

**INQUIRY INTO ISSUES RELATING TO
REDFERN/WATERLOO**

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Theme:

Summary

16 April 2004

The Chair
Committee Secretariat
Standing Committee on Social Issues
NSW Legislative Council
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney BSW 2000

Dear Madam

Re: Inquiry into Issues Relating to Redfern / Waterloo

Please find enclosed submission by Barnardos Australia to this inquiry. We have an extensive history of direct welfare provision in this area, and are currently delivering an intensive outreach home visitation service under a two year contract to the NSW Department of Community Services, funded by the Redfern Waterloo Partnership Project.

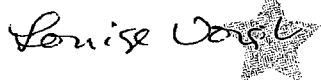
We have employed a diverse multicultural team comprising aboriginal and non aboriginal staff in the Redfern office, supervised by a highly skilled and experienced Social Welfare Manager recruited following international advertising. We are currently working with some of the most difficult and well-known families of Redfern.

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Barnardos would be pleased to participate in public hearings when they commence and the Committee would be welcome to visit Barnardos' Redfern office should that be of assistance to the Inquiry.

Please contact Ms Deirdre Cheers, who will be available to give evidence and arrange further information as required. Ms Cheers has been Senior Manager of Barnardos' South East Sydney programs for over ten years and has considerable familiarity and expertise in issues relating to Redfern/Waterloo.

Yours faithfully



LOUISE VOIGT
CEO & Director of Welfare

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**Submission by Barnardos Australia to the NSW Legislative Council Standing Committee
on Social Issues**

Inquiry into issues relating to Redfern/Waterloo, April 2004

Barnardos Australia is one of the largest child welfare service providers in NSW, our programs number over 50 at any time and target children at risk of abuse and neglect, children and young people in out-of-home care and at risk and detached adolescents. We currently provide a number of services and programs in Redfern Waterloo, some of which have provided care and support for children and families living in the area for many years. The agency is consequently very familiar with the issues relating to children and families and is concerned to maximise the practice of government and non-government agencies in meeting needs in the area. Barnardos programs servicing Redfern Waterloo are:

- South East Sydney Temporary Family Care (TFC)-crisis foster care and planned respite foster care for children 0-12 years
- Adolescent Services program-community based placements for young people 12-18 years, including indigenous young people
- Sydney Kid's Friends-mentoring program for children 5-12 years
- Find a Family (Adoption and Permanent Care)-foster care placements for abused children permanently removed from family care by the Children's Court

and the most recent Barnardos program:

- Redfern Waterloo Intensive Family Support Service (IFSS)-funded by Premier's Department Redfern Waterloo Partnership Project to provide intensive family home visitation to vulnerable families (incorporating Kids Speak family and child activity program-a community managed service operating Friday afternoons on Waterloo Green)

Having direct contact with many families in the area, both aboriginal and non aboriginal families, employing aboriginal staff, and working closely with other non government as well as government agencies, we provide the information contained in this submission under the Terms of Reference of the Inquiry.

Barnardos wishes to emphasise that, although the impact of drugs in the area is not identified separately under the Terms of Reference, drugs have an effect on what happens at every level in Redfern Waterloo. Drugs are an underlying issue to many of the problems in the area. The fact that Redfern is in close proximity to the city of Sydney, and is a transit point for many people who pass through the area on a daily basis, means that Redfern Waterloo is a pick up area for drugs for people from other suburbs. Dealers also come into the area in order to buy and sell drugs, with consequent effects on crime rates. It is not simply that there is a high number of drug users living in Redfern Waterloo, there are many community residents, both aboriginal and non aboriginal families, whose daily lives are deeply affected by drugs even though they are not involved directly in buying, selling, or using drugs.

Barnardos have been told by other agencies (including aboriginal agencies) that the drug dealers frequently are not residents of the Block but come in from other areas to buy and sell drugs, are from other cultural backgrounds ie not just aboriginal people, and that the dealers use "standover" techniques. Drug trafficking has an overwhelming impact on the Redfern Waterloo area and environment, impacting not only the crime rate but also on issues related to child protection. For example aboriginal girls as young as 12 and 13 are given heroin in order to build an addiction then used by drug dealers for prostitution while drugged, primary aged children act as "runners" for drugs and witness drug dealing, and pre-schoolers play in streets where used syringes are thrown.

1.(a) policing strategies and resources

IFSS has frequent contact with police stationed at Redfern local command, and believe that the current Police Area Commander, Dennis Smith, has initiated and developed a number of projects which support the general community. The police have in general adopted some strategies which appear to be working well, including the community policing strategy which has officers continually visible and approachable on the street, and working cooperatively with non-government agencies like Barnardos. We have participated with police in providing planned activity programs for numbers of aboriginal children and young people who are excluded from school and consequently at increased risk of juvenile offending, many of these are under the age of ten years and cannot be charged with a criminal offence. The incumbents of the police Youth Liaison Officer positions are generally liked and accepted by

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the kids, and these officers have worked with the Kids Speak program. Police camps for local children and young people are well attended and Barnardos' observation is that these are enjoyed.

A source of difficulty however is that individual police officers frequently do not understand welfare practice and as a result do not know how to refer families to other agencies for assistance. This appears to be compounded by a belief that they cannot give personal information out about families (for example names and problems/reasons for referral) due to privacy laws. In the early days of the IFSS, at a meeting between Redfern police, Premier's Department and Barnardos, it was expressed that Barnardos was "not doing anything" with a number of aboriginal families. On further discussion it was realised that Barnardos knew nothing about these families, as a referral had not been received. It has also been Barnardos experience that agency intervention plans with families have on occasion been overturned unexpectedly and without discussion. In one instance this occurred because police wanted a particular troublesome child temporarily moved out of the area, due to school holidays and potential problems with crime.

1.(b) other existing government programs including local, state and federal programs

Government departments in Redfern Waterloo, whilst generally staffed with committed employees, are hampered in service delivery by bureaucratic procedures, lack of flexibility and poor interagency relationships.

Unfortunately rigid adherence to bureaucracy is not likely to assist the socially excluded population of Redfern Waterloo.

The Partnership Project has organised regular Senior Officers Group meetings to discuss issues such as privacy management protocols and case coordination,

however the daily reality for families resident in Redfern Waterloo is that they continue to experience difficulties in dealing with government departments.

Some case examples are as follows:

HOUSING

An elderly aboriginal grandmother looking after her daughter's children requested assistance from Barnardos in applying for a housing transfer. We helped her complete a priority housing application form in December 2003, then attempted to lodge it with the appropriate housing office. Housing asked for additional medical and financial information, which was forwarded promptly. In late January an Aboriginal housing specialist telephoned to request further medical and financial information, telling us that the application had been passed to her by another worker but she did not know why because it seemed to her to be a straight forward priority housing application. She wanted to know why the grandmother was not receiving Centrelink payments for care of her grandchildren, and also said that birth certificates were required for all members of the household. We unsuccessfully attempted to advise her that the application had been checked thoroughly by a housing officer at the time of lodging. Barnardos explained that, as with many Koori families, arrangements to care for grandchildren are informal and that this was the grandmother's choice. Also that grandparents often do not want to take parenting payments away from their adult children, or "dob them in" to Centrelink. The Barnardos aboriginal family support worker explained to Centrelink that as a member of the stolen generation this grandmother will do nothing to disadvantage her daughter or inform on her to a federal authority. Thus she, like many indigenous grandmothers, will forgo any payment for looking after her grandchildren. We asked about the relevance of personal choices such as this to the issue of housing transfer. We also explained that birth certificates do not have the same meaning in the indigenous community as they do in the non-indigenous community, this grandmother was born in Queensland and was registered under her father's name, a name that she has never used. Such a certificate, if it existed, would not in fact help to "prove" who she was; however, when Barnardos asked why a birth certificate was necessary when other proof of identity had already been supplied, the only reason given was "it's policy". The housing officer could not elaborate on consequences should grandmother continue to choose not to claim all the money for the grandchildren and or be unable to supply a birth certificate, or what would happen if it took some time to obtain a birth certificate. It appeared that she would express her views with regard to the above in a report (not shared with others) to be forwarded to her line manager. The housing officer requested a personal meeting with the grandmother and all involved agencies, the basis for this was that she wanted to personally discuss the parenting payment and birth certificate issue. She later agreed to meet with Barnardos as the key agency, along with the family, when we explained that a very high number of agencies was involved and a meeting time suitable to all would be hard to arrange. However she could not meet for a couple of weeks. A telephone call to the Housing Department the next day revealed that they had closed the family's housing application as it had been in the system for over three

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weeks! We were told that the decision as to whether the family would be accepted for priority housing would now depend firstly on a report written by the housing officer, which would be submitted to the senior, who would then make a decision about whether it would proceed! If it did proceed then the application would be re-opened at the original date of submission. It would then be forwarded to the senior officer in the area which the family were requesting to move to and given consideration by them as to whether it would be accepted or not. It may then be placed on a waiting list with all others and receive no priority despite the housing department knowing all along that the children of this household are regularly placed in vulnerable and traumatic circumstances due to their current location on the "Block" (the riots had just occurred).

EDUCATION

In early November 2003 Barnardos was referred three primary school aged boys from separate aboriginal families, [redacted] who had been excluded from school. We were asked to coordinate an activity/education program for them for the duration of the school exclusion. Investigation revealed that these young boys spend more time away from school than at school, either through family not sending them to school, or exclusions due to behavioural issues. A 6-8 week education exclusion in early November effectively meant that the children would be out of school for 3 months until school resumed in February 2004, as the 6 week suspension time frame is generally followed by meetings for reintegration at the end of the period, and the end of the 6 weeks would be the last week of school for 2003. This is an obviously grossly inadequate means of ensuring positive re-introduction to the school environment and ensuring school attendance. Barnardos worked with other local agencies including the police, and employed casual staff using IFSS brokerage funds, to develop an appropriate alternative day program for these boys. Simultaneously undertaking intensive family support intervention with their families and coordinating other agency involvement. Referrals were made for specialist health and behavioural assessment, activity programs were maintained throughout the January school holiday period, and direct support provided to assist school reintegration at the beginning of 2004. Whilst 2 out of these 3 boys are mostly attending school daily at present, there continues to be ongoing difficulty in the Education Department maintaining sufficient support to children such as these in order to contain them within either the mainstream or available special school environment.

Aboriginal children such as these boys are not catered for adequately within the mainstream education curriculum, nor are proper funded educational alternatives available. Barnardos believes that until schools themselves radically change or an alternative educational facility with indigenous input is set up, aboriginal children will continue to be poorly catered for.

PUBLIC HEALTH

The most severe public health issue is related to the fact that there is no longer a needle and syringe exchange located on the Block. This leads directly to used syringes being discarded on the street, and the actual doorsteps and footpaths outside family homes can be littered with dangerous needles. Barnardos has observed toddlers and young children playing on footpaths where the gutters contain used needles, this creates child protection concern.

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1.(c) non-government services and service provision

As is well documented elsewhere in reports and in the media, there is a high number of welfare agencies and programs operating in Redfern Waterloo and some of these are long established. Included are numbers of religious based agencies with a pastoral care basis in addition to direct welfare service provision. Many agencies operate on small funding bases therefore none of them can maximise their impact from such a low resource base. Agencies are clearly struggling to meet the reporting requirements of government, which are increasingly stringent as far as accountability is concerned. Barnardos observation is that despite this however and unlike the government agencies, non-government services are generally characterised by:

- Lack of bureaucratic process,
- Clear service delivery protocols and procedures, including referral paths,
- Openness with clients, and
- Active attempts at cooperation with other local agencies, to the benefit of families.

We emphasise here that as with all disadvantaged/marginalised communities, it is most important to build the trust of the people if assistance is to be offered successfully. To this end the work of the University of New South Wales community development project has also been crucial to some of the good things that have happened in Redfern Waterloo, for example the Community Gardens.

1.(d) strategies under the current NSW Government "Redfern Waterloo Partnership Project"

Barnardos IFSS has been funded under RWPP, and we have had close dealings with the office and Premier's Department staff in Rosehill Street. In terms of the initiatives of the RWPP we are aware that some of the criticisms of the community have been that RWPP staff have not been sufficiently open and transparent to the community as regards decisions made about the overall strategy for Redfern Waterloo. Barnardos was clear at the time of accepting the contract for provision of the IFSS that we would develop and deliver an outreach intensive family support program to the community, and would not use the funding to promote the public relations concerns of government. This was, and continues to be, acceptable to the Partnership Project and to the community.

Barnardos' lengthy experience in service provision in the area informs us of the high needs of both aboriginal and non-aboriginal families. Whilst welcoming the welfare initiative of the RWPP in adequately funding a large intensive support service for families, we would take this opportunity to point out that 2 years is not a long period of time in which to impact in the long term on the community in an area of such high social need. The short term nature of all RWPP funding contracts is therefore problematic to ongoing service delivery in the area.

The RWPP has consistently attempted to bring the government services together, via Senior Officers Group meetings, working on issues such as privacy and shared information protocols, and case coordination.

Finally, it is noted that many agencies have been required to participate in a high number of service evaluations and audits since the inception of the RWPP. For example Barnardos must complete the CSGP annual report for DoCS, an Evaluation Form for RWPP office, have an independent program evaluation as part of the 2 year funding (this has been contracted to the University of New South Wales School of Social Work), and is also currently participating in the Redfern Waterloo Human Services Review.