

**Submission
No 91**

COMMUNITY SAFETY IN REGIONAL AND RURAL COMMUNITIES

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NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into
Community Safety in Regional and Rural Communities

Thank you for creating space for submissions to this important inquiry.

I am writing as a local Armidale citizen without professional knowledge of youth crime. My goal in writing is twofold: to counter the fear and excessive concentration on crime and locking up 'naughty kids' as young as ten, and to encourage collaboration between all levels of government and local communities to improve the lives of our kids.

PCYC: It seems probable that one of the major causes of misbehaviour is boredom. Kids don't have a lot to do. I hate to hark back, but we used to have weekend night time activities at the PCYC. I understand there is a program Friday afternoons and boxing early in the morning but nothing on Saturday or Sunday. I think the Basketball nights have also ended. They attracted a lot of kids. There seem to be adult programs at PCYC but I don't see a lot of kids going in. I recommend more police be assigned to working with kids in positive ways to build rapport, create more activities and defuse hostility. That's where they are needed. Law and order is better served if we support kids before they get involved in criminal activities. One goal should be to keep kids out of the criminal justice system.

Programs: There are adult programs such as, Stop and Go, Employment, Circle Sentencing, and Behaviour Change courses, but they are only for adults. We need similar programs for youth. A Restorative justice program could be valuable. We also need programs that support parents. Thankfully there are a few programs that support parents with young children but we need more programs for parents with teenagers. We used to have a peer mediation program, REFS, in which teenage and adult mediators collaborated to hold mediations between teenagers and their parents. This, too, folded after several successful years. I gather Armidale may support a Justice Reinvest program and this might provide teenage skills, such as driving. This seems to have been very effective in other communities.

Foot Patrol: there used to be an active foot patrol program in which adults befriended and supported kids on weekend nights. It folded years ago, perhaps because it was run by volunteers. I don't think it received support from any level of government, though CDEP might have been a sponsor. Such a program helps kids to feel safe and be safe. It builds connections between young and old. The adults involved tend to look out for the kids they meet and often become advocates. Kids tend to look up to them for guidance.

CDEP provided significant training and employment that helped many young people to become skilled workers or, at least, to learn to hold a job. This, too, is gone. One thing we can learn from this is the importance of money going directly to Aboriginal leaders.

Housing: I understand there are people homeless in Armidale, among them kids. There are houses empty. A good example is the Bupa aged care facility on Rusden Street in which at least eight houses appear to be empty and could be assigned to young people.

Black Tracks: Of course, we do have Black Tracks as a fabulous model but it only reaches a small number of kids and is definitely not enough. Their ability to respond when communities are in crisis, such as when the tornado struck Armidale, shows the importance of kids feeling they are making a contribution, are doing and learning practical skills that can make a difference.

I've looked backward not to suggest we replicate exactly what we have tried but to indicate the kinds of programs that have helped: weekend evening activities like dances, costume parties, basketball comps; supportive paths to employment; experiences that bring young and old, kids and police, kids and community members together for safety, fun and friendship; opportunities for creative expression in music or art, not only sport; programs that deal with anger and other emotions; and more. What is needed is far more funding for programs for our kids, our schools, and our professionals, hopefully to keep kids out of the criminal justice system, particularly out of remand, and create safer, happier childhoods and a safer community. This would also be less expensive in the long run.

Patsy Asch,