

**First Report of the Inquiry into Crime Prevention through Social Support
Standing Committee on Law and Justice**

December 1999

Summary of Recommendations

Chapter 6 – Early Childhood Intervention

Recommendation 1

The committee recommends The Cabinet Office continue the model used in the North Coast pilot in clearly separating Family First initiatives which are funded from existing programs and those funded from the \$55.6 million program. To promote transparency these plans should be publicly available.

Recommendation 2

The committee recommends that an outcome evaluation be conducted of the volunteer home visiting component of Families First. This should include use of a control group in an area not yet receiving the services. This evaluation should consider the outcomes which include whether the families increase in their relatedness to their community and the level of referrals to other services.

Recommendation 3

The committee recommends that any overall evaluation of the Families First project include the assessment of its crime prevention effect as one of the measured outcomes.

Recommendation 4

The committee recommends that the Families First program guidelines for volunteers be developed jointly by government and non-government agencies. The committee recommends that these guidelines be regularly revisited, and that in this process the capacity for training, supervision and the appropriateness of the volunteers used be examined.

Recommendation 5

The committee recommends The Cabinet Office should give increased priority to consultation with the non-government sector, seeking their input on how the Families First program is working in the areas where it is being trialed. This may require the development of formal consultation mechanisms.

Recommendation 6

The committee recommends the Schools as Community Centres Program continue to evaluate the impact of the program on children reached by it up until the transition to high school. If possible the impact should be compared with similar neighbouring schools which do not have the program. The evaluation should focus on risk factors relevant to later juvenile offending.

Recommendation 7

The committee recommends The Cabinet Office, in its planning of the Families First program in local areas, consider ways to enhance the capacity of both community and private child care services to deliver early intervention services in disadvantaged areas. This may include supplementing staff resources to allow home visiting or special needs workers.

Recommendation 8

The committee recommends that the NSW government approach the National Crime Prevention agency with concerns raised during this inquiry about the impact of changes to Federal funding of child care. In particular, concern should be expressed about the closure of centres in poor communities, the increase in multiple child care arrangements and the impact of the 20 hour a week cap on services for non-working parents. With regard to the latter, the inflexibility of the way in which hours are determined needs to be redressed.

The committee also recommends the NSW government inquire further into the benefits of funding universal preschool places for four year olds so as to offset some of the negative impacts of the Federal changes, at least so far as the transition to school is concerned.

Recommendation 9

The committee recommends the Office of Child Care of the Department of Community Services develop and implement a strategy to promote to the non-government sector the availability of Federal funding for child care targeting “at risk” children.

Recommendation 10

The committee recommends that the Department of Community Services give urgent priority to its project to work with family support services to examine the causes of the strain on family support services and to examine ways in which delivery of services can be changed to reduce this strain. The results of this exercise should be provided to The Cabinet Office to assist the development of its Families First program.

Chapter 7 – Local Government and Crime Prevention

Recommendation 11

The committee recommends that the Department of Local Government urge all local councils to consider their responsibility for preventing crime within their area. The committee recommends this be formalised by requiring councils to report in their annual report or their Social Plan on the decisions they have made regarding the need for crime prevention within their area. In making this recommendation, however, the committee does not support councils being given a mandatory crime prevention function.

Recommendation 12

The committee recommends The Cabinet Office liaise with the Local Government and Shires Associations to ensure the current role and potential future role of local government in early intervention be fully recognised in the rolling out of the Families First program.

Recommendation 13

The committee recommends the Departments of Education and Training and the Department of Community Services meet with the Local Government and Shires Associations to discuss ways of co-operating with expansion of the Schools as Community Centres project as a means of overcoming funding constraints on expansion of neighbourhood centres.

Recommendation 14

The committee recommends that the Department of Local Government urge local councils to cease current attempts to supplement police resources by funding their own law enforcement. The committee further recommends promotional campaigns by the Crime Prevention Division of the NSW Attorney General's Department include reminders of the cost and ineffectiveness of councils undertaking this law enforcement role.

Recommendation 15

The committee recommends that an assessment be made of the future funding needs of the Crime Prevention Division and its ability to meet the demand on grants funding and staff generated by increasing interest in crime prevention by local government.

If additional funding is required the committee also recommends that the Premier's Department seek other agencies, other than the Attorney General's Department, to contribute to any funding increases.

Recommendation 16

The committee recommends the Crime Prevention Division liaise with the Local Government and Shires Associations to develop a formal mechanism for improving access to information on grant funding for crime prevention projects by local communities, including councils.

To facilitate this the committee recommends the Division and the Associations meet with those responsible for the Communitybuilders project in the Premier's Department and also the NSW Office of Philanthropy Australia. The aim of this should be to ensure local crime prevention is funded from a more diverse range of sources than the Division's limited grant funds.

Recommendation 17

The committee recommends the Crime Prevention Division continues its practice of funding projects on a non-recurrent basis; however for suitable projects it should conduct evaluations as to their value as ongoing activities. If project evaluations do demonstrate the need for ongoing funding the Division should develop transition plans to ensure the continued support of the projects from relevant agencies.

Recommendation 18

The committee recommends that the Crime Prevention Division discuss with the Local Government and Shires Associations a strategy to communicate the success of the application of *Children (Protection and Parental Responsibility) Act 1997* in Ballina and Moree. This strategy should be targeted at three groups: local councils, particularly in rural areas; Department of Community Services Area managers and District Officers; and Police Local Area Commands.

In communicating with Community Services and Police the emphasis should be that the Act has to date reduced the need for frontline law enforcement in Ballina and Moree.

Recommendation 19

The committee recommends that the Crime Prevention Division in close consultation with the Local Government and Shires Associations, the Premier's Department and the NSW Police Service develop and implement a communications strategy which shares knowledge about the crime prevention activity of councils across NSW. This strategy should include sharing information about evaluations conducted so as to broaden knowledge of "what works and what doesn't." This strategy should include a mechanism to allow this sharing of information to continue as an ongoing process.

Recommendation 20

The committee recommends the Crime Prevention Division consider, either as part of or in addition to the strategy referred to above, a communications strategy aimed at local government which highlights work in Australia and overseas on successful and unsuccessful programs. The aim of this would be to deepen the knowledge base of local government on crime prevention.

Chapter 8 – Crime Prevention and People with Intellectual Disabilities

Recommendation 21

The committee recommends the NSW Attorney General's Department evaluate the success of the project of the Illawarra Disabled Persons Trust in terms of diverting intellectually disabled persons from unnecessary contact with the criminal justice system. Depending upon the outcomes of this evaluation the committee recommends the Department approach its Federal counterpart to fund a network of similar court support services for the intellectually disabled as a crime prevention initiative.

Recommendation 22

The committee recommends the Interdepartmental Committee on Intellectual Disability formally consider and respond to the findings of the current project by the Council for Intellectual Disability and the Intellectual Disability Rights Service to develop a legal, policy and community services framework to address the needs of individuals with a disability at risk of offending.

Recommendation 23

The committee recommends that the policy of devolution be supported by a significant increase in funding of support services for those living in the community. Future closures of large institutions should follow successful past models, of planned transitions for disabled persons into the community.

Recommendation 24

The committee recommends the Ageing and Disability Department and the Department of Community Services consider and formally respond to any recommendations arising from the study by the Community Services Commission on crime prevention strategies suitable for use in large residential institutions

Recommendation 25

The committee recommends that the Ageing and Disability Department establish a probity screening unit for employment of staff working with adults with an intellectual disability with a similar role to that established for children and young people through the Office of the Commissioner for Children and Young People.

Recommendation 26

The committee further recommends that, through this unit or through another mechanism, minimum standards be developed for employment and training of staff applicable to the non-government as well as government run services.

Recommendation 27

The committee recommends that the Crime Prevention Division in consultation with the Ageing and Disability Department identify a list of specific services in New South Wales which allow intellectually disabled persons with challenging behaviour to live in a community setting. The most highly regarded of these should be the subject of independent evaluation of their success in preventing intellectually disabled persons from unnecessary involvement in the criminal justice system.

Recommendation 28

The committee recommends a category of “risk of offending” be used in criteria for determining services to the intellectually disabled. The Interdepartmental Committee on Intellectual Disability should consider how services provided under this criteria can be jointly funded by human services and criminal justice agencies and which Department should administer the allocation of these services.

Recommendation 29

The committee recommends the Ageing and Disability Department consider how to liaise with other agencies to improve the provision of day programs to the intellectually disabled, particularly:

- day programs for those in unsupported accommodation;
- increased availability of TAFE courses for purposes other than job seeking;
- improved access to early childhood behaviour management programs; and
- increase in specialist health services for the intellectually disabled, particularly drug and alcohol.

Recommendation 30

The committee recommends that training at the Police Academy in intellectual disability be increased to a level more commensurate with such persons making up more than one in five of the prison population; and that regular in-service training should also be developed.

Recommendation 31

The committee recommends that NSW Police adopt and train staff in use of a screening test or other method of identifying intellectual disability during police interviews.

Recommendation 32

The committee recommends that the Interdepartmental Committee on Intellectual Disability examine the following aspects of the legal process for those with a intellectual disability charged with a criminal offence:

1. Improved co-ordination between relevant agencies in the obtaining of required reports prior to trial, so as to avoid unnecessary adjournments.
2. Review of the use of s 32 of the *Mental Health (Criminal Procedure) Act 1990*, and how greater use of the provision as a diversion can be encouraged by magistrates.
3. Review of the “fitness for trial” hearings in District Court matters as to how their current adversarial nature can be reduced.
4. Examining the diversionary strategies used in the Illawarra Disabled Person’s Trust scheme for their suitability for wider application.
5. Examining the independent evaluation made of the Newcastle Court Liaison Nursing Service to determine whether a similar service could assist other courts.

Chapter 9 – Evaluation and Crime Prevention

Recommendation 33

The committee recommends that the Premier’s Council on Crime Prevention develop and fund a strategy for a whole of government effort to conduct outcome evaluations of programs with potential to reduce crime which Departments either:

- invest considerable amounts in at present (Families First, family support services, child care etc); or
- consider to have potential for increased investment in the future (Schools as Community Centres, local government crime prevention)

These evaluations should examine the “before and after” impact of the program on crime compared to a similar area over the same period where the program was not introduced. The length of the evaluation should be appropriate to that necessary for the outcomes of the program to be demonstrated.

The strategy should also encourage individual programs to conduct other forms of evaluation, such as needs based studies and process evaluations, and to collect the data useful for all types of evaluation.