

Submission

No 85

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

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22 May 2008

Ms Jo Alley  
Committee on Children and Young People  
Parliament House  
Macquarie St  
Sydney NSW 2000

By email: [childrenscommittee@parliament.nsw.gov.au](mailto:childrenscommittee@parliament.nsw.gov.au)

Dear Ms Alley,

Rosemount Good Shepherd Youth and Family Services welcomes the opportunity to provide comments to the Children and Young People Committee in relation to the Children and Young People 9-14 Years in NSW (Inquiry).

### **About Rosemount Good Shepherd Youth and Family Services**

Rosemount Good Shepherd Youth and Family Services, which is located in Marrickville, was established in 1982 and is auspiced by the Good Shepherd Sisters. Rosemount's target group is young people aged twelve to twenty four and their families. There are two main streams of service provision, education programmes for young people whose needs have not been met through mainstream education and two counselling services; a specialised sexual assault programme and a more generalist adolescent and family counselling programme. The service employs staff from a range of professions including, social work, psychology, education, and youth work. The response to this inquiry is based on the knowledge, expertise, and experience of staff from across Rosemount's programmes.

We look forward to the findings of this Inquiry –should you have any questions regarding this submission, please do not hesitate to contact Amanda Boyd, Acting Director of Rosemount on 9519 6788 or at [Csa2@rosemountgs.org.au](mailto:Csa2@rosemountgs.org.au)

Yours faithfully

Amanda Boyd  
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A Service of The Good Shepherd Sisters

**1. the needs of children and young people in the middle years, i.e. between about nine and fourteen years of age;**

Children in the middle years need access to age appropriate before and after school care. Staff at Rosemount have noticed a trend of increased numbers of children in this age range being left at home by themselves after school and often well into the night. Children have confided to counsellors about how lonely they feel in this situation and some have disclosed instances where they are left, not only at home alone, but with responsibility for younger siblings. Moreover, a number of children in the middle years are carers of their parents; often to the extent that they are actually running the household. For example, not merely assisting with cooking, cleaning, and shopping but with sole responsibility for these tasks.

**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;**

The needs of children and young people in the middle years may vary according to age, gender, and level of disadvantage. However, it is equally important to recognise the marked and uneven developmental changes that occur during this period. That is two children may be the same age but at markedly different developmental levels and therefore with quite different needs. This is important to consider in the development and implementation of activities, services, and supports for this group of children

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

Firstly, there is a gap in appropriate and affordable childcare and out of school care for children in junior years of high school. Currently out of school, care is only provided for children in primary school. This means that the 11 and 12 year old children of working parents may be at home alone and unsupervised well into the evening. Staff also noted that this can also result in children using computers and the internet unsupervised and for long periods.

Secondly, in some situations the most effective means of assisting children is to increase the services and support available to their parents. For example parents with low level, rather than acute mental illness (for example where the parent experiences mild chronic depression rather than an acute episode of major depression) often have difficulty both with initial access to mental health services and with ongoing support. Rosemount staff have seen number cases where children have been forced into a carer's role due to the lack of such support for their parent's. Another example is a lack of parenting programmes, which focus on the distinctive issues facing parents of children in the 'tween' or middle years. Most programmes currently target the parents of younger children. Again, this is an intervention, which targets parents but would be a very effective avenue for increasing children's resilience by virtue of strengthening parental capacity.

Thirdly, there is a need for appropriate sex education programmes for children in this age group. Rosemount staff across programmes have seen 12 and 13 year old children who have not had exposure to sex education programmes, yet in some cases are already sexually active. Where programmes are available, there are concerns about how adequately they deal with contemporary issues. For example, staff are aware of quite young males having access to pornography via the internet.

Finally, there is a need for alternative education programmes for children in this age range. Rosemount's education programmes are only available to young people of school leaving age (14 years and 9 months) yet often receive referrals for children as young as 12. Similarly, the counselling service often receives calls from referrers trying to find services for primary aged children who are truanting from school.

**4. the extent to which workplace practices have impacted on children and young people in the middle years, including changes to workplace practices which have the potential to benefit children and young people in the middle years; and**

Longer working hours, couple with irregular working hours has resulted in increasing numbers of children in the middle years being left at home alone. In some cases these children are also responsible for the care of their, often much younger siblings. Access to affordable and appropriate out of school care, is one solution. Another is the introduction of a shorter working week and flexible work arrangements so that parents are able to be at home with their children before and after school hours.

