

INQUIRY INTO ISSUES RELATING TO REDFERN/WATERLOO

Organisation:

Name: Name confidential

Telephone:

Date Received: 15/04/2004

Theme:

Summary

Victoria Pymm - Submission re Redfern/Waterloo

From: [REDACTED]
To: <socialissues@parliament.nsw.gov.au>
Date: 14/04/2004 4:41 PM
Subject: Submission re Redfern/Waterloo

Please find attached my response to the Inquiry into
Issues Relating to Redfern/Waterloo

Please acknowledge receipt.

Regards

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

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This is in response to the resquest for Community Members to submit contributions to the Inquiry Into Issues Relating to Redfern/Waterloo

I have been an owner/occupier at [REDACTED] for 12 years. I am between [REDACTED] which means for over a decade I have lived on the corner of the Block.

The actual Block - which is a minor portion of Redfern and not in fact all of it or even from the Railway down to the Seymour Centre as many Agencies seem to believe).

A) Policing strategies and resources in the Redfern/Waterloo area.

Due to the increasing drug related crime which as escalated over the past four years, we are in constant contact with Redfern Police.

The greatest proportion of difficulty faced by residents adjacent to The Block are the unsupervised young children. It is a daily occurrence that toddlers and young teenagers are on the street both during school hours and until well after midnight. Generally they have no adult supervision and are left to damage homes, cars, and parks and to terrorise pedestrians. A high proportion of the car break-in and bag snatches are by children too young to be charged.

No residents living between Louis and Hugo park their vehicles in front of their homse even though this is an unrestricted parking area. We all have purchased parking permits which enable us to park on Abercrombie Street or further away in the Area 32. Visitors need to be warned and protected.

It is difficult to make outsiders to our area aware of the magnitude of this problem, but try to understand that the age of the child is not the issue when you are threatened with a brick, fire, broken bottle or syringe. Projectiles break windows regardless of who throws them.

Add to this the Aboriginal theory that young children are not accountable for their actions and the legal problem of the police having no power over the under 10s. These children are most aware that they are untouchable.

The level of violence in the play of the smallest children is distressing in the extreme, however the Police being distracted into Mentoring programmes as successful as they appear to be is not the purpose of the Police. Redfern is often so understaffed they cannot supply drivers for the vehicles.

It has taken hours for a response to a resident at risk; Doors kicked in the middle of the night or responding to a knock to be spat at and threatened, constant broken home and car windows, disgusting graffiti, fires being set on our doorsteps - pushed under doors. These are regular occurrences.

Often the officers responding are unsympathetic even when much damage has been done, as they know they can do nothing for us when the children are underage. From experience they cannot get parents interested, even to the extent of picking children up from the police station. Those incidents which do get before the courts commonly result in multiple releases back into the custody of the adult who didn't prevent the behaviour in the first place.

It appears that legislation does not support either the Police on the street or law abiding residents.

The short tours add to the situation, in over a decade I have rarely dealt with the same officer twice. Most incidents start with having to explain the history of the area, to point out that I and my neighbours are not The Block and to insist that we don't have to "just put up with it because we live there".

No Go Area

As a long term resident I also wish to comment on the "No Go Area issues".

Politician and Senior police often publicly deny that Redfern is EVER a no go area

I have often been told that police are unable to respond to my call due to some other incident that they 'do not want to inflame'. This years NYE being a recent example. There was a stabbing in Everleigh Street so no police would come into the area.

We were imprisoned in our homes while drugged up youths ran about with knives.

It needs to be made clear at senior levels that in fact there are times when Police are directed to/choose to stay out of Redfern. This is terrifying to those of us who see the Police as a line of resistance between the criminal element and the majority of the law-abiding Redfern population.

Each time I ring – I have no idea whether the call will result in a response. Is my safety judged important enough or is keeping a lid on the area the better decision on the day.

Surely this is not a decision police should be making – either the law is broken and needs to be upheld or it is a no go area and this needs to be clear so residents at risk can take steps to protect themselves.

The criminal element in Redfern – while getting all the press, is in fact a small percentage of the population and must not be allowed to dictate the living standard of the rest.

B) Existing government programs

Broadly I would suggest that the actual demographic of the Redfern/Waterloo area is not properly understood. Various initiatives developed without a clear understanding has forced long term residents to suffer programs being implemented on their doorstep where the target audience was not from the suburb – let alone the street.

With a permanent Aboriginal population of less than 300, and Welfare House of merely 4000, Redfern/Waterloo also must support the efforts of the more self sufficient proportion of the populace. Support networks are vital, but must not disenfranchise those whose efforts in fact make the support possible.

I did not receive an opportunity to complete a Census form (even though I rang and requested it four times) and I am not aware of any resident in Hugo Street or my portion of [REDACTED] who did receive one.

Any information disseminated via local newspapers/leafletting/community meetings etc rarely reaches us as these deliveries do not come into the area for safety reasons. Indeed - until Clover Moore and the Redfern Waterloo Partnership Project instigated email newsletters we received none of this.

Public meetings held during work hours will only be attended by those available at that time (and aware – see above) or those paid to attend. As a community group we try to have an representative where we can, however are disadvantaged by the fact that we have to plan time off work or away from businesses. Often just not possible.

The other ongoing concern regarding the demographic as a whole is that older people move out due to fear and younger ones leave when they have children. This results in a poor community mix.

C) Non government services

Services to the area have still not been documented. The RWPP since its inception has often stated that an assessment of services is to be made. My understanding is that many of the Services themselves have not made this information available.

My observation is that a proportion of my indigenous neighbours do very well from the constant influx of services and charities, however the difficult fraction of the population rarely engage.

Duplication of services and projects which work at cross purposes are constant:

E.g. after working successfully with one agency to monitor and supervise an increasing aggressive and violent group of youngsters to then find a separate agency taking a reverse approach.

the Permanent Needle Van (Redfern is the only suburb in Sydney which has such a facility) parked permanently by the child playground at the new Community Centre.

D) Redfern/Waterloo Partnership Project

RWPP has been consultative in its approach and has reached many areas which had previously been overlooked. Generally the initial proposals were optimistic and as a long term resident I was extremely supportive.

Unfortunately there has been little result at my street level. Aggression directed at long term non-indigenous residents is spreading, and safety concerns are rising.

Up until approximately four years ago, these personal directed attacks were unheard of. This dates to the rehoming of many of the original families from the Block and the influx of squatters drawn to the industry of readily available drugs.

E) Proposals for the Block.

Currently the Aboriginal Housing Corporation manage the few remaining homes in the Block. From some of these few tenants come the major proportion of trouble for both indigenous and non-indigenous Redfern Residents. Constant intimidation to ensure the Drug Business continues uninterrupted. Police are fully aware of the perpetrators but years go by and the same people operate the same business. One family in Louis cause more distress than all of the others put together and yet neither AHC or any of the multiple other Agencies have any answers.

Since one home in Caroline Street was squatted by drug dealers for over 12 months. A 'drug war' was conducted over this period with the Louis

Street home. As a result Caroline Street has lost over 5 owner occupiers and the rental properties only attract the lowest standard of tenant. Several young families have been driven out due to the squatters and have lost their homes to the bank taking possession.

The Parks have often aggressive drinkers and the drug users openly inject and toilet. Parents with any option choose not to expose their children. Recently residents of over ten years have sold and moved – not from choice but driven out because they cannot raise their children surrounded by this commonplace accepted behaviour.

Refurbishment over the Block has occurred twice in the past and yet so many of these historic properties are destroyed past the stage of being liveable.

Visitors to the area are appalled at the condition of the homes and the piles of garbage on the street. In fact garbage is collected and general cleaning is done daily by various charity groups and outside agencies. However everyday piles of garbage are thrown directly onto the street.

Normal services can be restricted on safety grounds. Examples: South Sydney Council had a fabulous initiative to combat graffiti, however they rarely came to my street as they were driven out – they combated this occasionally by coming very early in the morning and working quietly. Only last week, the footpath refurbishment we have been soliciting for over 5 years, was stopped by aggression and threats. Our local shop has closed after 10 years as the shopkeeper left after being robbed one too many times and getting a Taxi to Redfern is all but impossible.

Mick Mundine of the AHC says that “people should accept what Redfern is like”. I fail to understand how these people who can do their jobs in any other suburb - come to Redfern and they get rocks, garbage and abuse thrown at them. Any initiative to clean up the area is met with violence.

If such a small population cannot be handled by the AHC - how will a proposed residential development for many more (the last figure I heard was 150?), be managed?

In my 12 years here I have not seen any proactive initiative or contribution to the greater community by AHC and have grave concerns about yet another development.

f) Other Matters

Redfern is in the centre of a major Australian City – however the only media image ever seen of Redfern is of a dirty despairing Eveleigh Street. The Block is a tiny part of a large suburb and should be raised to a standard where all of Australia can – if not to be proud of it – at least not to be ashamed of and frightened of it.