

New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Children, Young People and the Built Environment

Joint Committee on Children and Young People

Submission by **Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth**

through
Professor Brian Head, Chief Executive Office

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The Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) is a not-for-profit network organisation that brings together members from government agencies, research centres, professional associations and community service organisations concerned with the major issues affecting the wellbeing of children and young people. ARACY has members across all areas of Australia, and takes a national perspective as well as supporting initiatives at state, regional and local levels through its member organisations. ARACY is concerned to generate new thinking about the most important issues affecting the health, education, emotional wellbeing and life-chances of young Australians.

ARACY does not itself deliver services directly to young people. It focuses on strategic issues such as the design, implementation and evaluation of programs and practices. ARACY was founded in 2002 with a corporate structure and governing board (www.aracy.org.au). Its organisational membership includes more than 200 of the leading bodies in the sectors of government, research, professional practice and community services. The methodology is to develop collaborative partnerships across these sectors to seek better solutions for complex problems. The focus is on using the best available knowledge and evidence to design and improve programs and practices.

In the last two years ARACY has undertaken extensive consultation with leading members of the professions, the research community, government agencies (state and federal), and non-government service delivery organisations, in order to establish research priorities and directions. One of these organisations is the NSW Commission for Children and Young People, with whom ARACY has had a very fruitful relationship of mutual support.

This priority-setting process culminated in September 2005 in a national workshop that established several strategic issues for ARACY to champion in the next two years. These priority issues include the need to establish a strategic framework of principles that help citizens and decision-makers to identify the characteristics of a child-friendly community; and to use this framework as a basis for considering and improving each important institutional domain that affects children and young people. These domains were believed to include the built environment, education and vocational training, the health system, and recreation/sport. ARACY believes that the way communities are designed will impact significantly on the extent to which

children, young people and families are supported and their capacity to remain well connected to the wider society, including communications.

One such institutional domain that deeply affects children and young people is the built environment. ARACY is therefore delighted that the NSW Parliamentary Committee on Children and Young People has determined that it will inquire into:

1. trends, changes and issues for children and young people in the development, implementation and coordination of policy, design and planning for the built environment;
2. the mechanisms available for monitoring and reporting on planning processes and decisions concerning the built environment, as they relate to and impact upon children and young people;
3. 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;
4. 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;
5. any other matter considered relevant to the inquiry by the Committee.

ARACY commends also the quality of the background papers issued by the Committee, and believes these papers should raise the standard of the material coming before the Committee in submissions by many organisations. ARACY has provided member-organisations with information concerning the Inquiry, and encouraged submissions. However, it was not possible for ARACY to co-ordinate a joint submission between some or all members.

The brief comments below, concerning the ARACY forward program, are intended to provide strong support for the work of the Inquiry and strong support for the role and high competence of the NSW Commission for Children and Young People. Comments in this submission are not binding upon any of ARACY's member-organisations.

1. ARACY has recently decided to establish a taskforce, drawn from the sectors included in our membership, to develop a framework document outlining general principles for a child-friendly community. This framework would take account both of high-level international principles (e.g. the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and any other international examples) and Australian legal and regulatory frameworks and administrative practices. This framework would not only include a conceptual-philosophical base in values and rights/obligations, but would also pay due regard to the evidence base where appropriate.

The intention is that ARACY would adopt this framework and invite others to endorse, adapt and apply it.

An important innovation would be that children and young people should be involved in productive ways in discussing and helping to shape the emerging draft of the document. This links not only with the approach taken by the NSW Commission on

Children and Young People, but also with ARACY's planned Network capacity-building activities on engaging children and youth in research and consultation.

2. In a second stage of framework development, in the second half of 2006, it is envisaged that more specific guidelines, based on best available evidence, would be developed for at least some of some key areas which most directly impinge on the quality of the lives of children and youth, such as:

- (a) the built environment – taking account of the Report of the current Inquiry;
- (b) education and vocational training;
- (c) safe and stimulating recreational and sporting opportunities;
- (d) environmental health and safety – including good nutrition and absence of pollution;
- (e) neighbourhoods (e.g. local government areas); and
- (f) child/family-friendly workplaces.

3. Co-hosting a Conference on Child-friendly Cities:

Preliminary agreement has been reached with Prof Brendan Gleeson, Director of the Urban Policy Research Centre at Griffith University, to co-organise and plan the second national conference on Child-friendly Cities.

This would be held in Sydney in late 2006 (the first was held in Brisbane in October 2004).

It is expected that strong support for this Conference would be forthcoming from organisations and professions that wanted to be part of the solution, including the private development industry, the planning professions, local governments, State departments, and Children's Commissioners from several states. The Conference would be timed to take into account the tabling and publication of the forthcoming Report on Children and the Built Environment currently being undertaken by the NSW Parliamentary Committee on Children and Young People.

This Conference would also link closely with the project [2 above] to develop guidelines/principles for child-friendly cities and neighbourhoods. Conference attendees would be involved in working groups to assist in developing these guidelines and in considering practical implications arising from the Inquiry Report.

4. ARACY anticipates developing a public-access website to host materials concerning many aspects of the above issues, to assist organisations and decision-makers in considering future planning and policy processes. This material will be progressively available through the ARACY Clearing-house facility which will hold newly commissioned documents summarising research, guidelines and best practice. Subject to funding, ARACY may also assist organisations in some areas of professional development, e.g. through events that allow various professional groups, policy-makers, service providers and researchers to be exposed to broader views.

