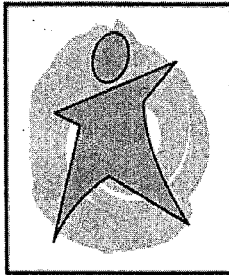


INQUIRY INTO PUBLIC DISTURBANCES AT MACQUARIE FIELDS

Organisation: THE JUNCTION WORKS INC
Name: Ms MAREE MULLINS
Telephone: 02 9606 9628
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Theme:

Summary



THE JUNCTIONWORKS INC.

Supporting People of all Abilities

The Junction Works Submission

To the

Legislative Council Inquiry conducted by

Standing Committee on Social Issues

into public disturbances at Macquarie Fields

November 2005

Preamble

The Junction Works Inc. has been providing services to the community since 1987. We provide a diverse range of programs to young people in Liverpool, Camden and Campbelltown areas.

The Junction Works Inc. Mission Statement is **“create, Choose, Strive, Achieve. At The Junction we inspire, we support, we educate and we care”**

In 2005 The Junction was the successful organization to manage Glenquarie Neighbourhood Centre. The Neighbourhood Centre provides numerous programs that address the needs of the local community (Macquarie Fields, Ingleburn and Glenfield).

Glenquarie Neighbourhood Centre is situated behind Macquarie Fields Police Station. The centre has been in operation since the early 1980s. The centre is a pivotal point of access for residents seeking community services. There are no other generalist community services based in the area.

According to Campbelltown Councils Community (2005) profile the Macquarie Fields historical settlement patterns are;

- 4.2% from the United Kingdom
- 2.3% from New Zealand
- 2.2% from Fiji
- 2.1% from the Philippines

New South Wales Department of Housing provides 28.5% public housing. Home ownership constitutes 24.9%, whilst private rental constitutes 42.4%. Low Income household contribute to 22.3% of the population. The employment status for people who reside in the Macquarie field's area is 11.1% are unemployed 25.2% are employed part-time and; 60% employed full time.

Background

On the 25th of February 2005, a police chase took place which resulted in a motor vehicle accident which tragically claimed the lives of two people.

Two weeks prior to the Macquarie Fields riots, the police conducted a drug raid on home of the driver's aunt. A number of arrests were made pertaining to drug related offences. Whilst this raid was taking place streets were closed and a large number of police were involved. Residents of the estate stated they were frightened and concerned for the safety of their children. There appeared to be a rise in residents' animosity towards the Police.

On the day after the car accident the community have stated **"the streets were full of police cars, helicopters and media"**. A large number of young people were congregating on the streets. Many children and young people did not attend school, due to the increased activity throughout the night. An extremely important aspect to acknowledge was that there was no intervention provided to young people to possibly diffuse the situation. Young people were given information pertaining to the accident which was innuendo.

This misinformation heightened the tensions between the young people and the police. By day three of the riots, the wider community joined in with the violence. The community were angered by the amount of police attending the scene.

Our [redacted] stated **"she witnessed five police officers throw a young girl to the ground, because she swore at them"**. Subsequently her friends made phone contact with other young people, to let them know what had taken place. This resulted with more young people descending on the scene. Our [redacted] asked the police **"Could you not ignore them?"** The Police stated **"They must have respect for the law"**.

A number of young people attempted to antagonise the police by making inappropriate gestures. Our [redacted] stated she heard the police stating **"Do you want to be arrested?"** and **"You should have respect for the police"**

During the riots you could not gain access in or out of the estate. Many families were on their way home from work and could not ascertain if family members were safe. Many did not get into their homes till after 11.00 pm.

The Neighbourhood Centre received calls from women who were victims of domestic violence. When the reports were made to the local police they stated they were too busy with the riots.

Families stated that the streets lights were turned off and how frightened they were. Subsequently the police switched on flood lights into the crowded streets.

Families stated that the noise from both police and media helicopters had disrupted sleep patterns for their children. To this day some children are fearful of helicopters.

The media, who were reporting on the events, in particular Channel Nine and Channel Ten, paid young people, up to \$50.00 to behave badly in front of the cameras. Some reporters purchased cigarettes and alcohol for young people, who were under the age of 15. These incidents were reported to Media Watch, ABC

Many young children have been traumatised by the riots. Children have a very poor image about the Police. Children have reported to us **"cops kill"**. This slogan was used throughout the riots by young people.

A local community worker stated "A woman was holding her 18 month old baby in her neighbour's front yard. The police had decided to enter the house. At the time the police were in formation, one police officer took the baby out of her arms. Three police officers pushed her to the ground. One police officer held her right arm, the second police officer her left arm, the third had his knee if her back. The woman started swearing at the police and stated "what are you doing?" One police officer stated **"come on honey this is how you like it, rough"**.

The police riot strategies appeared to antagonise the community and heighten an already difficult and tense situation. We believe that the local police were influenced by police from outside the local area command.

The Junction would like to acknowledge that in hindsight we all may have instigated different strategies to diffuse a complex situation. However, an improved crisis management plan by the police needs to be developed.

The police have an extremely difficult profession and it with great respect they place their lives on the line for the community.

We are certain that the police also encountered many acts of violence and abuse and they too need some closure on the events that took place. The need to build a collaborative partnership with all stakeholders is essential.

There appears to be some precipitating events that took place prior to the riots which may or may not have contributed to the anxiety state of residents.

Local community services are extremely under resourced and the State government needs to ensure that appropriate services are available to all people who reside in the Macquarie Fields area, In particular young males. Providing a short term, quick fix solution is not in the best interest of the community. It is more beneficial to top up existing service's that have developed a trusting and supportive relationship with the community. In a period of crisis people are often sceptical of outside intervention.

Over the past 6 months we have been involved in meetings which have attempted to provide Premiers Department with the unmet needs in the local area. However no constructive outcomes has eventuated.

The community believed that the State government would assist in developing new programmes to address unmet needs. It is my understanding that residents feel let down and have an increased distrust of government.

There are many residents who were not involved in the riots and they feel strongly about the poor image the media has portrayed about Macquarie fields.

Maree Mullins

CEO

The Junction Works Inc

RECOMMENDATION ONE

That the State government improve the level of service provision for the residents of Macquarie Fields. In particular, services that address violence and drug and alcohol abuse in the young male population. To top up existing services and not bring in agencies that are unknown.

RECOMMENDATION TWO

Those residents who suffered emotional trauma are offered counselling. In particular children and frail aged people.

RECOMMENDATION THREE

Community services to conduct community events to promote a positive image of the police.

RECOMMENDATION FOUR

Community services should be based at Macquarie Fields to ensure the best possible delivery of service.

RECOMMENDATION FIVE

For both State and Local government to provide ongoing consultation process to ensure that the community is an active stakeholder in the planning process.

RECOMMENDATION SIX

Improved transport systems with the northern Campbelltown areas.

RECOMMENDATION SEVEN

The Dept of Housing to provide a Housing Communities Assistance worker for the Macquarie Fields residents.

RECOMMENDATION EIGHT

To provide positive media stories about the community of Macquarie Fields.