

## **INQUIRY INTO PUBLIC DISTURBANCES AT MACQUARIE FIELDS**

**Organisation:** Northern Campbelltown Community Action Group (NAB) Inc  
**Name:** ---  
**Telephone:**  
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**Theme:**

**Summary**

The Director,  
Standing Committee on Social Issues,  
Legislative Council,  
Parliament House,  
Macquarie Street,  
SYDNEY 2000

2<sup>nd</sup> November 2005

The Northern Campbelltown Community Action Group (NAB) Inc (NCCAG) is a new group consisting of residents and service providers from the Macquarie Fields, Ingleburn and Glenfield area. This submission is the result of informal discussions with residents of Macquarie Fields, with responses grouped according to the terms of reference for the Inquiry into Public Disturbances at Macquarie Fields.

**Residents requested that their identifying information was not made public. We have made every effort to keep any identifying information private and confidential and request that this be respected.**

Residents raised the following questions and concerns:

**a) Policing Strategies and resources**

- Could the deaths of the two young people in the car smash have been prevented? If the young people were under surveillance and the police knew the car they were about to use was stolen, could the police have intervened earlier to prevent the car chase from occurring?
- The police response was heavy handed, with the whole public housing estate being blockaded. People who had done nothing wrong were treated like criminals. Innocent people got caught up in the riot police marches while just trying to find out what was going on. Children were terrified. Even elderly people were subjected to bag searches.
- Residents described living through the riots as like being "in a war zone for four days". One resident said: "Helicopters still make me cringe. People are suffering from post traumatic stress disorder."
- The style of the police response has left a negative legacy for the relationship between residents and the police. As one resident commented: "In Macquarie Fields, it is not good to be seen to be associated with the police. If they come to your door, you just want to get rid of them as soon as possible."
- Despite all that has happened, local people feel that the police do not really listen to or respect community members. One resident who attended a community forum in October said of the police: "It seemed like they didn't really want to hear what we had to say."

**b) Government programs and service provision**

- Macquarie Fields has seen many government programs come and go. Within the community, there is much cynicism about government programs which “promise the world but don’t deliver”.
- Unrealistic welfare payments play a significant role in the problems experienced in Macquarie Fields. Many families live below the poverty line. Their inadequate income contributes significantly to the stress and the problems they face.
- Residents of Macquarie Fields public housing estate believe their community is often neglected by government services, including local government. One resident commented: “Council cleaned up after the riots each day and the place never looked better. We never get that sort of service usually.” Street lighting at night is bad, residents have difficulty getting rubbish removed and dog control is very poor.
- One resident spoke of the need for counselling services for families, children and young people. “My children wouldn’t go to counseling without me but they wouldn’t let us go together so they didn’t go and I had to try to counsel them”.
- The attitude of some service providers is also a concern. “Some think that we don’t care, so why should they bother with us.”
- One resident asked why this Public Inquiry has taken so long. “Do they want us to forget?”

**c) Non-government services and service provision**

- Residents of Macquarie Fields recognise some non-government services as very worthwhile and believe the co-operation between many agencies is excellent. The Macquarie Fields, Ingleburn and Glenfield Interagency (MIG) provides a valuable forum for networking between agencies, enabling them to work together to do more with their limited funding. The Northern Campbelltown Community Action Group plays an important role in bringing residents and service providers together. Two community programs connected to local schools are highly valued – the Schools as Community Centres program and the Primary Connect program at Guise Primary School.
- Valuable programs, however, are often lost because of poor funding decisions by governments. The Primary Connect program at Guise Primary School is about to close because it has lost its State Government funding. Residents believe community programs which have proven their value must be given priority in funding decisions. Too many worthwhile programs are given short-term funding only.
- Residents are wary of services conducting surveys and then not following them up. “Macquarie Fields has been surveyed out,” one resident commented. “People are tired of being asked, especially when promises are never delivered on.” When a new community worker or service comes into an area, they often experience a period of testing, until trust is established. One resident’s advice to community service providers is: “Just start the programs and, if they are good, we will come. Don’t consult us and then not do anything.

Youth off the Streets found that young people did not want to be consulted; they just wanted something to happen for them.”

- Limited service times and the retention of staff can undermine the effectiveness of some services, with the Macquarie Fields Youth Centre nominated as an example of this.

**d) The underlying causes and problems which may have contributed to individual and collective acts of violence and social disorder.**

Residents identified the following underlying causes and problems:

- The lack of police response in Macquarie Fields has been a problem for years prior to the riots. Police regularly did not respond as needed when people reported domestic violence or break-ins. “When police don’t follow up acts of violence against us, we want to take the law into our own hands,” one resident said. “Some parents have guns. Some have them for safety, some for status. You wouldn’t want to be waiting for the police to show up in any confrontation.”
- The relationship between police and the community in Macquarie Fields remains poor. Children have no respect for the police, as they know the police have no authority over children. In the past, the police used to build relationships with local young people by playing baseball with them. The elderly in this area are bullied by children; they are scared in their own community. The elderly need help to learn self-defence. “Community workers, police and politicians need to be based on the estate or to live here to really understand what it is like for us.”
- Drug dealing and bullying are significant local problems. “People are too afraid to say anything for fear of reprisals. There is a code that says you shut your mouth for your own safety.” More potent illegal drugs are widely available and are contributing to mental health issues.
- Mental health services are inadequate. “Depression is common. The lack of being able to change anything leads to powerlessness. We want to help but how?”
- The disadvantage of people on welfare benefits is growing as the division between rich and poor continues to grow. The lack of parenting and living skills is now generational.
- For families from other cultures, there is a cultural breakdown between generations. Young people are adopting “Aussie” cultural mores, while parents try and fail to maintain traditional discipline.
- Young people are among the most disadvantaged in Macquarie Fields. “Kids get nothing. They have been asking for a skate park for years.”
- The media contributed greatly both to the harassment during the riots and the negative image of Macquarie Fields. “The media needs to be policed,” one resident commented. “They were offering bribes of money, as well as buying alcohol and cigarettes for underage kids to get them to talk to them during the riots. When challenged, they said ‘you prove it’ but we’re not the ones with the cameras.” Morale in Macquarie Fields is at an all time low. Local people want the media to “back off” and give the community time

to rebuild. Some residents fear that continuing negative publicity from programs like "Today Tonight" could spark a new crisis.

Despite these many problems, many long-term residents remain resilient. "We're still here and we're not going anywhere. I don't care what they say." This resilience is a real strength of the Macquarie Fields community, a positive which can be built on. "We support each other in tough times. We come together in times of crisis. If we think someone is getting a raw deal, we advocate for them. If we use baseball bats to do that, it's because we're not going to ring the police or trust service providers to help us."

**e) Any other matters**

During the riots, young people came into the area from other districts, looking to create trouble. However, it was Macquarie Fields which gained the bad reputation, not the communities these young people came from.

The experience of the riots has heightened the Macquarie Fields community's sense of isolation. One resident commented: "The riots make us more insular as a community. We are not trusting. We feel we need to protect ourselves from outer society."

**Return address**

On behalf of the Northern Campbelltown Community Action Group (NAB) Inc.  
C/- PO Box 1076G  
Glenquarie 2564