

Submission

No 78

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

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Parliamentary Enquiry – YMCA of Sydney Response

1. The needs of children and young people in the middle years (9-14)
 - 1.1. Development of their identity/individuality and an environment for this to happen
 - 1.2. Independence
 - 1.3. Acceptance from peers
 - 1.4. To be heard
 - 1.5. Sound support base (i.e. family, school, peers, clubs etc)
 - 1.6. To feel safe as they become more aware of the potential risks/dangers in their environment
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 – younger (9-11/12) are more *family oriented* while the older (12-14 – as they enter into high school) are more focused on *social acceptance*.
 - 2.2. Gender – generally same needs but just deal with them differently e.g. the need for *self-worth* is often obvious in young females yet young males still have this need but may not display it or may display it differently. Perhaps the need here is that the support adults are aware of this.
 - 2.3. Needs vary for children in different financial circumstances or their need priorities change. For example, where many middle class children's needs may be based around acceptance etc, children from lower socio-economic backgrounds needs may place more emphasis on basics such as food, shelter, water etc.
3. The activities, services and support which provide opportunities for children and young people in the middle years to develop resilience
 - 3.1. Self-confidence building and team building activities
 - 3.2. Information services – services that provide information on issues relevant to this age bracket i.e. puberty, drug and alcohol, sexual health,
 - 3.3. Clubs – sporting and non-sporting, provide a sense of community and belonging and support network.
 - 3.4. Mental health services – increase of stress, anxiety, depression, lack of self-worth in children/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;
 - 4.1. Flexible workplace practices such as job sharing, working from home, flexible hours all have the potential to benefit children and young people.
 - 4.2. However, longer working hours result in less family time and higher need for out of home care.
 - 4.3. Higher stress levels and fatigue from work hours etc lead to less quality family time. For example, while the parent/s may spend time with their family, it will be in front of the television rather than doing something interactive with the children.
5. Anything else that may have an impact on children and young people in this age bracket
 - 5.1. Media – pressure to look and act a certain way and to have whatever is “cool”.
 - 5.2. Technology – more time spent in front of the TV, watching movies, on the internet, playing computer games etc. Less physical activities.
 - 5.3. Peers – peers are often the greatest influence in children's/young people's lives and can often place a pressure on them to be involved in negative behaviours. Middle years

are difficult as they are seeking the acceptance of their peers but are not necessarily old enough or self confident enough to stand up to them.

YMCA Response

The YMCA of Sydney has a very proactive approach to the identified issues; as a core program area we are developing programs that can assist youth across many communities to develop a their social, educational and life skills in a variety of contexts.

Some local YMCA programs and initiatives include:

1. Youthlinx Program
2. Vacation Care Junior Leaders Program
3. Teen Gym Program
4. Plus other centre based initiatives

As an organisation, we have state wide initiatives that aim to address some of the disconnection issues that youth face through constructive youth leadership programs. These programs are designed to develop skills and confidence in young people in the most difficult years of their lives.

These programs include:

1. Uno Y
2. Future Leaders
3. Marland Cup
4. Youth Parliament