

**Submission
No 123**

COMMUNITY SAFETY IN REGIONAL AND RURAL COMMUNITIES

Name: Ms Lynne Hosking

Date Received: 30 May 2024

To the Committee on Law and Safety

NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into Community Safety in Regional and Rural Communities

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Yesterday I emailed a submission (included below) and I would now like to make an addition to it or this page can be a small stand alone submission.

I would like to emphasise the importance of support and funding programs that are working well for young people, whether in rehabilitation, “falling through the cracks”, those serving some sentences in community service, training, education etc.

I particularly want to highlight the positive pathways engendered by creative programs that also connect the young participants to animals and to nature. Working creatively together, regardless of each participant’s background, can engender learning & skills opportunities, respect, a sense of responsibility to others, self confidence, hope and a sense that life can be different in a better way.

Two very good examples of what works and that began with humble beginnings are

- Back Track Youth Works <https://backtrack.org.au> programs
- Moorambilla Voices <https://moorambilla.com>

I hope that you will be able to look at these websites, and better still have the opportunity to make direct contact with these organisations, and meet with them.

As elsewhere in Australia, there are problems with crime in our rural and regional areas, and it is important to put youth crime in perspective with the overall rural crime rate unrelated to the age of the perpetrators e.g. theft from rural properties including stock is rife in the countryside, and the occurrence of violence and domestic violence in the rural countryside.

There is a tendency, with the focus on youth crime, to skew the general picture by this focus and it often results in creating undue fear and prejudice toward sectors of our communities.

However there is a real need to look at the situation of young people in rural and regional areas involved in crime and I have suggested some of the factors adversely affecting young people. I have also commented on what is needed in our communities. (see below)

There are many people in our rural communities who work together with young people, often on a voluntary basis.... by identifying what programs with young people work well, it is to be hoped that the NSW & Federal Governments will recognise that providing funding and resources for these programs will have very positive outcomes for youth and for rural and regional communities.

Yours sincerely

Lynne Hosking

31 May 2024

Emailed 30.5.24 To the Committee on Law and Safety
NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into Community Safety in Regional and Rural Communities

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

For almost fifty years I have lived in Armidale, a pleasant regional city in northern NSW.

There seems to be an emphasis on youth crime but I do not know how the statistics here compare with elsewhere.

What I do know is that rural crime occurs not only in country towns but is rife in the countryside - especially theft from houses and sheds on properties and including livestock. Therefore I advise that youth crime needs to be put into the wider context of overall rural crime. Similarly, throughout Australia, domestic violence occurs on country properties as well as in country towns.

Therefore focus on youth in relation to crime and bad behaviour needs to be put into a wider societal context - leaders in our society need to behave well in order to provide role models - and the behaviour of Parliamentarians does not set a good example nor inspire youth. By putting youth crime in context it may help lessen the use of fear - mongering and scape-goating that occurs and which often leads to an unbalanced focus on youth, and to bias against some racial groups, to increasing uncertainty and fear in our communities.

Adult and youth crime in our community is not a black or white problem - we need awareness of the whole of Australian context and seek solutions by working together as communities in partnership with local, state and commonwealth agencies and governments.

The issues of crime in rural communities are often driven by some of the following factors:

- Lack of employment opportunities
- Lack of affordable house prices, rentals and scarcity of public housing
- Lack of understanding and prejudice against some ethnic or social groups
- Family financial difficulties or violence at home
- Lack of appropriate funding and resources in Government agencies and organisations e.g. community health and welfare programs and youth services impacted by short term funding and political cycles
- Pressure on police in rural areas trying, on behalf of more relevant but underfunded and under-resourced agencies, to assist people with mental health issues and welfare issues
- Lack of coordination between government agencies, organisations and community volunteers

What is needed in Regional and Rural Communities :

- Immediate need for safe refuges for young people at risk from “ravished families”
- Immediate need for safe refuges for women and children at risk as well as for women without children at risk.
- Support for victims of violence
- Funding for peer support workers
- Behavioural change programs for men & places where the men can stay while participating in these program/s
- Identify what is working well to lessen crime and especially to assist young people - a very good example in Armidale is Back Track Youth Works <https://backtrack.org.au> programs; and also PCYC programs <https://www.pycnsw.org.au/armidale>;
- “Boot camp” or “tough love” programs with skilled and caring facilitators in a safe environment - telling youth what they need to hear rather than what they want to hear
- Support for effective local partnerships e.g. Armajun and Centrecare in Armidale
- Establish rehabilitation programs for youth by developing filtered down programs such as are provided for adults at Freeman House (only available for those over 18 years old). Note that even the established and respected Freeman House has a waiting list of 8-9 months <https://www.vinnies.org.au/nsw/find-help/houses/freeman-house-armidale>;
- Programs that assist people to budget and receive advice about practical day to day financial management;
- Support and resources increased for TAFE training programs in skills applicable to rural employment;
- Identify what community organisations, businesses and government agencies may take on trainees or volunteers as pathways toward acquiring skills, experience, confidence toward studies and employment.
- Re introduce funding for programs run, for example, under CDP (Community Development Programs). Armidale had funding for the ‘foot patrol’ a small bus with caring volunteers who collected young people wandering at night and took them home or, if at risk in their own home, to somewhere safe.
- Support Aboriginal based programs for young people e.g. in learning traditional language and cultural values out on country; youth programs that aim to show by example how being firm but fair can demonstrate that life can improve through not only knowing one’s rights but also learning about responsibility e.g. Anaiwan Newara programs <https://www.newaracorp.com/about>; and Aboriginal Connectors Program <https://alc.org.au/newsroom/one-year-one-aboriginal-connectors-program/>
- Provide more support and funding for these and other positive programs e.g. Dept. of Community and Justice programs aimed at preventing re-offending <https://dcj.nsw.gov.au/about-us/careers-at-dcj/pathways/careers-for-aboriginal-people/roles-for-aboriginal-people/community->

corrections-officers-why-work-for-dcj/community-corrections-programs-armidale.html Note that UNE is employing 6 people from the *Brothers in the Dale* program

- Circle sentencing aims to reduce offending and recidivism though the beneficial effects are likely to vary depending on the strength of the offender's support system (NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research). Recommend re introducing circle sentencing in Armidale.
- Identify potential employment opportunities for a diverse range of skills and education - in IT, in practical rural skills e.g. working with animals, with farm machinery, in natural resource agencies e.g. NPWS, Water, Soils, in creative fields of music, dance, painting, photography, craft.
- Highlight, in all forms of the media, the achievements of young people in our communities.

We hope that the Committee will visit our rural areas to discover what is working well for our young people as well as investigating what is not working and recommend ways that we can all work together

Yours sincerely

Lynne Hosking

30 May 2024