

INQUIRY INTO PUBLIC DISTURBANCES AT MACQUARIE FIELDS

Organisation:

Name: name suppressed

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Theme:

Summary

Partially Confidential

Parliamentary Inquiry-Public disturbances at Macquarie Fields
Legislative Council Inquiry conducted by the Social Issues Committee

Background

I had literally trained hundreds of volunteers from Macquarie Fields Housing Estate and many of the projects we worked on together, with local agencies involved thousands of people. When my program finished a few years ago, 200 residents and agency workers came to the Farewell so I can safely say that I had an excellent relationship with the residents on the Housing Estate and because I was careful to be honest and consult on "their terms" with the young people of the area I was able to do a lot to assist them e.g. assisted them to get a Graffiti Art Project, give them a showcase for their Art, Poetry, Music and Dance as well as a chance to air their concerns and frustrations.

I will address the Terms of Reference for the Inquiry in order:-

1. Policing strategies and resources in the Macquarie Fields area, particularly in the immediate period leading up to and following the motor vehicle accident involving two fatalities on 25th February 2005

I have read the full -Final Report into Macquarie Fields Public Order Management Incidents and while appalled at the confusion and lack of leadership and lack communications between all the different police groups I am not surprised. Twelve years ago I was asked to be part of a Disaster Action Plan Group because I had actually assisted after the Bangladesh floods in the 1970's and know I am able to work through in an emergency. It surely did not seem that these police were sufficiently trained or resourced for what occurred in Macquarie Fields so I do agree with the recommendations in the Police report however I do make my own recommendations.

Recommendation – training for the Operations Support Group Commanders should be longer and more thorough. These people need to know how to utilise staff in order to defuse situations and have Leadership qualities such as decision-making skills –you don't get these in a four-day course –just communications should be at least a 4-week course. I do believe the lack of decision-making of the Police Team Leader contributed greatly to problems over those crucial days of unrest.

Recommendation – There needs to more liaison with the community leaders in public housing as well as the agencies and these groups to be trained to come with food, drink, grief counsellors and mediators as well as community elders, so that troubled groups can be split up and be taken home by people who can help those grieving to heal rather than reacting in a negative way. This training should include knowing the **chain of command** for **all** the groups who are to be involved.

Recommendation –As the community lose more and more of their rights (after decades of hard work getting these rights) as things get pushed through the senate – there needs to be a vehicle for people to vent their anger peacefully. Over-reacting to public anger by stopping people having peaceful demonstrations will lead to some very nasty demonstrations of anger such as is being exhibited in France at the moment. People will be like powder kegs, ready to go off.

I have been in peaceful demonstrations (against GST) and felt very threatened in the back row near the horses and I did worry that the police might increase the speed of the march, thus putting us in the back row in danger of the horses. In the 60's peace marches, trouble was caused when police refused people being able to leave the march and would not let us stop, which led to violence by the older, more tired in the group. I ask that police not resort to these tactics if there are peaceful protests in future. I do believe people are getting angrier, in general, and if refused peaceful demonstration, it will become very dangerous.

Recommendation –Molotov Cocktails have been used to ignite houses and cars in tis area for as long as I can recall –too often the community people reporting such action is ignored –while the Department of Housing is going through with changes such as demolishing houses, we expect this activity to increase – there needs to much more police talking with the community, whilst on foot patrol. Police used to spend more time getting to know the local community, who then felt able to talk about concerns – we need this to increase... and a special project targeting the makers of Molotov cocktails to be apprehended (and given a harsh sentence).

Recommendation – The trouble occurred mainly due to the relative of one of the young people involved allegedly telling the young person to say it was the Police's fault –so she should have been charge with causing a riot.

Recommendation To me, the police still need to do a lot to improve their image with the public. We have so many brilliant dedicated police but we still find the wrong type being picked – we notice whenever new recruits leave the academy and come to learn at Macquarie Fields Police Patrol, that incidents escalate e.g. problems with unnecessary searches of young people.

I am a law –abiding person, yet I know of two incidents where I **personally** know of Police misuse of motor vehicles.

Police, including detectives were often seen drinking, many in uniform at a particular pub. The police went back to work on such sensitive cases as Child Sexual Assault whilst they were awaiting charges. They should not have been working; officer's who were distracted by their own situations did not serve the young person's interest. When these officers were found guilty of causing the accident, there were pages of positive police press wrapped around the small article to deflect attention away. Macquarie Fields can't move away from the bad image the community now has, nationwide.

The second incident was the death of a local young man Chris K., who went to school with my sons in Ingleburn; Chris was killed when police were chasing car thieves. Chris was working on his car on the side of the road near when he lived at the time, and had nothing to do with the incident. Macquarie Fields patrol supposedly has a lot of things that are supposed to stop people driving fast so maybe using other methods, and then car chases are a possibility

Recommendation

Police are given better debriefing, when faced with issues that affect them. They should have better support staff and be taught coping skills so they do not drink, take drugs or become corrupt or act out in such risk-taking behaviour such as unnecessary car chases against young people, who do it for the adrenaline rush –other safer means such as immobilisers should be used.

According to what I heard from people who were there, in the press and in the Police final report, Police knew who these young people were and what they were involved in so I believe that issue needs to be looked at more and why they changed the police plans that night.

Recommendation

Look more deeply into the police officers involved in the original police chase and the reasons why they did chase the young people, when they knew who they were, when they knew what they had done and where they lived. Local people will be angry till they have the answers to these questions.

Recommendation – That police & the media are to keep their distance when there is a wake –some young people got into trouble when they were just going to pay their respects to the families of the dead, attend the funeral or attend the wake and were upset they were not given their privacy and pay their respects.

2. Government programs and service provision in the Macquarie Fields Area, including local, state and federal programs

Recommendation - Better use of Community leaders –when events such as this occur. A co-ordinated approach like a Disaster Plan –police, ambulance, social workers, grief counsellors, community mediators and cultural leaders all involved, trained up with possible scenarios and willing to come no matter, what time, those without transport to be transported by police as there is not much of a night service in this area.

Recommendation - Funds should come to assist to work with Islander groups, Aboriginal groups to use their art and music to work through their emotion e.g. A Co-operative where they can design fabrics portraying the positive aspects of Macquarie Fields such as the Flora and Fauna in the area. More local art projects that could then be an exhibition in the Campbelltown Art Gallery. More preventative projects. Bring back HCAP so that there are not such divisions in the community as there are now. Under HCAP, hundreds of the local community worked together to better their area. And the community drove the work needed.

Recommendation Eleven – Traxside (the only specialised health agency dealing with youth in the area, is being down-graded and hardly open. It should be funded to have better security, and to do projects with young people like they were doing in Wollondilly eg Holding music ‘Battle of the Sounds’ in the local area so local people have something to do, the winning acts are put on a compilation CD and promoted by Triple JJJ, hopefully going on to bigger and better things. Art projects and Craft projects, utilising young peoples’ talents could lead to employment in local Co-operatives. This goes along with messages about risk-taking behaviour such as stealing cars, car chases and self- mutilation for young women. Unfortunately too, young people with psychosis from drugs or mental illness will not self-refer and Traxside will not take young people unless they are doing so voluntarily so parents need to know how to get about the mental health system, which is complex and has too few preventative projects such as those mentioned above.

Recommendation -Federal Government needs to look at issues for people in housing who don’t have small children, who are assessed on gross income **not** on the actual income , people get in their hands –everything is assessed on this –Centrelink payments etc. Many do not get transport concessions and pay adult fares for 14 year olds as local bus operators have a different scale of what constitutes an adult than Government transport.-lots if equity issues about money-now prescriptions are dearer and fuel and food is dearer –there needs to be an Inquiry into these issues. Federal government, were part of the problem of the incidents in Macquarie Fields as politician after Politician jumped on the bandwagon and called our citizens, louts and ratbags. Let the politicians come and live like we do –not for a week –for a year –let them try to maintain rent, utilities, food and a life on a low income or the dole and they will see that the majority are good at budgeting –they need to assessed in a more equitable way.

3. Non-Government services and service provision in the Macquarie Fields area

Recommendation – A Clubhouse for people over 18 be established in the local area that is for the use of people with mental illness that empowers them, teaches coping skills and links them to training and jobs that are not setting them up to fail. The Clubhouse model is successful all over the world. I am part of **The Beautiful Minds Community Committee**, auspiced by The Schizophrenia Fellowship, thus having charitable status. Our Committee is raising funds to establish a Clubhouse in S.W.Sydney as the only one in Sydney is on the North Shore and some of our young people are also going there, as there is no unified preventative health program in SW Sydney.

Recommendation –reinstitute programs for 8-12 year olds. Macquarie Fields had a successful program working out of Guise school that assisted young people. Also more community days such as Fun Days, Festivals and Kite flying days, that encourages families to be together.

Recommendation – Our youth Centres in the Campbelltown area need to be open for longer, have after school tutors and sports to keep our young people healthily and positively occupied. Each Youth Centre needs a number of workers.

Recommendation - Our young people worked with Police, Youth Workers, business people and the Glenquarie Centre management on a public space project. They wanted a Skate Ramp, kids safe bike riding track and had collected 1000 signatures including the head of Police, politicians and business people. The next skating rink needs to be in Macquarie Fields in the spot picked out in the original position near the TAFE, so no drugs are involved.

Recommendation -Local agencies need to sign a **memorandum of understanding with the people of Macquarie Fields** stating they will keep ideas and submissions private as these agencies also work in other local Housing areas and the young people lost trust when their hard work was utilised and ‘pipped at the post’ by Claymore – which has had much money, workers and attention, as it is shown as a positive model. All agencies should keep faith with the people in their areas, not make promises they can’t keep and really listen to what the people in the area want, not What the agencies want or what the workers want as all the local housing areas are losing faith in the agencies that should be supporting them.

Recommendation- The community – **not self-evaluation**, should evaluate –local agencies being given money for community development. One agency in particular, whilst very helpful elsewhere is not managed well in the Campbelltown area and the community has complained for years, about them getting such a large slice of the financial pie...very little of which goes to the community.

4. Whether the lessons learned from the Social Issues Committee and Coburn Reports resulting from the Redfern disturbance, have been utilised in this incident

Many residents in the local area were also very suspect about the timing of the problems here on the Macquarie Fields Estates and on the Redfern estate as, for some time certain politicians and so-called social justice advocates believe that by getting on National media – money comes to an area. This is just not true it destroys so much more than is gained.. Trust between the community and their leaders. Tenants on the estates are trained up now and they know when something is a beat up. The Aboriginals believe that the trouble in Redfern was allowed to fester – as a way to justify getting rid of the ‘BLOCK’. – the aboriginal housing block is prime real estate in the heart of the city.

In Macquarie Fields approximately eight years ago there was big news about violence in Macquarie Fields, given to the Sunday papers . The young people of Macquarie Fields came to me and other representatives of the Macquarie Fields Neighbourhood Board (NAB) to complain. They believed , people in the Minto area were setting them up. The photos used in the media beat – up were actually Minto and suspiciously a new Crime Committee was to be set up with the NAB, the next week. We checked the issues out and refused to be come involved in something that was a beat up.

This time again, community leaders have been again told time & time again by young people and community people on the scene of the incidents that a busload of youths came from Minto on the night in question and started the violence. So many residents believe it was a beat up, so they can pull the houses down because of the real estate value. It is urgent that relationships between the community, agencies and the government, is healed. The swing in the local elections against Labor towards Greens in the Macquarie Fields By-elections confirms this lack of trust in a previously strong Labor area.

5. The underlying causes and problems, which may have contributed to individual and collective, acts of violence and social disorder.

Recommendation – Never leave the bodies in a car or at the scene if the incident involves young people – the five hours that those bodies were there, just drove the young people into a frenzy – it shows no respect – a special force needs to secure the crime scene so no important clues are lost – then other police should question witnesses whilst others are moved on. Then the young people can come with their flowers etc and show their respects, after the bodies have been removed.

Recommendation – Our other community buildings should also be open longer hours so as to make maximum use of the facilities – Co-ordinators to train up volunteers to be there, if they have outside meetings etc rather than just have Centres open for only 2 or 3 hours a day – it’s a way to slowly lose our hard fought for Community Centres, which are needed to make living on a housing estate bearable for people who have chronic illness, poverty and lack of social & life skills. Woodbine is an example of a Neighbourhood Centre, well run and utilised. It costs a lot more to hospitalise them.

The Senior Citizen’s Building in Macquarie Fields is now better utilised but community reps in Macquarie Fields have been given a community house so they can come & voice concerns and work on projects to help Macquarie Fields, however,

there is no funding for a Co-ordinator or seeding funds, this needs to be addressed by the Premier's Department.

Recommendation – A project that assists single mums to have positive role models for their sons and daughters. A reward system, if the children are put into healthy after-school activities such as Army, Air Force & Navy Cadets, Sports, weekend art courses or music tutoring etc. A special fund to assist them to pay for it –or make parents more accountable for the extra money they get for children now...could be a project of the Benevolent Society –Centre for Women's Health who also has a program to assist mothers with babies.

Recommendation– the local churches of the area especially St. Vincent de Paul, Salvation Army and the Baptist Church has been very helpful but only the Salvation Army is on the estate itself –Baptist church has a room at Work Ventures but One building where each church could work a day would be good. The Seventh Day Adventists, who have an excellent knowledge of nutrition and health, wish to come into the area and teach good nutrition principals so it would be good if a building were available for them.

Recommendation -Father Riley has started a program with Macquarie Fields Youth, after I set up a committee of locals who wished his support. He has been wonderful – the only problem is that families are coming to get fed, plus very young children without supervision –this is a worry, as the homeless young people will be feeling very wary about it. My Recommendation is that Campbelltown Seventh Day Adventists and their charitable arm ADRA –be invited to bring their food van in on **other nights** to feed the families –thus not interfering with the youth 's basketball nights. ADRA and the Adventists have access to **Foodbank** , so would be able to give evening meals two nights a week or even to organise **food packs** such as I trialled with Foodbank as part of HCAP, years ago. This trial was much easier than FoodShare, much easier to organise

Recommendation – there are still a lack of positive agencies working in the area nuns working in Ingleburn that used to work in Claymore –they could come to Macquarie Fields if a building was available –women especially need help with Assertiveness training, Self Esteem and Confidence Building plus how to work on healthy pursuits.

My Committee **Beautiful Minds Community Committee**, auspiced by the Schizophrenia Fellowship will apply to Department of Housing for funds to bring tenants who are carers or have mental illness to join us producing craft at the Glenquarie Neighbourhood on Saturdays to work together , with support people, making craft and learning new skills as well as where to go for their other needs. All our profits go directly to raising Funds for a Clubhouse in the area.

Recommendation – that DOH funds a tenant project under **Beautiful. Minds Community Committee** in order for people suffering isolation, depression and mental illness plus carers on the estates can come together, learn new skills, support each other and work towards getting the first Clubhouse in SW Sydney for people with mental illness. The 1 in 5 people having mental illness statistics goes down to 1 in

4on housing estates. It is a huge problem in the Ingleburn, Glenfield, Macquarie Fields, Minto area.

Recommendation

That The DOH (Department of Housing) donates a house in the local area for the **Beautiful Minds Community Committee (BMCC)**, to run a Clubhouse for people with mental illness. The Premier's Department to provide the funds needed to fund the first two years. The BMCC is presently looking to self fund the Clubhouse in the future by having a Sunflower Day (like Cancer Council Daffodil Day) in every main shopping centre in the SW.Area Health Region which now stretches from Balmain to Bowral. We are asking support from all the Councils within the SW Area Health area to contribute seed funds so that we can be self-funding in future. The funds needed to be in line with other Clubhouses \$280,000 a year.

Things were much improved in Macquarie Fields in 2000, after the HCAP program and the physical changes made to the estate –now people are no longer looking after their houses, are worried about the new charges and how they can afford the higher charges

. She phoned Police, when the crash happened around **11pm** and the violence started and the Police didn't get back to her till **3pm in the morning**. She promptly told them “–you did not want to talk to me , or come when I needed you, so I am not talking to you at 3 in the morning “ . She had to leave her house for over a week as young people acted out near the scene of the crash, where young people had made a shrine , which is still there today. No one came to debrief her. I know enough community people who were on the scene on those nights who encouraged people to stay in their homes, otherwise I am sure even further problems would have occurred.

–The underlying causes and problems which may have contributed to individual and collective acts of violence and social disorder

I believe our young people will become more angry and disorderly if used as a scapegoat for failed government policy and procedures. The more we show contempt and push them out of society, the more they want to hurt that society. We need the young people to foster trust in the system and the leaders in the community. We need Police, Firemen and other strong, positive role models working with them to assist them to achieve their needs such as better funded youth centres, a place to work on art and music projects and a vehicle to help them link with the Campbelltown Art Gallery, Fisher's Gig and talent quests via local projects .

Our young people have been disappointed over and over again as youth workers come and go. They now giving any new worker a hard time so problems compound.

Recommendation We have had a huge truancy problems in the Macquarie Fields/Ingleburn area and I believe the new special Suspension Centre at Glenfield for those young people, will be a great way to stop a lot of senseless destruction however we must also ensure that other young people who do not go to school –are made to attend school. I see the same young people , every day , not attending school , some as

young as six or seven. the Home School Liaison must come down hard to stop this activity as young children miss crucial learning

Recommendation –that young people using the new Suspension Centres in the area be carefully evaluated as to success of the program and that Home School Liaison and Doc's taking a tighter line on young people not attending school and wandering the streets alone at night.

6. Any other matters arising from these terms of reference

The self-esteem of everyone in Macquarie Fields has been affected by the events 25-29th February 2005 so we need something big to get people back together again. Next year it will be ten years since the Festival of the Fields. This was our most successful event involving thousands of people, including three whole schools. We won Community Event of the Year and all sorts of people worked together. School teachers, parents, young people, Aboriginal community, Pacific Islander community, Muslim community. We still have the CD depicting the event.

Recommendation –Bring back HCAP and give funds for a **Festival in the fields 10 years on** to be held in 2006 on the anniversary of the Festival. This would be a great way to bring people back together again.

I hope you think long and hard about my practical recommendations which come from a sincere desire to assist the agencies and residents of Macquarie Fields. I was privileged to work with people who worked as hard as I did to achieve results in that area. I thank Macquarie Fields office of Department of Housing especially for their forward thinking and Head Office of Housing who were sincere in their wish to create a better life for people on housing estates.

I would be happy to give personal testimony if required.
Yours Sincerely