

Submission

No 30

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

Organisation: Marrickville South Interagency: "Working group for 8-12
school holiday program"

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The Committee Manager
Committee on Children and Young People
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To Whom It May Concern:

Re: "Inquiry into Children and Young people 9-14 years in NSW"

1. The needs of children and young people in the middle years i.e. between about 9 and fourteen years of age.

The predominant need for children and young people of these ages in the Marrickville LGA has been highlighted by the Marrickville South Interagency (MSI) as care and support especially in the school holidays and after school. The original need to engage children in the age bracket of 8-12 in the school holidays came about after kids under 12 had been hanging around the Marrickville Youth Resource Centre (MYRC) in the school holidays and getting into mischief to alleviate their boredom. The MYRC has a minimum funded age of 12 years old, and therefore they could not provide a service to this age group. These children are at an age which has many challenges and they need support and attention, (e.g. puberty [e.g. becoming independent but not at a maturity level to be responsible for self]) yet there is a gap in community services for children during this vital period. Families NSW-funded services' age is maximum 8 years, while Youth services generally start at 12 years. There is therefore a large gap in services at a time which is crucial. This issue was brought to the attention of the service provider community by a youth worker at MYRC, at the Marrickville Child and Families Interagency and also by the Local Police after a few incidents in the area. Without any accessible programs in the area, or services focusing on this age, the children are being overlooked and many are looking to troublesome behaviour in the streets without supervision. Parents often are overwhelmed by the stressors of life. This means that often children go unsupervised. Many families do not have the finances to access expensive holiday programs or vacation care. There is also the issue that availability of vacation care places does not match the demand. Although there are some free programs during the school holidays, such as Children and Young people services at the Libraries in the area, they often are limited to a couple of hours maximum and parents need to attend.

Often children in the middle age bracket with parents who are unable to supervise cannot get to these services, and need full supervision for the equivalent duration of a school day. Other reasons why children roam is that families are large and parents (sometimes a single parent) are tending to the needs of younger children in the home. On the other hand, youth centres have also noted that some of the children in this age bracket are the carers of even younger children.

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.

In the Marrickville LGA although there are quite wealthy parts of the area, there are pockets of severe disadvantage, for example Tempe, St Peters and South Marrickville. It is particularly vital to the age of 9-14 that the disadvantages of families (for example financial/lower economic status) do not impact upon the opportunities, growth and development of children and young people in this age bracket. We need to give these disadvantaged families equal access to this growth and development. Without responsible supervision in the holidays, children in the middle years are going without accessible services or support networks. Children in the middle years, just as preschoolers, teenagers and adults do, need to feel a sense of belonging. This yearning is often satisfied by the growing gangs and hanging around older youth around the streets in their neighbourhood. This in turn leads to children in the middle years resorting to and learning ways of violence, stealing, and other dangerous and concerning behaviour. Children in the middle years need to be provided with programs that offer activities to alleviate their boredom, to teach them respect for each other and those older than them, respect for authority and rules, to educate them in various ways and give them a sense of belonging to a group, encourage mentorship and fun in their holidays. This would be an early intervention exercise, preventing children from learning risky behaviours and activities.

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

The Marrickville Child and Family Interagency and the Marrickville Youth Interagency took this issue on board to work together to develop services for the community in this area. The MSI was formed as a result in order to continue to work on meeting this pressing need.

ANGLICARE Family Support Service, Marrickville, took this issue on board and decided to pilot a free holiday activity program for this age bracket (developed and coordinated by a Social Work Student in 2007). The initial partnership was between ANGLICARE and Holy Trinity, however over time, several other partners came on board, and the end result was a partnership between ANGLICARE, Holy Trinity, Marrickville Council, Marrickville Child, Adolescent and Family Health Team (CAF), CONNECT Marrickville, Inner West Aboriginal Community Company, Marrickville Youth Resource Centre (MYRC) and South Marrickville PCYC. This partnership was integral to the program as the community all came together and took part. ANGLICARE provided the staff, the programming and the administrative work, and Holy Trinity provided the venue, some funding for program costs, and some volunteers. The other partners provided many integral resources, time and energy. The idea was to provide a flexible structure to engage the children and give them a space to have fun and be engaged by the leaders and workers. The program was named FRESH. It was decided that this program would be a small pilot study which would be open to evaluation with a view to examining the benefits and practicalities of running it on a more ongoing basis.

In order to keep the children engaged with a range of activities available at different times, there were a number of activities that were set to run each day. The afternoons consisted of a flexible program with a couple of things running at once such as craft, mural, pool, air hockey, Xbox, in order to create a choice for the children.

There were many things that went well throughout the week. Firstly, ANGLICARE are pleased to report that, although numbers were slightly lower than anticipated, we did manage to reach our target group. All children who attended were children from vulnerable families, many of whom would otherwise have been unsupervised during the school holidays. Several of the boys, in particular, had been in trouble in the past during school holidays. One mother commented to a worker, *"For the first time in a long time, I know where my son is between 9 and 3"*.

In the afternoon there was time for free activities. These facilitated the development of skills such as turn-taking and mentorship. It was a pleasure to observe one of the older, "tougher" boys teaching the youngest boy the rudiments of pool! Artists were employed by Marrickville Council to facilitate designing and painting the mural. The children became really excited when it came time to do the mural

and some of the most rowdy boys got really into painting their "tagging" artwork on the wall. This gave them a positive way of expressing themselves, through a medium which has got them into trouble tagging buildings in the past.

The FRESH holiday program was a success in many ways, however there are many things which could be improved upon for a program in the future. This pilot study was conducted in the hope of securing ongoing funding in order to offer this as a permanent part of Marrickville Community activities reaching out to engage children aged 8-12.

The program provides a much needed support and relief from stress and a respite for parents/carers of children that are in the gap between the ages of child and youth services. It also provides the children with the care, attention and mentorship that they so greatly need. Children who may otherwise be engaged in risky and/or illegal behaviour are contained and engaged in a safe and stimulating environment.

This program has a positive impact on the community of offering children and families an alternative to spending time on the streets and from boredom at home and providing activities that engage them and are fun. The program also helps them learn how to share, respect one another and adults, honour boundaries and guidelines, through fun activities and games and interaction with young adult volunteers and community service workers. It is often a mentor relationship that is one of the most vital parts of growing up. There was evidence of these types of relationships throughout the week, in particular between the girls and some of the young women volunteers.

This program requires continued involvement from other community agencies in the form of provision of leaders, transport and workshops. We have been pleased by the level of support from the community, both in terms of practical assistance, advice and encouragement. While we are ready to take the lead in any future endeavours in this area, ANGLICARE does not have the resources to offer such a program again without some external funding. We also consider that a community approach is vital.

It is integral to the needs of these children that it not only be focused upon their age bracket receiving services, but that the families are served to better equip the development and resilience of children of

this age. This model of the holiday program for children in the middle years has an ongoing Family work component and has a broad impact on the family as a whole. These children, given the same opportunities as their more advantaged peers, can build on their social, emotional, psychological and physical development into ways which will benefit themselves, their families and the community.

5. Any other matter relevant to the inquiry by the committee

It was important to target the disadvantaged families with children in this age bracket. Examples of the types of families involved in this target group are:

- Parents with chronic illness/disability
- Parents with mental illness
- Parents with substance abuse issues
- Children with challenging behaviours and learning difficulties
- Indigenous families
- CALD families
- Single fathers: working or non working
- Families who have experiences trauma or suicide
- Families with child protection issues
- Grandparents, parenting younger children
- Children with poor social skills

Although this program and model are still very much in the pilot stage, ANGLICARE and the wider Children and Family Services network in Marrickville have high hopes in its potential for effectively responding to identified needs and issues.

Lucinda Malcolm
Anglicare, Marrickville Family Support
on behalf of Marrickville South Interagency:
"Working group for 8-12 school holiday program"