

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

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## **CFS Response for Inquiry into Children and Young People Aged 9 to 14 in NSW** **8th August 2008**

### **1. Disconnected families**

Issue: Growing communication gap between parents/carers and their children.

Evidence:

The CFS Youth Team has observed growing disconnection between children and parents/carers. We consider this is due in part to the lack of parent education and awareness. For example, many parents are not informed about activities their children take part in, such as the Internet, groups and subcultures. This leads to misunderstandings and conflict.

The CFS Youth Team deals with parents' concerns regarding their children's behaviour in such cases and observes the stress placed on the relationship between child and parent that could be prevented.

There is lack of awareness by both parents and youth about their respective rights and responsibilities.

Opportunities:

Early intervention strategies that help build connections between parents and children as parent education programs. Examples are the Kidz Biz programs that focus on building relationships and skills between parents/carers and children and the Homework Help program.

### **2. Low literacy & numeracy**

Issue: Low levels of literacy and numeracy amongst children. This is often a cyclic issue in families where parents have low levels of literacy and numeracy skills and English Language limitations or proficiency.

Evidence:

There is a high level of high school drop out in the Fairfield LGA. For example, in 2006 approximately 39% of persons aged fifteen years and over had completed year 12 or equivalent; approximately 19% had completed Year 10 or equivalent; approximately 12% had completed year 8 or below; and approximately 7% did not go to school.<sup>1</sup>

CFS Youth Team clients are often those who have 'fallen through the gaps', reaching a certain level of high school without being able to read or write. Then when they are placed in a job or apprenticeship they fail to perform. Young people drop out of high school with low literacy and numeracy skills are likely to be on a path to unemployment/poverty.

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006 Census, Fairfield LGA Basic Community Profile (ABS 2006)  
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This issue is not isolated to young people from non-English speaking backgrounds as it is experienced across all communities.

Low skills levels contribute to high unemployment rates for youth. Youth unemployment in the area is also consistently above the State average.<sup>2</sup>

Opportunity:

Programs to bridge the education gap between parents and children, for parents with language barriers or disabilities, programs with schools to promote visibility of youth workers with the aim of lowering high school drop outs.

The Homework Help program aims to impact on these statistics in the area by providing literacy, numeracy and homework support to students aged 8 – 12yrs. The project builds parents' knowledge about educational issues and skills to assist their children. Demand for project participation remains high, with waiting lists of over 20 students and families who are predominately from non-English speaking background communities. CFS is currently seeking funding to continue and extend the program.

### **3. Gap in family counselling services**

Issue: Lack of family counselling services.

Evidence:

The CFS Youth Team frequently makes referrals to service providers with long waiting lists. This has been the case for some time.

Many young people are unable to access counselling services within the required time, or at all, unless it is deemed an emergency. As a result, youth workers are required to take on the role of crisis counsellors, placing extra strain on staff and resources.

Opportunity:

Provide more counselling services to deal with serious cases that are not emergencies. Such services are in a position to make early identification of issues and provide support for children dealing with family and youth issues.

### **4. Lack of safe public space**

Issue: Lack of safe public space for children and young people.

Evidence:

When young people gather outside shops, in parks, outside units and the streets, they often experience harassment and hostility. For example, there are complaints about young people 'hanging around' outside the Internet café on Ware Street in Fairfield.

A large number of families and children in the Fairfield area, particularly the CBD, reside in apartments without backyards and safe play areas.

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<sup>2</sup> Fairfield City Social Plan 2007-2009, prepared for Fairfield City Council by Heather Nesbitt Planning, 2007, at [http://www.fairfieldcity.nsw.gov.au/upload/pvndq78579/Final\\_Fairfield\\_City\\_Social\\_Plan\\_10\\_07\\_07.pdf](http://www.fairfieldcity.nsw.gov.au/upload/pvndq78579/Final_Fairfield_City_Social_Plan_10_07_07.pdf) (Fairfield City Social Plan)

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There is a lack of youth facilities in Fairfield CBD where young people can spend their free time. CFS' The Shed Youth Centre in Carramar is one of only two youth centres in the area, the other being at Bonnyrigg operated by Fairfield City Council.

Young people are particularly reliant on public space due to factors relating to their age such as lack of access to other services and lack of income. There are few jobs for young people who need an income to be able to pay for the train or go to the movies.

Fairfield has the third largest youth population in NSW with 33,000 young people aged 13-24 and a growing number of young new arrivals particularly from Iraq and Africa.<sup>3</sup>

Opportunity:

More facilities and venues for young people, education programs to counter notions of 'youth nuisance'.

There have been several projects that have sought to renovate parks and create places for children to play, however they have been sporadic and not continuous.

## **5. Viability of services**

Issue: The viability of organisations and programs is at risk due to the high cost of service delivery, funding barriers, insurance limitations/costs and recruitment difficulty.

Evidence:

The funding for programs and activities does not meet expenditure.

There is a high demand for programs such as school holiday activities and camps, but not enough resources to meet this demand. The range and continuity of working programs is limited by funding sources and often program costs and particularly service expansion and development have to be met by other income generation means.

Policy changes that inform funding contract expectations often do not correspond to an appropriate increase in funding to assist with recruitment of suitably skilled staff.

Insurance costs, regulations and transport for activities are prohibitive to the delivery of programs.

Local sponsorship is piecemeal and largely dependant on club support, (CDSE), which is limited to small non-recurrent amounts. There is no transparent process for sponsors targeting community organisations and is not a reliable source of funding.

There is a fragmented service approach across some areas of the LGA, resulting in service gaps for children and young people due to lack of coordination.

There is difficulty in recruiting qualified staff generally. University qualified are taking up positions with the Department of Education and Training instead of long day care and before and after school services that assist working parents.

In addition recruitment of professional staff for limited contracts is difficult in the area due to skills shortages and competition from better paid sectors.

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<sup>3</sup> Fairfield City Social Plan

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There are increased costs associated with the requirements of accreditation, licensing and administration for child care services.

Opportunity:

Increased recognition and re-evaluation of not-for-profit sector funding to be more in line with contractual outcome expectations and more evenly competitive with the government sector for staff recruitment.

Provide security of tenure for staff by recurrent funding for successful programs that can demonstrate real outcomes and benefits.

## **6. Gap in services for children with special needs/challenging behaviours**

Issue: Lack of services for children with special needs/challenging behaviours.

Evidence:

There is a lack of resources including funds to train staff in mainstream services to cater for children and young people with special needs/challenging behaviours.

There is a lack of specialised services to cater for children and young people with special needs/challenging behaviours. As a result, some parents do not disclose that their child has a special need/challenging behaviour when applying to take part in certain programs such as school holiday activities, for example cases where a child has Autism.

Opportunity:

More training and resources in mainstream services, more specialised groups and activities for children with special needs/challenging behaviours.

## **7. Access mainstream child care**

Issue: Lack of access mainstream child care.

Evidence:

There is a transitional gap for after school care for children in first year high school, particularly for those with special needs.

There is a saturation of child care facilities in some areas that compete for demand.

Local demographics do not support Out of School care in particular areas.

Lack of affordability of child care is an issue for many parents in the area and inability to assist parents in real need due to financial liabilities and viability of operating the services.

Opportunity:

Consideration of local Councils regarding the regulation of child care locations in Environmental planning schemes may assist in ensuring quality service provision that relies on capacity.

More support to assist working families with children transitioning from primary to high school, particularly for children with special needs and their carers.

Transition to High School programs through youth services and Out of School Care programs as an extension of the current under 5's Schools as Communities centres to be extended to children starting High school.

Funded transport system between services with low utilisation and primary schools with low need of Out of School Care.

## **8. Access to services and programs**

Issue: Lack of free and affordable services and programs

### Evidence:

There is strong demand for additional free and affordable services. CFS provides free and affordable services such as school holiday activities, vacation care, Kidz Biz, Homework Help, out of school activities. CFS programs frequently have waiting lists. There is sufficient demand to run additional programs such as school holiday activities. However, the range and continuity of programs are limited by funding sources.

Many low income residents cannot afford to access services. Fairfield LGA as an area of socio-economic disadvantage. Median weekly and household incomes for Fairfield residents are significantly less than the national average.<sup>4</sup> Fairfield East is ranked the most disadvantaged area in Sydney.<sup>5</sup> 16% of children aged 0-4 years and 16% of children aged 5-9 years old live in poverty.<sup>6</sup>

Fairfield is home to many newly arrived migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. In 2006, more than half (51.5%) of residents were born overseas, predominantly in a non-English speaking country.<sup>7</sup>

In the 5 years leading up to June 2006 Fairfield received 20% (4,114 persons) of NSW's humanitarian visa settlers<sup>8</sup> and was the intended residence of 22% of all humanitarian program arrivals and 13% of family visa program arrivals with low English proficiency to Sydney from 1997-2003.<sup>9</sup>

Residents from non English speaking countries have a higher level of economic disadvantage than both residents from English speaking backgrounds in the Fairfield LGA and many other residents from non English speaking countries in other LGAs.<sup>10</sup>

Residents from non-English speaking countries are in particular need of support services and programs as they face multiple social disadvantage that impact on health and wellbeing of children and families.<sup>11</sup>

### Opportunity:

Better recognition from the whole of community regarding the issues of social inclusion and benefits to society of supporting communities.

A more coordinated input from philanthropic, Business sponsorships as well as Government funding to support free and affordable programs for families.

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<sup>4</sup> ABS 2006

<sup>5</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) 2006, at <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/mediareleasesbyReleaseDate/87E66027D6856FD6CA257417001A550A?OpenDocument>

<sup>6</sup> State of the Community Report 2004, Fairfield City Council, 2003 at <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/mediareleasesbyReleaseDate/87E66027D6856FD6CA257417001A550A?OpenDocument> (State of the Community Report)

<sup>7</sup> ABS 2006

<sup>8</sup> Fairfield City Social Plan

<sup>9</sup> State of the Community Report

<sup>10</sup> State of the Community Report

<sup>11</sup> Fairfield City Social Plan

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