

**Submission
No 8**

ASSAULTS ON MEMBERS OF THE NSW POLICE FORCE

Organisation: Youth Action

Date Received: 28 August 2020



Youth Action is the peak organisation representing young people and youth services in NSW. Our work helps build the capacity of young people, youth workers and youth services, and we advocate for positive change on issues affecting these groups.

It is the role of **Youth Action** to:

1. Respond to social and political agendas relating to young people and the youth service sector.
2. Provide proactive leadership and advocacy to shape the agenda on issues affecting young people and youth services.
3. Collaborate on issues that affect young people and youth workers.
4. Promote a positive profile in the media and the community of young people and youth services.
5. Build capacity for young people to speak out and take action on issues that affect them.
6. Enhance the capacity of the youth services sector to provide high quality services.
7. Ensure Youth Action's organisational development, efficiency, effectiveness and good governance.

Acknowledgement of Country

Youth Action acknowledges and pays respect to the traditional owners of the land, past, present and future, across NSW. We are committed to a positive future for Aboriginal young people and their communities. The Youth Action office is located upon the land of the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, and we acknowledge their traditional custodianship.

Youth Action NSW

Suite 401, 52-58 William St Woolloomooloo NSW, 2011 Australia p (02) 8354 3700
e info@youthaction.org.au
ABN 17 209 492 539



NSW Legislative Committee on Law and Safety
Inquiry into Assaults on Members of the NSW Police Force

Youth Action welcomes the invitation to make a submission to the Inquiry into Assaults on Members of the NSW Police Force by the Committee on Law and Safety. NSW Police play an integral role in community safety and have the right to conduct their work without fear of violence. While the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research indicates instances of police assault from young people is low, we believe this inquiry has the potential to strengthen police practices and programs to support positive relations with young people and limit any potential violent behaviour.

Three key recommendations will be outlined which we believe could improve police safety by reducing the likelihood of a violent altercation:

- Immediate and transparent reduction in the usage of the Suspect Target Management Plan;
- Full implementation of NSW Police Youth Strategy with ongoing evaluation;
- Provide additional youth participation and engagement training for officers in every Local Area Command.

Examples will also be given of best practice youth engagement initiatives which could be further resourced to improve relationship between young people and NSW Police.

Youth Action is acutely aware that the relationship between young people and police is complicated, however we know that positive interactions can be a protective factor for youth involvement with the justice system. We aim to use this opportunity to give committee members examples of good practice that could be resourced to improve protective factor.

Immediate and transparent reduction in the usage of the Suspect Target Management Plan (STMP)

The STMP is a police intelligence tool that uses risk assessment to 'predict' suspects, disproportionately young people and Aboriginal people, and leads to repeated targeting by police regardless if they have committed a crime or not.

A study conducted by the Youth Justice Coalition found that young people on the STMP experience inappropriate forms of over-policing disproportionate to the future risks they are alleged to pose to society, and concluded that NSW Police should not be exposing any young people to the STMP.

Further findings highlight the STMP severely damages the relationship between police and young people and increased the likelihood of future contact with the criminal justice system.

Youth Action believes a reduction of the usage of the STMP would greatly improve interactions between police and young people, when they do occur, and decrease the likelihood of a violent altercation.



Full implementation of NSW Police Youth Strategy with ongoing evaluation

We welcomed the NSW Police Youth Strategy when released in 2019, particularly its key priority areas of Prevention, Intervention and Partnership, and its formation in consultation with young people.

A proactive approach to improving relationships between young people and NSW Police is required to limit the potential for adverse interactions leading to violence. The Prevention priority of the NSW Police plan outlines a number of strategies we support, most notably for this inquiry:

- Improve police responses to young people with mental health issues and/or cognitive impairment;
- Participate in collaborative approaches to address the needs of homeless youth;
- Create communication opportunities for communities to provide feedback and raise concerns;
- Promote positive image of young people through the media;
- Established trust and confidence of children and young people in police.

We would welcome any updates on outcomes and how NSW Police is actively implementing strategies outlined in the plan in relation to the above strategy.

Provide additional youth participation/engagement training for officers in every Local Area Command

Utilising a trauma informed, human rights-based approach to engagement with young people will go far to limit the number of negative interactions. Research released in 2017 in Police Practice and Research indicated the majority of the police's interaction with young people are with those that have higher prevalence of mental health issues, disability and drug and alcohol misuse. An understanding of complex life situations and their impact on behaviour is vital to engaging with a young person in a way that is safe for them and police. This is particularly important when it comes to communication, with research examples describing police's challenges in communicating with young people, and discerning the difference between intellectual disability and a mental health crisis.

By providing enhanced youth participation and engagement training to all officers, police will be able to approach young people with more confidence, safety and respect. Improving the attitude young people have towards the police affects not only their compliance and levels of cooperation, but also the likelihood with which they would accept information that might bring about a positive outcome for them.

Sector Survey

As part of the formation of this submission, we conducted a rapid-response survey with the youth sector asking for examples of good engagement between young people and police to demonstrate proactive work that exists within communities. Each of the responses listed PCYC programs, namely Fit 4 Life, that emphasise positive relationship building between young people and police. One response noted the Box With A Cop program in Liverpool was working with young people with a refugee background engage with police in a supportive environment.

"There was also opportunity for both groups to get to know each other as the program continued to learn about each others backgrounds, and to breakdown barriers that Police are people like everyone else."



Youth Action supports the work of the PCYC and welcomes the ongoing, outcomes-based evaluation of its suit of programs. The results of the survey indicate there is significant opportunity for police to work more with youth and community services outside of the PCYC. Youth and community services are best placed to facilitate a safe environment and often already have positive relationships with young people in the community.

Youth Action advocates for a society where all young people are valued, engaged and supported. We also believe all police should be safe to conduct their important work providing community safety. Improving relations between young people and the police is the best way to ensure safety for everyone and implementing the above recommendations will go far to achieve such an outcome.