

Chapter Five - Community Safety and Young People

“Community Safety is being able to go anywhere at any time without being afraid”.

- 15 Year old, The Block

5.1 Introduction

Young people aged 12-18 years are a significant part of the community who make an important contribution to the South Sydney area. Adolescence is a time of great change as young people are increasingly influenced by their peers, begin to participate in risk taking behaviour and begin to assert their own sense of identity. There are many misconceptions about young people and crime and while adolescence can be a crucial time for the emergence of anti-social behaviour, common perceptions of a “juvenile crime wave” are not borne out by reality.⁴⁰

Young people are often depicted by the media as constituting an increasingly dangerous and criminal group. The fact is that most crime is committed by adults. For young people life is changing rapidly and much of this change is good for this group as it provides new opportunities. Most young people manage to find the right pathway for themselves but for those who are vulnerable the key is to provide better support for those in danger of falling through the gaps in existing support services and ensuring that they can relate to the type of help that is being offered. Even more challenging is the need to provide ways to help young people who, for whatever reason, are already adrift from their families, their schools and other support systems, and for whom there is no obvious way forward.

5.2 Young People – Offenders or Victims?

Research has shown that:

- Young people aged 15-24 are more likely to be victims of crime than any group
- A significant number of young people are victims of school bullying
- An estimated 1 in 15 children are victims of sexual or physical abuse
- In 1999 10% of all young people experienced a crime – 1% of elderly in the same year
- 75% of young people offend once before desisting from further criminal activity
- 15% of young people offend on one subsequent occasion before desisting from crime
- violent crimes and drug offences are in the minority even for those young people who persist to become chronic offenders
- offenders usually act alone or in pairs – there are few organised youth gangs
- most juvenile crime is episodic, transitory, local, unplanned and not repeated.⁴¹

⁴⁰ N.S.W. Council of Social Services in Beyond Bars (2003) Alternatives to Custody, Fact sheet No. 5

⁴¹ N.S.W. Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (2001)

Young offenders are often from disadvantaged backgrounds and are victims of family breakdown, homelessness, maltreatment, neglect and other social, economic and cultural pressures. Severe penalties are often associated with an increased likelihood of juvenile offending. In the period from 1986 to 1994 only 12% of young people who appeared in the Children's Court who received a nominal sentence re-offended. In the same period nearly 80% of offenders who received a custodial order re-offended. From this data we can conclude that tough penalties do not address systematic social and health problems underlying juvenile offending.⁴² There are 299 young people in custody in New South Wales at the time of writing.⁴³

A study recently released by the Australian Institute of Criminology focused on 41,700 children born in Queensland in 1983. It found that 10% of these children came into contact with the Department of Families (the equivalent of Community Services in N.S.W.) by the time they were 17 years old because of a child protection matter. The authors examined eleven predictive factors for youth offending and found that children who suffer maltreatment are more likely to offend.⁴⁴

Similarly the Australian Temperament Project (ATP) is a large scale, longitudinal study that has to date followed Victorian children from infancy to 17-18 years of age. The initial sample comprised 2443 infants (aged 4-8 months) and their parents and data has been collected on aspects such as the child's temperament, behavioural and emotional adjustment, academic progress, health, social skills, peer and family relationships as well as family functioning, parenting practices and family socio-economic background.

The study found that anti-social behaviour was quite common among participants over the period 13-14 to 17-18 years. The most common types of anti-social acts were property offences, with approximately 10-20% of participants engaging in acts such as theft and vandalism. For the 13-14 year olds 39% had used alcohol compared to 85% of 17-18 year olds, 6% had used marijuana compared to 19% of the 17-18 year olds. The 13-14 year olds revealed that 34% had been involved in physical fights. One in ten of all the participants had been in contact with the police for offending with 3% charged, 1% had appeared in court and less than 1% had been convicted of a crime.⁴⁵

Another recently released study of 175 organisations that use sporting activities to reduce anti-social behaviour in young people across Australia revealed that sport and physical activity programs can facilitate personal and social development through which behaviour may be positively affected.⁴⁶

⁴² N.S.W. Council of Social Services (2003) Op. Cit.

⁴³ N.S.W. Department of Juvenile Justice (2003) Personal communication

⁴⁴ Australian Institute of Criminology (2002) Pathways from Child Maltreatment to Juvenile Offending, Trends and Issues Paper No. 241

⁴⁵ Australian Institute of Family Studies (2002) Patterns and Precursors of Adolescent Anti-social behaviour, Crime Prevention, Victoria

⁴⁶ Australian Institute of Criminology (2003) Sport, Physical Activity and Anti-social Behaviour in Youth, Trends and Issues Paper No 249

5.3 The Commonwealth Government and Young People

The Commonwealth Government has recognised the importance of adopting programs which support young people particularly through interventions at critical points in a young person's development and attempting to ensure that they are given the maximum opportunity to lead productive and law abiding lives. The Commonwealth Government supports a large number of initiatives aimed at young people including conducting research into the most effective ways to prevent and stop bullying in schools, profiling an analysis of the factors that contribute to the successful operation of mentoring programs for young offenders and exploring options for juvenile diversion and truancy prevention programs.⁴⁷



5.4 The N.S.W Government and Young People

The N.S.W. Government has developed the N.S.W. Youth Policy which provides a universal framework targeting all young people in the state. The policy has six main strategies which cover a broad range of issues to address the needs of young people namely:

- increasing participation of young people in the community and involving them in decisions and processes that impact on their lives
- supporting young people to achieve their educational and employment goals
- enhancing opportunities for young people to participate in sport, recreational and developmental activities
- providing information and services to help young people lead healthy lives now and in the future

⁴⁷ National Crime Prevention Program (2003) Early intervention, Youth, Crime and Families Strategy Website

- improving the safety and well-being of young people by improving the safety of their environments and by providing appropriate support before their problems become acute and
- facilitating partnership building and collaboration in local communities to improve planning, services and programs for young people.⁴⁸

5.5 The Redfern-Waterloo Partnership Project and Young People

Community Consultation

In 2002 the Department of Community Services as part of the Redfern-Waterloo Partnership Project circulated an expression of interest to all youth services in Redfern and Waterloo to auspice an extensive community consultation with local youth. South Sydney Youth Services successfully tendered for the project and consulted 129 young people aged 8-20 who attend primary school, high school, and youth services in Redfern and Waterloo.

The consultation revealed that:

- young people are skeptical about being consulted
- young people who felt safe in the area knew a number of people and felt protected by them
- young men are afraid of other young men and adult men
- young women are afraid of being "hassled" by adult men
- there is a lack of safe or crisis accommodation
- young people are concerned about their relations with the police
- young people are concerned about being negatively represented in the media
- young people have a positive impression of existing youth services
- young people identified school as a place they are inspired by
- young people are concerned about the state of the Redfern-Waterloo environment including the quality of youth facilities.⁴⁹

The Street Team

One of the initiatives the Redfern-Waterloo Partnership Project has funded is the Street Team. The Department of Community Services is the lead agency for this initiative. The Street Team is an innovative project which has adopted a multi-agency approach and includes representatives from the Department of Community Services, Health and non-government organisations. The team provides a pro-active service to the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children and young people in Redfern and Waterloo. The team aims to divert young people from risk taking behaviours and link them to services that will assist them. The Street Team will become fully operational in August 2003 but has already proven itself to be a vital initiative in contributing to the safety of the communities of Redfern and Waterloo.

⁴⁸ N.S.W. Government Website (2003)

⁴⁹ South Sydney Youth Services (2002) Youth Consultation Report, Redfern-Waterloo Partnership Project

5.6 Redfern Police and Young People

Redfern Police Local Area Command has received funding under Redfern-Waterloo Partnership Project's Youth Intervention and Development Project to co-ordinate a number of programs aimed at building relationships between Police and local children and young people.

Youth Mentor Program

Redfern Police established the Youth Mentor Program in December 2002. A total of 24 children and young people are involved with 12 Police Officers and two Aboriginal Liaison Officers with the aim of improving relations between Police and local young people, to improve school attendance and academic performance and to reduce the incidence of youth-related crime within the Redfern Local Area Command.

Each young person involved in the program has been allocated a Police mentor who aims to meet with the young person on a fortnightly basis to discuss relevant issues such as school or sport. Two Police-Youth camps have been undertaken in 2003 and another is planned for the summer 2003-4 holidays. The camps target vulnerable children and young people and provide a range of focused activities such as rock climbing and canoeing. The Youth Mentor Program involves Police attendance at local youth centres to participate in sporting activities as well as an excursion program and visits to local schools.

Redfern P.C.Y.C.

Redfern Police have also established a working relationship with Redfern P.C.Y.C. which includes starting up a "Drop In" on Friday nights. The night includes trivia nights, movies and touch football competitions and local Police are encouraged to attend and make contact with local young people in an informal setting. The Youth Liaison Officer is based at the P.C.Y.C. on Friday nights. New programs which have been developed include the Traffic Offenders Program which assists repeat traffic offenders and Re-connect which supports young people who have been suspended from school to keep up to date with school work as well as the implementation of counselling and crime prevention programs.



South Sydney P.C.Y.C.

Juvenile At-Risk Program

Redfern Police have also established the Juvenile At Risk Program which targets children and young people who are on the streets late at night and who are at risk of being involved in opportunistic crime. Six children are involved at any one time where there is no attendance at school or are out late at night. Children and young people are returned to school or their parents and DOCs are informed where appropriate. The aim of the program is to place greater emphasis on parents for the actions of their children.

Police have also recently developed improved referral practices with a range of local service providers and now have an increased presence in local schools offering crime prevention workshops and attendance at school events.



Crowds gather at the annual Smartarts festival.

Additional initiatives

The Redfern-Waterloo Partnership Project has also undertaken a range of programs which target young people as well as children and families. These initiatives are outlined in more detail in Chapter four, Early Intervention Approaches to Community Safety and include the Intensive Family Support Service, Case Co-ordination, the Aboriginal In-Home Support Service, CALD counselling, the Aboriginal Family Violence Initiative and the Alexandria Park Sports Development Program. In addition to this program, funding has been made available to non-government youth services to run more activities in the evenings and at weekends.

5.7 South Sydney Council – Services and Draft Social Plan – Young People

The South Sydney Council Draft Social Plan (2003) has identified a number of priority issues and needs which with community consultation information forms the basis for this section of the plan.

Issues identified include:

- relations between police and young people can be improved
- safety is a primary concern for local young people including fear of victimisation and fearfulness on public transport
- young people are portrayed quite negatively in the press which in turn encourages negative stereotypes of young people in the community
- young people feel that too often decisions which affect them are made by adults without any regard for their views
- youth services have limited budgets to promote their services
- youth services believe they are under-funded
- youth services are targeted more toward mainstream young people rather than the disadvantaged
- there is a trend toward local young people leaving school earlier
- young people are particularly vulnerable to unemployment
- misuse of alcohol and other drugs are major issues in South Sydney
- homelessness is an increasing problem amongst young people in South Sydney and
- young people are concerned about the quality of local facilities.⁵⁰

5.8 Youth Services in Redfern and Waterloo

There are four main youth service providers in Redfern and Waterloo namely South Sydney Youth Services, Fact Tree, South Sydney PCYC and the Settlement as well as the services provided by South Sydney Council. All of these organisations have been consulted in relation to this plan. These organisations provide a range of services including drop-in, casework and counselling, outings, school holiday programs, employment and education programs, outreach, art and craft activities, leadership programs and sports activities. The consultations conducted by South Sydney Youth Services through DOCS and the Redfern-Waterloo Partnership Project revealed that local young people are generally satisfied with the quality of service being provided by these organisations.

The quality of facilities was raised as an important local issue for the two suburbs. The Fact Tree Youth Services occupy an old building at a busy intersection opposite a pub. South Sydney Youth Services occupy an old toilet block at Waterloo Oval. The Settlement is housed in a terrace house surrounded by neighbourhood dwellings. The best quality facility in the area for young people is Redfern P.C.Y.C. which is currently under-resourced.

⁵⁰ South Sydney City Council (2003) Draft Social Plan Op. Cit.



South Sydney Youth Services



The Fact Tree Youth Service

The following strategies have been developed to address the needs of young people in Redfern and Waterloo in relation to community safety after examining existing research, community consultation data and discussions with local youth workers.

Strategy	Who
<p>5.0 Explore strategies for expanding the Police-Youth Mentor and Juvenile At-risk projects.</p>	<p>Redfern Police, Council</p>
<p>5.1 Establish a training program between Police and local youth workers around common issues in relation to young people.</p>	<p>Council, Redfern Police, Youth Services sector</p>

Strategy	Who
<p>5.2 Develop a resource / educational package around working with local communities for Police taking on community liaison roles.</p>	<p>N.S.W. Police in partnership with Council, DOCs and the community sector.</p>
<p>5.3 Explore strategies for the involvement of parents in any recreation activities between young people, youth services and the Police.</p>	<p>Redfern Police, Redfern-Waterloo Partnership Project, Youth Services sector, Council</p>
<p>5.4 Ensure that all new Police recruited to the area are made aware of and participate where possible in local youth service recreation programs as part of the induction process.</p>	<p>Redfern Police, Youth Services sector</p>
<p>5.5 Establish a program such as “Adopt a Class” between Police and schools to implement programs related to bullying, young people’s rights and inappropriate risk taking behaviour.</p>	<p>Redfern Police, Local schools</p>
<p>5.6 Identify opportunities for improving the quality of local facilities for young people through the Human Services Review and the Facilities Plan.</p>	<p>Human Services Review staff, Redfern-Waterloo Partnership Project, Council</p>



Strategy	Who
<p>5.7 Conduct a review of consultation mechanisms with young people and develop new methods for consultation including improving ways of young people having input into other planning processes.</p>	<p>Redfern-Waterloo Partnership Project, Council and the Youth Services sector.</p>
<p>5.8 Continue to hold On for Young and Old Day and other initiatives which promote interaction and understanding between young and older people.</p>	<p>South Sydney Youth Interagency South Sydney Aged Services Interagency</p>
<p>5.9 Develop a Recreation Plan to meet the recreational and leisure needs of local young people and implement its recommendations.</p>	<p>Council</p>
<p>5.10 Continue to promote the after school activities program of the Alexandria Park and Darlington Public Schools to improve access to such programs for the most vulnerable young people in the area.</p>	<p>Alexandria Park Community School, Redfern-Waterloo Partnership Project</p>
<p>5.11 Explore opportunities for expanding the Kidspeak program to include older children / young people.</p>	<p>Youth Services Sector</p>
<p>5.12 Identify opportunities for the provision of quality and appropriate after hours services particularly for at risk young people on weekdays and weekends through the Human Services Review.</p>	<p>Redfern-Waterloo Partnership Project</p>
<p>5.13 Develop a program for young people convicted of an offence to attend a structured program to educate and assist the person from further offending.</p>	<p>Redfern Police Redfern P.C.Y.C.</p>

Strategy	Who
<p>5.14 Work with local employment agencies and local businesses to improve the participation of high needs groups in local employment.</p>	<p>RWPP, Council</p>
<p>5.15 Seek funding opportunities through the N.S.W. Department of Sport and Recreation and other relevant funding bodies to increase recreational options for young people in Redfern and Waterloo including expanding the Kidspeak program to include older children / young people.</p>	<p>Youth Services sector Council</p>

