



THE CABINET OFFICE

7 JUN 1996

NEW SOUTH WALES

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The Hon Ann Symonds MLC
Chairperson
Standing Committee on Social Issues
Legislative Council, Parliament of New South Wales
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Ms Symonds

The Premier has asked me to forward the *NSW Government Response to A Report into Youth Violence in New South Wales* by the Legislative Council Standing Committee on Social Issues, tabled in Parliament on 26 June 1996.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Wilkins'.

Roger B Wilkins
Director General
The Cabinet Office



NSW GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

TO

***A REPORT INTO YOUTH VIOLENCE
IN NEW SOUTH WALES***

**BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL ISSUES**

NSW GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

TO

***A REPORT INTO YOUTH VIOLENCE
IN NEW SOUTH WALES***

**BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL ISSUES**

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Overview

The recent horrific events in Tasmania have focused the nation's mind on violence to an unprecedented extent. All Australian Governments are now acting to tighten their gun laws. But clearly, the roots of violent behaviour are complex ones. The use of firearms is but one symptom of violence in society. Restricting their availability and use is an important method of violence prevention but other measures will also be necessary.

The issue of youth violence was referred to the NSW Legislative Council Standing Committee in April 1993 and the Committee reported in September 1995. The Committee's terms of reference were to:

- collect and analyse data on the occurrences of youth violence, and its underlying causes, including violent incidents in schools
- examine the policies, actions, research and proposals of relevant government agencies and the impact of racial tensions, unemployment, family breakdown, media portrayal of violence and any other relevant factors in relation to youth violence and
- make recommendations to the NSW Parliament to assist all relevant government agencies in developing the most effective strategies to deal with youth violence.

During a two year inquiry period the Standing Committee performed detailed research and analysis, conducted public hearings, visited schools and received written submissions. The result of that investigative process was a major report of almost 400 pages in length, with 181 recommendations, seven of which the Committee considered to be key ones.

The Government welcomes the Report's recommendations. They provide a major contribution to making New South Wales a safer place to live. This Government is committed to addressing the problems and issues identified in the Report.

The Standing Committee noted the difficulties in conclusively mapping the incidence of, and trends in, youth violence. It did conclude, however, that there is no youth violence 'crime wave'. The vast majority of young people are responsible members of our community, of which we can be proud.

It is important that our community recognises that our young people are more often victims rather than perpetrators of violence, as illustrated by the recent child abuse allegations arising from the Woods Royal Commission. Violence is often perpetuated through generations of learned behaviour and those young people who do commit acts of violence have often been victims themselves.

The Standing Committee's terms of reference were broad. As a result, the Report touches on a range of diverse issues, including the role that family breakdown, unemployment and the media play in contributing to youth violence.

The Government supports the Standing Committee's holistic approach which emphasises prevention, increased safety measures for the community and effective and integrated responses to young offenders to tackle the problems that do exist.

Responsible Ministers and agencies have carefully examined recommendations of the Standing Committee's report.

The Government is acting to address the great majority of the Standing Committee's recommendations as part of mainstream policy and program development, and to implement initiatives which support young people - delivering services to those who have 'fallen through the cracks', to maximise their opportunities and ensure they have an effective springboard into adult life.

This overview highlights the Government's response to this comprehensive report, chapter by chapter, and identifies key initiatives of the Government which respond to its recommendations.

Chapter 1 of the Committee's report provided a theoretical overview, cataloguing various explanations for the violence committed by some young people. It discussed crime prevention, an issue the Government takes very seriously.

The Government is committed to preventing juvenile crime before it occurs. For example, it is developing a *Juvenile Crime Prevention Strategic Plan* for NSW and has instituted juvenile crime prevention grants for pilot projects such as one which helps young people in danger of committing violent crimes to explore alternatives to violence.

Chapter 2 of the Report reviewed data on the incidence and characteristics of youth violence and Chapter 3 examined the incidence and characteristics of violence in schools. Significantly, the Committee highlighted the fact that the family home is a more dangerous place for children than their school grounds. The Committee was concerned, however, to ensure the best possible data is available on the incidence of violence in schools and that the obligation to report violent incidents is clear.

The Department of School Education began collecting more comprehensive statistics on suspensions in Term 3, 1995 and these are already yielding information which will provide a valuable framework for the development of effective strategies against school violence.

Chapter 4 looked at the relationship between family breakdown and youth violence. It examines pressures on families which may contribute to youth violence.

Services for children and families remain a top priority for the Government. Some recent achievements which respond to recommendations of the Standing Committee in this area include:

- a \$13 million 'rescue package' for abused children and those in care
- the establishment of a Women's Equity Bureau in the Department of Industrial Relations which will help implement the Committee's recommendation that workplace reform continue to provide more flexible working arrangements to support families.

Chapter 5 took a 'big picture' look at how unemployment, poverty and homelessness may contribute to youth violence. The Government is deeply concerned about these problems. They cannot be ignored by any government. A key recommendation of this chapter was that the Government give priority to job creation schemes in areas of high youth unemployment.

Labour market programs and employment subsidies are traditionally a Commonwealth responsibility. To avoid duplication, the NSW Government is working to maximise quality vocational training opportunities as a way of tackling high youth unemployment and its associated problems.

For example, as part of the 1996/97 Budget the Government allocated \$6,862 million to fund programs which assist disadvantaged young people by improving their literacy, numeracy and self esteem - to help them stay in education and training, and to better access jobs. Further, the Government has put a proposal to the Prime Minister for the establishment of a Joint Commonwealth/NSW Taskforce on Youth Training and Work.

Chapter 6 of the Standing Committee's report looked at young people's use of public space for recreation, what recreational options were available and problems associated with drug and alcohol misuse.

As recognised by the Committee, better planning for the use of public space by our young people is required in recognition of their right to socialise in shopping centres or on their neighbourhood streets. The presence of young people in a public space must not automatically bring a presumption of criminal behaviour. To this end the Government:

- has funded a pilot project to do qualitative research in the Parramatta city centre on the relationship between young people and public space
- is consulting with the Youth Action Policy Association about a Young People and Public Space research project.

The Committee also addressed the problems of illicit drug and alcohol misuse and abuse by young people. The Government is currently developing a strategic policy framework for drug and alcohol policies and programs for young people, and will be informed by an across Government audit of existing policies and programs.

In response to a key recommendation in Chapter 6, which focused on measures to limit violence on licensed premises, the Government has introduced amendments which place a harm minimisation objective into relevant legislation that strengthens provisions relating to the responsible service, promotion and consumption of liquor.

In addition, a joint initiative has been undertaken by the Departments of Gaming and Racing, Police and Health to educate liquor licensees, club managers and their staff about the responsible serving of alcohol, to promote a safer environment on licensed and club premises.

The Government also recently introduced legislative amendments so that hotels and clubs can provide alcohol-free entertainment for young people under 18 to increase the availability of entertainment and recreational opportunities for young people across NSW.

Chapter 7 examined the relationship between violence in the media and youth violence. This matter was recently taken up by the Federal Government in response to events in Tasmania - it has convened a Committee of Ministers to examine studies on links between violent behaviour and the availability of violent material on television, film, video and video and computer games.

The Government considers this to be primarily an area of Commonwealth responsibility. However, it is similarly concerned about the possible impact of violence in the media on young people and will carefully consider the findings of the Commonwealth Committee when they are available.

In the meantime, the Government is looking at violent material on the Internet, a communication tool now openly available to young people. The Government is currently considering proposals to create an offence for the transmission and retrieval of objectionable material on the Internet, including matters which 'promote, incite or instruct' in matters of crime and violence.

Chapters 8, 9 and 10 reviewed the Department of School Education's policies and actions to combat youth violence. Chapter 8 took a broad brush approach to the issue, looking at the role and nature of schools, their relationship to the community and parents and anti-violence strategies. Chapter 9 considered anti-violence initiatives in New South Wales schools, including programs and curricula.

The Government has acted decisively in relation to the Committee's recommendation that the Government ensure sufficient resources are available to schools to enable them to function as models of co-operative, tolerant and non-violent communities.

The Minister for Employment and Training will release a package of material addressing the key issues of discipline and student welfare during Term 3, 1996. The package will include:

- a new *Student Welfare Policy*
- a Ministerial Statement on *Good Discipline and Effective Learning*, released in December 1995, which makes it clear that no violence, discrimination, harassment or bullying will be tolerated in government schools and which requires all schools to prepare a new School Discipline Policy by the beginning of 1997
- teacher support materials to assist schools in the implementation of the policy and the Ministerial Statement
- revised procedures relating to suspension, exclusion and expulsion of students from school and the declaration of place vacant.

The Government has:

- established a new *Student Welfare Directorate* in which the Behaviour and Attendance and Student Counselling and Welfare units will provide more focused support for schools in the area of suspensions, exclusions and expulsions
- revised the *Teaching Against Violence* kit for use in schools to assist in implementing programs which aim to prevent violence, discrimination, harassment and bullying. The kit received an *Australian Violence Prevention Award* and is being distributed to schools in 1996
- passed legislation which restricts the right of teachers to use corporal punishment as a disciplinary method
- implemented the *Strategies for Safer Schools* program - a school development program designed to extend the skills of teachers and members of the school community in managing student behaviour
- developed a *Dispute Resolution Project*, involving collaboration between the Department of School Education and Community Justice Centres to trial a peer mediation program for secondary students
- and promoted the *Personal Development, Health and Physical Education syllabuses* which canvass a range of issues such as power in relationships, conflict resolution, violence in the family, child sexual assault, vandalism, homophobia, equity and discrimination and sex based harassment.

In Chapter 10 the Committee looked at how the Department of Education deals with the causes of violence in schools and factors which underlie it. Key initiatives of the Government in these areas include:

- the development of a *Gender Equity Strategy*, as recommended by the Standing Committee, to ensure boys and girls are not disadvantaged in education in any way
- strategies to address bullying, a particular concern of the Committee, detailed in the resource documents *Strategies for Safer Schools* and *Teaching Against Violence* and to be further progressed as a result of the Minister's Statement, *Good Discipline and Effective Learning*

- strategies to address racism, through the development of the *Whole School Anti-Racism Project Resource Materials*
- establishment of a conduct disorders program for high school students
- the development of a project on student homelessness to determine prevention and early intervention strategies.

Chapter 11 reviewed the role of the NSW Police Service in relation to youth violence. Key achievements which respond to concerns of the Committee include:

- a successful guns and knives amnesty, with over 9,600 weapons surrendered or confiscated to date
- the development of a proposal to discourage young people from carrying knives, involving Police and the Department of School Education
- the development of a Police Service *Youth Policy Statement Action Plan 1995-2000*
- a soon to be finalised *NSW Police Service Implementation Plan for the Charter of Principles for a Culturally Diverse Society* and an accompanying *Statement of Intent*
- the establishment of an *Aboriginal Complaints Unit* and appointment of a *Youth Liaison Officer* within the Ombudsman's Office.

In Chapter 12 the Committee examined issues relevant to young people who have committed violent crimes and, as a result, have become involved in the juvenile and adult correctional systems. Many of the principles which informed the recommendations of the Standing Committee in this Chapter have already been adopted by this Government.

The Government is working to ensure young offenders are held accountable, while offering appropriate intervention, supervision and management to maximise the potential for their successful reintegration into society and to break the crime cycle.

A range of strategies have been put into place to provide for violent young offenders. For example the Department of Juvenile Justice is developing a *Violent Offenders Program* for repeat violent offenders in detention which is due for implementation by August this year. It is also conducting a *Sex Offender Program* where juveniles are taught to recognise and manage their cycle of offending.

The Department of Corrective Service is working on new programs to alter the behaviour of sexual and violent offenders. As part of the Government's announced restructure of the adult correctional system, the 1996/97 Budget provided \$1.2 million for sex offender programs, with the redevelopment of Long Bay to offer special therapeutic treatment units. Young sex offenders are identified as a sub group of sex offenders and their particular requirements will be addressed.

Finally, Chapter 13 examined the role of a range of Government agencies whose services and policies impact upon the problem of young people and violence. It focuses on Government provision of community services, housing and public transport. Of particular note in this context are:

- the Government's significant reform initiatives in the substitute care and child protection areas, including the establishment of a *Child Protection Enforcement Agency* within the NSW Police Service

- the negotiation by NSW for a national research project on children in the *Supported Accommodation Assistance Program*
- the establishment of the *Transport Safety Bureau*, responsible for ensuring the highest practicable levels of passenger security are maintained
- the development of a *Good Neighbour Policy* by the Department of Housing to help tackle anti-social behaviour and work with local communities and tenant groups to establish a safer environment for tenants, their families and neighbours.

In summary, the Standing Committee produced a thorough and comprehensive report on this very important issue. Its work was a valuable stimulus to across-Government action. The Government response documents the detailed actions being taken to address each of the recommendations made by the Standing Committee. The Government is committed to continuing to actively work to unravel the causes of, and find solutions to, the complex problem of youth violence.

CHAPTER 3 - THE NATURE AND EXTENT OF SCHOOL VIOLENCE

Examines the incidence and characteristics of school-related violence.

RECOMMENDATION 1 - SUSPENSION RECORDS

Recommendation:

That the Minister for Education ensure that records relating to the suspension of students include

- the sex of the student and
- the reason for the suspension

so that information on suspensions for violent behaviour can be obtained, trends monitored and appropriate intervention strategies developed.

Government response:

The Government supports the recommendation to collect data on the sex of students and reason for the suspension. The Department of School Education has been collecting this data from schools since Term 3, 1995. Additional data is also being collected on grade, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and NESB status. This will enable the development of effective strategies and the related targeting of Departmental resources. This process will be completed by the end of 1996.

The information collected to date shows that secondary school males are more likely to be suspended than any other group and that some cultural groups appear to be disproportionately represented. The collection of this additional data will provide a valuable framework for the development of effective strategies.

RECOMMENDATION 2 - REPORTING OF SUSPENSION, EXCLUSION & EXPULSION DATA

Recommendation:

That the Minister for Education ensure that suspension, exclusion and expulsion data are published in the Department of School Education's Annual Report.

Government response:

The Government supports the recommendation.

While a small amount of information on suspensions was published in the Department of School Education's Annual Report for 1994, a much more comprehensive statement on suspensions, exclusions and expulsions was included in the 1995 Annual Report. In particular, the statement drew attention to the backgrounds of students being suspended and the reasons for their suspensions.

RECOMMENDATION 3 - DEFINITIONS OF VIOLENT BEHAVIOUR

Recommendation:

That the Minister for Education ensure that information is distributed to all government schools which

- contains a comprehensive definition covering the types of violent behaviour which should be the subject of a Critical Incident Report

- includes examples of these types of violent incidents and
- advises that the degree of malice and the nature of injuries incurred should be considered in decisions on completing Critical Incident Reports.

Government response:

The Government supports the recommendation.

Critical Incident Reports are required for a range of serious matters involving the disruption to the work of schools. These include fires, gas leaks and major damage to property in addition to violence and threats of violence against staff and students.

Critical Incident reporting has traditionally been organised through regional offices. With the phasing out of ten regions and establishment of 40 district offices, action is being taken to shift responsibility for Critical Incident reporting to districts. In this context guidelines are being prepared which address, among other things, the matters referred to by the Committee.

RECOMMENDATION 4 - REPORTING OF VIOLENT INCIDENTS TO POLICE

Recommendation:

That the Minister for Education

- amend the guidelines on suspension, exclusion and expulsion to clarify the parameters of the discretion of principals regarding the reporting of violent incidents to the police and define cases in which reporting is essential
- require schools to review procedures for decisions relating to reports to police when judgment must be exercised, with appropriate input by the school community and
- require schools to lay down a set of clear guidelines on the reporting of violent incidents to police that apply both to cases in which reporting is essential and cases in which the exercise of judgment is required.

Government response:

The Ministerial Statement on *Good Discipline and Effective Learning*, issued in December 1995, clarifies the role of the principal in managing school discipline and gives specific direction on the circumstances in which police should be called to schools.

The Department of School Education and the Police Service are collaborating at operational level to ensure better co-ordination between portfolios.

CHAPTER 4 - THE FAMILY

Examines the relationship between the family unit and violence among young people.

RECOMMENDATION 5 - DEVELOPMENT OF AWARENESS CAMPAIGN AND TRAINING STRATEGIES TO ASSIST FAMILIES WITH VIOLENCE PROBLEMS

Recommendation:

That the Ministers for Community Services and Health develop an awareness campaign and training strategies to assist those working with families where violence by young people towards parents or other family members is occurring.

Government response:

The Government recognises the problem of violence in families and notes the recommendation.

A range of strategies which address this recommendation are now underway.

The Department of Community Services:

- provides training to field staff on violence, including issues relating to youth violence against other family members
- funds a number of services that provide support to families where youth violence occurs. Identifying such families and providing relevant support services is an integral part of service delivery and will receive greater focus as part of the Department's move towards a preventive and early intervention approach.
- The NSW Health Department has recently released a Youth Health Discussion Paper, *Caring for Young People*, which examines the training needs of those working with young people with special needs.
- Youth health centres provide in-reach services to young people in Juvenile Justice Centres and links are being developed to co-ordinate services for young people being discharged from custody. These links extend into the violent offenders' program run by the Department of Juvenile Justice.
- The Departments of Community Services and Health are represented on the Violent and Disruptive Youth Interdepartmental Committee chaired by the Department of School Education.

The Government does not fully support the recommendation for an awareness campaign on this issue. It prefers a more focussed strategy, incorporating prevention and early intervention initiatives, which are supported by evidence-based literature. Some current approaches and strategies are detailed below.

- Early identification of young people at risk of developing disruptive behaviour disorders and the provision of mental health services during early childhood has been demonstrated to be an effective intervention strategy for disruptive behaviour. The Centre for Mental Health within the Department of Health sees prevention and early intervention as a priority in dealing with mental health problems and has identified children and young people as priority populations. The Health Department will be developing a set of early intervention programs of proven effectiveness, targeting young people from early childhood through to adolescence and young adulthood. These programs will involve not only families and schools but the wider community.
- Enhancements have been provided to the Adolescent Mental Health course, run by the Institute of Psychiatry, to increase the availability of appropriate adolescent mental health training for rural workers.

- The Department of Community Services funded the Adolescent-Parent Mediation Project as a pilot under the Community Services Grants Program. The aim of the project was to prevent breakdown of family relationships and to avoid premature, permanent parent-adolescent separation. An independent evaluation of the project was conducted, the results of which are now with the Minister's office.
- The *Parent Help Line* is funded as a pilot program under the Community Services Grants Program (for more detail on this initiative see the Government's response to Recommendation 12 below).
- The issue of 'early intervention' for young people aged from 12 to 15 years is also being considered by Youth Ministers through the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs. Terms of reference for this project including recording and highlighting best practice in regards to 'early intervention' and 'prevention' strategies and considering the supplementation of the early intervention policy and program responses to the needs of young people at risk.

RECOMMENDATION 6 - TRAINING FOR SCHOOL COUNSELLORS AND TEACHERS

Recommendation:

That the Minister for Education appoint sufficient specialist officers to ensure school counsellors and teachers are appropriately trained to recognise and provide support to children experiencing violence in their homes and meet their mandatory reporting obligations.

Government response:

Action is being taken to achieve appropriate training for teachers and school counsellors using student welfare consultancy support within the Department of School Education. With the support of the Departments of Community Services and Health, the Department of School Education consultants in student welfare and other relevant officers, can organise appropriate professional development for teachers and school counsellors.

Forty newly appointed student welfare consultants will receive training to support schools to fulfil their obligations in child protection in the context of student welfare.

The Department of School Education's kit, *Resources for Teaching Against Violence*, contains a section on domestic violence. It has been updated and has been provided to all schools.

RECOMMENDATION 7 - PEER REVIEW EDUCATION PROJECTS ADDRESSING FAMILY VIOLENCE

Recommendation:

That the Attorney General direct the Juvenile Crime Prevention Unit to review peer education projects that address family violence, such as the Victorian Young People in Need project, and consider supporting the development of a New South Wales equivalent.

Government response:

The Juvenile Crime Prevention Division, Attorney General's Department, is in the preliminary stages of reviewing peer education projects that address family violence, such as the Victorian Young People in Need project. The Division has met with the convenor of the Victorian project and sought information on a number of other peer education programs operating in both New South Wales and interstate. The Division aims to prepare a paper reviewing academic literature and programs. Subsequently, the Division will prepare advice on the merits of a project based on peer support.

RECOMMENDATION 8 - RESOURCES FOR CHILD ABUSE WORK

Recommendation:

That the Minister for Community Services ensure that sufficient resources are provided for adequate investigation and follow-up of reports of child abuse received in response to campaigns.

Government response:

This Government has announced a comprehensive package of measures to help overcome the human problems caused by child abuse:

- a \$13 million rescue package for abused children and those in care, including:
 - \$300,000 p.a. additional funding to the Department of Health's Physical and/or Emotional Abuse and Neglect of Children (PANOC) Services. Additional PANOC co-ordinators will be appointed to increase access to health services for young people in Broken Hill, Taree, Bourke and Moree. Aboriginal metropolitan PANOC workers will be appointed in the South-West and Central Area Health Services
 - closed circuit television systems will be installed over the next 3 years at a cost of \$2.5 million in courts in all major locations across NSW and in children's courts
 - an independent information, referral and counselling service will be funded for the six months from May 1996 for people who have experienced abuse while previously in substitute care, with the service being incorporated into the 'After-Care Centre' once it is established (see the Government's response to Recommendation 23)
- the establishment of a Child Protection Enforcement Agency within the NSW Police Service
- a review of the recruitment and screening of staff of the Department of Community Services, its funded services and other agencies involved in the care of children
- following on from the decision in 1995/96 to appoint 60 new child protection specialists, 45 additional field staff will be appointed during 1996/97 to provide child protection services at the point of notification of abuse.

The Government recognises the importance of providing a comprehensive child protection response. This approach is outlined in the draft document, *Strategic Directions in Child Protection*. In light of this, the Government has provided \$2 million per annum for family initiatives to develop individual service packages to strengthen families, thus reducing the risks to children and the likelihood of statutory intervention. This represents an investment in early intervention for families.

RECOMMENDATION 9 - NON-VIOLENT DISCIPLINARY METHODS

Recommendation:

That the Minister for Community Services develop and implement community education campaigns to discourage the physical punishment of children and provide information about non-violent disciplinary methods.

Government response:

The Government supports the development and implementation of community education campaigns to discourage the physical punishment of children and provide information about non-violent disciplinary methods. To this end the Government:

- provides funds for and supports the Association for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect which actively promotes community education and awareness of non-violent disciplinary methods and alternatives to physical punishment

- funds the Child Protection Council which raises community awareness regarding the protection of children and changing community attitudes towards child abuse. The Government provided an additional \$100,000 for the Child Protection Council in 1995/96 for prevention strategies.

RECOMMENDATION 10 - FLEXIBLE WORKING ARRANGEMENTS TO SUPPORT FAMILIES

Recommendation:

That the Minister for Industrial Relations ensure the continuation of workplace reform to provide more flexible working arrangements to support families.

Government response:

The Government is working to ensure more flexible working arrangements to support families.

The Women's Equity Bureau (WEB) of the Department of Industrial Relations will continue to develop, promote and assist in implementing work and family policies. WEB is currently finalising a *NSW Work and Family Strategy*. The document will promote principles to help balance work and family, through Government initiatives and the encouragement of co-operation between business and flexible work practices and community services.

The Government's principles in relation to promoting a balanced work and family life are as follows. Its underlying aims are to:

- define family responsibilities in a way which reflects the diversity of today's society, which includes the caring needs of the young, the old, people with disabilities and family members
- eliminate barriers which impede the full and equitable participation of workers with family responsibilities
- enable workers to make a more effective economic contribution to assist the achievement of workplace efficiency
- recognise the importance of all key parties involved in the process of assisting workplaces and workers with family responsibilities and in developing solutions to overcome problems. Key parties include the government, employers, trade unions and employees in the public, private and community sectors.

The proposed objectives are to effect:

- attitudinal and behavioural change
- workplace reform
- fairness and equity in the workplace
- equitable access to vocational education and training
- flexible, responsive and accessible community services and resources.

Emerging issues identified are to:

- develop material and assist in training to demonstrate the cost and benefit to business of having effective work and family policies
- identify and respond to the specific needs of small business in relation to work and family policies
- identify and respond to the specific needs of rural and remote areas in relation to work and family policies
- provide material to analyse and promote the need for, the meaning of, and the impact of flexibility in the workplace
- ensure a focus on, take into account the demands of, private life which incorporates care for older people, people with disabilities, children and partners.

Initiatives being developed responding to these areas include:

- developing equity provisions in the *Industrial Relations Bill 1996*
- a Community Services reference and resource booklet to assist employees with family
- developing a 'Business Case' to explain to business the benefits of balancing work and family responsibilities
- appointment of a trade union equity officer, responsible for promoting pay equity among trade unions and employees.

A Work and Family Taskforce of Senior Government Officers, chaired by the Director General of the Department of Industrial Relations, has been established to finalise and drive the Government's policies and programs to assist workers balance their work and family lives. It is planned the Government will launch its work and family platform of policies and programs towards the end of 1996.

KEY RECOMMENDATION 11 - OUTSIDE SCHOOL HOURS CARE FOR 12-15 YEAR OLDS

Recommendation:

That the Ministers for Community Services, Sport and Recreation and Education collaborate on the expansion of outside school hours programs specifically designed to meet the needs of 12 to 15 year olds.

Government response:

The Government supports this key recommendation which aims to ensure appropriate leisure activities for 12 to 15 year olds outside school hours and acknowledges the essential role of child care in supporting families.

It notes the existing collaborate effort between the Departments of Sport and Recreation and School Education and the Australian Sports Commission in the area of sports development programs outside school hours, through 'Aussie Sports'. Several program elements, eg Sport Leadership programs, are tailored to meet the needs of this age group. They emphasise the development of leadership skills such as communication, decision making, problem solving, team building, organisation and innovation.

The Department of Community Services is currently developing the Community Services Grants Program (CSGP) Reform Strategy, to evaluate and restructure services funded under CSGP. The program will be divided into two discrete programs — an Individual and Family Support Program and a Community Resources Program. Adolescents are identified as target groups in each of these programs and their special needs will be actively considered in the development of the two programs. The reform strategy will proceed over three years (commenced January 1996).

There is also potential for more innovative Out of School Hours projects provided by the Department of Community Services. For example, a number of pilots have recently been funded for activities for children with disabilities (including older children aged up to 15 years) and two projects which separate children under 12, with those over, so as to provide more age appropriate activities.

The Government recognises that the inability of young people with a disability to access mainstream programs, such as after school hours care, increases their isolation and marginalisation, reinforces negative perceptions of difference and increases the likelihood of them becoming targets for harassment and violence.

Impediments facing young people with a disability in accessing out of school hours programs and care are identified in a report by the Network of Community Activities, *We Care Too!* While innovative pilot programs for young people with a disability, discussed above, are useful, the

preferred option is for children to participate in mainstream services. Discussions are underway between the Commonwealth and State Governments about resourcing out of school hour services for young people with a disability.

KEY RECOMMENDATION 12 - FAMILY SUPPORT PROGRAMS

Recommendation:

That the Minister for Community Services and Minister for Health ensure that family support programs are fully evaluated and coordinated and successful programs offered state-wide, especially to parents of children in the crucial first three years of their life.

Government response:

The Government supports this key recommendation.

An extensive range of family support services are piloted, co-ordinated and evaluated in an ongoing way by the Department of Community Services, the Ageing and Disability Department and the Department of Health. These include:

- a *Parent Help Line*, funded as a pilot program under the Community Services Grants Program. It is a telephone counselling service aimed at preventing family problems turning into major crises by providing professional information and support at an early stage. It is widely advertised through schools, baby health centres, churches and clubs for parents and children. Following initial contact, written information is sent out where appropriate and referrals made for specialist counselling and treatment when necessary. Because of its anonymity and 'non-welfare' image, it encourages contact from parents who may normally not feel it appropriate to seek help
- the Department of Community Services' *Community Services Grants Program (CSGP) Reform Strategy* will include the development of service standards, program outcomes and the evaluation of Family Support projects. The strategy promotes service delivery aimed at prevention and early intervention
- the Department of Health's extensive range of services for parents with children, providing a range of parenting support programs, from prevention and early intervention to treatment and referral. A major program is the development of appropriate antenatal and postnatal education programs aimed at improving the level and quality of the wide range of educational programs and support services available free to enhance parenting skills
- the Centre for Mental Health, Department of Health has as a priority strategy the development of prevention and early intervention initiatives, particularly those for children and young people and their families. For example, it is currently facilitating the enhancement of improved mental health service parenting initiatives, e.g. examining a Queensland model called 'Triple P' - Positive Parenting for Preschoolers and initially targeting rural NSW
- the Department of Health established a Volunteer Home Visiting Research Working Group because it was apparent several home visiting programs were established without a clear purpose of effectiveness. Its role was to examine the national and international literature to determine the most effective models and evaluate the existing programs against a standard evaluation criteria. This involved the co-ordination of a pilot home visiting program using volunteers, targeting families with additional needs and the development of an evaluation tool for this program. An important outcome of this initiative has been the convening of two national forums to identify the components of a home visiting program, to establish inter-sectoral networks within Australia and develop appropriate standards
- the Departments of School Education, Health and Community Services are piloting a two year program to establish four interagency family community services, designed to develop and trial models of effective and efficient interagency co-ordination to support families with children under five years
- the Ageing and Disability Department is currently developing a policy on children with a disability and substitute care. It is addressing the issue of children with disabilities entering substitute care and the needs of families to have access to preventative services to meet the needs

of the family as a whole so that the child can remain at home. Where family breakdown is unavoidable, the Department is examining the need for a range of out-of-home placement options, based on permanency planning principles, which aim to ensure the best interests of the child are safeguarded.

In the 1996/97 Budget the Government announced the provision of \$2 million per annum for family initiatives to develop individual service packages to strengthen families, thereby reducing the risks to children and the likelihood of statutory intervention, representing an investment in early intervention for families.

RECOMMENDATION 13 - SUPPORT FOR ABORIGINAL PARENTS

Recommendation:

That the Minister for Community Services ensure that pilot programs to assist Aboriginal parents are fully evaluated and successful programs are offered Statewide.

Government response:

The Department of Community Services is taking action to ensure that pilot programs to assist Aboriginal parents are fully evaluated and successful programs are offered Statewide. The Government is committed to solutions devised and implemented at a local level, after consultation and negotiation with Aboriginal organisations and communities.

The Department of Community Services' *Community Services Grants Program (CSGP) Reform Strategy* will evaluate and develop CSGP funded services and place a greater emphasis on the evaluation of Aboriginal services. Area based needs analysis will better identify needs and gaps in service provision for Aboriginal people. Relevant pilot programs include:

- an Intensive Family Based Service operating on the Far North Coast of NSW, specifically designed to support Aboriginal families to maintain the care of their children and to reduce risk factors so that the child's safety in the home can be assured. Families are referred to the service when a child is at risk of being removed from the family as a result of abuse or neglect. The final evaluation report is due in December 1996
- a *Parent Help Line* which has an Aboriginal identified position (see the Government's response to Recommendation 12 above).

CHAPTER 5 - SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS

Investigates the links between socio-economic status and levels of violent crime.

RECOMMENDATION 14 - EXTENSION OF YOUTH STRATEGY ACTION GRANTS PROGRAM

Recommendation:

That the Minister for Industrial Relations encourage the Federal Minister for Employment, Education and Training to extend the Youth Strategy Action Grants Program to ensure funding continues beyond the establishment grant.

Government response:

The Youth Strategy Action Grants Program was discontinued by the Commonwealth Government in the May 1995 Budget.

The Government has no plans to re-establish the program or develop a program with similar objectives.

KEY RECOMMENDATION 15 - JOB CREATION SCHEMES FOR YOUTH

Recommendation:

That Government Agencies, in partnership with community organisations and the private sector, give priority to job creation schemes in areas of high youth unemployment.

Recommendation:

Job creation schemes are funded and managed by the Commonwealth through the Department of Employment Education and Training. To avoid duplication, the NSW Government seeks to focus its efforts on providing vocational education and training for young unemployed people.

In the 1996/97 Budget the Government provided nearly \$16m to youth employment initiatives. This includes \$6.8m for programs such as *HELP* (Helping Early Leavers Program), *Circuit Breaker* and the *Koori Youth Program* which are aimed at assisting disadvantaged young people to stay in education and training and to access jobs.

The Government is also progressing towards its target of 5,000 additional State funded TAFE student places in 1997. These places will be allocated to regions experiencing increased student and industry demand to ensure students have access to quality education and training opportunities in the areas of the State where they are needed most.

The Government has put a proposal to the Prime Minister for the establishment of a Joint Commonwealth/NSW Taskforce on Youth Training and Work.

RECOMMENDATION 16 - PART TIME WORK AND JOB SHARING

Recommendation:

That the Minister for Industrial Relations act to ensure that appropriate opportunities are provided for part-time work and job sharing to increase the availability of employment options.

Government response:

The Government is working to ensure that appropriate opportunities are provided for part-time work and job sharing to increase the availability of employment options.

The Department of Industrial Relations is currently reviewing its role in this area with a view to establishing a workplace reform unit to assist NSW workplaces to introduce more effective, productive and flexible working arrangements.

Two Work and Family Advisers - one at the Labor Council of NSW and another at the NSW Chamber of Manufactures - successfully completed their projects and reported at the end of 1995 (the projects commenced in 1994). The Advisers provided support, information and advice about flexible work practices and enterprise bargaining and promoted the inclusion of flexibility and flexible working arrangements through enterprise agreements.

The Department of Industrial Relations is currently reviewing and developing a future project which will be to appoint a trade union Equity Officer, responsible for promoting pay equity and workplace reform among trade unions and employees.

With the assistance of the Department of Industrial Relations, the Officer will work on a rotational basis, between unions, to provide advice on equity matters and to encourage workplaces to implement flexible work practices and employment conditions.

RECOMMENDATION 17 - TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT TO MAXIMISE ONGOING EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Recommendation:

That the Minister for Industrial Relations ensure, in consultation with the federal counterparts, that all training and employment initiatives are structured to maximise the likelihood of on-going employment for young people.

Government response:

The Government is working with the Commonwealth to ensure that training and employment initiatives are structured to maximise the likelihood of on-going employment for young people.

Changes to anti-discrimination laws relating to age discrimination in employment, and the implementation of a national training reform agenda, have led to the involvement of the Department of Industrial Relations in two reviews:

- a review, managed by the Australian Industrial Relations Commission (AIRC), aiming to reach agreement on issues related to the national training reform agenda and changes to federal age discrimination legislation. The Steering Committee comprises representatives from the Commonwealth, various State governments, ACCI, ACTU and the Retail Council of Australia
- a New South Wales tripartite Working Party on Junior Employees is reviewing the current exemption for junior rates under the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1977*.

The Department is also represented on the Australian Vocational Training System (AVTS) Implementation Task-force which is establishing the framework within which the AVTS initiatives are implemented in NSW.

The NSW Government believes that youth and training wage arrangements should promote broad-based skills formation for young people, while at the same time being flexible in operation and relatively simple to administer. These arrangements should recognise that skills can be acquired through a number of pathways (eg employment-based, institution-based, on-the-job/off-the-job training and vocational placements).

In NSW, amendments to the *Anti-Discrimination Act* exempt wages prescribed for people under 21 years of age from age discrimination provisions until June 1996. Subsequently the exemption *may* be revoked by proclamation, but the Government has no immediate plans to do so.

To ensure that there are no adverse consequences for youth employment, reforms to youth rates should not occur unless suitable wage models can be developed that protect youth employment.

Conversion of age-based and training wage arrangements should be carefully managed within a timetable that allows industrial parties to develop suitable skill and experience-based replacements.

The Government has given assurances to employer groups that the protection afforded to age-based junior rates in NSW will not be removed until the industrial parties and relevant industry tribunals have had a realistic opportunity to develop an adequate alternative to age-based rates.

RECOMMENDATION 18 AND 19 - COMMONWEALTH DEVELOPMENT EMPLOYMENT PROJECT

Recommendation 18:

That the Minister for Industrial Relations consult appropriate Federal Ministers to ensure that taxation penalties against Aboriginal workers in CDEP (Commonwealth Development Employment Project) programs are removed.

Recommendation 19:

That the Minister for Industrial Relations, in consultation with appropriate Federal counterparts, consider the expansion of the CDEP (Commonwealth Employment Development Project) scheme to non-Aboriginal unemployed young people in selected communities.

Government response:

The Government notes that employment programs are the responsibility of the Commonwealth Government. The Government will raise the matters referred to in Recommendations 18 and 19 with the Commonwealth Government.

KEY RECOMMENDATION 20 - LEARNING AND RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES FOR UNEMPLOYED YOUTH

Recommendation:

That the Government, in partnership with community organisations, sponsor the development of learning and recreational activities for unemployed youth. As one means of advancing this process, the Minister for Community Services should seek expressions of interest and fund the development of a pilot scheme providing training for unemployed young people to develop anti-violence programs and workshops to educate their peers.

Government response:

The Government has put a proposal to the Prime Minister to establish a Joint Commonwealth/NSW Taskforce on Youth Training and Work. The Government will act to ensure that this recommendation is considered by the Taskforce once it is established.

The Department of Community Services, through the Community Services Grants Program (CSGP), funds youth projects and has recently funded a series of seminars focussing on anti-violence to raise awareness and understanding of the issue.

Department of Training and Education Co-ordination programs, such as *HELP* and *Circuit Breaker*, also aim to improve employment prospects for unemployed youth.

RECOMMENDATION 21 - VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS FOR THE UNEMPLOYED

Recommendation:

That the Minister for Industrial Relations, in consultation with his federal counterparts and community groups, ensure that unemployed young people are given information on alternative ways of contributing to the community through volunteer programs.

Government response:

The Government will consult with the Commonwealth Government regarding the proposed *Green Corps* program. This program proposes that volunteers be trained to assist in emergency and natural disaster situations, mainly in non-urban areas.

The Government will also examine programs run for young unemployed people by the New Zealand Ministry of Youth Affairs, for example the Conservation Corps and Youth Service Corps.

RECOMMENDATION 22 - WORK PREPARATION TRAINING FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WITH BEHAVIOURAL DISORDERS

Recommendation:

That the Minister for Community Services ensure that adequate funding is allocated to programs attempting to develop work preparation skills in behaviour-disordered young people.

Government response:

The Government supports the recommendation in principle.

The issue requires careful co-ordination among several Departments, including Ageing and Disability, Community Services, Health, School Education and TAFE Commission, Juvenile Justice and the Police Service. The Commonwealth also has a significant role as the major provider of employment and training programs. This matter could be referred to the proposed Youth Work Task Force for consideration.

The Department of School Education has established a Conduct Disorders Program for high school students. Eight projects have commenced across the state for young people who have been diagnosed as conduct disordered. The types of projects range from schools for specific purposes, units attached to high schools, wilderness projects and tutorial centres.

See also the Government's response to Recommendation 103.

RECOMMENDATION 23 - WARDS

Recommendation:

That the Minister for Community Services closely monitors the delegation of accommodation, care and maintenance of wards to the non-government sector to ensure his statutory obligation to provide adequate support is met.

Government response:

The Government is committed to ensuring its obligation to provide adequate support to wards is met, and that delegation of responsibilities to the non-government sector is monitored. A range of mechanisms to achieve this end are in place. These include:

- release of *Strategic Directions for the Substitute Care Program* in March 1996 to explain future directions for the Department of Community Services in the care of wards by public and private sector service providers
- continuation of the review by the Interim Review Committee, an inter-agency committee of representatives from the government and non-government sectors with expertise in substitute care issues, of outcomes for children and young people currently in foster and residential care
- consolidation of the statewide planning model for future services and the implementation of area substitute care plans
- completion of the closure of the Department's large residential centres and the continued provision of area based residential services to replace closed institutions
- an allocation of an extra \$300,000 per annum to the State-wide Network for Young People in Care to act as an advocate for children in care, run holiday camps, and involve children in decision-making processes which affect them
- the review of the circumstances of all children in foster and residential care to ensure their care is appropriate and that their individual needs are being met
- establishment of an After-Care Centre and the appointment of Leaving Care Workers to provide support, advice and initial follow-up for young people who are leaving care or who have been in care
- the funding of an independent information, referral and counselling service for the six months from May 1996 for people who have experienced abuse while previously in care, with the service being incorporated into the After-Care Centre once established
- establishing a Substitute Care Ministerial Advisory Committee, to be chaired by Father John Usher, to provide advice on an appropriate permanent independent monitoring mechanism for substitute care which is to be set up by 1997
- undertaking a review of the recruitment and screening of staff of the Department of Community Services, its funded services and other agencies involved in the care of children
- the development of key policy and practice documents on topics including assessment and decision making, intensive care services and standards (implementation of Standards for Substitute Care Services in NSW is occurring in 1996)
- for foster carers:
 - providing \$300,000 annually to provide stronger peer support and improved information services to the 4,000 approved foster carers in New South Wales
 - increasing, in the 1996/97 Budget, the Standard Age Related Fostering Allowance for children aged 12 to 17 years, to help rectify the shortage of foster carers for adolescents.

A significant proportion of wards have disabilities and interface problems exist between disability and care and protection/substitute care service systems. The Government will ensure that the Ageing and Disability Department is included on the Advisory Committee reviewing substitute care, to ensure the review involves an examination of both children with disabilities who are wards and those who are in care on a 'voluntary' basis in a range of government and non-government services.

RECOMMENDATION 24 - PLACEMENT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WITH ACTING-OUT BEHAVIOURS

Recommendation:

That the Minister For Community Services ensure that appropriate placements are available to young people with severe acting-out behaviours, and that these placements minimise risks to other residents and staff.

Government response:

The Government recognises the need for young people with severe acting-out behaviours to have available to them appropriate placements.

The Department of Community Services' facilities, known as Ormond and Minali, continue to provide intensive support services to children and young people with complex needs. The intensive support strategy aims to improve the quality of services and help the exit of children from these services to more appropriate arrangements as quickly as possible. An ongoing review of intensive support services is already providing different and more appropriate outcomes for children receiving those services and data to develop service models which respond to young people with complex needs.

An outreach service, the Intensive Support and After Care Service (ISACS), with responsibility for assessment, planning and casework for young people needing to exit intensive support services commenced in 1996.

RECOMMENDATION 25 - SAFETY IN SUPPORTED ACCOMMODATION SERVICES

Recommendation:

That the Minister for Community Services ensure that staff of supported accommodation services are provided with information on best practices in intervening in violent incidents, to reduce risks to themselves and other residents, and on appropriate strategies for encouraging residents to deal with anger and aggression in non-violent ways.

Government response:

The Government supports the recommendation.

Safety and security emerged as a major issue for the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) in 1994 following the murder of a youth refuge worker by service users and several other very serious incidents. Five strategies have been developed, with consultative input from service management, staff, union and employer interests, occupational health and safety professionals, academics and experienced trainers. The strategies aim to:

- assist management of SAAP services meet their employer obligations and responsibilities in providing safer work places
- offer SAAP staff relevant training
- examine the resourcing measures needed to manage SAAP workplaces from an occupational health and safety perspective.
- The strategies are:
 - a safety and security audit of NSW SAAP services piloted with youth SAAP services, the findings of which will be incorporated into the SAAP Program Development Implementation Plan 1995/7
 - the development of health safety and welfare guidelines for manager of SAAP services
 - continuing SAAP training courses on safety and security/occupational violence for staff and management which, subject to successful evaluation, will become a regular component of the NSW SAAP training agenda
 - ensuring future SAAP Funding Agreements include check lists/benchmarks for safety and security
 - a review of Assessment and Referral Procedures, to be implemented in late 1996.

RECOMMENDATION 26 - STAFFING OF SUPPORTED ACCOMMODATION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (SAAP) FUNDED SERVICES

Recommendation:

That the Minister for Community Services ensure that

- services funded under the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program which target young people with behaviour disorders are provided with adequate resources to ensure two staff members are on duty at any one time and
- the additional staffing be used to provide further services, especially training for residents in the management of violence.

Government response:

The Government notes the recommendation.

The Department of Community Services considers that it would be more appropriate to focus on flexible staffing, such as being able to call on a second staff member at peak or crisis times. The Department will further examine this issue in the context of work currently underway to develop the SAAP Program Development Plan 1996/7. Training for SAAP workers in management of violent behaviour has been designed and implemented. Reports from participants are positive and the training will be ongoing.

RECOMMENDATION 27 - ADEQUATE SAAP SERVICES

Recommendation:

That the Minister for Community Services urge his Federal counterpart to ensure that adequate services are available through the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program to provide needy young people in all areas with appropriate accommodation services.

Government response:

The Government reports that the new SAAP agreement has been signed and the outcomes from the last National Review of SAAP have been consulted upon. There are no SAAP growth funds for the term of the current agreement. The Department of Community Services is currently finalising strategies to implement new program directions under the term of the third, five year agreement signed in 1995. The Department is working to ensure that funds are as efficiently targeted as possible. For example it is examining benchmarks, standards and funding formulas, issues of access, referral and assessment and is closely monitoring services that are refusing referrals.

RECOMMENDATION 28 - YOUNG HOMELESS ALLOWANCE & MEDIATION SERVICES

Recommendation:

That the Minister for Community Services urge Federal counterparts to develop further mediation services for families of children applying to receive the Young Homeless Allowance.

Government response:

It is understood that a major feature of the Commonwealth's Youth Homelessness Pilot Program is an emphasis on mediation, and where possible, family reconciliation for those young people applying for the Young Homeless Allowance.

In NSW the Department of Community Services funded the Adolescent-Parent Mediation Project as a pilot under the Community Services Grants Program (Family and Child Support). The aim of the project was to prevent breakdown of family relationships and to avoid premature, permanent parent-adolescent separation. An independent evaluation of the project was based on comparative data collection which involved the mediation service, Adolescent Family Counsellors and District Officers from the Department of Community Services. Workshops, focus groups and interviews were conducted with all the stakeholders. This evaluation is now with the Minister's Office.