

Submission
No 38

INQUIRY INTO BULLYING OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

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Scouts Australia – New South Wales

Response to the
New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry
Into Bullying of Children and Young People

Scouts

No place for Bullies

Submitted by

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New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry Into Bullying of Children and Young People

Response

Scouts - No Place for Bullies

Summary

For more than 100 years Scouting has been encouraging and supporting young people to make use of their energies in positive ways.

In our experience Scouting prevents bullying through a program that requires

- teamwork and overcoming challenges in a peer group,
- interactions across age groups,
- promotes tolerance based on a values framework, across broad socio-economic (and religious) groups
- young people to develop strategies for interacting in social groups and ameliorate the effects of bullying if they do experience it
- And provides young people with the benefit from adult role models outside the family group.

There is no place for bullying, and little or no opportunity for such negative behavioural patterns to emerge within Scouting.

Greater support for proven programs such as those provided by Scouts would

- help make the benefits accessible to all young people in New South Wales, and
- Help ameliorate the societal issues stemming from negative, destructive behavioural patterns such as bullying.

We are happy to share and discuss our experience with the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Bullying of Children and Young People.

Background

Scouts is the largest youth development organisation in Australia and is a leader in the non-formal education sector. The Scouting Program prepares young people (female and male) aged 6-26 for business and community leadership. Australian Scouting is strong with around 60,000 male and female members, and in 2008 celebrated its' Centenary Year. **In NSW more than 20,000 young people and adults are members of Scouts, supported by some 3,000 or more volunteers.**

Over the past 100 years Scouts has taught millions of young Australians resourcefulness, self-reliance, leadership, decision making, and concern for their community and the environment. Many of these young people have used the skills and confidence gained in Scouts to achieve success in their careers or make other community contributions. Scouts aim is to help children and young people achieve their full potential in life. This is done through individualised, fun, adventurous, challenging, leadership and teamwork-oriented programs. Scouts regularly reviews and expands its programs for young people, continually changing the activities on offer, to keep up with contemporary interests. "Be Prepared" is the well known motto for Scouts, and sums up the essence of what Scouting aims to teach young people.

Scouts delivers a wide range of programs across New South Wales to enhance youth development and build community. For more than 100 years we have been continually providing the community with young Australians who have a wider range of skills, understanding, knowledge and leadership ability than that normally gained through formal education systems.

Scouts Australia New South Wales is well positioned to provide informed comment to the New South Wales Parliamentary Inquiry into Bullying of Children and Young People.

Scouting Sections

Scouting is programmed in age-appropriate sections, as follows;

- Joey Scouts - 6 to 7.5 years of age.
- Cub Scouts - 7.5 to 10.5 years of age.
- Scouts - 10.5 to 14.5 years of age.
- Venturer Scouts - 14.5 to 17.5 years of age.
- Rovers - 17.5 to 26 years of age.
- Adult Leaders and Support Members

Introduction

Scouts – No Place for Bullies

"What is bullying and harassment?"

"Bullying and harassment occur when people use and abuse power to trouble, annoy or oppress a person."¹

(Australian Education Authorities 'Bullying No Way' website resource for schools, parents and children)

"Deliberate psychological, emotional and/or physical harassment of one person by another, or a group, occurring at school or in transit between school and home. Includes exclusion from peer group, intimidation, extortion and violence"²

(Kids Help Line)

These two definitions go to the core of community understanding of 'bullying'. They underscore the very real reasons parents, children and educators are concerned at the extent of bullying and both its immediate and longer term impacts on the individual and society.

Kids Help Line (KHL) also provides a valuable point of reference for current feedback from young victims of bullying. *"The young people that call KHL regarding bullying identify a variety of reasons for their victimisation. These reasons include ethnicity, resistance to pressure to behave in a certain way, physical differences, high achievement, being new, sexual orientation, socio-economic background. Individuals who have low self-esteem or personal power can also be targeted."³*

This submission focuses on successful approaches used within Scouting to prevent negative social behaviours such as bullying, and to nurture appropriate development in young people. With an emphasis on peace, education and understanding, Scouting transcends all cultures, religions, races, politics, age and gender barriers⁴... Scouting addresses many of the underlying reasons for bullying identified by KHL and others, and has more than 100 years experience in doing so. With appropriate support for organisations such as Scouts, these strategies could be shared further with the young people of New South Wales.

¹ <http://www.bullyingnoway.com.au/chillout/bullying.shtml>

² See www.kidshelp.com.au

³ <http://www.kidshelp.com.au/template/standard.aspx?s=167&p=425&r=105&b=2>

⁴ <http://www.scouts.com.au/>

Inquiry Response

This submission addresses two of the Inquiry's Terms of Reference.

- 3. Prevention and early intervention approaches to address bullying**
- 6. Approaches to address bullying in Australian and overseas jurisdictions**

(We do not propose comment specifically on cyber-bullying)

Scouts – Foundations

1. Values and structure are proven to build self confidence and resilience, and prevent negative social behaviours emerging

Scouts is a non-political organisation with no religious affiliations⁵. It does, however, have a clearly defined set of values which young people are introduced to from the time they join Scouts. This could be as early as 6 years old, when a Joey Scout is taught "*A Joey Scout cares, a Joey Scout shares*". This basic statement of values is developed as the child ages and is able to process more complex information. A 7-10yr old Cub Scout "*is loyal and obedient. A Cub Scout does not give into themselves.*" By the time a member progresses to the Scout section (aged 11-15 yrs) they are encouraged to live by the Scout law:

*"A Scout is trustworthy
A Scout is loyal
A Scout is helpful
A Scout is friendly
A Scout is cheerful
A Scout is considerate
A Scout is thrifty
A Scout is courageous
A Scout is respectful
A Scout cares for the environment"*

When a young person becomes a Scout they could find themselves exploring a mountain wilderness, at the controls of a glider plane, helping in emergency rescues, operating a radio station, photographing wild animals, sending coded messages, searching for gold, canoeing down a swift river, camping out, recording songs or sailing across the ocean with the salt spray in their face.

⁵ Note that Scouts recognizes and accepts all religions. Members are expected to acknowledge spirituality, through recognition of 'their God', a growing understanding of themselves and an holistic awareness of the world beyond self.

Importantly, all activities are underpinned by the clearly defined values outlined above. They take place within a well developed operational structure. And include ever increasing levels of directed risk-taking.

Scouting sees risk taking as an important contributor to growth of the individual. Scouts have the opportunity to test themselves and release the exuberant energy of adolescence in 'safe' yet challenging ways. This always takes place within a (sometimes unseen) structure which protects participants but does not extinguish the *sense* of risk (and reward). Participation in such activities builds resilience, respect and self confidence. These qualities mean bullying behaviour is not contemplated and help make a Scout less likely to be a victim of bullying. The frustrations many young people feel in today's restrictive and danger-conscious society are much less likely to play out as aggression and bullying for those involved in Scouting.

In our experience, the structure and values underpinning activities offered by Scouts are effective tools for preventing the emergence of negative social behaviours including bullying. Beyond prevention, Scouting provides a positive framework for developing community minded children and young people who often become the leaders of tomorrow.

2. Community Connections

Stephen Biddulph, well known Australian family therapist and author says the following in his book 'Manhood'⁶

"We've already said that men are absent from the lives of little boys. So are older boys, since in our society we isolate each age group and expect them to mix only with same-age, same-sex children. This is an odd arrangement, since little boys love to be around older boys in every village and slum and tribe around the world. By comparison, the world of the little boy in primary school is a harsh and scary one. Because there is no natural leadership from older children, the group is unskilled in cohesiveness and lacks real protection. It becomes the law of the jungle – the kind of conditions portrayed in 'Lord of the Flies'".

Scouting is somewhat unique in providing peer-to-peer support across the transition from childhood to young adulthood, through its Cubs (ages 7-10) and Scouts (10-15 years) programs. On a weekly basis children interact with peers across various age ranges, across the transition from primary to high school, and across different community backgrounds. Members of each Scout group are likely to come from various local schools and school years.

⁶ "Manhood, An action plan for changing men's lives", Stephen Biddulph, page 156-7, 3rd ed 2002, Finch Publishing Pty Ltd, Sydney

Consequently, the Scouting structure provides young people with increased linkages and support in the community. Peers provide age appropriate role models, and young people have the opportunity to form relationships beyond their family, school or sporting networks.

Stephen Biddulph's "*natural leadership from older children*" can be found in Scouts, and is a major contributor to the success the organisation has in nurturing young people through peer-to-peer connectedness. Bullying is less likely to emerge or be tolerated when 'natural (positive) leadership from older children' is present.

3. Role Modelling

Scouts provides a non-competitive environment where all young people (rather than either girls or boys) are able and expected to lead, and to undertake the same (physical or other) challenges. Scouts believes both girls and boys benefit from this in mixed gender groups. The experience and role modelling of 'equal opportunity' can be a formative and life changing experience for many children. It may be one of the few times children in their formative years interact with a mixed-gender, mixed-age group.

Operational structures within Scouting, such as the 'Troop Council' and 'Patrol' system formalise peer support in a systematic way that is managed by the youth members themselves. These systems are self-governing, require members to take responsibility, and rely on respect and role modelling. **Negative social behaviour such as bullying is often ameliorated by role modelling and positive peer group pressure.**

Through Scouting young people also benefit from exposure to adult role models from all walks of life. Scouts interact with adult Leaders from their own group, other Scout groups and with outside specialists through arranged activities. They regularly interact with adults outside their own family group and are in the company of strong role models. They become part of a broader community under the watchful eye of adult Leaders who take responsibility and FUN seriously! There is little opportunity or desire to develop a bullying habit.

Scouts - Operations

4. Prevention – An organisational approach

Values, structure, community connectedness and role modelling are all part of the foundations of Scouting. They are overlaid by well developed operating practices, including extensive training for adult Leaders. All Leaders go through a standard training process which prepares them for the challenges, and FUN of

guiding an exuberant group of young people. The training program has been developed systematically over the past 100 years of experience and success. Nationally, and across New South Wales, volunteer leaders continually appraise and update training to respond to contemporary needs. The quality of Scouts training for adult leaders is evidenced in the organisation's recognition as an accredited training provider. Scouts training is sufficiently thorough and well regarded that Scouting qualifications are accredited toward various certificate and diploma awards.

Thorough training means local Leaders are comprehensively supported across all elements of group operations; including management of behavioural issues should they arise. In addition, adults at senior levels in Scouting are appointed to roles which leverage their professional skills, and are available to advise local Leaders. Protocols are in place for local Leaders to call on other adults in Scouting for support, advice and guidance. Resources such as web based Leaders Guides, and specialist information are readily available. The following paragraph is based on an internet resource available to all Leaders in Scouts Australia – NSW, entitled 'Teenagers', and reaffirms Scouts approach to managing behavior positively.

Teenagers

Why are they so irresponsible? Why do they take so much risk?

...Can Scouting help?

- Definitely, it holds a very strong solution to help youth grow into meaningful adults.
- We should be giving members a variety of challenging activities that channels their risk taking impulsive behaviour in a way that is satisfying and safe.
- Focusing discussions around modern day issues is important. (e.g. News items on TV and adolescent issues that appear in the media)
- Planning, decision making, values and ethics, challenges that extend members, safely, will all contribute to growing the brain pathways that support 'executive functioning' and good decision making throughout life
- The Troop Council and Unit Council are also very essential (as they are self governing systems run by youth members themselves), but we must remember that young people are with Scouts to learn and acquire skills. They are still to develop their 'executive function' skills, but this could be the ideal place for those skills to develop.
- It is also an excellent place for girls to take part in the some more masculine risk taking behaviour (abseiling, white water rafting) and males in the feminine emotive such as discussions and socialising.
- Coaching/guidance are necessary, but not advice giving, leaders need to offer alternatives for youth members to consider. It's all about learning.

Adult leaders in Scouting are well versed, well supported and well resourced should they need to deal with negative social behaviours. Together with the underlying ethos of Scouting, this has been shown to be an effective method to prevent negative social behaviours – and further, to positively contribute to developing well rounded and community minded individuals.

Bullying has no place or opportunity to gain a foot hold in Scouts. Scouts provides a strong example of an organisational approach to preventing bullying. This experience could be shared more widely, to the benefit of children and young people throughout New South Wales.

A final note:

Often the pressure is placed on the education system to implement further strategies in the area of youth policy. Aside from the debatable philosophy around appropriateness of relying on the education system to implement social policy, already crowded curriculums make this a very challenging role for schools to take on. Continual government support of Scouting in all socio-economic areas would help take the pressure of schools in this area by providing an appropriate avenue for young people to develop socially in proven safe environment.

In Conclusion

In the words of KHL *"It is now recognised that there is an indisputable link between bullying in childhood and adolescent anxiety, low self-esteem, loss of confidence and depression and self-harm"*⁷.

In our experience Scouting prevents bullying through a program that requires

- teamwork and overcoming challenges in a peer group,
- interactions across age groups,
- promotes tolerance based on a values framework, across broad socio-economic (and religious) groups
- young people to develop strategies for interacting in social groups and ameliorate the effects of bullying if they do experience it
- And provides young people with the benefit from adult role models outside the family group.

There is no place for bullying, and little or no opportunity for such negative behavioural patterns to emerge within Scouting.

For over 100 years Australian Scouting has successfully implemented these strategies, to help develop the leaders of tomorrow.

⁷ <http://www.kidshelp.com.au/template/standard.aspx?s=167&p=425&r=105&b=2>

Support for proven programs such as those provided by Scouts would;

- **help make the benefits of these programs accessible to all young people in New South Wales, and**
- **Help ameliorate the societal issues stemming from negative, destructive behavioural patterns such as bullying.**

Please contact us for further information regarding the success Scouts Australia New South Wales has had in addressing and preventing bullying – and going further to develop well rounded and community minded young people. We are happy to support the Parliamentary Inquiry into Bullying of Children and Young People in whatever way possible.