

Submission

No 14

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

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Date Received: 1/05/2008

Council's Reference:

BW/AP

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

Dear Sir/Madam

Richmond Valley Council would like to make the following submission in relation to the terms of reference for this inquiry. Unfortunately due to time constraints, Council is unable to include in the submission, the evidence to cover the points raised, however these can be provided on request or at a hearing.

According to the Terms of Reference of the inquiry, the following are issues that are regularly raised in discussions with Council staff and Councillors by members of the public, youth workers, Aboriginal Community Members, Child and Youth and Educational Interagencies, Health staff and the like.

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

The challenges that face this age group in the Richmond Valley are:

- Transition to high school is extremely challenging for young people. A number of young people dropping out of school below the minimum age for education and/ or become "part-time students" due to their challenging behaviours or learning needs.
- There is no youth centre for the young people to meet.
- Limited or no access is provided to a youth worker (for example, 1 part time youth worker covers the whole of Casino and surrounds with approximately 830 young people to cover). Some youth workers are not permitted to cover the majority of this age group because their service is for young people aged 13 and over.
- Criminal behaviour from this age group is common and is often attributed to their supposed feelings of immunity because of their age.
- Increasing costs for membership of sporting clubs etc, finds many of the most disadvantaged without any recreation opportunities.
- Talented young people who have been chosen for state, regional and national sports teams are unable to attend them due to the costs to travel these distances.

- Access to transport for sporting purposes and for health and alternative education purposes is very limited. In places it is non-existent; as a result young people are not able to be members of society in a way that they would like.
- Alcohol use amongst this age group is very high and increasing with secondary supply of major concern.
- Many young people in this age group in some towns have stated that they have been sexually abused, many others are exposed to Domestic Violence. Because of their age, these cases are not prioritised by DoCS.

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:

- The needs of children in primary school and high school are quite different in our area. Primary schools are much more likely to be small, personal and local. High schools are much more likely to entail more travel (sometimes hours), larger class sizes, exposure to anti-social behaviour, drug use and anonymity. This is a part of the reason for the fast drop-off rate between primary and high school students.
- The school drop-off rate is particularly bad amongst Aboriginal populations, the majority of which do not make it past year 9 at the local high schools.
- Disadvantage is also far worse for young people who live in isolated areas. There are young people who are members of local sports and social clubs who cannot attend meetings due to transport concerns and cannot know what happened at meetings because they do not have access to the internet to receive minutes/ photos etc.

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

- Sport has been shown to develop resilience in young people and children, unfortunately those that are the most disadvantaged in our area are the ones with the least access to sport.
- We believe that access to a counsellor would increase resilience amongst these young people and decrease crime rates. A number of young people in this town have expressed the need to have access to a counsellor. There have been some deaths amongst the young people but there was little to no formal and ongoing counselling offered and there are extremely limited counselling options available externally for these young people.

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:

- No Comment at this stage.

5. Any other matter considered relevant to the inquiry by the Committee:

- The tyranny of distance is of particular concern for young people in areas where there is no broadband internet access. Communication, lifestyle and education are all adversely affected for these young people; they grow up in a different era to their city peers.
- One of the most recent inquiries held by this committee focused specifically on infrastructure concerns. Richmond Valley Council made a submission and attended the hearing in relation to this inquiry. The situation has not improved since the inquiry was held and this continues to impact on young people in the local area.

For further information please contact Council's Community Projects Officer, Joanne Petrovic on telephone (02) 66600225.

Yours faithfully

Brian Wilkinson
GENERAL MANAGER