

Submission

No 15

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

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24/4/08

The Committee Manager  
Committee on Children and Young People  
Parliament House  
Macquarie St  
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Sir/Madam,

Please find the relevant submission to the 'Inquiry into Children and Young People 9-14 Years in NSW' attached to this letter. The submission has been prepared by Newcastle University student, Loren Riddell, on behalf of the Newcastle Police Community Youth Club (PCYC). The submission has been authorised by the NSW PCYC Chief Executive Officer Chris Gardner and Newcastle PCYC Manager Lee Shields. The Newcastle PCYC is a sport and recreation club that provides activities for people of all ages; however it has a core directive to support youth and to develop a partnership between youth, the community and the NSW Police.

For these reasons the PCYC has a direct interest in this inquiry as it desires to inform the Committee about the current needs and issues of the young people of Newcastle. This submission recommends, in order continue to provide for the needs of children, that parents need to be more aware and involved in assisting the development of their child and that the NSW education system re-evaluates its physical and extracurricular activities. Parents, schools, the PCYC and the Government need to be united in this mission. It is hoped the recommendations raised in this submission will help shape and develop future policy created by the NSW Government in relation to this important age group. The PCYC would appreciate feedback regarding the outcome of this inquiry and the consideration of this particular submission.

Yours sincerely,

Loren Riddell (On behalf of the Newcastle PCYC)

# **Newcastle Police Community Youth Club**

Author: Loren Riddell

Committee on Children and Young People

## **‘Inquiry into Children and Young People 9-14 Years in NSW’**

24/4/08

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## **1 INTRODUCTION**

The Newcastle PCYC provides this submission in order to assist the Committee on Children in Young People with its research into children and young people between the ages of nine to 14 years. The Newcastle PCYC is able to provide invaluable expertise to the Committee, resulting from an extensive history of interaction with children in the Newcastle area.

The Newcastle PCYC is one of 59 clubs in NSW, which provides children, including many of those considered disadvantaged or ‘at risk’, with a safe and secure environment to participate in various activities, sports and programs, which help in their development and self confidence building. It has an interest in helping children to develop, grow and succeed. As identified in its mission, the PCYC aims to;

- ‘get young people active in life;
- work with young people to develop their skills, character and leadership;
- and prevent and reduce crime by and against young people.’ (PCYC 2007)

The purpose of this report is to stress the importance of programs and services, similar to those that the Newcastle PCYC runs, in assisting the development of youth. It also highlights the importance of participation in such programs during the early stages of a child’s development, to work as an early intervention strategy to juvenile crime. It is hoped that by providing the Committee with this report that children in this age group, not only in Newcastle, but throughout NSW, will be afforded better facilities, services and support to be able to develop into mature, healthy young adults.

This submission will be based on two points of the inquiry’s terms of reference; with a specific focus on children and young people in the Newcastle area, including;

- the needs of children and young people in the middle years i.e. between about nine and fourteen years of age;
- and the activities, services and support which provide opportunities for children and young people in the middle years to develop resilience.

The submission will raise arguments on particular issues which the Newcastle PCYC believes require urgent attention in this policy area.

- The Newcastle PCYC believes that it is integral that the NSW Government is able to provide all children in NSW with access to similar programs and services that the PCYC are providing at the present time.
- To ensure positive and consistent development for all children, each environment needs to steadily reflect similar values. This means parents need to be better informed and equipped to provide this support in the home environment – where organisations such as the PCYC cannot.
- There also needs to be greater pressure placed on the NSW education system to support the Newcastle PCYC's approach to the importance of getting children active, to ensure consistent and effective development for youth in all areas; including the prevention of youth crime.
- It is also fundamental that organisations such as the Newcastle PCYC continue to receive adequate funding to be able to continue to provide these important services to assist the needs of youth and children.

This submission was compiled by the author, Loren Riddell, in direct consultation with (via meeting, e-mail and phone) the Manager of Newcastle PCYC, Mr. Lee Shields. The content of the submission is also based upon external research and PCYC published material.

## **2 BACKGROUND**

### **2.1 PCYC**

The first PCYC, originally known as the Police-Rotary Boys Club, opened in Woolloomooloo, Sydney, on April 1st 1937. It was established to 'provide a venue where boys could engage in healthy sporting, cultural and recreational pursuits and mix in a safe, non-confrontational environment'. (PCYC 2007)

In July 1937 other clubs were established in areas such as Bega, Tamworth, Yass and Young.

Undergoing several name changes throughout the years, in 1995 it finally became known as the Police and Community Youth Clubs NSW, reflecting the important ties to the NSW Police and the general community.

The PCYC now boasts over 54 000 members in 59 clubs across the state, which offer young people a range of sports, activities and ‘drop in areas’ for young people to meet and have fun in a safe environment. The PCYC also has a principal role in the reduction and prevention of crime, by and against young people. Programs are developed to teach self-defence and moral values, striving to stay in touch with the needs of local young people, keeping them off the streets and out of trouble. (PCYC 2007)

## **2.2 Youth**

### **2.2.1 Statistics**

Children in the age group relevant to this inquiry make up a significant percentage of Australia’s population.

- The total number of children aged 0 to 14 years has been increasing over the past few years. In 2006 - 4.1 million, 2001- 4.0 million, 1996 - 3.9 million.
- In June 2006 there were 1.33 million children aged 0-14 years in NSW.
- Children accounted for 19.6% of the NSW population in 2006. (ABS 2007)

As these trends show, the population in this age bracket continues to expand, which is placing increased pressure on current limited resources and services which are unable to cope with the heightened demands for the education and development services for youth. The implementation of programs for children by the PCYC has resulted in positive outcomes for the development of youth in the Hunter. The 2006 PCYC Annual Report indicates a 70% reduction in offending behaviour by young people involved in the ‘Targeted’ programs, demonstrating the effectiveness of such services and programs in diminishing criminal behaviour and developing youth resilience. The Newcastle PCYC is concerned however, that the current limitation on resources is affecting the real potential for these programs.



### **3 DISCUSSION**

#### **3.1 the needs of children and young people in the middle years i.e. between about nine and fourteen years of age**

There is an abundance of information and research available about the particular needs of children and young people in this age group. What seems to be constantly overlooked during the making of policy in this area are the needs of the child's parents, in relation to being able to effectively cater for the needs of the child. The years between nine and 14 are the critical time when children begin to develop into adolescents. What children need the most during this time to be able to develop resilience is someone to talk to.

##### **3.1.1 The Role of Parents**

At this time parents become vital actors in mentoring and assisting their child with common problems arising during adolescence, including peer pressure and self-esteem issues. For many parents this is a daunting experience, often feeling inadequately equipped or trained to provide the help and support their child needs. This is often picked up on by the child, which in turn makes them either embarrassed or unable to talk to their parent. This is when organisations such as the Newcastle PCYC provide youth with the mentoring facility to talk about issues or problems they are unable to speak about with peers or parents. While this is an important facility for a child's development, because a child may not feel this similar connection with their parent, this may create further long term issues in the parent/child relationship. It is the Newcastle PCYC's view that this process can be made more effective and beneficial in assisting the needs of the child if parents are more actively involved.

### 3.1.2 Parenting Programs

The Newcastle PCYC believe that parents of children in this age group need to be given adequate help and advice about what their children may going through during this stage of development, to be able to become more involved in assisting their child's needs. Many parents do not understand how to reach out to their children during this time as peers quickly become the major influences in their micro world.

The 2006 NSW Government Youth Action Plan recognised this in stating that 'research tells us young people can be supported by... programs to help parents improve the way their families work' (Youth Action Plan 2006). However, there was no mention of any action that would be taken to put this into practice.

The Newcastle PCYC would like to see the establishment of programs to give support to parents of children between the ages of nine and 14. The programs should include raising awareness of the existence of charity organisations which strive to assist youth such as the Newcastle PCYC and the benefit of being involved in their activities and services. The programs would need to include information on how to communicate with your child, importance of children being active, how to recognise warning signs in children and the importance of early intervention to prevent anti-social behaviour. To be more effective this should include compulsory attendance of parents in special programs, before children begin high school. Compulsory attendance would ensure that the majority of parents receive adequate information required to help them in their children's development and to make them aware of the assistance available.

### **3.2 the activities, services and support which provide opportunities for children and young people in the middle years to develop resilience**

The PCYC was established to fulfil the exact requirements of this particular term of reference. It is the activities, services and support which the PCYC provide, that allows everyday children and young people to be given the opportunity to develop resilience.

A major part of this service is the ability of Newcastle PCYC to meet the needs of children in this age group by providing a safe sanctuary for them to relax and make friends. Children need things to do. Without a safe place to do them, there is the possibility that they become anti-social, or will look for these activities in the wrong places; become involved with drugs, alcohol, or criminal activity. The ability for youth to ‘drop in’ to the PCYC allows children to know they always have somewhere safe to go. The PCYC also offers various programs to assist youth and maintain this assistance into adulthood.

The Blue Star youth development program ‘gives young people the opportunity to make a fresh start and develop themselves as citizens and community leaders’,(PCYC 2007), and provides a range of practical life skills assisting young people into early adulthood. The program is based around reflecting the importance of citizenship, commitment, respect, integrity and resilience and has been successful in providing youth with important life skills.

Services such as this are proving extremely beneficial to the youth that engage with the programs. Similarly, the wide ranging sports and activities the PCYC offers children, has led to the high levels of success and has become an important asset to the positive and healthy development of youth in Newcastle and other areas of NSW.

### 3.2.1 Physical Education

The Newcastle PCYC is a strong advocate of the importance of participation and getting youth active, as mentioned in the 2006 Youth Action Plan. It is widely accepted that ‘lack of physical activity has been identified as a probable mediator of obesity and cardiovascular risk factors in children and adolescents’ (Haga 2008). The Newcastle PCYC offers youth many weekly activities to keep children healthy, active and out of trouble, including; boxing, kickboxing, chess, gymnastics, pilates and judo. The activities are established to provide fun, but also allow children to engage in healthy competition.

It is a concern however, that too many children between the age of nine and 14 are not engaging in a suitable amount of physical activity. The Newcastle PCYC recommends that schools need to play a greater role in assisting youth physical development by placing a greater focus on the PD/H/PE curriculum. The curriculum needs to be reassessed or redeveloped to ensure maximum participation by students. This could be achieved by creating stricter requirements for minimum participation levels throughout primary and high school education. There also needs to be a reduction in the stigma, mainly amongst teenage girls, that physical education is a ‘waste of time’. This could be achieved by widening the students’ choices when choosing a particular sport or activity.

### 3.2.2 School Extracurricular Activities

Research indicates that ‘those children who participated in school extracurricular activities were less likely to drop out of school as adolescents or to become arrested as young adults than similar persons who were not involved’ (Mahoney 2000). The Newcastle PCYC would like to see NSW schools reflect research by developing a larger range of extracurricular activities for children to be involved in; keeping children engaged in friendly and safe activities and acting as a crime prevention strategy. More schools need to develop groups such as choir, dance, band, drama and hobby clubs to provide children with the opportunity to be involved in activities after school. The aim is to keep children off the couch and keep them interacting with mentors and peers.

### 3.2.3 Funding Scheme

It is undeniable that the services that organisations such as the Newcastle PCYC provide for youth play a crucial role in assisting children and youth to develop. However restrictions on funding and a heavy reliance on donations mean that the Newcastle PCYC is limited in their ability to continue to provide such services. The PCYC would like to see a funding scheme set up by the NSW Government to allow for organisations in a similar situation as the Newcastle PCYC to be able to maintain the club house and give it an urgently needed refurbishment. (See Appendix A and B)

Much of the Newcastle PCYC's facilities and equipment is outdated and is in dire need of repair or replacement. Refurbishment would not only provide a happier, attractive and friendly environment for youth, but will also provide a safe environment (as many of the areas on the verge of becoming occupational health and safety hazards). Funding is integral to be able to continue to provide effective services for children and youth in the area.

## 4 CONCLUSION

Children between the ages of nine and 14 need all the assistance they can possibly get to be able to develop into confident and healthy adults. In order to facilitate this development the key actors in a child's life, parents, need to be confident and informed about how to assist their child and what services are available to provide help.

Schools need to play a more dominant role in keeping children active and participating in extracurricular activities to avoid youth getting into the wrong crowd, turning to crime and anti-social behaviour. The Newcastle PCYC continues to act as a key agent in working together with parents, schools and the community to provide children with the activities and services they need to develop. To be able to carry on in doing this however they need continued funding and financial support from the State Government.

## **5 RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **3.1.2 Parenting Programs**

That the NSW Government directs compulsory attendance by parents of children entering high school to informational programs about the assistance that is available to parents and children through this period of adolescence (nine to 14).

### **3.2.1 Physical Education**

That the NSW Government re-evaluates the current PD/H/PE curriculum and places a significant focus on mandatory participation and the importance of staying active.

### **3.2.2 School Extracurricular Activities**

That the NSW Education system plays a greater role in developing extracurricular activities to extend children's social development and act as an early intervention strategy for juvenile crime.

### **3.2.3 Funding Scheme**

That the NSW Government develop a funding scheme for charity organisations such as the Newcastle PCYC in order to be able to update, refurbish and maintain club facilities and allow them to offer more effective and varied programs and services.

## 6 APPENDICES

### 6.1 Appendix A –

#### Brass Band Room



Newcastle PCYC, 2007, *Brass Band Room*, club venue facility, Police and Community Youth Clubs NSW Ltd, viewed 20 April 2008, <[http://www.pcycnsw.org/\\_new/facilities.php?c=52](http://www.pcycnsw.org/_new/facilities.php?c=52) >.

## 6.2 Appendix B –

### Weights Gym



Newcastle PCYC, 2007, *Weights Room*, club venue facility, Police and Community Youth Clubs NSW Ltd, viewed 20 April 2008, <[http://www.pcycnsw.org/\\_new/facilities.php?c=52](http://www.pcycnsw.org/_new/facilities.php?c=52) >.



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