

Submission

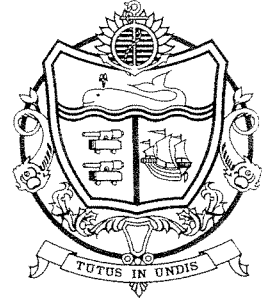
No 75

## INQUIRY INTO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE 9-14 YEARS IN NSW

Organisation: Mosman Municipal Council  
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Date Received: 6/05/2008

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# MOSMAN MUNICIPAL COUNCIL



08.03.01  
Kay Clarke/DP

30 April 2008

The Committee Manager  
Committee on Children and Young People  
Parliament House  
Macquarie St  
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Sir/Madam

**Re: Inquiry into Children & Young People 9-14 Years in NSW**

I would like to contribute the attached Council submission to the above NSW Parliamentary Inquiry

This brief submission has been developed in collaboration with Council's Youth and Children's Services, and is informed by recent Council consultations with parents of children and with young people in Mosman.

Should you have any queries regarding the submission, please contact Council's Social Planner, Dianne Page on 9978 4125 or [d.page@mosman.nsw.gov.au](mailto:d.page@mosman.nsw.gov.au).

Yours faithfully,

V H R MAY  
GENERAL MANAGER

Per:   
Kay Clarke  
(Director Community Development)

*MOSMAN IS. community*

## NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into Children & Young People 9-14 Years in NSW

### Submission from Mosman Council

30 April 2008

#### Introduction

This submission has been developed in collaboration with Council's Youth and Children's Services, and is supported by recent Council consultations with parents of children and with young people on their needs to inform Council's social planning and community development strategies.

It attempts to address the Inquiry's Terms of Reference:

1. *The needs of children and young people in the middle years i.e. between about nine and fourteen years of age*
2. *The extent to which the needs of children and young people in the middle years vary according to age, gender and level of disadvantage*
2. *The activities, services and support which provide opportunities for children and young people in the middle years to develop resilience*
4. *The extent to which changing workplace practices have impacted on children and young people in the middle years, including possible changes to workplace practices which have the potential to benefit children and young people in the middle years;*

While this brief submission does not attempt a definitive exposition of the needs of 9-14 year olds, it is hoped that the identified issues raised by Mosman parents and young people and Council responses to date will assist the Inquiry.

#### Identified Issues from Mosman Council arising from the Terms of Reference

While significant research and ensuing service development in NSW and Australia has focused in recent years on early childhood and older youth, the needs of children and young people in the middle ages of 9-14 years has appeared to be somewhat overlooked. In moving through middle childhood to adolescence, this age group needs transitional support that is developmentally appropriate and responsive to individual needs given varying stages of physical, psychological, emotional and social maturity. Children from 9 years are starting to progressively become more independent from their parents while still requiring a safe, nurturing and supervised environment. Moving from primary to secondary school is a major milestone in a young person's life and the ease of this transition can have major ramifications for a young person's life adjustment, self esteem, health, educational and future employment outcomes. It also marks the transition for many children from use of children's services such as out of school hours care (before and after school care and vacation care) to accessing youth services.

Council has identified significant gaps in services for this age group at a local and regional level. Needs include before and after school care (BASC) and vacation care that are age-appropriate and provide meaningful activities in a safe and nurturing environment. Council's BASC Service finds that there is a reduced participation rate

of older primary school aged children (particularly 11 and 12 year olds) and that this is a common experience amongst other services.

Some parents report that their children refuse to attend any BASC and they feel they cannot force them to attend. Even where other local services attempt to adapt their programs to meet the needs of this older primary age group, funding constraints often mean younger and older groups cannot be separated and age-specific program provision is limited. Commonwealth funding and State support needs to recognize the specific needs and encourage the development of targeted programs for this age group.

Council and other agencies working with youth are finding that this age group is very vulnerable and increasingly engaging in risk-taking and experimental behaviour at this stage, where in the past this behaviour was not generally evident until later in the secondary years. Thus targeted programs that address these developmental issues are needed. This highlights the need for Youth Services to connect with this group through constructive, age-appropriate and supervised activities before this age group no longer finds children's services engaging.

Parents of children entering high school have also communicated that there are very few affordable supervised activities during school holidays and, where both parents work, have identified that they are not comfortable to leave them alone all day. With women's increasing workforce participation, the issue of unsupervised children and young people out of school hours will become more prevalent. Commonwealth and State funding for specific supervised programs that are attractive to this age group should be provided to local government and community based organizations to fill this gap in service provision. Vacation and before and after school activity programs could be operated by or in partnership with local youth services, thereby linking the young person with appropriate support as they move into middle adolescence.

In addressing the diverse needs of 9-14 year olds, consideration needs to be given to issues of gender, cultural background, level of disadvantage, and specific needs of children and young people with a disability. Recent national research has indicated an alarming rise in the incidence of binge drinking and smoking among teenage girls. Anecdotally, local youth workers have also expressed concern with the earlier 'sexualisation' of young girls, with related issues of low self esteem and unhealthy body image. In order to address these issues, there is a need to undertake preventative programs that target girls in the upper primary and early high school years. Council's Youth Services have also found that initiating specific girls-only programs at its Youth Centre has been successful in reaching girls and encouraging them to access other programs including information, referral, and counseling.

Young people with a disability and their families also have significant unmet needs, including age-appropriate recreational opportunities, social integration and respite.

### **Council Initiatives for Children & Young People 9-14 years**

In attempting to address the aforementioned issues within existing resources, Council has initiated the following programs which may be of interest to the Inquiry.

#### Club 114

A monthly social and recreational program for young people aged 11 to 14 on a Friday night. This program aims to target the issues specific to young people who are in the transitional age between primary and secondary school. The program targets a different issue each month that is relevant to this group and seeks to couple this with

an activity such as rock climbing or laser tag, or nights where the young people stay at the Youth Centre for a pool competition and pizza for example.

#### Year 6 Open Days

Youth Services engages local primary schools to bring their Year 6 classes to the Youth Centre for an excursion late in the school year. The purpose is to introduce the young people to the Centre, Youth Services staff and its programs and services. The groups get to "try out" the fun things to do at the centre which aids in encouraging them to return in future.

#### Coordination between Council's Children's, Youth and other Services

Council's Children's Services and Youth Services have jointly undertaken measures to ease the transition from use of out of school hours care provided by Children's Services to accessing Youth Services, including the Youth Centre. Council's Children's Services have commenced using the Youth Centre on occasion for their older vacation care group (Years 3-6) which has aided in this group becoming aware and comfortable in accessing the Centre. Other joint programs across services, including intergenerational initiatives with Council's Senior's Centre and Library have recently been initiated.

#### Health Forums (Mosman High)

A one day forum targeting Year 8 students by rotating the year in groups through 6 separate workshops run by local youth and health services targeting; legal rights and responsibilities, healthy relationships, sexual health, safe partying, drug and alcohol use and general health. The information presented is targeted at informing young people about their holistic health and therefore building resilience.

#### Targeted Library programs

Mosman Library provides a comprehensive range of age-appropriate programs to encourage literacy among children and young people in a fun and entertaining format. They also offer children in Years 6 & 7 and their parents information sessions in using the Library resources for high school.

#### Principals' Forum

A forum of primary and secondary principals is convened by Council once per term to facilitate communication and coordination between schools and Council, and other local agencies on invitation.

#### Age-appropriate playgrounds and other recreational facilities

A major playground upgrade has recently been completed at Clifton Gardens that provides challenging and stimulating outdoor play experiences for older primary aged children. In planning future playground upgrades and development of new recreational facilities, Council will be mindful of the needs of this age group.

### **Summary**

As part of Council's role in social planning and community development, Council's community services staff actively support local service networks for children's, youth and family services. Council will continue to work with State and Commonwealth government agencies, community based organizations and groups to facilitate service development to meet local community needs. The pivotal role of Local Government as a partner in planning, development, delivery and coordination of services for this age group needs to be acknowledged by State Government. Council looks forward to the Inquiry findings and its outcomes resulting in improved service delivery for children, young people and their families.