

Chapter Ten

Future Work

10.1 Introduction

Crime prevention through social support is extremely broad. In this report the committee has only been able to address three main target groups for prevention activity: young children, the intellectually disabled and local councils.

When the matter was first referred to the committee by the Attorney General no reporting deadline was placed on the inquiry. This was to enable the committee to run the inquiry over a length of time so as to generate community interest in crime prevention through social support.

The target groups and prevention issues below provide an indication of the likely topic areas to be covered in future hearings and a later report. The committee does not intend to formally call for new submissions for this inquiry but it would welcome submissions from those who wish to add to those received on the topics discussed in this chapter, or in response to other chapters in the current report.

10.2 Children and young people in care/state wards

The committee has received many submissions and considerable evidence which highlights that effective social support provided to young people in care is desperately needed. The needs of this group overlap with early intervention services discussed in Chapter Six, but young people in care will be dealt with separately because of their unique needs.

Some of the issues raised to date include:

- the harmful effect of multiple placements;
- the need for respite care for carers;
- the special needs of disabled people in care;
- the intergenerational cycle of young people in care;
- the failure of agencies to track and prevent the progress of young people in care into the adult prison system;
- the difficulty of obtaining foster parents for adolescents; and
- the vulnerability of young people in care to becoming victims of crime.

The committee would welcome details of programs either interstate or overseas which have proved successful in reducing the likelihood of young people in care engaging in offending behaviour in later life. The committee

would also welcome contributions from former state wards who are able to identify what (or who) most helped them.

10.3 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups

The committee has not received many submissions or evidence which describe successful crime prevention initiatives among Aboriginal communities. In visits to Ballina and Moree the committee gained some idea of the magnitude of the problems which Aboriginal communities in New South Wales are struggling to overcome. In evidence, leading crime prevention expert Professor Ross Homel said:

The only evidence I see of real success in the reduction of violence and the improvement of conditions in Aboriginal communities anywhere in this country is where local people have genuinely taken some control over their situation.¹

The statistics on over-representation of Indigenous men, women and young people in prisons and juvenile justice centres indicate both the need for effective crime prevention and the lack of success of efforts to date.

In examining crime prevention through social support for Aboriginal communities the committee will not be examining policing issues in depth but does recognise that over-policing and the failure to use diversions are a vital part of the crime prevention picture. The committee would welcome any contributions from individuals or groups able to contribute to the inquiry on the following:

- post-release programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners;
- successful community-based crime prevention programs (or explanations of why programs trialed have not succeeded) for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders;
- early childhood intervention programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders;
- employment programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders; and
- schools and crime prevention for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

¹ *Evidence 26/7/99, Professor R Homel, p 29.*

Any other contributions to issues relevant to crime prevention through social support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups would be welcomed.

10.4 Prisoner recidivism

One of the terms of reference for this inquiry refers to “the type and level of assistance and support schemes needed to change offending behaviour”. Assisting prisoners through programs within prison and particularly post-release is an essential aspect of crime prevention. The committee has received a number of submissions from prisoner groups and from those who work with prisoners, and will take evidence from them during 2000.

The Department of Corrective Services recognises that recidivism among prisoners is high: approximately 39% of inmates who were released from a correctional centre between 1 July 1994 and 30 June 1997 received another custodial sentence within two years of their release. Twenty five per cent were first time inmates and 49% were inmates who had already served a term of imprisonment.²

Some of the issues regarding recidivism raised to date are:

- the need for bail hostels;
- lack of drug and alcohol programs within prisons;
- post-release housing problems;
- changes to Centrelink payments which have disadvantaged prisoners and particularly their families;
- lack of planning for transition from prison to the community; and
- the special needs of women, Aboriginal and intellectually disabled prisoners.

The committee will not deal in any depth with the crucial issue of the needs of children of prisoners, as the Standing Committee on Social Issues produced a very thorough analysis of this in 1997 in its report *Children of Imprisoned Parents*.

² *Submission*, 11/11/99, Dept of Corrective Services, p 2.

The committee has not received much material which demonstrates successful interventions which reduce recidivism, and would welcome such contributions.

10.5 Policing and crime prevention

As stated at the beginning of this report, the committee understands the terms of reference of this inquiry to be about alternatives to crime prevention by law enforcement. This does not preclude consideration of the role of the police. There are many examples of police working co-operatively with local councils or government agencies on holistic crime prevention programs. Crime prevention by law enforcement can assist crime prevention through social support or hinder it; the committee is interested in pursuing this interaction further.

The committee is also interested in the priorities given to crime prevention by the Police Service and the strategies for working with groups such as Indigenous communities, juvenile offenders, non-English Speaking Background groups, those with an intellectual disability or a mental illness. The Police Service has many programs which involve liaison with groups either vulnerable to crime or to becoming offenders; some of these are outlined in Chapter Five.

10.6 Employment

The relationship between unemployment and crime is complex as discussed in Chapter Four. Whatever view of a direct link is taken there is a strong argument that employment can prevent crime. In Weatherburn and Lind's research, paid employment is one of several contributions which can reduce crime in the next generation (by reducing economic stress on parenting) rather than having an immediate effect.

The committee to date has not received much material on links between employment programs and crime prevention and would welcome any research which has considered these links. The committee would particularly welcome any evaluations of employment programs which have measured impact on crime as one of the outcomes.

10.7 Housing

Stable secure housing is a basic need of every person. Its absence leads to great stress and makes ordinary relationships problematic, let alone employment. Homelessness is an acknowledged risk factor which

contributes to crime as well as making persons vulnerable to becoming victims of crime.

Beyond this however there are other aspects of housing which interact with levels of crime. These include:

- overcrowding within households;
- availability of public housing;
- design of housing, including issues of public vs private space and surveillance; and
- special needs such as those of the disabled, prisoners post-release and young people.

The committee would welcome any contributions which explore the relationship between housing and crime prevention.

10.8 Mental illness

The committee has considered intellectual disability in depth in this report. Aside from two submissions which address the lack of services for those with a mental illness in rural areas³ the committee has not received any material covering this area.

The committee would be particularly interested in responses which outline specific needs and programs to prevent those with a mental illness becoming unnecessarily entangled in the criminal justice system.

10.9 Juvenile offending/adolescents

One of the major findings of a 1992 Standing Committee on Social Issues Report: *Juvenile Justice in NSW* was that the great majority of young offenders do not go on to become adult offenders. It is disturbing that there are suggestions in some recent reports that this pattern is weakening, with the peak age for offending increasing.⁴

The committee would like to learn more about the causes and extent of this shift and measures which can redress any trend. It wishes to focus on forms

³ *Submissions*, 1998 and 6/9/99, Kempsey Mental Health Support.

⁴ *Pathways to Prevention* March 1999, National Crime Prevention p 3.

of social support which lessen the likelihood of juveniles becoming, or continuing to be, offenders.

10.10 Sport

A lack of appropriate leisure and recreational options has been cited as one factor that can lead a young person to become involved in criminal behaviour. A submission from the NSW Department of Sport and Recreation states that:

Evidence shows that sport and recreation activities have a profound effect on quality of life, self-esteem (particularly in young people), developing leadership skills, supporting families and communities and reducing crime levels.⁵

Sport programs involving Aboriginal youth have been used with some success in parts of New South Wales in recent years. The committee would welcome any examples, particularly those that have been evaluated, of sport programs being used with “at risk” groups as a means of preventing crime.

10.11 Other issues

In an inquiry with such broad terms of reference it is very easy to omit important groups or major strategies. Some of the other issues which may be explored include:

- prevention and non-English Speaking Background communities;
- the special needs of rural areas; and
- social supports to prevent domestic violence.

These issues will be addressed within other topic areas if they are not covered as topics in their own right. Regarding rural areas the committee will endeavour to visit more regional cities and towns in New South Wales during 2000. It has found the trips made to three regions to date among the most valuable parts of the current inquiry.

The committee wishes to thank all those who have contributed to the inquiry to date. This report is part of a long process of seeking to change the perspective on crime prevention from one based on police and prisons to a more holistic view. It is a debate which is taking place world wide, as this quote from a United Kingdom expert indicates:

⁵ *Submission 12/10/99, NSW Dept of Sport and Recreation p 2.*

To bring about this shift in policy will require the vision to see what can be achieved and political leadership of a high order to bring it about. But it will be worth it. There will be many benefits which will be felt well beyond the criminal justice sector. The challenge now is to invest in prevention before problems become too big to prevent.⁶

⁶ Bright J *Turning the Tide* 1997 p 113.