

Submission

No 43

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

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

Dear Committee on Children and Young People,

**City of Sydney Response to the Inquiry into Children and Young People
9 – 14 Years in NSW**

The period between 9 to 14 years is a crucial stage in a child's development; being a transitional stage between childhood and youth, and primary and high school. The City of Sydney (the City) is committed to ensuring this age group is catered to through ongoing programs and projects which help young people negotiate these life transitional periods.

According to the 2006 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data, there are 2882 young people between the ages of 9 – 14 years residing in the City of Sydney Local Government Area (LGA).

The City provides a specialised Outside of School Hours (OOSH) service to children aged 5 – 12 years as well as specialised Youth Services for young people aged 12 – 24 across the LGA.

There are also a range of other community based, not for profit providers operating in the City of Sydney that provide services and programs for this age group.

While not included in the terms of reference, the current funding models that support the provision of programs for this age group need mentioning, as they affect the operation of the services and the capacity of services to be responsive to the needs of children and young people and their families.

The City provides 6 programs that provide activities or services for 5-12 year olds.

3 of these services receive federal government funding in the form of CCB. The remaining 3 are wholly funded by Council. These 3 centres represent a cost to Council of approx \$648,000.

The City also provides 6 Youth Services for 12-24 year olds.

One of these receives a small amount of state government funding. Another receives some federal government funding. The significant remainder of the cost involved in providing the services is funded by Council (approx \$900,000 for the 6 programs)

Council provides Tweenies programs (for 9-14 year olds) as part of the existing Youth and OOSH budgets.

Council also funds OOSH and Youth Services through our community grants program.

Because of the lack of flexible funding models available to cater for this age group, the City contributes significantly to the cost of programs provided. Consideration should be given to greater funding from state and federal governments to support the programs provided in this area.

OOSH services are primarily funded by the Commonwealth through Child Care Benefit available to eligible families. The characteristics of this funding model are:

- There are national standards and quality assurance criteria that services need to comply with.
- A fee is charged for the service.
- The service model prioritises the allocation of places based on the workforce participation of parents, rather than the needs of the children.
- Hours that families can claim the benefit are restricted according to workforce participation

Under this funding model, a fee is charged to all families and fees are reduced for eligible families through the means tested child care benefit model. Records of attendances and absences must be kept to claim the benefit and families' access to the benefit is restricted according to workforce participation.

These services focus on stimulating developmental, social and recreational activities for children, while meeting the care requirements of families. Vacant places must be filled in accordance with Priority of Access Guidelines, which prioritise families who are working or studying. Services are not encouraged to accept self-referred children (those who arrive at a service without being enrolled) to attend a service without permission from a parent or guardian.

Services that receive child care benefit need to comply with National Standards and be accredited by the National Child Care Accreditation Council against quality areas and principles that summarise and define quality in OOSH. These Quality Areas and Principles guide the service in maintaining and improving the quality of their child care practices.

Council's own five Youth Services and numerous programs are funded by the City, and receive partial funding from the State Government's Department of Community Services (DoCS) and the Federal Government's Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA).

The City of Sydney provides this service free of charge to young people aged between 12 to 24 years. While records of attendance are kept within each service, there is no strict enrolment model and no quota to be met. The City's Youth Services focus on life skills, social cohesion and integration to the education system.

The City's Youth Services are work in accordance with the Youth Action and Policy Association NSW (YAPA) Service Model Policies which guide; casework, rights and responsibilities, inclusiveness, privacy and confidentiality, child protection and safety.

Council's Youth Services are dedicated to provision based on the NSW Best Practice Principles for Youth Participation as announced by the NSW Premier in June 2007. These aim to encourage and support young people in having input into the development of programs and services which impact on their life. The main elements of these principles include:

- Recognising young people's rights to participate in developing Government policy, programs and services that impact upon them
- Promote respect by listening to young people's views and taking them seriously
- Build and maintain strong relationships with young people
- Provide young people with appropriate and timely information on Government processes
- Build on young people's knowledge and skills
- Recognise young people's different situations and backgrounds particularly those from; Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Island backgrounds, culturally diverse backgrounds, with disabilities, in out-of-home care, and vulnerable or marginalised groups.
- Organise participation processes that take into account the needs of young people, such as training and transport.
- Encourage young people to provide feedback on the effectiveness of participation processes.

The current funding model, for both OOSH and Youth services, do not always meet the needs of communities, particularly those communities with high levels of disadvantage and low levels of workforce participation.

While both children and youth groups have dedicated services, the period between 9 to 14 years is a key life stage for young people with issues including;

- The transition from primary to secondary schooling
- The transition from OOSH Services to Youth Services
- Transitioning from OOSH Services to other programmed activities
- Retaining children in OOSH Services up to the age of 12 years
- Some young people are not accessing either OOSH or Youth Services
- Children and young people spending time without the supervision of responsible adults, impacting on their personal safety
- Children and young people being exposed to negative influences and peer pressure

The City of Sydney identifies this age group as a need within the Youth Strategy and is addressing the gaps by working with the City's OOSH Services and the State's Better Futures Strategy to provide programs to address the issues these young people face.

The City's response to the Terms of Reference for the Inquiry into Children and Young People 9 – 14 Years in NSW is as follows:

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

1.1. Targeted Programming

Programs need to cater to the 9 to 14 year age bracket rather than programs focusing on 5 to 12 years or 12 to 24 years, which are age brackets for OOSH and Youth Services. A specialist program needs to be established to meet the needs of young people in this target group.

1.2. Consistency and Best Practice Principles

Young people between the age of 9 and 14 years are experiencing many changes and need a consistent and ongoing program designed with involvement from young people, OOSH staff and Youth Services staff, based on their needs. Consulting young people on what they see as their needs in addition to what they would like to do to create a holistic program.

1.3. Transitional Needs: Primary School to Secondary School

Young people between the ages of 9 to 14 years are transitioning from primary to secondary schooling and require support and guidance in this transition. In many areas within the City of Sydney young people are leaving primary schools within their local area and moving into secondary schools in outer suburbs. This change includes the need to access and be comfortable on public transport while also adapting to the many differences between the two types of education.

1.4. Transitional Needs: OOSH Services to Youth Services

OOSH Services provide a structured service catering to the needs of young people aged 5 to 12 years, while Youth Services offer a less structured and more informal provision aimed at the needs of young people aged 12 – 25. For young people to transition smoothly from one service to another, gradual programs need to be tailored easing the target group from the OOSH Service to the Youth Service. This may include such activities as an induction day or enrolment day.

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

2.1. Age of participants

The target group in discussion are in different periods of development, so programs and projects developed need to address the different stages of development that these young people will go through by cross-age activities.

2.2. Participants Backgrounds

Participants within OOSH Services are from a variety of different backgrounds with a majority coming from low socioeconomic backgrounds. The majority of young people accessing Youth Services have a history of disadvantage and are also from a low socioeconomic background. Not all young people accessing OOSH services will transition to Youth Services, and will enter into other activities, including non structured and social activities.

2.3. Cultural Awareness

The City of Sydney LGA contains a culturally diverse population with a significant number of Indigenous children and young people accessing services. The cultural appropriateness of delivery models needs to be considered in the development of all programs for all ages, especially 9 – 14 years.

3. The activities, services and support which provide opportunities for children and young people in the middle years to develop resilience

3.1. City of Sydney Programs

The City of Sydney Youth Strategy identifies the key need of young people aged 9 -14 years for specialist after-school and vacation care. Programs currently targeting this age group are run on a one-off basis, within the School Holiday Programs, weekly programs and at the end of the year (in term 4).

To date, programs delivered by the City include:

- Structured Hip Hop and Drama workshops (for older OOSH and younger youth services participants) at the Maybanke Youth Centre in Pyrmont held once a week in the fourth school term (delivered in 2006 and 2007).
- A weekly young women's program (Glebe PCYC).
- Weekly Tweenies Day at the Jo Sergeant Youth Centre in Erskineville.
- Monthly events conducted by the Juanita Nielsen Youth Centre (OOSH Service and Youth Service) in Woollahroomooloo under direction of an initial youth consultation.
- A one off introductory session with grade 7's at local high school to introduce young people and teachers to the Abraham Mott Youth Centre in Millers Point.
- One-off events held within the School Holiday Programs (combined OOSH and Youth Service events) including excursions to the cinema and Taronga Park Zoo (all Council centres including Council funded centres).
- Surry Hills OOSH Centre offers a youth room to year 6 participants with their access being increased as they move towards Youth Services age bracket. During Summer School Holidays prior to entering grade 7, participants are able to attend their choice of either OOSH School Holiday Programs or Youth Services School Holiday Programs.
- OOSH services provide a 9+ focus identifying and acknowledging the needs and interests of children aged 9 – 12 years. This includes routine, level of responsibility and promotion of retention of children in this age group.
- Youth Services provide age specific programs which account for the needs of the 12 – 14 year olds who attend the centres.

4. 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

4.1. Access criteria for OOSH services

The current access criteria for OOSH services favours those families who are participating in the workforce and those with a capacity to pay a fee for the service. In areas where there are concentrations of families that do not fit this category, the service model is less likely to meet the needs of the community (for example, in areas with concentrations of high disadvantage and low socio-economics)

4.2 Impacts on children

To ensure their well being, children should be under the supervision of adults until they are of an age where they have sufficient maturity to care for themselves. Models for service provision need to consider the concepts of and continuity of duty of care and growing independence skills

4.3 Staff retention

There can be some turnover of workers in both the OOSH Services and Youth Services. Young people within this age are seeking positive role models and the staff-to-child relationship is important. A high turn over of staff results in a lack of consistency.

4.4 . Consistency

A consistent approach towards both programming and staffing ensures that this transitional period for young people is made as unproblematic as possible.

The City of Sydney would like to thank the Committee for the opportunity to submit a response. If you have any questions regarding our submission, please contact Sharon Campisi, Manager – Children's Services on (02) 9265 9333 or scampisi@cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au; or Helen Xiros, Manager – Youth Services on 0419 254 228, (02) 9265 9333 or hxiros@cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au.

Yours sincerely

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