

## INQUIRY INTO PUBLIC DISTURBANCES AT MACQUARIE FIELDS

**Organisation:** Macquarie Fields Women's Action Group  
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**Telephone:**  
**Date Received:** 9/11/2005

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**Theme:**

**Summary**

Partially Confidential

## **Inquiry into Public Disturbances at Macquarie Fields:**

We are writing in response to the request for call for submissions for the above-mentioned enquiry. We are writing on behalf of the Macquarie Field Women's Action Group. We are all long term residents (10-20 years) on the Macquarie Fields public housing estate and have been involved as volunteers and management committee members with a variety of community organisations over the years including the three estate public school P&C's, the Neighbourhood Advisory Board, the Northern Campbelltown Community Action Group, Glenquarie Family Support, the Macquarie Fields Youth Centre, Schools as Community Centres Program, Primary Connect, the Safe Women's Group, the Glenquarie Neighbourhood Centre, and Neighbourhood Watch. Our contact details area;

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We submit the following comments and recommendations with regard to the terms of reference set down by the Committee on Social Issues.

Reference 1 – *Policing strategies and resources in the Macquarie Fields area... Involving two fatalities on 25<sup>th</sup> February 2005.*

### **Key Issues:**

- Immediately prior to the motor vehicle accident there was significant police activity in the area surrounding Cottonwood Drive where the driver of the vehicle resided.
- Prior to the accident there existed a negative relationship between police and the local community. This resulted in a lack of respect and a siege mentality between the police and the local community. Many of the police at Macquarie Fields have a lack of understanding of the social issues and stress factors confronting the community.
- New police to the local command are often drawn into the existing negative police culture. There are some good police but they often get worn down by existing negative police attitudes.
- Residents have been concerned by a lack of police response to local disturbances such as stone throwing, car damage and domestic violence incidences.
- There is insufficient allocation of police resources to the area such as cars and personnel.
- Police often speak to the community unacceptably eg calling them names such as house trog, dole bludger etc. but if the community says anything disrespectful, they get charged.
- There is a noticeable turnover of police commanders resulting in a change of attitude to police policy and a lack of stability.
- The Police Youth Liaison Officer Chris Cotter is grossly overworked and prior to February 25<sup>th</sup> did not have and still doesn't have, car at his disposal to fulfil his duties, even though he works within a large geographical area.
- In the two weeks following the disturbances, Police were excessively heavy handed resulting in the traumatising of the entire community particularly young children. This included the ongoing presence of police in riot gear walking the streets and herding residents into their homes, the police helicopter flying overhead night after

night preventing children sleep and the fact that any young male between 16-25 years became a target for questioning/harassment by police. The forceful arrest of suspects involved in the disturbances was also very upsetting to the community with innocent neighbours being affected by police climbing over fences, knocking people over and going through backyards. It was like living in a police state for two weeks. Counselling for traumatised families and children was organised by the Schools as Community Centres Program at both Curran and Guise public schools.

#### Recommendations:

1. More police foot patrols to encourage a sense of security within the community and to develop a positive profile for the police
2. Stable police leadership at Macquarie Fields committed to community participation, communication and relationship building.
3. Merit selection with regard to recruitment for the area commander with community representation on the interview panel
4. More police participation on community committees and at community events.
5. Increase police education programs with regard to local community issues. This should be facilitated by long-term workers in the community as well as by local community members.
6. Professional development for police officers at the front desk of the Macquarie Field's Police Station to ensure a positive approach to serving the community.
7. More efficient and decisive policing at the time of the actual disturbance. Withdrawal of tactical response police and reinstatement of normal policing as soon as possible following a public disturbance.

Reference 2 – *Government programs and service provision in the Macquarie Field's area including local, state and federal programs.*

#### Key Issues:

- **Local** - Campbelltown City Council does not provide graffiti removal to Macquarie Fields and does not communicate with residents about council clean-ups because residents on the estate are not direct ratepayers. The council does not provide adequate outdoor or park facilities for the community.
- The streets are often dirty and the open spaces are often littered with garbage.
- The Macquarie Fields Youth Centre is dysfunctional with frequent changes in staff and is inadequately resourced. The limited opening hours at the centre restrict attendance by local youth. There is poor communication about what programs if anything, is going on at the youth centre.
- Inability of youth to access limited sporting programs due to financial and transport issues.
- Programs negatively impacted by short term funding eg. Programs negatively impacted by short term funding eg. 1 or 2 year funding cycles or pilot projects.
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#### Recommendations:

1. Strengthening and expanding youth services including the recruitment of skilled experienced youth workers. Increase the low wages of youth workers to attract better qualified and skilled workers.

2. Open the youth centre at times when youth want to access it.
3. Provide better resources to the youth centre.
4. Expand the community development role of Council
5. Get Council to reinstate our successful Clean up Your Street and BBQ s.
6. Ensure that Council fulfils its responsibilities to clean the streets, provide public garbage bins and mow the grass in public places.
7. Improve the dispersal of community information from Council to the community.
8. Provide outdoor community facilities. Youth has been lobbying Council for years to put in a skate park. The Schools as Community Centres Program parents have been trying to get a park for children and families at Macquarie Fields for 10 years.

#### Key Issues:

- **State** - Programs negatively impacted by short term funding eg. 1 or 2 year funding cycles or pilot projects.
- The Schools as Community Centres Program which has been the only stable, reliable and trusted service on this estate for the past 11 years, continues to just get funded for a year or two at a time. On the weekend immediately following the disturbances, Jan Watson, the facilitator of the Schools of Community Centre Program was out in the community providing support and comfort to young families on the estate. That is what the Program is all about – being there for the community, delivering what it says it will. But believe it or not this valuable Program has also had to cut valuable services to the community because of a lack of funding- for instance, one of the free community preschool sessions have been cut, the home visiting has been deleted and also the Coffee and Kids, a street outreach service, has also gone. The SaCC program runs a range of different programs including parenting programs, toy and book library, nutrition and healthy lifestyles programs, workshops for parents on different issues such as child health, child development, family budgeting, programs on communication and conflict resolution skills, fruit and vegie co-ops – the list goes on. However, these are all dependent on what bits of money government departments have left over to direct to the Program. The Program runs on the smell of an oily rag but manages to see 60 –80 families each week.
- State run/funded programs like Schools as Community Centres and Primary Connect can't apply for additional funding grants because they are not incorporated or a charity so they miss out. Private welfare agencies often don't want to be partners with government programs, when they can apply and get funding for themselves and do it their way.
- There are insufficient or non-existent local health services, including mental health, women's health and youth health provided to the area. What has happened to health promotion? It seems to have disappeared. Waiting lists are very long, and getting to health services in Campbelltown or Ingleburn is very difficult or prohibitive for many in the community.
- The Primary Connect program helping children 8 – 12 years at Guise Public School is going at the end of December.
- Public housing stock is being left vacant and then gets vandalised or burnt.
- Public housing stock is being sold off to private investors who have no commitment to building and investing in community. The youth involved in the car accident were residing as private tenants in a privately owned house, which was previously owned by the Dept. of Housing. Channel 9, Current Affair rented a privately owned house

in the Cottonwood area to portray negative images of the community following the public disturbances.

- The Department of Education schools need to develop programs for children who truant or are suspended. Too many of the children on the estate are not getting to Year 10, - children are then getting further behind with school work, hanging out on the street, unsupervised, with nothing to do which often leads to trouble.
- There is not enough emphasis on training and finding employment for young people in the area.

Recommendations:

1. Give permanent or long-term status to successful programs like the Schools as Community Centres Program rather than just 1 or 2 years at a time. Reinstate the Primary Connect Program.
2. Provide adequate resources for existing local programs that work, that the community trusts and build on their success rather than bring in a new pilot program or give money to programs that don't work. This year Curran Public School and the SaCC program in consultation with the community, applied for early intervention funding from DoCS to create a much needed Family Centre with family support workers but the money all went to big welfare organizations instead of supporting what's here and working.
3. Increase locally based health services to the area, particularly mental health and alcohol/substance abuse programs. It is too expensive and too difficult for many residents to get to Campbelltown for help. Just try walking 3 kms to the train station with young children and then have to climb to sets of metal stairs to get on and off the train.
4. Provide more vocational education programs and pre-apprenticeship programs at Macquarie Fields TAFE and James Meehan High School.
5. Run the Year 10 equivalent course at the local TAFE so that youth who left school early can get their School Certificate and then go on to do TAFE courses to gain employment.
6. Develop a proper program with in the schools to work with children who are suspended rather than just sending them home to end up on the streets or throwing objects at police during public disturbances. Curran Public School tried( and failed) to set up a suspension centre at one of the schools where children are supervised and are given work to do and where parents are involved with the process of getting their children back to school.
7. Put more money into the early years of primary school so that children feel good about school and learn how to read, write and do maths. Children in Kindy, Year 1 and 2 should have small classes and have more time with the teacher to make sure that they are learning. If primary school children are happy and confident about themselves and learning they are more likely to stay at high school and not get involved in public disturbances.
8. Find a way to attract skilled, experienced teachers to our schools rather than just first year out teachers who are enthusiastic but have a lot to learn.
9. Find a way to help long-term public housing residents to buy their occupied homes as this would help build a real sense of community.
10. Don't let the Department of Housing leave houses vacant for long periods of time.
11. Fund more crime prevention programs in the area.

### Reference 3: *Non-government services and service provision in the Macquarie Fields area.*

#### Key Issues:

- Other than the Neighbourhood Centre, Work Ventures and the Salvation Army Centre, all the NGO's work on an outreach basis to the Macquarie Fields area. They bring in programs with out consulting the community and as a result many of them fail even after just a few months.
- There is a lack of community trust with Burnside and the Benevolent Society and other NGO's because they are not based on the estate and they often come in as the experts, don't consult, get it wrong and then just disappear.
- It is a concern that so much federal and state money is going to welfare organisations that are private and church and religious based. Are Burnside and the Benevolent Society going to become the new DoCS? A lot of the community doesn't go to the Salvation Army Centre because of the religious connection.
- State agencies and programs often can't apply for state or federal funding so it goes to the NGO's.
- There are many NGO's who are funded to cover all of the Campbelltown LGA but somehow the money and services never seem to get past Airs or Minto. Macquarie Fields always seems to miss out because we are at the very northern end of the LGA and we get forgotten. Who checks that NGO's are actually doing what they say they are doing in their evaluation reports?
- Now that there is trouble at Macquarie Fields and there is potential for funding dollars, all of a sudden the NGO's are interested in us. There is a stampede to show how much they care and how they have supposedly been involved here for years. News to us, we don't know where have they been for the past 25 years? We couldn't get Father Riley and Youth Off the Streets interested before, but now all of a sudden they are on TV saying "give us 4 million dollars and we'll fix Macquarie Fields" and magically we now have Youth Off the Streets doing basketball evenings. We appreciate the program and their effort but where have they been in the past?
- NGO's like Work Ventures (they have a cottage on the estate) don't communicate well with the community or consult properly so they never build up real relationships with the community. They then wonder why the community isn't coming to use their computers or getting involved in their programs.
- NGO's spend too much time competing with one another for money and worrying if they are getting their name or logo in print so they can get brownie points.

#### Recommendations:

1. Have more real accountability for NGO's about how the money is being spent and if the service is being provided properly when and where it is supposed to, not just a report.
2. Rather than just turn over money to NGO's, support government run programs like Primary Connect.
3. Support programs that are based on the estate and trusted by the community, rather than private welfare organisations that do outreach services.
4. There should be a proper plan drawn up about providing services to the area and future directions. Premiers Department has started this process, but we don't know what has happened to the plan that was written after the Community Forum in October.

Reference 5: *The underlying causes and problems which may have contributed to individual and collective acts of violence and social disorder*

Key Issues:

- Poverty.
- The government has created a manufactured community made up of a large number of people suffering enormous economic and social disadvantage with high needs and with out a proper infrastructure to support it. That has got to be a recipe for trouble.
- The Macquarie Fields Housing Estate is constantly being negatively stereo-typed by the media and the outside community. Because of it, the community is always battling a sense of despair and depression after being told over and over again that we are worthless scum. No one ever hears about the good people here on the estate, the great parents, the people who work and the happy kids.
- **We have third generation un-employment and poverty.**
- Families are isolated from relatives and the family support that young parents need..
- Individuals have poor education histories and literacy levels.
- There are no proper employment programs or job creation programs for youth
- Transportation is poor – people become isolated and virtual prisoners on the estate.
- There are not enough good community role models particularly positive male role models for the boys.
- We get consulted and studied time and time again, but then nothing ever happens to change things other than having a pretty report written to go on someone's shelf or into a filing cabinet.
- Senior bureaucrats and politicians spend too much time listening to junior bureaucrats and policy advisors who have never worked or lived in Macquarie Fields.

Recommendations:

1. Don't build large public housing estates.
2. Wouldn't it be great if the media wrote a good news story about Macquarie Fields!!
3. Convince the state and federal governments to support and expand existing programs based on the estate that are getting the job done.
4. The Standing Committee on Social Issues members should talk directly to residents. It is hard to put down everything on paper the way you want it said.
5. The Standing Committee on Social Issues members should talk directly to long-term workers on the estate who spend every day here on the estate rather than managers in area or regional offices.
6. Create employment opportunities – help people on the estate get training and find jobs.