of children and young people in the middle years i.e. between about nine and fourteen years of age

Children 9-14 years are a complex cohort in relation to needs as it covers a wide developmental range from childhood to early adolescence.

These young people especially, often have "bad press" with a focus on their deviant behaviours. An emphasis on what and how children and young people contribute to their communities challenges this negativity and raises positive expectations

In general all children require the following to be resilient, confident and active - contributing to their own wellbeing and the wellbeing of others:

- School connectedness - learning environments which encourage participation, healthy relationships, leadership opportunities, the valuing of diversity and opportunities for ALL students to succeed. A system of personal bests would ensure that every student competes against themselves in a system of continual progress rather than just a few "A" students having success and accolades. Children who are not motivated to learn now will be harder to engage later.

- Inclusive environments - this means an attitude by adults that all children have something to offer and that social exclusion is to be avoided at all costs

- All adults working with this age group need a basic knowledge in pre-adolescent psychological and cognitive development. As well as training in the knowledge and skills that underpin good relationships and promote positive-social behaviour. Skilled management of challenging behaviour and emotional distress is also needed.

- The practice of labelling children with 'disorders' is unhelpful as it perpetrates the notion that problems exist 'within' children rather than in the interaction between vulnerable individuals and their environments.

- Schools need to be places of enjoyment and community support for students, staff and families. This involves a focus on the positive and possible, not unnecessarily constricted by heavy and unhelpful bureaucracy.

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[11] Vinson, T. (2004) Community adversity and resilience: the distribution of social disadvantage in Victoria and New South Wales and the mediating role of social cohesion. Richmond, Vic: Jesuit Social Services.

- Children need opportunities for a wide variety of physical exercise which are not all based in competitive sports, eg. trekking, biking, climbing and skateboarding.
- Children need access to good nutrition and knowledge about this.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Investment in workforce professional development in the areas of pre-adolescent psychological and cognitive development; and managing challenging behaviours and emotional distress.

The extent to which the needs of children and young people in the middle years vary according to age, gender and level of disadvantage.

The extent to which the needs of these young people vary across age, gender and disadvantage is a broad landscape and for the purposes of this submission, we have highlighted broad areas of concern but focused on an area not specifically addressed in the terms of reference – children's activities in the on-line environment.

The 9-14 year age bracket covers the transition from primary school to high school; from being supervised (at home and in after-school care) to being home alone; from travelling in care to travelling independently. It is the period when the technology and access to the global community really kicks in and issues around cyber safety become paramount. It is a time of experimentation both positive and negative – alcohol and substance (often leading to binge drinking), sexual relationships and when the difference in physical stature and strength between boys and girls becomes obvious.

Children are able to take increasing responsibility within their communities and need to be given opportunities to do so

Young boys often have role models for masculine behaviour that are not helpful to them. The professional males in their lives need to challenge ideology about what 'strong' means and to provide role models that demonstrate optimal male behaviour.

All students, regardless of gender, need curricular input into healthy relationships to inhibit current and later violence and abuse between adults and children.

A Victorian study (VDHS 2002) found that, *"key underlying features, such as low income, substance abuse, mental health issues and the burdens of sole parenting, which led to some families coming into contact with child protection systems, were complex and chronic. The child protection system often did not effectively deal with these problems and many children were subject to renotifications and resubstantiations.*

The report noted that helping families to deal with these problems required more sustained and less intrusive support than the services usually provided by child protection authorities. It highlighted the need for strengthened prevention and early intervention services as well as improved service

responses for children and young people with longer-term involvement in the child protection system."[12]

9-14 years On-line

"The internet has changed our world – it has opened up unprecedented opportunities for young people to connect, grow and thrive."

Jack Heath, Founder Inspire Foundation

"85% of young people (in Australia) use the internet and after family and friends it's where young people turn to for advice and support in difficult times." DCITA 2005[13]

Technologically most of these children and young people are far more advanced than the adults supporting them. They have developed social networks in their 'virtual' environment which far exceed the social networks in their 'real' world. Cyber space provides both opportunities and threats to children and young people.

Some alarming statistics from cyberspace:

- 50% of the young people surveyed had been approached by someone they felt was not who they said they were. (Net Alert Survey 2006)
- 71% reported receiving messages online from someone they don't know.
- 45% have been asked for personal information by someone they don't know.
- 30% have considered meeting someone that they've only talked to online
- 1 in 7 young Internet users receive unwanted sexual solicitations[14]

Young people presenting at the Cyberia Symposium in Melbourne 2007, identified their major concerns in the online environment as:

- Cyber bullying using convergent technologies
- Identity theft
- Predation
- Loss of technology – if they admit to the above.

There was also an underlying concern about "addiction to the technology"

Michael Carr Greg in his presentation to the Symposium likened these children's exploration of the internet to "parents waving their 9 and 10 year olds off at the pier as they set sail for parts unknown"

Further insights from Profero Digital Advertising regarding young people in the online environment:

"They cram 30 hours into 24 hour days

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[12] As cited in *Child Protection Data 2006-2007,* AIHW 2007
[13] As cited in Inspire Annual Report 2007
[14] NetAlert Survey 2006

How do young people find the time to watch 5 hours of TV per day and still be the pioneers of new technologies. The answer is the growth of multi-tasking.

(Source: Admap 2003)

They live in a media saturated culture of choice

Today's teenagers are skilful information processors. They memorise little, and 'make it easy for me' is their motto.

(Source: Vegas 2004)

Advertisers give them what they want, when they want it

The iPod generation want everything right here and right now.

(Source: Warc Young Consumers)"

Engaging and empowering young people in their online environment are essential additions to the parent and teacher education models that are available.

There are a number of programs and resources that have been developed to educate parents and teachers regarding children in the online environment. None, to our knowledge target children themselves within the online spaces they operate. Whilst NAPCAN endorses and supports the need for programs such as Net Alert's *Protecting Australian Families Online, we recognise the need to address children in the environment where they have most potential but are equally most at risk.*

NAPCAN's Smart Online Safe Offline project is outlined in this submission.

RECOMMENDATION 4

Provide funding support for programs that empower children and young people in their on-line environment.

The extent to which changing workplace practices have impacted on children and young people in the middle years, including possible changes to workplace practices which have the potential to benefit children and young people in the middle years.

The impact of workplace practices should be examined both from the perspective of working parents and impact on children but also from the "children at work" perspective.

Two parent working families, longer working hours, longer travelling times, less flexibility in the working environment, children transitioning from after school care to an independent situation are all issues that particularly impact on children 9-14.

RECOMMENDATION 5

Children need continuing supportive relationships with adults. There needs to be a system of after-school community activities that provide opportunities not only for children to be supervised but also to be mentored and supported.

Children at Work

The 2005 report by the NSW Commission for Children and Young People *Children at Work* gives a comprehensive view of children in the workplace – the opportunities, the barriers, the conditions and the remuneration. Children in the 9-14 age group are in the first stages of their working life and their wellbeing and safety in the workplace must be paramount. This is an important stage of integration within their community for young people and as such has real value.

RECOMMENDATION 6.

NAPCAN supports the recommendations to make work work for children developed by the Task Force convened by the NSW Commission for Children and Young People in response to the *Children at Work Report* released in 2005. While we note that certain recommendations have been acted on, for example, the development of the *Babysitting Guide,* more needs to be done to ensure the workplace safety particularly of young people entering the workforce.

NAPCAN – preventing child abuse

An overview of NAPCAN's broader role is included at Appendix 1, however, following is an outline of specific programs targeting children 9 – 14 years.

KIDS CAN (Kids Community Action Network)

NAPCAN developed KiDS CAN to provide a framework to engage, support and resource children and young people so they may actively participate in initiatives which contribute to the development of child friendly communities. This process helps build protective factors that will reduce the risk of them being harmed.

How KiDS CAN Works

The KiDS CAN Microgrants program provides funding ranging from $250 - $1,000 to finance those activities.

Projects need to demonstrate that they will:

- Enable kids to contribute to others within their community
- Help build a positive sense of self and reliance in the kids involved
- Assist kids learn social and emotional skills
- Model supportive and respectful relationships
- Draw on creativity, knowledge and expertise

KiDS CAN supports schools and community based projects that enable kids to develop relationships with other people in their communities.

The project categories include, but are not restricted to:

- Environment
- Emotional wellbeing and safety
- Community service
- Social justice
- Physical wellbeing
- Creative projects - music, art, literature
- Culture and history

KiDS CAN encompasses programs and initiatives that:

- Enable children to contribute to others
- Build self esteem through taking responsibility and involvement in decision making
- Model supportive and respectful relationships with adults and the wider community, and
- Draw on children and young peoples' own knowledge and expertise.
- Each of these components of KiDS CAN are known factors that enable children to succeed in life.

NAPCAN has developed KiDS CAN – LG (Local Government) to provide a self sustaining model that is run through Local Government in partnership with community stakeholders. NAPCAN provides a quality assurance role over the criteria and supports the education of community service agents to develop their skills around communication and engagement of children and young people.

Three outstanding initiatives in 2007

Banskia Public School - Kids Art Network (KAN)

The KAN project has allowed children to use the arts to build bridges between different cultures, religions, places and people. Kids teach and learn from each other through a variety of art forms. KAN inspires young people to express their individuality and help them to reach their life long goals. Kids also learn to use the arts in their daily life helping them to build their self esteem and reach their potential."

Rosie's Place - Coming Together:

Uniting children who face the isolation and stigma of sexual assault.

"This project has produced a resource for children who have experienced sexual assault. The resource, in the form of a booklet has developed as a co-research model, consulting with the many children who attend our service. The information sought included their ideas in regard to the dynamics and impact of sexual assault as well as strategies for dealing with such trauma."

Kempsey South Public School - Murring Living: (Dunghutti - Good Living)

This program has three outcomes:

1. Additional support program for students to enhance knowledge and decision making in relation to food and healthy lifestyle choices.

2. Teaching children to more effectively use leisure time through fair and safe play activities whilst enhancing social skills development during break time at school and in the community.

3. Increase awareness of local Aboriginal culture by enhancing social cohesion, community connectedness and assisting in the development of community partners through the medium of art, which will be modelled by local artists and respected elders.

Smart Online Safe Offline

Smart Online Safe Offline is being developed to specifically target children 9-14. It will target them in their online environment. The pilot campaign deals with predation but issues such as cyber-bullying and identity theft will be the focus of future campaigns.

Smart Online, Safe Offline is:

- a DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS strategy to educate young people of the risks and dangers of giving out too much personal information online;
- a CRIME PREVENTION INITIATIVE to reduce the incidence of successful online "grooming", educating children and young people when they are most at risk....when they are on-line;
- an EDUCATING AND EMPOWERING strategy to encourage young people to understand they can harm others and may be breaking the law with inappropriate use of technology and to know how to maximise the huge benefits the internet and mobile phones bring to their lives;
- a STRATEGY TO ALERT young people of these opportunities and risks with the support of the online communities in which they play;

Smart Online Safe Offline will:

- WARN children of the dangers when they are most at risk - in chat rooms, kids community sites, social networking sites, forums, online games;
- EDUCATE children on web safety behaviour - communicate in a manner that they will listen and respond to - using their language eg. "R U alone when U meet online m8s" ;
- PROVIDE a support program for children with practical solutions;
- EXTEND the campaign as part of larger communication strategy - provide education & support for parents, carers, teachers & wider adult community.

Core Elements

Young people need a simple and immediate way to respond to any threat. Our project will consist of three simple elements:

- A powerful creative message to cut through the general advertising clutter in their online space to inform young people to be immediately aware of possible risks;
- Provision of easy access to resources and tools to educate young people such as those provided by Net Alert and others and,
- A method of reporting suspicious and criminal behaviour to police.

Conclusion

NAPCAN submits the following recommendations to the Parliamentary Committee as actions that have potential to make a real difference in the lives of children 9-14 years:

RECOMMENDATIONS

1.   Promote the development of programs and projects that link children 9-14 years with their communities.

2.   Investment in workforce professional development in the areas of pre-adolescent psychological and cognitive development and managing challenging behaviours and emotional distress.

3.   Investment in workforce professional development in the areas of pre-adolescent psychological and cognitive development; and managing challenging behaviours and emotional distress.

4.   Provide funding support for programs that empower children and young people in their on-line environment

5.   Children need continuing supportive relationships with adults. There needs to be a system of after-school community activities that provide opportunities not only for children to be supervised but also to be mentored and supported.

6   NAPCAN supports the recommendations to make work work for children developed by the Task Force convened by the NSW Commission for Children and Young People in response to the *Children at Work Report* released in 2005. While we note that certain recommendations have been acted on, for example, the development of the *Babysitting Guide,* more needs to be done to ensure the workplace safety particularly of young people entering the workforce.

References

Ask the children: Overview of children's understandings of well-being, NSW Commission for Children and Young People

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NAPCAN
PREVENTING CHILD ABUSE

<u>NAPCAN</u>

National Association for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect

NAPCAN is....

Australia's leading advocate for the prevention of child abuse and neglect.

It is a national, independent, charitable organisation with a clear purpose ......

> **to prevent child abuse and neglect before it starts**.

In the last year there were over 50,000 substantiated notifications to statutory authorities of children being abused or neglected in this country. Children died, children were seriously injured and tens of thousands of children were physically, psychologically and emotionally damaged.

This number is growing every year.

NAPCAN believes …
it is time to draw a line in the sand and

> **break this cycle of abuse**

NAPCAN works …….
within a public health conceptual framework focussing its expertise and energies on primary and secondary prevention strategies.

NAPCAN develops its prevention strategies on the basis of sound evidence, expert advice and consultation across its extensive national network.

NAPCAN is currently…….

* ❖ **working directly with children and young people to strengthen their protective behaviours and to build their resilience and life skills**

  "KiDS CAN", and its projects of significance such as "LoveBites" & "Rosies' Place" are key examples of NAPCAN's work in this area, as are "Stomp It", which focuses specifically on Indigenous young people, and "Smart Online, Safe Offline" which works within the cyber community to raise awareness and strengthen protective behaviours.

NAPCAN

PREVENTING CHILD ABUSE

❖ **assisting "at risk" parents through face-to-face programs and via an extensive network of professionals and practitioners, providing practical support and guidance**

   Examples include NAPCAN's Positive Parenting Workshops in Vic & NT & Positive Parenting resources distributed nationally

❖ **working in local communities to strengthen and co-ordinate the resources available to support families and children at risk and to build social capital**

   Community development principles underpin NAPCAN's work including the "Play a Part" program in Queensland and the "Child Friendly Community" initiatives in NT, NSW, SA & Tas.

❖ **raising public awareness that what "children see, children do" and promoting behaviour change which will provide positive modelling for children**

   The multi-award winning "Children see, Children do" advertisement, developed by DDB on behalf of NAPCAN, will become the centrepiece of a national social marketing campaign relevant to the whole population but specifically focussed on those parents whose behaviours are most likely to maintain the cycle of abuse.

NAPCAN knows……

this is just a start…and that……

to break the cycle of abuse and neglect a long term national, multi-facetted and well-resourced prevention strategy is essential.

Currently in Australia for every $300 spent on remedial statutory intervention for children who have already been harmed, only $1 is spent on prevention of child abuse and neglect.

NAPCAN will….

continue to advocate to the Federal and State and Territory governments for the allocation of public resources for prevention and NAPCAN will work with government on the design and implementation of evidenced-based prevention strategies which impact on the whole community whilst targeting those at greatest risk.

NAPCAN urgently needs………

corporate and individual financial and practical assistance to support and extend its programs and continue its advocacy work.

www.napcan.org.au