

Submission

No 27

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

Organisation: Marrickville Youth Resource Centre

Name: Ms Julie Robinson

Position: Director

Telephone: 02 9564 3222

Date Received: 2/05/2008

Submission into Inquiry into Children and Young people 9-14 years in NSW

Marrickville Youth Resource Centre (MYRC) works with young people aged 12 -24years and their families. MYRC is committed to improving skills and opportunities for young people and the development of positive community participation and action. We do this by offering a range of services including individual support, recreation, school holiday programs and creative programs as well as education programs such as Links to Learning which aims to support young people to stay at school and an ACCESS to Year 10 program for indigenous young people who left school before obtaining their school certificate. Last year MYRC worked with over 500 young people where 51% were young male and 49% were young women. Our clients reflect the cultural diversity of the Marrickville Local Government Area with 70% from a Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Background, 25% from an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) Background and 5% from an Anglo background. The majority of the young people who access our service are between the ages of 12-16 years.

While MYRC works with young people from the age of 12 years we also have experience with children much younger either as siblings of older children or in requesting to access the services themselves. Over the last couple of years MYRC has noticed an increase in the number of requests for help by young people aged between 8 -11 years. In November 2007, Barnardos Streetwork Team and MYRC collected information on the number of 8-11 year olds that were requesting assistance from workers in Marrickville. The workers had 50 requests for assistance by this age group during the month of November. This is an average of 2 requests per day. Most of these requests were for food or things to do. A number of these young people report being “bored” with nothing to do and were therefore hanging out in parks or with older siblings and family members. The majority of the young people were either ATSI or from a CALD background.

The needs of children and young people aged 9-14 years

The needs of children and young people aged 9 – 14 years are varied. No group of children and young people are homogenous and therefore their issues and subsequent needs will also be different. However some of the issues this age group have identified to us include:

- ***Emotional and physical***

This age group covers a wide range of adolescent development differences and therefore their emotional needs are varied. For many young people this is a time of rapid change. It is a time when young people are exploring the questions of Who am I? and Where do I fit in the world? This age group want to be socially accepted by their peers and this is often a time they experience bullying and discrimination by others. For some young people it is also a time of conflict with parents and there maybe a need for support from a variety of services including counselling services, accommodation services or intervention by the Department of Community Services to name a few.

Young people aged 9 -14 years can experience difficulty accessing services particularly appropriate accommodation services and intervention from the Department of Community Service. Over the years we have seen the Department of Community services giving priority to younger children which for a young person at risk of harm this can have detrimental effects.

- ***Social***

For this age group their peers are becoming increasingly important and they want to develop a sense of independence yet still need the support and guidance of significant adults in their life. Therefore their social needs are different than younger children. They want to be able to have fun with their friends in safe environments, they want increasing freedom with increasing age and this often presents challenges to parents as to 'letting go' and balancing the need for appropriate levels of supervision. For many of the young people we see they are looking for things to do "to not be bored" and to have a safe space they can hang out with their friends.

There is a need for free safe activities for young people to access particularly after school or during the school holidays. This age group often report being bored with nothing to do, which if left to their own devices can lead to the start of anti social behaviour. At MYRC our current funding levels means we are unable to provide appropriate activities for the 9 -11 year olds. However we believe there is a need for a range of age appropriate activities to be provided. This may include having activities for the under 12's and then separate activities for the over 12's.

- ***Educational***

Educational issues are one of the many issues facing young people today. For children and young people aged 9 -14 years they will experience one of the biggest and often toughest transitions in their education when moving from primary school to high school. This is the period when problems may start to emerge particular as these young people struggle to find their place in a high school system as well as experiencing key adolescent development stages.

Difficulties young people often talk about experiencing at school include not getting the support they need to do the work, not understanding the work (ie literacy and numeracy rates below their peers), social acceptance among their peers, lack of access to school counsellors, bullying, discrimination and an unsupportive home situation which makes study hard. For some young people these difficulties prove too great and they leave school before or at the minimum age of 15 years.

The activities, services and support required

Young people aged 9 -14 years require a holistic approach to service delivery. As a society we need to be able to provide relevant, affordable and a range of services and activities for this age group. We need to consider all their needs including their educational needs, their emotional needs, their need for protection when they are considered to be 'at risk', their need for support and their need to be able to have positive safe fun.

When working with this age group we also need to consider the support their families may need. Many parents report struggling when their child becomes a 'teenager', they report no longer feeling like they know how to parent their child as they get older. Therefore we need to offer parents and families support and encouragement to stay connected to their child through their adolescent period. There is a need for services to offer parenting courses as well as support groups so parents do not feel so isolated.

The impact of changing workplace practices on children and young people

Changing workplace practices and the impact of increasing costs of living impacts greatly on all the families we work with. The young people we work with often report their parents work long hours sometimes working two or three part time jobs to make ends meet. Our experience is that this is particularly the situation for parents from a refugee background. As a result after school these young people are often left to look after themselves or young siblings. We work with a number of young people who are caring for their siblings while parents work. They report often they do not have keys to get in after school and have to wait to their parents get home. Therefore there is a need for after school care for this group where they can be safe and have food provided. There is also a need for youth services that typically cater for the over 12 year olds to consider how they meet the needs of those young people who care for their siblings after school.

School holidays also present a real challenge for many families of this age group. Often school holiday programs at youth centres do not cater for the under 12 year olds. The 9 -11 year olds we know will not access vacation care as costs are high and they report being bored when they go because vacation care caters for a younger group. Therefore we believe there is a need for low cost activities that keep 9-14 year olds active during school holidays. At MYRC we run two weeks of school holiday program each holidays for 12-18 year olds with increasing numbers accessing this service. We have also found we need to provide lunch on all the activities as often young people do not have their own or money to buy their own.

MYRC supports the enquiry into Children and Young People 9-14 years on NSW and encourages the committee to seek the views of the young people themselves and their families. If the committee has further questions or wishes to discuss our work with this age group further please contact me on 9564 3222.

Yours Sincerely

Julie Robinson
Director