

**Submission
No 10**

INQUIRY INTO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE TRENDS AND ISSUES IN NSW

Organisation: Nepean Community & Neighbourhood Services

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Domestic Violence trends and issues in NSW

Nepean Community & Neighbourhood Services is a medium sized non-Government organization who receives approximately \$1.5 million in funding from the State Government through Families and Community Services covering various funding streams including Community Builders, Families NSW, Brighter Futures, Better Futures and Aboriginal Child Youth and Families Strategy & Housing NSW. The Federal Government provides funding via Indigenous Sport and recreation program and FaHCSIA. Our organization covers the Penrith LGA & has 25 permanent staff and several casual staff working from six locations.

Our organisation works within a social justice framework a belief that all individuals are entitled to a fair go at the opportunities of life. However we realize that disadvantaged people are often presented with an uneven playing field. We work to redress this through community development practice which aims to build the capacity, skills and cohesion of communities and empower groups and individuals to build skills they require to effect change in their community.

As part of our work early intervention strategies are implemented to promote awareness and build skills around particular issues affecting communities. One of the key issues our organisation has chosen to act on for the past 10 years is Domestic Violence.

We have a specialist youth team funded through Better Futures who provide in schools programs focusing on resilience and social/ emotional intelligence for years 5 (Primary school) to year 8 (High School), middle years transition, targeting children and young people 9-15yrs old. It is from the perspective of early intervention with young people that we are responding to this inquiry.

In this submission we are responding to point 2 of the terms of reference

Early Intervention Strategies to prevent Domestic Violence

As our response to this inquiry, we would like to outline a case to ensure that early intervention strategies are targeted at young people and targeted universally, at both boys and girls during early adolescence before they are seriously involved in their earliest relationships.

Early adolescence is a time of great change and great challenge. Dahl (2004), identifies that adolescents are more prone to erratic and emotionally influenced behaviour, which can lead to disregard for risks and consequences. Currently many of the programs aimed at educating young people about relationship

violence have been successful. Young people know that relationship violence is wrong and can identify unhealthy traits. The Love Bites program run by NAPCAN has demonstrated this repeatedly with young people who are part of the program designing anti violence art works advocating against violence in relationships and sexual assault. However the numbers of people caught up in violent relationships has not reduced. Murphy & Smith (2010), argues that the limitations of programs such as this are that young people do not have the skills to counteract violence once it is happening and before it becomes entrenched.

Murphy & Smith (2010), argue that youth targeted relationship abuse prevention programs need to equip both boys and girls with a two fold method of psycho-education program focusing on the ways in which abusive relationships develop and well rehearsed skills to counteract the development of abusive relationship dynamics.

Providing information to both boys and girls would greatly assist young people who are same sex attracted, as identified by Elliott (1996), domestic violence occurs at approximately the same rate in Lesbian and Gay relationships as it does in heterosexual relationships.

Grech & Burgess (2011) report titled "Trends and patterns in domestic violence assaults:2001-2010" written for NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research identifies that incidences of domestic violence are stabilizing around the state with higher rates occurring in outer west regions. Bourke recorded the highest incidence of Domestic assault. The report also flagged that Indigenous women are vastly overrepresented as victims of domestic assault.

The report identified that the majority of domestic violence incidences occur in residential premises on Saturday and Sundays and the peak time is between 6 and 9pm. Interestingly the report also highlights that 20 percent of all victims of recorded domestic assault are aged 10-24 years.

We believe that this statistic in and of itself suggests that early intervention needs to be targeted at the 10-15 yr age group. The report does not stipulate whether these young people were assaulted as a result of domestic violence involving their parents, or other members of their families, or if it was as a result of their own relationships. However this statistic has come about it highlights the need for programs targeted universally at children and young people during the latter years of Primary school and the early years of High school.

New money needs to be focused towards providing young people with the skills and knowledge to counteract violent behaviours'. Young people require a toolbox of skills to prevent violence escalating and tools to abstain from responding in a violent manner once this behaviour begins. This is important as Murphy & Smith (2010), citing O'Keefe (1997), discovered that many adolescents

endorsed statements that it was right or justifiable for females to respond to a perceived provocation by a partner by hitting.

Developing a program that provides well rehearsed violence de-escalation skills would be highly beneficial and require money and a training budget. We believe that youth workers are best placed to deliver a program such as this along side teachers and support staff.

Implementing a strategy such as this would require State and Territory Governments to provide funding through integrated educational programs which would provide young people with knowledge and literacy to identify domestic violence when they see it and to stop it happening. We believe that the more subtle forms of Relationship violence need to be highlighted such as psychological, emotional, social & spiritual aspects of violence. These need to be clearly identifiable to young people.

Any early intervention program needs to give young people an understanding of how abusive relationships develop and provide young people with skills to assist them to avoid developing these types of relationships.

A way to deliver these programs to schools would be via Non-Government Organisations, (NGO's), delivering "in schools programs". NGO youth services are trained to deliver these often confronting issues to young people in a sensitive, fun and respectful way that engages young people. This method of delivery assists schools in the delivery of programs that require specialist knowledge and would achieve this at a much reduced cost. The aim of programs such as this would be to provide young people with knowledge about how abusive relationships develop and increase the capacity of young people to respond when they recognize that a relationship is developing abusive dynamics.

Programs targeted at young people that provide both the literacy for the abusive dynamics that are occurring and skills to deflect the tactics of abuse will have a significant effect on reducing the incidence of domestic violence involving young people.

Murphy & Smith (2010), highlight that considering young women under 25 are at an increased risk of suffering violence from their partner than any other age group. The prevention of chronic victimization setting in through increased skills, capacities and knowledge deserves priority.

Current research highlights that whilst current programs that work on attitudinal change have been successful to some extent they do not provide the whole answer.

Conclusion

We believe that the best opportunity to break the cycle of domestic violence being perpetrated by future generations is to provide skills and knowledge to our current generation of young people.

We would like to thank the committee for the opportunity to provide information on trends and issues for DV in NSW

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