

INQUIRY INTO ISSUES RELATING TO REDFERN/WATERLOO

Organisation: South Sydney Youth Services

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Theme:

Summary

Issues for young people

Issue

Lack of recognition of the Aboriginal community and its vital role in shaping this community. This is expressed at all levels and manifests as racism and tokenism.

Possible solutions

The Aboriginal community needs to be more connected to the power structures in the community. Training and support for Aboriginal young people to be elected as Councillors in local elections is a possible strategy for redressing this imbalance. Others include;

- The inclusion of Aboriginal young people on Council committees, with proper training and true decision making capacity.
- For all youth services to have active policies encouraging Aboriginal representation on management committees, with funding allocated to pay for training and sitting fees.
- Negotiated participation policies across Government and NGOs' that deliver real collaboration and decision-making power to the aboriginal community.
- Events to celebrate Aboriginal culture, particularly arts based initiatives.
- Ongoing anti-racism training delivered by young people to schoolchildren, police and government departments.

Suggested areas of improvement

Employment and business opportunities for Aboriginal young people that are supported by training and funding at a local level

Aboriginal young people are disadvantaged in the work force and need creative opportunities to work within the business sector. Alexandria Park Community School has provided mentorship within this sector in the past, raising young peoples' expectations and giving them greater skills and vision.

More targeted training opportunities

Allowing Aboriginal young people to find real work, both within and without the immediate community.

Anti Racism Training for the wider community

SSYS has experienced great success in the past in running community development projects that train young people as peer educators. Funding for these projects is usually on a 'one off' basis. The positive outcomes stemming from this training certainly warrant continuous funding.

Better participation policies

Encouraging and supporting the involvement of Aboriginal young people in community organizations.

More leadership training

Currently, we have a group of twelve young people who have received leadership training. These groups are now grant makers who give small grants to other young people. This funding then flows into meaningful projects that promote community connectivity and cohesion.

Grief and loss workshops

Many Aboriginal young people do not get the opportunity to deal with the difficult and often traumatic issues that affect their lives. Following the death of Thomas Hickey, several Aboriginal young people approached our service and requested support. We were able to provide a grief and loss workshop for Thomas' mother and twenty young people at the Aboriginal Healing House in Picton. The young people planted a tree in his memory, and had the all-too-rare opportunity to talk about how they were feeling.

More collaboration with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal services

Our service has a good collaborative working model, respectful of the cultural values necessary to make our work successful. We are happy to share our knowledge.

More collaborative casework programs with DoCS workers

Currently the local DoCS office in Renwick St. has no Koori caseworkers. This is a constant problem for the DoCS system. Aboriginal people find that the culture within DoCS is not friendly to Aboriginal workers.

Police and community relations

A similar situation exists within the police force. In the last five years I have got to know four of the Aboriginal Officers stationed in Redfern and all of them have felt alienated and unsupported by other Police. Many have had to endure racism and taunts from Anglo workers.

One off training in cultural awareness is not adequate. It needs to happen on a regular basis, as do events and activities of a cultural nature. Developing respect for difference and embracing it as the way forward is crucial.

The relationship between police and the Aboriginal community, both historically and currently, is fraught with tension. This is very likely due to the vast majority of contact between the two groups being of a negative nature; the community only see the punitive aspects of police activity, the police see only the criminal fringes of the community. Unless both groups are exposed to the substantial positive elements within the other, this situation is unlikely to change. Programs or events focussing on the helpful, protective role of police, delivered in conjunction with cultural awareness activities as mentioned above, may prove beneficial for both parties.

Parenting support programs

South Sydney Youth Services in conjunction with Centrelink, Rosemount, Reconnect and other services, have been delivering parenting workshops for the past three years. The project has attracted around 200 parents who were able to talk about problems they were having with teenagers and look at their strengths as parents. They also had the opportunity to make invaluable contact with other mothers and fathers. There is currently no funding for this program but it continues.

Developing programs that support parents to develop their own solutions is empowering and to the ongoing benefit of all parties.

Structural problems

Housing

With the high concentration of Department of Housing dwellings in the Redfern/Waterloo area and the complex needs of those residents we can expect big problems. The increase in tension within the community reflects the lack of statewide housing stock and the very high cost of private rental.

The lack of Department housing stock has meant that only the most needy families and individuals are housed. The type of resident in the community has changed in the last 15 years; 'the gap' is widening and tensions between those clustered at either end of the socio-economic scale are high. This is compounded by the fact that children are not able to leave home and the density of those housed is not recorded accurately.

South Sydney Youth Services works with some of the most disadvantaged including young people with dual disorders, mental illness and drug problems.

The waiting list for accommodation in NSW is around 10 years. Five years ago single mothers and families were able to get DOH accommodation. This is no longer the case. Overcrowding or homelessness is no longer criteria for getting accommodation.

Solutions

- The State and Federal Government needs to significantly increase the housing stock in NSW.
- Young people need to be able to leave the community when they become adults and housing schemes that facilitate this transition need to be developed.
- Low-income loans for the purchase of property in other communities. Government purchasing on behalf of the family and the waiving of interest on the loan.
- A more systematic approach to the mix of residents within public housing. Clients of ours, particularly those managing a mental illness, require greater sensitivity in placement. Some clients may benefit from close proximity to others with similar issues, for many however, particularly those who are floridly unwell, this may be disastrous. High density housing such as the high-rise blocks throughout the Waterloo area place at risk the physical and psychological safety of residents with mental health issues.
- Holiday opportunities for families. These might include subsidised beach-house and country accommodation. Many Redfern/Waterloo residents do not get the opportunity to leave the community at any time. Encouraging and enabling breaks is important. The Metropolitan Aboriginal Lands Council is in the process of developing a site at Wiseman's Ferry. These types of initiatives need to be supported.

N.B some 20 years ago many families were moved to the Western Suburbs, this was not the answer to the issues they faced. I am not suggesting moving the so-called 'problem', which is what happened previously, particularly for Aboriginal families.

Issues for Non-government Youth Service Providers

Resources

Currently youth services in Redfern/Waterloo do not have the administrative capacity to function at maximum efficiency. At least 30% of running costs need to be allocated to administration. Funding bodies need to consider this.

South Sydney Youth Services sees that community development activities are as important as direct casework and counselling but the pressure is to do the latter exclusively. When a service is only responding to crisis and can only provide direct services, this can engender unhealthy dependence and a sense of powerlessness. We see the importance of looking at the capacity building and involvement of young people in solutions to community issues. One-off funding does not have a positive impact. Often we come up with a good strategy and then the funding ends. For example, Anti Racism funding was for

one year. We trained 45 young people as peer educators and they were able to deliver training to 300 young people. Then the project stopped. As positive as it was, the project would have needed to operate for at least three years to have significant impact on future generations.

Funding of a new youth service, such as The Redfern/Waterloo Street Team, without considering the resource needs of existing youth services is unacceptable. The cost-effectiveness of this approach is untenable. Public interest would be better served by bolstering existing services.

SSYS currently has full caseloads for most programs. This is particularly the case for the mental health workers, Aboriginal counselling and the Juvenile Justice program. Our service is at capacity and with the number of workers we have, we turn away clients weekly. The service gets an average of 8 referrals a week for counselling and casework services. Just the time it takes to make onward referral can be problematic.

Most of the intensive casework undertaken takes up a lot of time; one client with complex needs might need seven or eight hours of support a week, for a period of up to 8 months. It is galling for workers and clients alike, to see copious funding exhausted to facilitate political gestures when the needs of those on the ground are barely being met. Our most pressing need is more casework and counselling services for young people with a mental health problem. We have a mental health housing worker and the funding for this position is temporary.

Myths

There is a pervasive myth that youth service providers do not work collaboratively. I'm not sure whence this myth was born, but feel that it became of age with the Redfern/Waterloo project. The only explanation for it, I believe, lies in the convenient but flawed reasoning that the significant problems faced by young people result from dysfunctional services. The issues are much more complex and need far greater depth of investigation.

I'm not suggesting that our services are perfect, but that government has failed to recognise the interrelationships that exist.

Much of the work of our service relies on the good will and collaboration of others, the hundreds of volunteers who contribute time and the joint projects such as Street Beat with the Aboriginal Resource Centre. The sharing of space with the PCYC and our Education programs, The Youth Matter Project (a coalition of youth service providers) and others. The Joint work with The Department of Housing and young people with Mental illness. The Many corporate bodies who support our programs with funding and volunteers. The sharing of resources between services including transport, staff, space. The hours of joint casework and case management that occurs between our service, the Fact Tree, Settlement, Girls Centre, PCYC, Centre Link, DOH, DoCS, Juvenile Justice - the list is extensive.

The wider South Sydney Community and Redfern/Waterloo

Firstly it is difficult for us to comment about just the two suburbs in the review because we feel that the delineation of these two suburbs from the rest of South Sydney is not reflected in reality. South Sydney Youth Services was established in 1972 to service *all* of the South Sydney Community, comprised of 11 suburbs. The organization was formed by some concerned residents who wanted to see more support services for young people. The service grew from the ground up and from its inception worked within this community and across communities. Many other communities have a strong relationship with this immediate area and vice versa. We recommend this be taken into account.

The Premiers Department's Redfern/Waterloo Partnership Project

We do not wish to spend our time criticising but need to articulate our experience working with this body.

The Redfern/Waterloo Partnership project has been in this community for the past two years and in that time has not consulted adequately with our service. The bureaucrats have set the agenda and we have had little opportunity to contribute to a plan for youth service provision.

All youth services would agree that the process has been disempowering for the local community. Trust was not initially established between the partnership and existing agencies. Missing this crucial first step resulted in existing structures such as interagency relationships and networks being damaged. The implication of the Partnership for local community organizations was that we have not done a good job, and that we are incapable of delivering. Another false premise of the Partnership project was that services are not operating with adequate collaboration. I cannot remark on the operation of government departments but as far as NGO's are concerned, nothing could be further from the truth.

The Partnership Project made many promises to the youth sector and none of them have come to fruition. I list a few of these,

- A commitment to find and fund the relocation of the Fact Tree Youth Service. The money that was allocated is apparently no longer there and no venue has been found.
- A commitment to fund some of the findings of a review of youth services some three years ago. These included after hours services for existing youth providers. The commitment was honoured in the first year and was to be for an initial two years with extended weekend hours for the Fact Tree Youth Service, the Girls Centre and the

Settlement. In the second year no funding was forthcoming and no explanation about why. This process set expectations for local young people that were dashed in the second year. It would have been preferable not to provide funding for this work in the first place.

- South Sydney Youth Services applied to provide housing support for young people with dual disorders. This was a major recommendation of the previous youth services review. We have received funding for one year. The project will end in June with no commitment for re funding. There was a commitment made by DoCS to support this project but there are no funds for the second year. I have not asked the Premiers project for further funding, but have been told by DOCs that Premiers' have made no allocation for the work. I will write to them in the near future.

South Sydney Youth Services.

Response to enquiry into issues relating to Redfern/Waterloo.

Summary of Issues

- A need for recognition of the good work done by services and the community, and a need to build on these successes.
- A lack of recognition of the aboriginal community and its' role in the shaping of the wider community.
- A need for the aboriginal community to be more securely connected to the existing power structures.
- A need for better training and employment opportunities for Aboriginal young people.
- A need for anti-racism training for the wider community.
- Better participation policies for the Aboriginal community.
- More leadership training for young people.
- Grief and loss workshops.
- More collaboration with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal services.
- More collaborative casework programs with DoCS workers.

- Police and community relations.

Structural problems

- Housing issues and some possible solutions.

Issues for Non-government Youth Service Providers

- A chronic lack of resources to enable good, proven practice to continue.
- Unhelpful myths that need to be challenged.
- The wider South Sydney Community and Redfern/Waterloo and related issues.
- The Premiers Department and the Redfern/Waterloo Partnership Project.