

Submission

No 55

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

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To Whom It May Concern:

The following document is a submission for the Inquiry into Children and Young People 9-14 years on behalf of the Singleton Seventh Day Adventist Church. The Seventh Day Adventist Church recognises the importance of understanding our children and young people and feels that further research by the NSW Government is integral to developing effective new policies.

It is evident that children and young people of this age are often overlooked and neglected due to the prominence of other age groups. We feel that it is important to better understand this age group because during this time children and young people are developing the skills to make vital decisions later on in life.

The Singleton Seventh Day Adventist Church, through this submission, would like to demonstrate how we approach children and young people of this age and how these activities are used to increase the resilience. We would also like to voice our concerns about how children and young people of this age are affected by issues in society, and suggest ways in which the government can combat these issues.

Yours Sincerely,

Rebecca Rabe

Inquiry into Children and Young People aged 9 to 14 years in NSW

Singleton Seventh Day Adventist Church
Rebecca Rabe
Due 5th May 2008

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1. Introduction

In modern society it is very important that children and young people are sufficiently provided for and valued in their surrounding community. The Seventh Day Adventist Church believes that by providing such services and support are integral to cultivating a well balanced and risk reduced child population.

In regards to this specific inquiry our submission will deal specifically with the first and third points in the terms of reference. These are as follows;

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

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

Whilst also briefly touching on the other two terms of reference within these areas.

Seventh Day Adventists believe that young people are God's children and that their positive contribution to society aids in the preservation of a cohesive community. We feel that in correlation with God and a supportive network of people we can help guide children and young people to make good decisions and live a health lifestyle. It is hence important that services and support are available to children and young people and that these services are easily accessible and age appropriate.

It has become apparent in society that children and young people aged 9 to 14 are often overlooked in comparison to the more tumultuous grouping of adolescents and the innocence of infants. Thus it is important for the government to make sure they are equally and adequately providing for this age group, since it is in this particular group that children are developing personal identities and learning important rights and wrongs. Later on in this submission we will propose some ways in which this age group could benefit from improved government assistance and further exploratory research.

2. Background

2.1 Who are Seventh Day Adventists?

The Seventh Day Adventist Church is widely known as a Protestant Christian denomination which is distinguished by its observance of Saturday as the Sabbath day. The denomination was established in 1863 out of the Millerite movement in the United States. The church's teachings are similar to those of the trinitarian Protestant

theology and are encapsulated in 28 fundamental beliefs. (Global SDA website, accessed 23/04/08)

The world church as an organisation is governed by a General Conference and its duties are distributed between smaller administrative divisions throughout the world. There are approximately 15 million Adventist believers throughout the world today, ranging across 200 countries and territories and consisting of an array of different nationalities and ethnicities. The church has numerous primary and secondary schools, universities, hospitals and publishing companies throughout the world. The Seventh Day Adventist Church also has a prominent not-for-profit humanitarian aid organisation by the name of Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) which has been in action since 1956. (Global SDA website, accessed 23/04/08)

3. Body

3.1 How do we approach Children and Young People?

Seventh Day Adventists understand that children and young people are the future of the church and that if we want to see a continuation of our values and beliefs we need to safeguard them and provide a means to get to know God better whilst positively building a self identity. We understand that in modern society it is difficult for

children and young people to abstain from negative secular activities, but we feel that if sufficient positive activities that encourage good attitudes are available then self-restraint will be a lot easier. We believe that through these activities children and young people will learn the skills which will assist them in decisions later on in life.

What we view as a problem with children and young people aged 9 to 14 in society is a lack of connectedness to community. Studies have shown that people are hardwired to connect but that due to a lack cohesiveness in society young people are disconnecting from ineffective authoritative communities and being lost in the chaos. In a recent study by The Commission on Children at Risk, a United States organisation, they stated that,

The weakening of authoritative communities... is a principal reason – arguably the principal reason – why large and growing numbers of ... children are failing to flourish. (The Commission on Children at Risk, 2003, 3)

This has evidently effected how children and young people are able to cope and deal with difficult situations. We feel, and local NSW studies have shown, that a good functioning relationship between the child's immediate family and regional community dramatically reduces the level of vulnerability felt by the child. As stated by Gillian Elizabeth Calvert in the Review of the 2005-2006 Annual Report of the Commission for Children and Young People,

What the kids told me was that by far and beyond the most critical thing that protects children from vulnerability is their relationship with their parents and their family, and that if they have a strong relationship...with their parents and their family then they are protected from being vulnerable, and so that is the most important thing. (Review of the 2005-2006 Annual Report of the Commission for Children and Young People, 2007, 36)

This also reduces the risk of abuse within the family unit, whereby good connections with family the surrounding neighbourhood help to provide positive reinforcement for children and young people.

In contemporary society it has become increasingly more evident that we are losing focus on what is effective control of our early teenagers. At this age it is important to strike a balance between their liberties and our control as parents. The Seventh Day Adventist Church website states that the,

The period of adolescence is a time of rapid physical, emotional and social change. It's a time when the young person begins to explore new attitudes, values and behaviours and to develop a whole new social and sexual identity...Without parental support and guidance they often feel extremely vulnerable as they seek to discover who they are (identity), where they fit (belonging) and whether they are good enough (competency) to make it in the adult world. (South Pacific SDA website, accessed 23/04/08)

Hence it is important that when we are making decisions which will ultimately affect these children we consider where they are in their development.

3.2 What are the services and support we provide?

The Seventh Day Adventist Church has numerous activities and support services focused on aiding children in their development both spiritually and mentally. We feel that regardless of a child or young person's beliefs they should be adequately provided for in the community. Hence the services we provide are available to both members and non-members with community participation openly welcomed.

For this particular age group the most common service we provide is a program called Pathfinders. This group is operated by the youth department of the Seventh Day Adventist Church and is similar to that of boy scouts and girl guides, though with a Christian focus. Pathfinders expose children and young people to a range of fun and educational activities. These activities help in building character and resilience, and also help children feel as if they are a part of a peer based community

where their opinions and issues are valued. Such activities include camping, hiking, craft making and community service. An important aspect of Pathfinders is that of peer mentoring. Peer mentoring involves older group members assisting younger members with issues and decisions which are important to them. Studies have shown that mentoring is a successful and positive way to help young people in society. A Youth Action and Policy Association study also stated that,

Studies have found that hanging out with their friends can be beneficial to young people's wellbeing. It is an opportunity for young people to talk about their problems and find and give support to each other. Young people said that they feel safe when they are with a group of friends. They also said that being familiar with the area and knowing the people around made them feel safe. (ACTivate, 2002, 9)

Thus we feel that providing a service such as Pathfinders can help children and young people feel valued, which we view as integral to positive development. (South Pacific SDA website accessed 23/04/08)

The Seventh Day Adventist Church also provides other activities such as kids clubs in school holidays, and summer camps in the December/January break. These activities are similar to that of Pathfinders but often involve a larger group of people from across a range of regional areas. (South Pacific SDA website, accessed 23/04/08)

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

4.1 Possible Changes to Children and Young Persons policy

First and foremost the Seventh Day Adventist Church feels that any changes to children and young persons policy must be done in collaboration with people in which the policy will effect. These decisions should consequently be in the best interests of all parties involved.

We feel that there is a great need for more funding to be attributed to children and young peoples activities. It is currently evident that funding for this age group is insufficient and has contributed to their neglect in the community. It was stated by young people in a Youth Action and Policy Association report that,

The NSW Government had a large part to play in fostering these relationships through providing funding and support for programs that improved young people's lives. (ACTivate, 2002, 4)

The Seventh Day Adventist Church has the ability to provide for those children and young people who are involved in their programs, but feel that those who do not have access to our services or the knowledge of them, are missing out on valuable resilience building activities. Hence we feel that this is the responsibility of the NSW government to provide for these children and young people in the community.

We also feel that the government needs to develop strategies which strengthen the authoritative communities within society and reintroduce these to children and young people in a way which includes them as valued members not outsiders. This is a topical issue due to the recent uproar surrounding teenage binge drinking, where some cases are as young as those concerned in this inquiry. In a recent study completed by The Commission on Children at Risk it states,

Building and strengthening authoritative communities is likely to be our society's best strategy for ameliorating the current crisis of childhood and improving the lives of ... children and adolescents. (The Commission on Children at Risk, 2003, 7)

Though this study on children and young people's disconnection from society is based on U.S data, it is also highly relevant to many other western societies which are facing the same crisis.

Finally in regards to the policy that affects children and young people, we feel there needs to be a change in focus on how to deal with children and their parents work commitments. The focus needs to shift on to how parents can be freed from work commitments to be better parents, not how parents can be freed from their children to be better workers. This is apparent in the current standpoint on child care and workplace relations discussions. (Gittins, 2008)

4.2 Suggestions of further research

Through research we found that in regards to children and young people aged 9 to 14 there is a limited amount information available. We feel that this is the reason why they are often misunderstood and neglected in society. Thus, to help construct their

contribution to society the NSW government needs to undertake some exploratory research. It was apparent when looking through the Kids Stats page on the NSW Commission for Children and Young People website that many studies were fairly outdated and in need of revising. We feel that studies on how well families function should be considered, and taken into account with recent discussions on the application of parenting contracts and their possible effectiveness for dysfunctional families. We also feel that research on how well children and young people socially connect and participate should be undertaken and utilised to create new positive activities.

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