

Submission

No 89

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

Organisation: Baha'i Council for New South Wales and the Australian  
Capital Territory

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# Bahá'í Council

For New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory

5<sup>th</sup> June 2008

Committee on Children and Young People  
Parliament House  
Macquarie Street  
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Sir/Madam,

## **Submission to the Committee on Children and Young People**

The Baha'i Community of NSW welcomes the inquiry by the Committee on Children and Young People into the special needs of children and young adolescents between 9 and 14 years of age.

The Bahá'í Community places a special emphasis on what it refers to as “junior youth”, the significant transformative period in the life of any individual as he or she embarks on the journey from childhood to adulthood. We believe that special attention must be given to assisting children and young adolescents between 9 and 14 years of age in managing the complex physical, emotional and intellectual challenges of this stage in life, so that they develop a strong sense of purpose and become empowered to reach their potential and contribute to their families and communities.

The Australian Bahá'í community has been actively engaged in developing and trialing a Junior Youth spiritual empowerment Program. The Junior Youth Program is an endeavor of the worldwide Bahá'í community in the field of social and economic development. Its purpose is to equip young people with language and a way of thinking that will enable them to engage in meaningful social actions and to effectively act as an instrument of their own transformation.

The Bahá'í Junior Youth Program is conducted by trained “animators” who run groups in local communities – responding to the challenges of different communities and the varied interests of the participants. These groups usually meet once a week and study materials that have been specifically developed for their age group. These educational materials assist young teenagers to navigate through their own issues with spiritual precepts in mind, and to become engaged in meaningful community service. Participants engage simultaneously in artistic activities, participate in sports and come together to perform acts of community service. Other examples of junior youth activities include the use of newspapers and magazine articles that can be discussed by the group in order to help them develop the capacity to analyze the world around them and become aware of the forces operating in it. They can also participate in special events in which the junior youth from an entire region come together to make dramatic presentations, sing, recite, poetry, and give talks. Ecological camps where appreciation of nature is fostered and activities such as planting trees are also encouraged, as is visiting the elderly in their communities.

The Junior Youth Program provides special attention to character building, which is closely associated with the development of reflective behaviour and the acquisition of virtues. This approach to moral development seeks to empower junior youth to develop their own moral conscience even at the sacrifice of their immediate interests. Rather than inducing rational but moral-free responses to life choices, the focus of the Bahá'í Junior Youth Program is on living the virtues and adopting them permanently until they become second nature. The emphasis is on developing a broad range of spiritual capacities such as consultation, service to humanity, compassion, patience and hopefulness, which are so vital for developing resilience to hardship and obstacles in life.

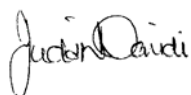
The Bahá'í approach to junior youth development also looks at personal transformation as a powerful factor in achieving social transformation. For example, raising awareness of world citizenship is considered a preparation for achieving unity in a world free from religious, racial or national prejudices. By focusing on higher ideals such as service to humanity, it is expected that the junior youth will transcend personal concerns to reach out to others as opposed to excessive self-indulgence. Through various community service projects that the junior youth devise themselves, they are learning to build a community spirit of service and giving.

Recognizing that promoting literacy is essential to social progress and understanding of the world, the objective of developing literacy is a component of the program. Further, the texts used are not only readings, but also exercises that address language skills, critical analysis and higher thought processes. The analysis of successful approaches and methods in the field confirmed that literacy programs need to be designed in the broader context of enhancing the power of expression. To successfully impart the various skills related to the power of expression – reading, writing, speech – program content is rich and meaningful. The junior youth have responded best when themes and words have relevance to their lives which motivates them and elicits effective participation. Participants learn how to express their ideas and thoughts eloquently and also are helped to understand the moral implications of their speech. In addition, it addresses the broader question of the need for words to be accompanied by pure deeds.

There are currently approximately 100 junior groups operating throughout Australia. Although we are in the early stages of developing and implementing the program, the initial results make us optimistic about its potential. We hope to build up our resources to make it more widely available over time.

The Bahá'í Council thank the Committee for the opportunity to have input to its deliberations and look forward to the outcomes of the inquiry.

For the Bahá'í Council of NSW and ACT



Judith Navidi  
Secretary