COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Inquiry into Children, Young People and the Built Environment

ISSUES PAPER 2: The 'Child-Friendly Cities Movement'

Executive Summary

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child promotes the participation of children in decisions that affect their lives. As a signatory to the Convention, Australia is compelled to seek methods for ensuring that children and young people do freely participate in critical decisions.

The establishment of the UNICEF International Secretariat for Child Friendly Cities in 2000 was the culmination of a decade of work promoting consideration of the needs of children in the built environment. The 'child friendly cities movement' originated in Italy, and in part seeks to build on the principles of participation established by the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The 'child friendly cities movement' has promoted practical methods for improving the built environment to recognise and reflect the needs of children and young people.

Numerous examples of good practice have now been identified by the International Secretariat for Child Friendly Cities, which demonstrate the diverse application of principles for child friendly cities. London (England), Christchurch (New Zealand), Tilburg (Netherlands) and British Columbia (Canada) are just some of the locations that have been recognised for their innovative approach to the built environment. These examples of good practice provide some insight into how improvement can be achieved:

- through participation of children and young people in design;
- via training of key built environment personnel to effective engage children and young people;
- by promoting and sharing practical outcomes and good news stories; and
- by improving the responsiveness and accessibility of local governance structures and developing coordinated planning principles and controls to ensure due consideration and involvement is given to children and young people.

However such developments are relatively recent and as a result there is little evaluation of this innovative approach currently available. In looking at possible methodologies for evaluating initiatives arising from the child friendly cities approach the Committee will be interested in any potential role for the Commission for Children and Young People in such evaluation processes.

Child-Friendly Cities

In recent years, there has been growing international interest in child-friendly cities. This is, in part, in recognition of the significance and importance of the built environment to children and young people. It also reflects national responses to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CROC). The Convention, declared on 2 September 1990, is a "comprehensive listing of the obligations the States are prepared to recognise towards the child … the whole thrust of the Convention is to emphasise the inter-connected and mutually-reinforcing nature of all rights in ensuring what UNICEF terms the 'survival and development' of children. In this respect, it can be more useful to describe the range of rights covered by the Convention as the three Ps: provision, protection and participation".[1]

Australia is one of the 191 countries that had ratified the Convention by 2002.[2]

With respect to the 54 articles contained in the Convention, it is worth noting that there are specific articles that are most closely aligned with the child-friendly cities movement. These are:

- Article 2 – non-discrimination
- Article 3 – best interests of the child
- Article 6 – the right to life and maximum development
- Article 12 – respecting the views of the child (participation)

The Convention was the first of a series of developments driving attention to child-friendly cities. The following provides a brief overview of other key developments in this movement:

- 1992 – Mayors Defenders of Children initiative launched in Dakar, Senegal, as a way of involving municipal authorities in implementing child rights;
- 1996 UN Conference on Human Settlements, Habitat II, in Istanbul stressed that the well-being of children is the ultimate indicator of a health society and that child friendly cities are also cities that are better for all age groups;
- Four major international fora in Italy between 1997-2000; and
- September 2000, the International Secretariat for Child Friendly Cities was set up.[3]

According to UNICEF, a child friendly city is actively engaged in fulfilling the right of every citizen to:

- Influence decisions about their city;
- Express their opinions on the city they want;
- Participate in family, community and social life;

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[1] Cantwell, N. (1995) 'United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child: Introduction', **Rights of the Child**, Defence for Children International, Switzerland.
[2] Bridgman, R. (2004) 'Child-Friendly Cities: Canadian Perspective', <u>Children Youth and Environment</u>, 14 (2).
[3] Riggio, E. (2002) 'Child friendly cities: good governance in the best interest of the child', <u>Environment and Urbanisation,</u> Vol 14, No. 2.

- Gain access to basic services such as health care, education and shelter;
- Drink safe water and have access to proper sanitation;
- Be protected from exploitation, violence and abuse;
- Walk safely in the streets, on their own;
- Meet friends and play;
- Have green spaces for plants and animals;
- Live in an unpolluted and sustainable environment;
- Participate in cultural and social events;
- Be supported, loved and cared for; and
- Be equal citizens with access to every service, regardless of ethnic origin, religion, income, gender or disability[4].

The International Secretariat for Child Friendly Cities promotes nine building blocks to becoming a child-friendly city:

1. Children's participation – promoting children's active involvement in issues that affect them; listening to their views and taking them into consideration in decision-making processes.
2. A child-friendly legal framework – ensuring legislation, regulatory frameworks and procedures which consistently promote and protect the rights of children.
3. A city-wide Children's Rights Strategy – developing a detailed, comprehensive strategy or agenda for building a Child Friendly City, based on the Convention.
4. A Children's Rights Unit or coordinating mechanism – developing permanent structures in local government to ensure priority consideration of children's perspectives.
5. Child impact assessment and evaluation – ensuring that there is a systematic process to assess the impact of law, policy and practice on children – in advance, during and after implementation.
6. A children's budget – ensuring adequate resource commitment and budget analysis for children.
7. A regular State of the City's Children report – ensuring sufficient monitoring and data collection on the state of children and their rights.
8. Making children's rights known – ensuring awareness of children's rights among adults and children.
9. Independent advocacy for children – supporting non-government organizations and developing independent human rights institutions – children's ombudsmen or commissioners for children – to promote children's rights.

International Examples of Good Practice
The International Secretariat for Child Friendly Cities (UNICEF) has identified a number of international examples of good practice in relation to child friendly city developments. Sites of good practice stretch from the Philippines, Africa, South America and the more industrialized / developed nations of Denmark, England, New Zealand and Canada. Examples illustrated here are from the more developed countries, due to the greater similarities with Australia.

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[4] http://www.childfriendlycities.org/resources/index_definition.html accessed on 27/08/05.

London, England

London has 1.65 million children aged under 18 years, which constitutes approximately one-fifth of the total population.

The "Mayor of London pledged to make London a child-friendly city by developing and implementing the Greater London Authority (GLA) Children and Young People's Strategy with the active participation of young Londoners and within the framework of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Strategy covers a projected implementation period of 10 years".[5] The following steps have been undertaken since this Mayoral pledge:

- Child and youth consultations 2000-01 – over 3,000 children and young people were consulted by the Office of the Children's Rights Commissioner for London
- Mayoral meeting – a meeting was organized between the mayor and children and young people to respond to the Mayor's economic, development and transport strategies
- Transport for London developed a Children's Action Plan
- Mayor's question time with young people provides further opportunities for direct input into key policy decisions
- Draft strategy – the draft strategy was released in April 2003
- Final strategy is launched in January 2004

In January 2004, the *Making London Better for All Children and Young People – The Mayor's Children and Young People Strategy* was released. Building on strategic partnerships with numerous agencies (including national, regional and local government and non-government agencies) this Strategy identified key focus areas, which included some of the following initiatives:

- Continue Meet the Mayor events for children and young people (Action Point 3.1.3)
- The Mayor will continue to add his support to the campaign to reduce the voting age in national and local elections to 16 years (Action Point 3.5.2)
- The Mayor's Children and Young People Unit will undertake a program of Child Impact Assessments (Policy 4.1.3)
- The Mayor will encourage designs for an accessible city and enhancement of the public realm that recognizes the health needs of children and young people (Policy 5A.1)
- The Mayor will use his 100 Public Spaces Program to model and promote designs for an accessible city that recognizes the needs of children and young people (Action Point 5A.1.1)
- Through the London Plan and Supplementary Planning Guidance the Mayor will ensure minimum standards for children's play and education needs are addressed in a London-wide and sub-regional basis. Planning obligations with developers should, where appropriate, fund facilities and services for children

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[5] International Child Friendly Cities Secretariat (2003) **London Review**

and young people, such as childcare facilities, play space or new open space (Action Point 5A.1.3)

This comprehensive plan (of 156 pages) identifies further goals and strategies for realizing the Mayor's vision of making London more child and youth friendly.

While not specifically related to the London Strategy, the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE), based in London, has produced numerous publications that promote children's and young people's participation in shaping the built environment. Funded by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, CABE has released the following publications:

- *Being Involved in School Design: a guide for school communities, local authorities, funders and design and constructions teams* (2004)
- *Involving Young People in the Design and Care of Urban Spaces*
- *Space for Learning: A Handbook for Education Spaces in Museums, Heritage Sites and Discovery Centres*

This series of publications and the contribution of CABE Education to research and training serves to support the London Strategy.

British Columbia, Canada
The Society for Children and Youth of British Columbia developed the Child and Youth Friendly Communities Initiative in 1999. The main purpose of this initiative was "To promote the concept of child and youth friendly communities and to help community groups, including children and young people themselves, assess their neighborhoods through the eyes of young people and engage in activities that will improve children and youth in their local communities".[6]

The five key objectives of this initiative included:

- To promote the child and youth friendly concept – this was achieved through conferences, media releases and the development of promotional and educational resources
- To develop tools with communities (including children and young people) such as child and youth friendly assessment checklists and to promote these tools – the 'Getting Started' and 'Planning for Action' checklists and community resources were developed as part of this objective and have been distributed to over 600 community groups and individuals
- To build expertise through a series of workshops, training programs, school curriculum resources and a series of publications – a series of conferences were held and training sessions conducted throughout the duration of the initiative
- To create networking opportunities through its website, newsletters and best practices and community successes – a specific child and youth friendly communities section has been added to the existing Society for Children and

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[6] International Child Friendly Cities Secretariat (2003) **Canadian Review**

Youth website and articles have been included in a regular newsletter, with over 3,000 circulation

- To challenge communities and celebrate success – a Child and Youth Friendly Community Awards scheme has been developed as a method of recognizing innovative and effective practices.

Having secured ongoing funding, this initiative is now in a second phase. The increased recognition of the importance of child and youth friendly communities continued funding and interest in resources developed suggest that this initiative has been successful in achieving its original purpose.

Christchurch, New Zealand
Christchurch City Council (and New Zealand more generally), has sought to address identified limitations in approaches to engaging children and young people and the resulting environments 'unattractive and unsupportive' to children and young people. With approximately 35% of the population aged between 0 and 24 years in Christchurch, devising better ways of considering the needs of and providing opportunities for children and young people to participate in planning decisions was considered important.

The two main policy developments reflecting a commitment to children and young people have been:
1. The Agenda for Children, and
2. The Youth Development Strategy 'Aotearoa'.

The Agenda for Children
The vision of this Agenda was – 'Making New Zealand / Aotearoa (Maori word for New Zealand) a great place for children'. This Agenda adopts a 'whole of child approach' for 0 – 17 year olds and established the following objectives:

- Increase children's participation
- End child poverty
- Address violence in children's lives
- Improve central government structures and processes to enhance policy and service effectiveness for children
- Improve local government and community planning for children
- Enhance information, research and research collaboration relating to children.

Youth Development Strategy
The Youth Development Strategy provides a framework for responding to the needs of young people (12-24 years). The following are the objectives of this strategy:

- Ensure a consistent strengths-based youth development approach. Policies and programs should be designed to minimize risk factors (low self-esteem and lack of family support) and to enhance protective factors (such as supportive communities and positive social interactions)

- Develop the skills of those professionals who work with young people. To relate to young people requires an understanding of the rapidly changing world of young people, youth culture and sub-cultures. Training is needed to ensure that professionals know how to trigger their participation and to be able to relate to them as equal partners
- Creating opportunities for young people to actively participate and engage. Healthy development of young people can be stimulated by creating opportunities for them to influence the outcomes of situations, solve problems, inform themselves and others, design and contribute to an activity or idea. Moreover, participation increases a person's sense of ownership and ensures that policies, services and programs meet the needs of young people
- Building knowledge about youth development through information and research. Effective and responsive programming depends on more and better information, especially on the trends that influence the lives and development of young people.

Tilburg, Netherlands

Tilburg is the sixth largest city in the Netherlands, with a population of approximately 200,000. Changes in recent times highlighted common trends in developed and industrialized cities - "The higher density of buildings, fewer open spaces and the increased traffic loads have made the urban environment increasingly unfriendly for children and youth. Unfortunately, recent urban developments have not been integrated into existing town planning priorities and attention has not been paid to the living conditions of children and youth".[7]

The 'Growing Up in Tilburg' Youth Policy was developed in response to these concerns. This policy framework included some innovative strategies to engage children and young people and to enhance participation:

- Youth Ambassadors – Tilburg Council specifically rejected the notion of a youth council, in fear that it would not be truly representative of the diverse interests and needs of all young people. Instead, Youth Ambassadors were created to liaise with local young people and to feed information into the Council. A website was established to increase the reach of this initiative.
- Youth Press Agency – a youth press agency was established to collect data and information about young people and to publish a regular youth magazine.
- Community Evaluation – a community evaluation has been conceived that will look at the living conditions of young people in all areas of the municipality. Specific attention will be given to traffic problems, areas for play, and recreation and sports facilities, amongst other things.
- Independent Youth Centre – a long term initiative involves the establishment of an independent youth centre, which is totally run and managed by young people.
- Youth Ombuds-point – a youth ombuds-point was established as a central point for children and young people to come and learn about local municipal activities and services for children and young people.

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[7] International Child Friendly Cities Secretariat (2003) **Netherlands Review**

What is perhaps most striking about these examples of good practice, is the breadth of strategies and the overall integration of diverse objectives. Improving child and youth participation is central to each of the approaches listed. However, participation has been coupled with child poverty reduction, provision of more effective services, training and education for personnel involved in the built environment, greater prioritization of children and young people through establishment of specific portfolios, budgets and policies, and cooperation across layers of government (and with non-government organizations) to ensure effective coordination of service delivery.

National Examples of Good Practice

Before reflecting more specifically on associated developments and initiatives in NSW, a small number of significantly different national examples of good practice will be considered. This overview is necessarily limited and only serves to provide some illustration of relevant developments in Australia.

Growing Up in Cities Project – Braybrook, Melbourne

The Growing Up in Cities Project operates as part of the UNESCO Management of Social Transformations (MOST) initiative. The Asia-Pacific Director for the UNESCO MOST project (Dr Karen Malone) is based in Australia (currently at Wollongong University). During her doctoral studies, Karen was involved in a project in Braybook (City Council of Maribyrnong). The project involved gaining a detailed understanding of young people's perceptions of the local area. Forty-four (44) young people aged between 10 and 15 years participated through drawings, discussions groups, walking tours, photographs, a photogrid and behaviour maps. Some of these young people served as consultants for the redesign of an open public space area following their contribution to the original project.

A further outcome of this project has been the development of the 'Streetspace' secondary school curriculum. The 'Streetspace' curriculum engages secondary school students in urban open space planning and design.

Other Growing Up in City sites include: Frankston and Abbotsford, Victoria.

Y-Space Website - Clearinghouse on Public Space

The Y-Space website is a clearinghouse of material on public space (predominantly focusing on the needs of young people). The Y-Space website was established by Dr Phil Crane in an attempt to draw together the vast array of local initiatives, academic research and evolving resources pertaining to young people and public space in Australia (and beyond). The website provides an invaluable tool for local practitioners, policy-makers, researchers and young people. Further to the benefits of providing a centralized resource database, the on-line forum provides opportunities for practitioners to utilise each other to develop solutions to local problems.

Griffith University Urban Research Program – Creating Child Friendly Cities Forum October 2004

In October 2004, Griffith University (Queensland) hosted a two-day form on 'Creating Child Friendly Cities'. This forum, hosted by Professor Brendan Gleeson (Griffith University) brought together a collection of academics and practitioners from across Australia and New Zealand. Keynote speakers included:

- Dr Karen Malone
- Dr Claire Freeman (University of Otago)
- Dr Paul Tranter (University of NSW)
- Dr Kurt Iveson

A book following this conference is due to be released in the coming months. The publication, *Creating Child Friendly Cities*, will draw together numerous Australian (and international) developments relevant to the inquiry.

These national developments have been specifically selected to reflect diverse approaches to tacking the various aspects of improving the built environment for children and young people. The Braybrook example demonstrates the merits of local participation of children and young people and the value that comes from effectively consulting with young people. The Y-Space website demonstrates how the Internet can be utilised to disseminate a broad range of resources, research and ideas about ways to engage young people in discussions on the built environment (in particular public space). Finally, the forum conducted by Griffith University (and the subsequent book on Creating Child Friendly Cities) demonstrates how there is scope to bring together academics and practitioners from various disciplines and backgrounds to further promote an understanding of the range of issues associated with children, young people and the built environment.