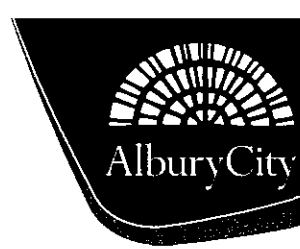


Submission

No 101

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

Organisation: Albury City Council
Name: Mr James Jenkins
Position: Director Community and Recreation
Telephone: 60238111
Date Received: 28/08/2008



19 August 2008

Ms Jo Alley
Senior Committee Officer
NSW Legislative Assembly
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Ms Alley

Subject: Submission to the Parliamentary Joint Standing Committee on the Inquiry into Children and Young People 9-14 years in NSW.

Thank you for allowing AlburyCity to provide a formal submission in respect to the inquiry into children and young people aged between 9-14 years of age.

The information raised in this submission is provided by officers of AlburyCity who work in the Youth Development and Aboriginal Liaison fields and the Coordinator of the Out of School Hours program (OOSH service), which is managed and run by AlburyCity. The comments mentioned below by Council staff have been reiterated and discussed at length by other local service providers at meetings attended by Youth and Aboriginal workers to address escalating rates of crime being committed within the community, particularly by Aboriginal young people.

a. Issues impacting on Aboriginal young people

There has been an increase in the number of young people, particularly young Aboriginal people engaged in local crime. The Police have reported that cars are being stolen for joy rides, young people are committing public nuisances such as throwing stones on roofs, pulling out plants in gardens and swearing and intimidating members of the community, including Aboriginal elders. There has been an increase in more serious crimes, with young people brandishing weapons and breaking into homes whilst the homes are occupied. Many incidents involve older adults conspiring with a young person to commit a crime, as it is commonly recognised that minors will not be convicted, but will receive a caution. The unacceptable behaviour of a minority is impacting on the character and reputation of the broader community.

The Aboriginal workers attended a meeting on 13 February 2008 and identified the following causes of young people being engaged in crime:

- Young children walking the streets at night, unaccompanied by an adult
- Young children not attending school regularly
- Families affected by drugs, alcohol and domestic violence
- Peer pressure from older adults
- Lack of a male role model in their family
- Children lacking self esteem and respect for others

In short, the community development workers believe the young people who are committing crimes are socially and culturally disengaged from their families, the education system and the community.

The Aboriginal workers identified the following strategies that could be put in place to address the increase in crime rates:

- Develop long term sustainable projects and programs to engage young people
- Acquire a community bus that the community can access to take the young people fishing, to overnight camps and to sporting programs.
- The development of a 'buddy system' at local schools, composed of community members
- Positive reinforcement and programs that build self esteem and self worth
- Programs that build and support the family
- Not rewarding and tolerating bad behaviour, and demonstrating to young people the repercussions of their actions
- Schools to take on a more proactive approach in understanding and dealing with acts of racism and developing cultural awareness programs at their school

b. Children accessing out of school hours programs (OOSH)

There is limited funding for programs for children above 12 years of age, particularly children between the ages of 11-14 years. Programs offered by local youth organisations don't cater for working parents, as they are usually run for short periods of time. The OOSH program run by Council provides a service to young people daily from Monday to Friday between the hours of 8am to 6pm. Council receives funding for the vacation component of this program only, not to run the daily OOSH service over 40 weeks of the year.

The OOSH service run by Council only services approximately 10% of the families who have a child with a special need. The OOSH service struggles to find suitable staff to be 'one on one' carers for children with a disability and the OOSH environment is not conducive to meet the needs of children with special needs. Council has experienced increased enquiries from families with children who have special needs wanting to enrol their child in a vacation program. Many families are finding it extremely difficult to find respite care or other care options during holiday periods and this results in parents having to take time off from their work.

c. Issues facing young people residing in socially disadvantaged communities

There are five neighbourhoods within the Albury local government area which are located within a public housing estate and attract disadvantaged families with young children. Often these families are geographically isolated and rely on public transport to access services outside of their neighbourhood. Council and the community centres and organisations such as the Department of Sport and Recreation have run successful programs at the neighbourhood level aimed at diverting young people away from anti-social behaviour and building positive relationships with families. These programs have included: sporting programs, hip hop workshops, health clinics, youth groups and self esteem and literacy classes. These programs have been successful in assisting young people feel more positive about their future and more comfortable about where they live. Although, not an anticipated outcome, the programs have assisted about 15 young people find employment.

The above programs run at the neighbourhood level have produced a number of positive outcomes, including the following:

- Crime rates have decreased in areas where the intervention programs have targeted
- More youth leaders and mentors in the community have emerged
- The community, including young people have taken more pride in their community.
- There is a more positive attitude amongst young people
- As young people gain employment, this has been infectious with other young people wanting to gain employment also
- More young people are attending school

A major barrier in running the intervention programs described above is inadequate funding being available to fund a specific youth position, which will be responsible for developing and evaluating youth programs. The community centres are jointly funded by Council and the Department of Community Services and this funding allows the centres to employ a sole worker to provide a range of services and programs to a cross section of the community. There have been limited funding opportunities and certainly no recurrent funding to employ a youth worker, who could work across the community centres and other youth venues within Albury.

Two of the five community centres are seeking funds to set up a homework centre for young people. Whilst funding is available for programs which target secondary school students, the centres are seeking funding to operate a homework centre for primary school students. It is our belief that young people between the ages of 9-13 are not being supported in their transition from primary to secondary school. The homework centre and early intervention programs at the neighbourhood level will assist young people to build confidence, healthy community values and successful educational outcomes.

Should you require further information in relation to the points raised in this submission, please don't hesitate to contact Council's Youth Development Officer, Mandy Wilson, on (02) 6023 8295.

Yours faithfully



James Jenkins

Director Community and Recreation