

**SUBMISSION TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL ISSUES IN
REGARDS TO THE INQUIRY INTO ISSUES RELATING TO
REDFERN/WATERLOO.**

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Summary

This document has been prepared as my personal submission as a local resident to the standing committee on social issues for the inquiry into issues relating to Redfern/Waterloo. This document includes relevant facts, opinions and recommendations to this inquiry.

Policing strategies and resources are discussed and my opinion of the present strengths and weaknesses within the justice system are discussed.

I have some comments on the abysmal state of DOCs and some ideas of how the Department of Housing can contribute to a better future locally.

I have observed some of the workings of NGO's in the area and am concerned with their ability to avoid duplication and deliver what people in the area really need.

The RWPP from my perspective has performed poorly however I hope that there are some strategic lessons if not technical learning's from it.

In relation to the future of the block I have outlined what I see as three of the main alternatives for its future. All of which are viable but each have differing degrees of compromise or implementation difficulties.

In essence I am attempting to tell it how it is. What I observe and become cognisant of by living in the area.

Comment on Policing Strategies and Resources in the Redfern/Waterloo Area

Policing in this area is of prime importance for all residents. The area has a notoriously high rate of crime. Over the last ten years it has been my experience as a resident in the area around The Block (Bounded by Eveleigh, Vine, Louis and Lawson Streets) has been one of increasing levels of crime, drug abuse and antisocial behaviour. In my opinion less than half of all crime is reported. I state this on the basis of the amount of crime I am told about by victims and the amount that actually gets reported by the same victims.

Previous plans to close Redfern Police station and incorporate it into an area "Super Command" located outside the area would have been disastrous. Redfern has several

peculiarities to its crime in comparison to other areas. It is my belief that the police who work in this area require specialised skills to deal with the type of crime in the area.

In all of my contact with the Redfern Police they have been co-operative and helpful. In my experience response times have generally been adequate for the type of incident reported. The police appear to be doing the best job that they can given the limited resources and lack of support that they receive.

I believe that the present Redfern Police Station in Turner St. Redfern is woefully inadequate for the work being performed there. It appears to be a largely antiquated building in need of substantial upgrading to meet current Building codes and OH&S requirements. The working environment appears to be extremely cramped, awkward and far from user friendly.

In my opinion not only does the working space fail to meet modern standards but also the building design is far from optimal for the type of policing required now. From the street alone the building appears quite vulnerable to the type of attack that was recently conducted against Redfern Railway Station.

The police obviously cannot act upon crime that is not reported. However the crime that goes unreported generally does so as people often perceive that there is no point in reporting the crime for the reason that there is nothing the police can do. This in itself is a self defeating circle.

To break this there needs to be improved perception about police powers. This requires greater engagement by police of the law abiding citizens (or crime victims) of the area. People need to be educated as to what police do on all levels from beat patrols to strategic planning. I suggest that neighbourhood watch be invigorated in this region and that an officer be appointed solely for implementing and overseeing this. The role must be separated from the current community liaison officer and must have demonstrable KPI's.

Further to this and more importantly there appears to be a failing within the judiciary system. Much of the crime that occurs in the area is caused by repeat (serial) offenders. The question begs to be asked why are these people allowed back into the community before they have been reformed? Does the correctional system work at all?

The cry of police brutality and racism is often heard in the area. From what I have seen this is entirely fictional and is fabricated by those wishing to evade justice. For instance I have occasionally seen the police enter The Block to arrest a suspect. The person invariably has resisted arrest and has struggled- usually with the result of injuring one or more officers. At the same time they will scream for assistance from others in the area and tell them to act as witnesses to "police brutality". I can in no way consider an officer to be brutal by placing an armlock, handcuffs or pinning a person to the ground after they have been assaulted by said person.

It is my conviction that people of aboriginal lineage who have participated in acts of crime use their aboriginality and the reconciliation issue as a shield to hide behind.

They have argued that because they were first citizens it is their right to defy the law and it is their right to perpetrate crime on other people. I find it shameful that the whole reconciliation issue can be treated in such an abhorrent way.

Juveniles commit much of the crime I have witnessed. In particular those in their young teens and even pre adolescent (under 10 years of age). Much of this crime goes unreported and is poorly pursued by police if pursued at all. The reasons for this seem to be that it is difficult crime to investigate and prosecute, the chances of completing a successful prosecution are slim, and the offenders if prosecuted often do not feel the impact of their crimes.

In essence the justice system does not seem to comprehend or is capable of dealing with the wickedness of these maladjusted children. The children have limited if any parental supervision- in some cases any supervision is likely to be negative. For instance children are often used in break and enters. Adults perform the initial forced entry the child is then sent in to perform the theft. Children are also used as drug couriers to deliver illegal drugs to the residences of dealers. This is done as it is known that children are near immune from prosecution. It is a strange sight to see nine year old children tendering \$100 dollar notes to buy a bag of lollies at the local store. These poor children cannot even count the change they are given.

It is reputed in the area that these children are also the victims of physical and sexual assaults. It is difficult to comprehend how these children can be left in an area where the only adult supervision seems to be training the children to perform crimes. I can only surmise that in general these problem children have Aboriginal parents. It is now considered politically and socially unacceptable to remove Aboriginal children from their parents in the wake of the "Stolen Generation" saga. These being said it must be observed that the children are the victims of failure- their parents have failed, their relatives have failed, and all government departments have failed. I can not imagine that these children have any future except illiteracy, innumeracy, drug addiction, crime, imprisonment and most likely early death. These children need to be removed from these negative circumstances and placed in an environment that can correct their way of life now. I have limited experience in this field but I would suggest functional aboriginal communities that are prepared to accept individuals and provide the necessary support and discipline to give them an alternate future.

The crime and antisocial behaviour in Redfern is like an iceberg. There is a small amount visible at all times but the rest is obscured just out of sight. Long term residents know this and can gauge the temper of the area by the amount of "visible" crime. As this increases (as it did prior to the recent riots) the more the underlying or more serious crime increases. Typical examples of "visible" crime and antisocial behaviour are: Boarding trains and using the railway station without a ticket, smashing car/house windows for enjoyment, theft from cars, verbal abuse of passersby, demanding money with menace, physically intimidating behaviour, indecent assault of young women, smashing bottles in the street, throwing objects at cars/pedestrians/trains, illegal drug dealing, illegal drug taking, consuming alcohol on public property, drunk and disorderly, petty theft.

In my opinion there is value in approaching the "visible" crime with a zero tolerance policy. The basis for this is that much of the underlying crime which is far more serious is committed by those perpetrating the "visible" crime. To enable this policy

the police need to be better resourced with increased police numbers to enable them to undertake the enormity of this task. They also need a strategic and policy environment that ensures that the offenders are appropriately penalised for their actions. The current “revolving door” type system of delivering offenders back to the streets the same day they are arrested will not be effectual.

Heroin provides the axis around which many of the crime and social problems rotate. The supply, distribution and use of illegal drugs in the area must be eliminated. It is said in the community that the sources of drug supply into the area are numerous. Drug addicts have been seen gathering near the railway station awaiting the arrival of dealers by public transport. This has reduced with the increased police presence at the Railway station. However dealers are now reputed to arrive by car. There are also several houses in the area that have been rented (from unwitting private landlords and NGO's) apparently by drug dealers for the purposes of distributing drugs in the area.

The police need to make the area as uncomfortable as possible for all drug dealers- regardless of quantity carried/supplied. In support of this programs need to be established to remove addicts from the area and relieve them of their addiction. The solution to this will require considerable creative thinking as there does not appear to be a comprehensive solution in existence now.

Other existing Government Programs in the area

I am not well qualified to comment on the operations of other Government programs in the area. As an employed male of working-middle class background I have not needed to be a recipient of many local services (except police and council).

I do observe though that the Department of Childrens Services (DOCS) though seems to be ignoring the children of the area or is completely and totally inept. Please refer to the section above on policing and juvenile crime for the introduction to this.

Children are left virtually unsupported in communities with carers who are incapable of caring or worse still abuse the children then DOCS competence must be questioned. When nobody else cares for a child, when those surrounding the child want to exploit the child then is it not DOCS responsibility to protect that child? The evidence of neglect that I see is in the behaviour of the local children. Most usually these children appear to be or are known to be of aboriginal parentage. Few of the children regularly attend school. Many teenagers are incapable of writing even their name or doing simple mathematical sums (such as adding the price of a bottle of Coke and a bag of chips to determine the total cost).

The children are often wandering the streets at all times of the day and well into the night/early hours of the morning. These are children as young as 4-5. I have even seen infants in nappies playing in the street completely unattended.

The children are restless and angry, they are looking for a thrill and somewhere/someone to vent their frustration. They yell racist insults at other aboriginal and non aboriginal people alike. Any derogatory and demeaning word of a loathsome nature that can be imagined is known to these children. The children must

know some of the meaning of these words as they used them correctly when they grabbed the relevant parts of my niece's anatomy.

The children prowl in packs and cause trouble in packs. Anyone ignorant enough or foolish enough to leave paint cans lying around will soon find the paint applied to their house/car/person etc. Some children were even throwing stones at my windows whilst I stood behind them giving their descriptions to police. When approached by the police the children accused me of assaulting them. A statement that I will comprehensively deny but I use it to illustrate how well they know how to use the system.

I have seen a group of children of ages 6-13 force cars off the road and intimidate the occupants by jumping on the roof/bonnet and attempting to open the doors.

The children seem to be full of hate. Their constant source of pleasure seems to be from causing harm to others and the destruction of property. I am not aware of any success that DOCs has had in this area.

Non Government Services and Service Provision

Again I have never needed the services of the NGO's in the area. However I am led to understand there is something in excess of 80 NGO's offering support to local people. This in my opinion is a phenomenal amount of effort. I would expect that this effort comes at a significant cost on top of that spent directly by all levels of government. I am a member of the Settlement and from reviewing the accounts know that it alone raises funds from grants in the order of \$500,000 per annum. This is directed towards assisting the most desperate families in the area. Typically this equates to accommodation and after school support for up to 35 families. Simply looking at it this is a support from one organisation to the tune of \$14,000 per annum per family.

I am not in a position to comment on other NGO's in the area and their contribution however I would anticipate that the Settlement is merely average. On this basis the amount of money flowing into the area is enormous. I would guess in excess of \$50,000 per annum per family. If this is then combined with direct government funding then it becomes hard to justify that economic poverty is the cause of all the areas ills.

To look at the pure economics of this one wonders how much of the NGO effort duplicates the efforts of other NGO's and the government. How much of the funding is drawn off by inefficiency. It may very well be that the majority goes into providing jobs for various people from outside the area to provide social services within the area.

It is also obvious that there is no real economic poverty in the area. In this case I define economic poverty as the ability to feed and shelter oneself. These basic services are readily available within the area through both government and NGO sources. Real economic poverty can be argued not to exist in Australia at all when we are compared with the bulk of humanity who live in third world nations.

The question must then be asked if it is not money that is required then what is required and how can it be delivered. I suspect that the answer lies in reshaping the

entire strategy for the area. The original vision for the Block has disintegrated and failed, the basis for the supply of public housing in the area has changed.

The area is no longer the industrial heartland of Sydney as it once was. There are no longer plentiful opportunities for unskilled workers. There is no longer a vibrant, passionate and self supporting community in the area.

It is pointless to create programs to provide those with jobs whose skills do not match the labour demand in the area. As soon as funding for the programs evaporates then the program will end and people will be without work. The only sustainable solution is to match the skills of the people to the local work. This can be done by providing training and teaching skills as well as moving people to the work for which they are skilled.

If the block is to be reinvigorated then it must be injected with hope not heroin. People who live there must be capable of finding sustainable work opportunities. There is no point in providing housing there for people who are unemployable locally. This will lead to boredom, self disgust and possibly crime/drugs.

Similarly but to a lesser extent the same is required for public housing. I would suggest that only those who can/are employed in the area, those who need the areas particular services (schools, hospitals, etc) or have special needs (eg family) be provided with accommodation locally. Any redundant public housing should then be sold off and the funding used to provide accommodation in regions more suited to the individuals needs.

I also suggest that an overarching strategy be implemented to manage the change the area requires. This strategy should be implemented by a single authority. As part of this strategy the local NGO's need to be assessed to determine their niche roles and to prevent the inefficient duplication of government/NGO services. The single authority in charge of the area could be made responsible for the rational distribution of funds, the monitoring of KPI's and the delivery of outcomes in support of the overarching strategy.

Redfern Waterloo Partnership Project effectiveness at meeting community needs

There is little that I can say about the RWPP except that it appears to have been something of a red herring. Hopefully at the end of the process and after the expenditure of around \$7M there may be a better technical understanding of the issues in the area.

However we residents have not seen any significant improvement in the area. Some minor initiatives such as the increased police presence at the railway station have made the immediate area safer (whilst the police are present). However like a balloon by applying pressure in one spot just moves the problem to another. We are seeing an increase in crime and anti social behaviour in our streets now.

In my opinion the RWPP has been poorly run. In evidence I can sight the election of the community council. My personal nomination was rejected on the basis of incorrect information that I had "accepted a position with the department of Ageing,

Disability and Home Care” [Letter from C Gellatly, File No RWP/01051 Pt 3, undated]. I was never asked if the information was correct and my application was dismissed out of hand. I therefore claim that the entire process was an inequitable sham.

I also sight a conversation with Anne Connelly where I was advising her of antisocial behaviour being committed by children in the vicinity of Edward and Vine Streets Darlington. I requested that the street team provide a more visible presence in the area. Anne was excusing of the behaviour as “tensions are high on the block because we have been discussing banning the use of the Redfern Station toilets and removing the pavers at the top end of Eveleigh street with the community”. Firstly I question why other streets should be the victims of issues in Eveleigh street and secondly why weren’t the pavers removed as discussed. These are the same pavers hurled at police during the riots some 6-12 months after the above conversation. The pavers were removed without fuss immediately after the latest riot.

Proposals for the future of the area known as “The Block”

My understanding is that “The Block” was set up in the 1970’s to provide not only housing opportunities but also as a self supporting aboriginal community. It was the first urban land owned by aboriginal peoples in Australia and has therefore developed a status of victory or defiance in the fight for recognition and native title rights.

Without belittling the native recognition issue the community itself has disintegrated into the antithesis of the original vision. It has become perhaps the most dysfunctional community in Australia. It is a highly visible area and the reputation for violence galvanises popular support against reconciliation.

The problems on the block seem to find their roots in a lack of cohesive leadership on The Block to guide the community forward. This was compounded by the arrival of drugs in the late 1980’s and the destruction of the block as a community by the voluntary relocations of the 1990’s. By this time very few self respecting people felt comfortable living on or near The Block and elected to move. This seems to have removed the last stabilising element and now the area is mostly a cesspit of violence and crime which is not a safe or happy community for anyone let alone the remaining residents.

I think there are several viable options for the future of the block as outlined below:

- 1) Redevelop the block as housing either entirely or predominantly for Aboriginal people. If this option were undertaken then care must be exercised in building the community. In particular those who live in the community must have the ability to work within local employment opportunities. It is essential that the community be drug free. The community must also be diverse and those who are viewed as community leaders must be respected, empowered and willing to enact rules within the community. This strong leadership is essential and should be backed up by charter. The community should also have strong links with other cohesive aboriginal communities within Australia. This will allow the movement of people to and from the block and provide the support mechanisms essential for individuals of differing tribal backgrounds. Redevelopment could also include the provision

of some degree of schooling and training facilities and where appropriate work space. In general though use of suitable existing infrastructure in the area should be utilised to prevent costly duplication.

- 2) Demolish The Block entirely and dedicate the area as a public park in memorial to the struggle for recognition by aboriginal people as the first peoples. This would meet the recognition of The Block as a place of recent cultural significance but would have limited direct social or economic benefit to its owners the AHC.
- 3) Sell the block to private developers. This is the reverse of option 2 and delivers maximum economic benefit to the AHC. This will provide a significant capital sum that would be capable of delivering substantially increased services to many more people in other areas. However it terminates aboriginal association with the area. In some ways this is good as the recent aboriginal association with The Block has not been good or successful. This could be considered a way of terminating a failure and starting again knowing the lessons of the past.

There are undoubtedly numerous other options. In fact probably as many options as there are stakeholders. In most cases the option will be valid but success or failure will depend on how carefully the proposal is orchestrated and implemented.

Other Matters

I would like to draw the committee's attention to the quality of life for the majority of people living in the Redfern/Waterloo area. We are a diverse range of people from all first peoples to immigrants from all over the world. We come from all levels of the socio-economic scale. The vast majority of us are law-abiding citizens who just want to lead good lives as good people.

However we are inflicted with a minority of people who have no idea and possibly no interest in leading good lives. In fact they seem hell bent on destroying their own lives and what they can of the lives of those people around them.

We are weak as a community and many of us recognise this as one of the problems in the area. However we are trying to rebuild a sense of community in the area. This is not easy though because very few people are now prepared to settle in the area long term. Either fear of crime or the actual experience of crime prevents people from settling down here. This makes it very hard to build lasting relationships in the neighbourhood.

It is also the case that people are frightened to get involved, frightened to get to know each other. It is hard to describe this to someone who has not lived here. But the best example is by allegory. The best way to avoid trouble (assaulted, mugged, abused) in the area is to not notice anyone. The moment you make eye contact with someone your chances of becoming a victim treble.

People have come to fortify themselves in their homes. To lock themselves away and pretend the horrors outside are not happening. It is difficult to love thy neighbour when your neighbour may bash you for doing so.

I am astounded when I walk down the streets of other suburbs- McMahon's point, Paddington, Balmain or Stanmore for instance. People don't have bars on their windows or doors. In fact their doors and windows are often open to the world. The streets aren't covered in broken glass, used hypodermics and bags abandoned from snatchings. People are standing around in the street talking to each other. People take pride in their houses and make them pretty.

In my street every house has bars on its doors and windows. They are usually closed to keep the sounds of the screaming and foul language out of the house. I dodge the glass and syringes on my way home as I scurry down the street avoiding everyone I meet. My only mission to get home without being attacked. I walk past rows of houses that I know are lovely inside but are hideous outside. People are too scarred to take visible pride in their houses. If they do then they become a target for those with hatred in their hearts.