

**First Report of the Inquiry into Crime Prevention through Social
Support
Standing Committee on Law and Justice**

December 1999

Chairs Foreword

This is the first report of the committee's Inquiry into Crime Prevention Through Social Support. The committee deals with a range of issues including the risk factors associated with crime, criminal statistics, the role of local councils in crime prevention, early intervention and early childhood intervention, evaluation issues and issues relating particularly to people with an intellectual disability. The material in the report reflects the majority of evidence received by the committee to date. It is anticipated that the second report of the inquiry will include issues relevant to Aboriginal people, state wards, young offenders, prisoners and recidivism.

Crime is a complex social phenomenon. No single cause can explain it, just as no quick fix solution can address it. Overwhelmingly, the evidence presented to the committee identified poverty, economic and social stress, leading to child neglect, to be the major precursors to crime.

Nevertheless, certain strategies can help to minimise or even prevent offending behaviour. The committee considered that programs grounded in early intervention can be the most effective means of achieving this. In particular, early childhood and home-visiting programs have been shown to have the best results in crime prevention.

Drawing from early intervention and home-visiting programs in particular, the NSW Government has commenced the Families First program which, it is anticipated, will have the effect of both supporting vulnerable families and reducing crime.

The committee is well aware that effective crime prevention is a long process and results are not immediate. However, those programs that have been shown to work and to be cost effective, are those which do not adopt the traditional "knee jerk" response to crime or are solely punitive. This approach is not to be interpreted as one which is "going soft on crime". Rather, it is one which, based on extensive evidence, considers that the best form of crime prevention begins at the earliest possible time rather than at the end of the criminal process.

Chapter Eight of this report concerns people with intellectual disabilities. Intellectually disabled people are one of the most over-represented groups in the criminal and juvenile justice systems, both as offenders and victims. This over-

representation is a reflection of the vulnerable and marginalised position that people with an intellectual disability hold within the wider community. The relevant recommendations in this report are designed to build on initiatives already in progress which aim to reduce unnecessary contact with the criminal and juvenile justice systems and to ultimately improve the status of intellectually disabled people within the community.

I wish to thank the Committee members for their dedication and commitment to this inquiry. The unanimity of this report demonstrates that politicians from different political persuasions can work together and reach consensus on what can often be a volatile issue. All members agreed that an effective response to crime prevention is for the benefit all people in New South Wales.

I also wish to thank the staff of the committee who worked to a tight deadline to complete this report. Committee Director David Blunt provided guidance and direction to the committee secretariat. Senior Project Officers Steven Reynolds and Alexandra Shehadie gathered, analysed and condensed all the evidence into what I believe is a document of high quality and importance. Phillipa Gately's presentation, formatting and editing of the report was of excellent standard and is greatly appreciated.

I commend this report to the Government.

Hon Ron Dyer MLC
Committee Chair