

INQUIRY INTO ISSUES RELATING TO REDFERN/WATERLOO

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Summary



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ISSUES RELATING TO REDFERN/WATERLOO

SOCIAL COHESION AND SOCIAL DISADVANTAGE

In his recent study "*Community Adversity and Resilience: the distribution of social disadvantage in Victoria and New South Wales and the mediating role of social cohesion*",¹ Tony Vinson describes the following social disadvantage factors:

- Unemployment
- Low income
- Early school leaving
- Unskilled workers
- Low birth weight
- Child abuse
- Psychiatric hospital admissions
- Criminal offence convictions
- Child injuries
- Imprisonment
- Threat severance electric supply
- Mortality
- Disability/sickness allowance

¹ Published by the Ignatius Centre for Social Policy and Research, 2004

He warns that those areas of NSW and Victoria that exhibit higher rates of these factors need to have their complex needs addressed by government or they may become "No Go Zones" in coming years.

We know that there are parts of Redfern and Waterloo where the above factors are exhibited to an alarming degree. These factors are also exacerbated by the presence of a disturbing and sinister illegal drug trade. These factors are also mirrored in the headline indicators of the federal government's report "*Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2003*". That report suggested that improvements in the following indicators (inter alia) would mean a decrease in social disadvantage for indigenous populations:

- Life expectancy at birth
- Rates of disability and/or core activity restriction
- Years 10 and 12 retention and attainment
- Labour force participation
- Household and individual income
- Home ownership
- Suicide and self-harm
- Victim rates for crime
- Imprisonment and juvenile detention rates

It was obvious, even before the "Redfern riot" that significant parts of the Redfern and Waterloo community experienced social disadvantage. It must be noted that crime and victimization of crime is only one indicator of disadvantage and the only one where policing has a major role to play. It must also be noted that none of the indicators stands isolated from the others. Unemployment is a major factor in increased crime, as is substance abuse. Early school leaving and lack of skills is a factor in higher unemployment levels. Unemployment is a

factor in substance abuse. All of the above are indicators of a higher risk of child neglect and abuse and higher suicide rates.

The recent gentrification of large areas of Redfern has resulted in the removal of many small businesses and factories that were sources of employment. There has been a concentration of crime in smaller pockets, particularly around the Block.

It would be seriously flawed to suggest that police alone are able to address the problems of Redfern and Waterloo or that changes in policing will have a major impact on the serious social problems. It becomes clear that a whole of government strategy is required to begin to develop inroads. The most that policing can do on its own is to contain the more overt symptoms from the broader public eye and remove some of the external factors (such as the drug trade) that exacerbate these problems.

COUNCIL FOR EUROPE

In May 2000, the European Committee for Social Cohesion (CDCS), a committee of the Council for Europe, adopted its Strategy for Social Cohesion. This policy developed the concept of social cohesion in communities where there were mechanisms and institutions which prevented the factors of division (such as an excessive gap between rich and poor or the multiple forms of discrimination) from becoming so acute as to endanger social harmony;

According to the CDCS, social cohesion policies should, inter alia, meet people's basic needs and promote access to social rights, particularly in the fields of employment, education, health, social protection and housing. They should also establish forums and procedures enabling the underprivileged and those whose

rights are insufficiently upheld to make themselves heard, and develop an integrated approach bringing together all the relevant fields of action.

THE UNITED KINGDOM

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation in the United Kingdom sponsored a study of advantaged and disadvantaged communities and identified some of the significant factors of disadvantaged communities:

The physical environment and the loss of resources

The neighbourhood environment has important social consequences. One of the most significant factors undermining local confidence was a strong sense of physical deterioration, loss and abandonment by the statutory services. Older, historic buildings are fundamental to residents' sense of place and the loss or decline of such 'landmark' buildings led to an acute feeling of lost heritage, pride, status and identity. Other changes, such as new housing developments, could not overcome the overriding sense that the neighbourhood had lost its heart, the community had lost control, and the local authority had lost interest in its future. There was a yearning for the collective sense of identity which such older, historically and socially important buildings could provide.

Pessimism was also produced by the (re)appearance of empty houses within a neighbourhood, and the lack of attention to the management of green spaces. Communities could not understand the presence of empty houses whilst local young people wanted accommodation. Although there may be valid reasons for this, for residents it confirmed that they were fighting a losing battle to save their neighbourhoods.

The physical environment is important for community morale and social interaction. The disadvantaged neighbourhoods lacked material resources and jobs. Most of the areas studied were physically isolated and in areas of industrial decline. The closure/ deterioration of 'landmark' local buildings had led to a loss of pride in the area's heritage, feelings of powerlessness and a lack of confidence. There was a strong sense of 'community lost' in some areas.

Bringing the community together

A lack of organised community activities and sufficient community facilities hindered the process of building social bridges between groups within the neighbourhood. Shops, cafés, youth clubs, sports and social facilities were generally linked with the potential for a better quality of life. A community development approach can help to foster supportive networks and relationships of trust. The reinstatement of a local public service presence in disadvantaged areas could also help to rebuild confidence.

Resident representative structures fail to deliver the control most residents want

Elaborate hierarchical representative structures have not achieved a sense of power or inclusion for less involved residents. Residents wanted to be in control of deciding priorities which professionals would then pursue on their behalf. In particular, they wanted greater priority for everyday concerns relating to local public services relative to "big (regeneration) ideas".

PR for neighbourhoods and links to the wider urban area are vital

Regeneration strategies need to involve image management in order to bring these neighbourhoods into the mainstream. To make them less invisible, more reasons need to be created for outsiders to go into the area and greater resources are needed for residents to take part in the life of the wider area.

Better links are required between urban development strategies and area regeneration programmes.

A bad reputation

Residents living in estates with a bad reputation felt stigmatised and thought that this led to active discrimination. In general, young people particularly resented the sharp, persistent but often unwarranted labeling that they experienced.

Inadequate consultation and resident involvement in regeneration

Residents wanted to be consulted if this could be shown to make a difference in the decision-making process, but many people did not believe this is the case.

Inadequate prioritisation given to public services within regeneration activities

Residents had concerns about everyday issues of public service, which they felt regeneration had ignored because it tended to focus on big projects. Residents wanted the rationalisation and withdrawal of the local public service presence in their areas reversed. Such public service withdrawal affected not only the local quality of the service in question, but also the confidence in the future of the area on the part of the community and other service providers.

Lack of inclusion in the wider urban area

Joblessness was seen as lying at the root of many social problems in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. While skill shortages are a barrier for many unemployed people, even where there were significant economic developments occurring nearby, residents of disadvantaged areas were often pessimistic about their prospects of even being considered for whatever jobs were to be on offer.

Residents of disadvantaged areas are looking for some confidence that they can access jobs in the wider urban area. This is important for both social and economic reasons, and to give such communities optimism for the future. The

regeneration task for disadvantaged neighbourhoods is thus about more than their internal renewal and functioning. It is about their connections with the wider urban society and economy.

The studies found both physical barriers, such as lack of adequate transport, and psychological barriers to reconnecting disadvantaged neighbourhoods to the urban area of which they are part. Better transport links to the rest of the urban area are an essential requirement in this respect. But more fundamental was a need to break down the psychological barriers to integration, both on the part of the residents of disadvantaged areas and of other city dwellers. Appropriate resources to enable residents to take part in more activities further afield were often lacking. The horizons of some residents were therefore limited so that they could not see what the wider urban area had to offer them. Conversely, the neighbourhoods themselves were insufficiently opened up to outsiders so that the wider population could not see what the disadvantaged neighbourhoods might offer them. There were insufficient reasons for people to go into or to pass through the neighbourhoods.

This rather lengthy preamble is to make it clear that a far broader and visionary approach needs to be taken to address the problems at Redfern and Waterloo – an approach that must involve creative problem solving by all agencies that have an interest in these areas (employment, health, education, community services, housing and law). When many of these agencies leave the areas at the end of the day, police are left to “pick up the pieces”. When things go wrong – it is the police who are expected to provide solutions.

POLICING

Policing resources and strategies

After the recent riot at Redfern, the NSW Police established Taskforce COBURN to address the operational needs of such situations. The Association has presented an extensive submission to that taskforce regarding the need to re-establish a permanent OSG presence in NSW. That taskforce will make its own recommendations regarding resources. We are prepared to make a copy of our submission available to the Standing Committee if it so wishes.

There are a number of other strategies that may assist police to better perform their duties in the Redfern/Waterloo area:

- Police new to the command should receive a reasonably in depth orientation to the community and relevant issues. Selection of officers to police in an area with the specific problems of Redfern and Waterloo should ensure that those police are sensitive to the needs of the community and trained in the unique policing strategies that are required. These officers should have an understanding of the cultural differences of the local community. This strategy has been used successfully in other commands such as Cabramatta, where the local community cultural mix requires particular understanding from police.
- There should be a permanent OSG readily available to the Redfern LAC, or have as many police as possible that are attached to Redfern receive similar training to the OSG. This is addressed in our submission to COBURN.
- The social activities conducted by the many community groups should be better co-ordinated to avoid clashes eg. Church groups on Saturdays, charity groups on Sundays and Police on Monday. Police feel that it is too much and quite often one loses out. There needs to be better cooperation and coordination between the groups.
- More attention needs to be given to the very serious drug trade that is operating in Redfern. The successful targeting of drug dealers and users in Cabramatta has had a significant impact on the quality of life of local residents.

Existing local, state and federal government programs

- The education system may just not be offering local children the appropriate form of education. A large number of them get bored at school, therefore truancy is high. Since there are no activities for them outside of school, they get bored on the street and so on and so on. A creative approach to schooling needs to be utilised – it is clear that many of these children are not suited to traditional forms of education. Experimental schools that operate in the context of the children's cultural background need to be explored as an alternative to traditional forms of school.
- There is no program in existence to help those children that are expelled from schools. Apparently they are handed an education package and are left to complete it. There is no system in place to follow up these kids therefore it is never completed.
- DOCS are not empowered to become involved early but appear to wait until they are forced to take action. The police state that a large number of their offenders should not be there in the first place, but because it takes DOCS so long to remove them, they offend.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The problems of Redfern/Waterloo do not have their genesis in the area alone and neither are the solutions to be found there. To expect policing on its own to have any more than a containment effect would be over ambitious. A whole of government approach is required, where innovative service provision is explored in cooperation with the local community.

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