



CANTERBURY CITY COUNCIL

City of Cultural Diversity

Our Reference:

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Submission 31

Ms Gillian Gould
The Secretary
House of Representatives Standing Committee
On Legal and Constitutional Affairs
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

RECEIVED
1 AUG 2002

BY: *G. B. Gould*

Dear Ms Gould,

Subject: Submission to the Inquiry into Crime in the Community

Enclosed is our Submission to the Inquiry into Crime in the Community currently being undertaken by the House of Representative Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs.

Our Council has taken an active role in community safety and crime prevention for many years and we look forward to developing appropriate partnerships with you to support crime prevention activities at a local level.

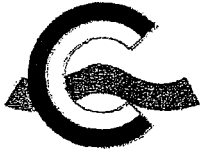
We also look forward to your Committees' positive response to our submission.

If you require any further information, please contact Andy Sammut on 9789 9457.

Yours sincerely


Jim Montague
GENERAL MANAGER

26 July 2002



CANTERBURY CITY COUNCIL

City of Cultural Diversity

*Submission to
The Inquiry into Crime in the Community:
Victims, offenders and the fear of crime.*

The Role of Local Government

to

*House of Representatives Standing Committee on
Legal and Constitutional Affairs*

Inquiry into Crime in the Community:

Victims, offenders and the fear of crime.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM CANTERBURY CITY COUNCIL:

- 1. THAT the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs Inquiry into Crime in the Community recognise and endorse the role of local government in community safety and crime prevention.**
- 2. THAT the Inquiry recognise the critical role of neighbourhood community centres in the early detection, intervention and prevention of crime.**
- 3. THAT the Committee recommend to the Federal Government that a capital funding program be established to provide matching grants to Councils for the development of social infrastructure, in particular community and youth facilities, targeting crime prevention activities.**
- 4. THAT in partnership with the States, the Federal government provide recurrent funding for crime prevention programs to resource local councils and support their role in Community Safety and Crime Prevention.**
- 5. THAT the Federal government allocate resources and negotiate with State governments to enhance funding for existing neighbourhood community centres to enhance their role in crime prevention.**
- 6. THAT a whole-of-government approach to the funding and resourcing of these centres be co-ordinated to ensure minimum standards of service to local areas.**

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Crime in the Community

A. Background to the Inquiry

On 21 May 2002, the Minister for Justice and Customs, Senator the Hon Chris Ellison asked the Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs to inquire and report on Crime in the Community: Victims, Offenders and the Fear of Crime.

The terms of reference for the Inquiry are as follows:

“That the Committee shall Inquire into the extent and impact of crime and the fear of crime within the Australian Community and effectiveness measures for the Commonwealth in countering and preventing crime. The Committee’s inquiry shall consider but not be limited to:

- a. the types of crimes committed against Australians
- b. perpetrators of crime and motives
- c. fear of crime in the community
- d. the impact of being a victim of crime and fear of crime
- e. strategies to support victims and reduce crime
- f. apprehension rates
- g. effectiveness of sentencing
- h. community safety and policing.

The Inquiry Information recognises the need for locally developed and responsive community based services to support victims of crime and prevent

the further incidence of crime. Preliminary research in Australia has also concluded that:

- Early intervention programs work effectively to reduce crime.
- Early intervention programs can be cost effective.
- Early childhood interventions can be worthwhile.

The most prominent Australian study investigating pathways to prevention was outlined by Professor Ross Homel of the School of Justice Administration at Griffith University in his submission to the *NSW Inquiry into Crime Prevention Through Social Support (2001)*. He highlighted the need for services that can detect the incidence and risk factors for involvement in crime and intervene in ways appropriate to *local* circumstances.

This submission outlines the effective role Local Government can and should be encouraged to play in preventing crime in these local circumstances. It highlights a variety of roles Councils are already performing in supporting the early detection and intervention in crime situations and highlights a range of initiatives that are having a significant and positive impact on crime and the fear of crime in local communities.

It argues that greater resources should be provided to support Councils in this work and enable them to promote primary prevention activities developed in partnership with local police and community organisations.

It also argues that there is insufficient emphasis on the social infrastructure and network of facilities and programs required to address community needs at a local level. It concludes that better partnerships with local government can improve the co-ordination, the availability and effectiveness of programs aimed at reducing crime at the local level.

B. The Context for our Submission to the Inquiry

Canterbury City is a large, diverse and multicultural community in the south west of Sydney with a significant range of indicators of socio-economic disadvantage.

With an area of about 34 square kilometres we have a very high population density. In fact of all the large Local Government Areas in the Sydney region (those with populations over 100,000 people) - and there's about eighteen of them in Sydney - we have easily the highest population density at 3897 persons per square kilometre.

The combination of large size and high population density is significant because it reflects the complexity of the community we serve; and the diversity of sub-groups that co-exist in our city. It means we not only have large numbers of young people, older people, families, and so on, but we also have one of the largest Arabic speaking communities in NSW and the largest number of people from China, Greece and Korea of any LGA in NSW.

We call ourselves the *City of Cultural Diversity* for good reason: not only do we have large numbers of people in each of the communities mentioned, but the last census revealed our residents came from over 129 different countries.

Almost twice the average for Sydney, and almost half of Canterbury's population was born overseas; 41.6% of our total population were born in non-English speaking countries - one of the largest NESB communities in Australia.

We have a high proportion of households with six or more people present - many living in flats, units or apartments. Our community has very low family incomes and high levels of unemployment, particularly among youth and migrants. Large proportions of our residents have low levels of formal qualifications and many have never attended formal education or schooling.

In sum, we are a large and diverse community, facing considerable social disadvantages. Government funding is in decline relative to the demand for services, and those available are struggling to cope with the level of need in our area. All of this is resulting in enormous social and economic pressures on families and residents - young and old, across every layer of our community.

In this context communities like ours are anxious about the future. They are exposed daily to the images that promote the fear of crime and as a community they are assessing what they can realistically do about preventing crime.

Councils have been responding to this concern for many years and more recently we in Canterbury have renewed our policy approach in Community Safety and Crime Prevention to better co-ordinate our activities to target crime issues. In the process we have lead the way in our community to build partnerships with local groups, the police and other government authorities to more effectively play our part in reducing the incidence and fear of crime.

C. Canterbury City Council's Response

Local councils have been involved in community safety and crime prevention in one way or another for many years.

Until recently, this work has been reactive and unco-ordinated - most councils preferring to see their prime responsibility to forward representations about community safety issues to State authorities, particularly the police.

But whether it be through:

- providing lighting, security and public safety infrastructure;
- advocating for adequate police and community resources;
- representing crime issues to the police
- the direct regulation of public space;
- providing community services like child care, youth facilities and community centres that conduct family support programs and services for victims of crime;
- reviewing safety features in proposed building development;
- carrying out our responsibility for planning our urban environments, or
- assisting with placements for offenders (known in NSW as Community Service Orders),

Councils have supported the development of "safer communities" in response to a long history of resident representations about community safety concerns.

But local councils, leading strategic planning and co-ordination efforts, proactively targeting local crime and community safety issues, is still a relatively new phenomenon in New South Wales and most parts of Australia.

In Canterbury's experience the strategic thinking and planning initially centred on generating coordinated action in response to specific concerns raised by our community, particularly street prostitution on Canterbury Road.

This evolved into a more systematic review of the community's perception of crime and safety; enabling us to develop specific, well coordinated, programs to address a broader range of safety and crime prevention issues.

So why is our Council involved in Community Safety? It is interesting to note that in terms of recorded crime statistics Canterbury City has consistently lower recorded criminal incidents than is true across the Sydney region. More recent trends show a continuing decline in recorded criminal incidents locally.

Yet the occurrence of any crime in a community affects the social harmony that is fundamental to the social cohesion we aim to support.

And we should not underestimate the importance of the fear of crime in undermining that social cohesion.

Fear of Crime stifles the participation of residents in community life and undermines their well being. It disrupts their effective functioning in the community, damages social harmony and generates tensions and isolation which lead to further crime, major costs to the community and significant human suffering amongst victims, perpetrators and their families.

Importantly, there is ample research to highlight many local environmental and community policing solutions to these fears and the incidence of crime; solutions that are well within the province of local councils.

Whether, as some would argue, it is the result of growing media attention on local crime, or the growth of "community policing". Whether more people have first hand experience of crime, or perhaps we are just getting better at consulting people; our experience is there is a growing concern about crime, law and justice. And this has been steadily and consistently raised in our social and city plan consultations over the last four to five years.

The other key issue about this concern for us in local government and for the Inquiry, is that we have for many years, assumed that "Law and Order" is outside Council's core activities - at best on the margins - to be referred to the police or State authorities.

This is changing. In one study we conducted recently, Council was merely consulting the community about priorities for its own management plan. Given the many other services we provide we did not expect that the one issue more residents ranked as both "most important" and "requiring urgent attention" for Council to address would be "law and order"; yet it ranked highest amongst 800 households randomly surveyed.

In fact they were asked to consider 29 different services and issues addressed by Council and "law and order" gained the most significant level of support for any service or issue surveyed in the study.

Add to this the open ended consultations we have conducted for our Social Profile, our Youth Summit, and most recently our Community Safety Summit and Community Safety Survey, and time and again we are hearing resident concern about law and justice issues and calls for Council to take local action.

There is no doubt that many councils' involvement in community safety has been spurred by growing community discontent with the evidence and fear of crime on their streets and in their communities. Our communities want local politicians and public officials prepared to respond to these concerns. And local government is playing a very effective role.

i. Our Role In Community Safety And Crime Prevention

Through our Community Safety Committee, our Council performs a number of specific roles to achieve its community safety goals including:

RESEARCH

We research and monitor the incidence and trends in local crime and investigate priority concerns for local action.

CONSULTATION AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

We consult and involve the community in community safety initiatives so that efforts to reduce crime can be effectively targeted and implemented.

EVALUATION AND PLANNING

We undertake safety audits of priority public sites and develop plans of action to prevent crime through improved environmental design and other appropriate community initiatives.

CO-ORDINATION

We liaise with key stakeholders such as police, businesses and the local community and assist partners to work co-operatively to prevent crime.

ADVOCACY

We lobby appropriate levels of government and the private sector for the allocation of resources required to reduce the occurrence of crime.

FACILITY DEVELOPMENT

We identify specific crime prone areas and develop safe street and building design features; recommending to Council and other appropriate bodies suitable facility improvements to prevent crime.

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT, SUPPORT AND ADMINISTRATION

We develop a broad range of preventative measures to curb crime in Canterbury including the administration, funding and delivery of positive activities for groups at risk of becoming involved in crime.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNITY EDUCATION

We raise awareness about community initiatives to reduce crime and ways of minimising the risk of becoming a victim of crime.

ii. Issues addressed by our Crime Prevention Program

With such a diverse range of roles open to local government, our Council has consulted widely with police and community representatives to identify a wide range of priority issues we are addressing in community safety and crime prevention.

Examples of the outcomes and range of issues we are addressing through these programs and roles are outlined in the following table:

Key Issues Addressed by our Community Safety Committee

Consultation, Planning and Resource Allocation

- We have developed our Community Safety Policy and produced an annual Community Safety and Crime Prevention Action Plan and Youth Crime Prevention Plan. Our Committee monitors the implementation of the action plan and reviews crime statistics and issues of concern to local police.
- We have conducted community consultations in the form of a Community Safety Summit, 2 Youth Summits, a Safer Seniors Summit, Survey of Fear of Crime and Forums on Domestic Violence. We use these forums to guide discrete action plans on priority issues of concern.
- We have secured funding from private and government organisations for crime prevention in the community.
- We initiated the allocation of funds for lighting and infrastructure improvements in specific locations. We gave priority in our annual donations program to projects targeting community safety.
- We maintained our commitment to allocate \$250,000 over five years for programs designed to promote community safety in the City.

Domestic Violence

- We have developed partnerships with local women's and child protection services in the area through the Domestic Violence Liaison Committee and Child Protection Committee.
- We support a range of anti-violence campaigns in the community and have produced resources to improve information to victims as well as community reporting of DV.
- We have increased Council funding to domestic violence education programs.
- We have worked with police to increase understanding and use of Apprehended Violence Orders by victims of domestic violence.
- With the Domestic Violence Interagency, we sought and received funding from the Community Benefit Fund for a Youth Project, promoting anti-violence and drug education with young people in local schools.

Neighbourhood Improvements

- We conduct safety audits, targeting specific neighbourhood problem areas.
- We are conducting business information seminars and are co-ordinating with police, residents and business, holistic programs to address crime.
- We have improved lighting and security at parks, car parks and public spaces, implemented neighbourhood improvements in specific disadvantaged areas and coordinated our improvements with police activities and funding for youth programs.

Development Control

- We instigated a Development Control Plan and guidelines for future building development to promote the concept of Safer by Design.
- We have developed a protocol to ensure police and fire brigades comments are taken into consideration in reviewing development applications.
- We train planning staff on Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design.

Police Resources and Facilities

- We made successful representations on operational facilities and staffing for police.
- We have successfully supported submissions to State funding bodies for joint projects.
- We have funded specific police resources such as video printing equipment that have directly reduced crime by improving detection and offender identification rates.

Personal Safety and Property Theft

- We developed resident information pamphlets to address theft around the home and personal safety in the community.
- We developed a property identification engraving program through our libraries.
- We worked with businesses and police to tackle car theft in major shopping centres.

Social Issues

- We established the Canterbury Drug Action Team and held community consultations to guide and direct it's activities. We provided establishment funding of \$5,000 to initiate community projects.

- We supported the dissemination of information about seniors alarm responses and promoted community awareness on issues like mental health and safety in public places.

Youth Issues

- We developed partnerships with Police Community Youth Club and other Youth services and appointed a second Youth activities officer.
- We successfully applied for funding and have appointed a Youth Crime Prevention Officer, developing an innovative Regional Youth Crime Prevention Action Plan. We also secured funding for and appointed a youth support worker to work with Youth at Risk in the community.
- We secured funding for a Graffiti Solutions Project, involving young people in finding solutions to graffiti in local areas.
- We increased funding to youth crime prevention programs, funding Youth Holiday and After school activities involving over 350 young people each holiday period.
- We support an ongoing forum for youth consultation, our Canterbury Youth Council, who develop projects and hold specific briefings with local youth organisations. Youth Council also conduct youth programs such as our Youth Info Card to improve youth access to essential services.
- Through our libraries we conduct Homework Help Programs to assist young people having difficulty in the school system.
- We sought and received funding from the NSW Attorney General's Department for a Community Guides Project, promoting community access to local support services.

iii. Outcomes of our role in Crime Prevention

What has been the benefit of this role to addressing the incidence and fear of crime? In our experience and in the view of our NSW Police Local Area Command, our local government based Community Safety and Crime Prevention program has had a significant impact on addressing the fear of crime and improving the social conditions that contribute to crime occurring in the community.

Because of the range of extraneous factors involved it is difficult to make a direct correlation between our effort and crime outcomes. However, our Local Area Commander, from the NSW Police Service, who is actively involved in our Community Safety Committee, is willing to speak loudly and highly of the role of our partnership in achieving the following trends.

1997 is the benchmark year that the NSW Police Service use to monitor the performance of Local Area Commands. The police also identify 3 key areas of performance that make up their ranking when compared to the other 80 Local Area Commands in NSW:

- In the beginning of 1997, Campsie had an average of 155 **break and enter crimes** committed each month. Today we have an average of 123.
- In 1997 we had an average of 133 **stolen vehicles** each month, that's been cut to an average of 100 stolen vehicles each month.
- In 1997 we had an average of 58 **assaults** committed each month. Today this has fallen to 44 per month.

Each of these three areas have been the subject of deliberate safety programs, information campaigns, and police operations co-ordinated through the Community Protection Committee. Relative to all other Commands in NSW our results are speaking for themselves.

In sum, when comparing the ranking of Campsie Local Area Command to 79 other Commands in the NSW Police Service between 1996 and today, Canterbury's ranking across all crimes has fallen from number 13 in the State in 1997 to today, when we are ranked at number 27 in NSW.

Further examples of the impact of this work include the following:

- Our Development Control Plan (DCP) on Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design is improving community safety in residential and commercial development across the city and establishing benchmarks for safer public access facilities into the future.
- Our formal Protocols with both the NSW Police Local Area Commands and the NSW Fire Brigades are maximising specialist input and utilising our partners' expertise in the assessment of Crime Prevention measures in Development Applications and improving our co-ordinated response to noise abatement and fire safety concerns.
- Planning for our own new works and public facilities like town centres, open space and car parks has improved and our thinking about key crime prevention design features like natural surveillance and access control has supported police crime reduction strategies in local areas.
- Our community development programs are focussing more effectively on supporting priority community safety initiatives on issues like domestic violence, youth crime, child protection and drug abuse; developing projects that our expert partners in these fields tell us are needed most and maximising the value for each dollar contributed by Council to these important programs.

On a practical level we have sponsored many projects including family support and education programs for parent of users of drugs, anger management and anti-violence workshops, direct counselling services to at-risk youth and those involved in the criminal justice system and supported the production of crime prevention resources such as the youth info card, domestic violence card, anti-violence training videos.

Our sponsorship of these programs is helping the early detection of child abuse, the improvement of information, education and resources to victims in our community and improved advocacy to government about our needs and this has attracted thousands of dollars in additional funding to our community.

- Our Youth Crime Prevention Program has attracted significant State funding for youth development programs and projects actively targeting motor vehicle theft, violence and vandalism.
- Our safety audit program has reviewed nine town centres and other key sites and helped evaluate our improvement and maintenance programs in these areas. At the same time we have enhanced the safety facilities provided to our community in these areas. We are also attracting funding and resources from local business and public authorities in these areas. Our audit program has also created partnerships with major commercial shopping centres significantly improving the quality and safety of privately owned public car parks.
- Our Community Media Campaign is using Council columns and bi-annual reports to households to tackle the fear of crime and promote the services we are providing with our community partners in response to the issues of primary concern to our residents.
- Our Graffiti Solutions Program enhances the look of known trouble spots – and involved youth and business in partnering Council to improve our City.
- Our management of public space, utilisation of no-loitering street signs and effective co-ordination with Police has increased surveillance and response times in trouble spot areas and had a major impact on the level of street offences including illegal street prostitution in our community. We feel it also contributed to a review of State legislation that improved police powers to respond to street offences.

- Our community safety surveys and ongoing community consultations are helping us target our resources more effectively to address the issues that matter most to our community.

These and many more outcomes from our community safety program have clearly added value to our core business activities and provided excellent results for crime reduction programs with our community partners.

Perhaps in no other area have we worked more closely with our community over such an extended period of time to promote community safety and crime prevention than in our partnerships with community neighbourhood centres. These centres work within communities to detect crime, support victims and divert offenders to more constructive community outcomes.

Appendix A provides a more detailed analysis of the role of these centres and Council's role in supporting the development of social infrastructure to maximise community safety outcomes. In planning and building community facilities that support neighbourhood programs Councils rely on Federal and State governments to help fund these significant capital costs. We urge the Inquiry to support a partnership to further this goal to effectively prevent crime. The benefits of these partnerships are clearly spelt out in this example.

D. Conclusion

This submission has highlighted the effective role that one local Council has and should be encouraged to play in preventing crime in its local community.

Our submission highlights a variety of roles Councils are already performing in supporting the early detection and intervention in crime situations and highlights

a range of initiatives that are having a significant and positive impact on crime and the fear of crime in its community.

We argue that greater resources should be provided to support Councils in this work and enable them to promote primary prevention activities developed in partnership with local police and community organisations.

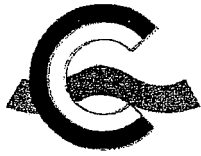
Our submission also provides evidence that there is insufficient emphasis on the social infrastructure and network of facilities and programs required to address community needs at a local level. It concludes that the Federal government should support better partnerships with local government and community organisations that can improve the co-ordination, the availability and effectiveness of programs aimed at reducing crime at the local level.

Similarly we urge the Federal government to recognise that local government, though well placed to deliver exceptional community safety and crime prevention outcomes, needs the commitment of both the State and Commonwealth governments to adequately fund Council programs and resource this involvement. Local government does not have the tax income base to significantly fund an expanded role in crime prevention and social programs. It requires a commitment from the Inquiry to promote our role and recommend real funding to support and effectively deliver programs to local communities.

*Inquiry into Crime in the Community:
Victims, offenders and the fear of crime.*

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM CANTERBURY CITY COUNCIL:

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- 2. THAT the Inquiry recognise the critical role of neighbourhood community centres in the early detection, intervention and prevention of crime.**
- 3. THAT the Committee recommend to the Federal Government that a capital funding program be established to provide matching grants to Councils for the development of social infrastructure, in particular community and youth facilities, targeting crime prevention activities.**
- 4. THAT in partnership with the States, the Federal government provide recurrent funding for crime prevention programs to resource local councils and support their role in Community Safety and Crime Prevention.**
- 5. THAT the Federal government allocate resources and negotiate with State governments to enhance funding for existing neighbourhood community centres to enhance their role in crime prevention.**
- 6. THAT a whole-of-government approach to the funding and resourcing of these centres be co-ordinated to ensure minimum standards of service to local areas.**



CANTERBURY CITY COUNCIL

City of Cultural Diversity

Appendix A:

CASE STUDY:

Crime Prevention and Supporting Community Networks -

Council's Support of Neighbourhood Community Centres

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CASE STUDY:

Crime Prevention and Supporting Community Networks -

Council's Support of Neighbourhood Community Centres

Canterbury City Council has operated community development programs since 1976 and has played a critical role in the development of community facilities and social infrastructure at the local level.

Amongst the most significant achievements of Council in promoting community safety since the 1970's, has been the development of multi-purpose community centres. These centres provide neighbourhood information services and develop a range of programs relevant to local needs.

The multi-purpose centre model is resource efficient because they target priority needs in local communities and optimise the use of the facilities through shared use of resources. They are responsive to their communities and secure resources from many appropriate government, and private bodies to meet common objectives in the local area.

This submission argues that neighbourhood centres provide the best opportunity for developing social programs relevant to community safety needs in local areas, and that a minimum network of facilities should be provided in local areas with adequate funding by the Federal government.

Most of these services are operated on the community development model, assessing local needs and developing relevant programs through the participation of volunteers and residents. In this way, neighbourhood centres offer flexible and responsive crime detection and intervention services, and can provide valuable and relevant crime prevention activities within the resources available. These activities may include family support, counselling and parent education, child protection, outside school hours care, community information and youth diversionary programs appropriate to local needs and circumstances.

Operating as positive community resources they also deliver recreational, and cultural activities that attract clients in a non-threatening environment - one that respects their right to participate in ways that will not stigmatise and therefore alienate participants.

This submission assumes that 'early intervention' programs go beyond child and youth related programs; but include services which address issues early in the cycle of crime (e.g. child protection), prior to the incidence of crime (child care), and in ways that reduce the fear of crime (aged care, information and recreation).

Community development activities operating in community neighbourhood centres can improve the quality of life of all age groups, by developing community support structures to create community cohesion, and actively prevent crime by promoting community participation and social harmony.

Neighbourhood Community Centres and Community Safety

What are neighbourhood community centres
and what do they do?

There are approximately 286 community centres in New South Wales; an average of 1.6 neighbourhood community centres for every local government area in the state.

Although they vary enormously in size and complexity, all centres:

- Respond to their local community's needs and characteristics.
- Have a community development role.
- Provide services to disadvantaged people, groups and communities.

Based on a 1996 survey of centres, the Local Community Services Association (LCSA) produced a discussion paper which outlines the origins, philosophy and role of neighbourhood centres in New South Wales (LCSA, 1996). They argue that there are some 1300 projects provided by centres across NSW and activities vary enormously from centre to centre depending on:

- Each community's needs and characteristics,
- community priorities at the time,
- the availability of resources - money, people, facilities and equipment,
- the existence and work of other service providers, and
- previous work on the issue or concern.

Examples of the type of services they offer include:

- Information, advice and referral
- Family support and counselling
- Home and Community Care - aged and disability services
- Child Care and child protection
- Education and training
- Emergency relief, supported accommodation and material assistance
- Youth services.
- Community development
- Organisational support

The rest of this submission outlines the relevance of these programs to the issues raised in the Inquiry's terms of reference.

A. The Impact of Neighbourhood Community Centres

on Criminal Participation rates

A key feature of neighbourhood centres is their flexibility as local community resources to either directly target people already involved in criminal behaviour or to prevent the incidence and fear of crime very early in the development cycle.

Depending on funding, crime activities directly targeted by neighbourhood centres include domestic violence, drug abuse, juvenile justice, family support, child abuse and personal violence. They also address the needs of specific

community safety related groups such as youth at risk, low income and unemployed groups, people with mental illness and victims of crime.

The effectiveness of these agencies in preventing recidivism is documented in the annual reviews of outcomes required by government funding authorities.

Objective and comprehensive evaluation research is needed in this area, but government departments have funded these centres for many years to directly prevent crime participation in areas such as child abuse, juvenile justice and youth support, family crisis and domestic violence.

These government agencies conduct detailed program funding reviews and continue to fund centres on the basis of their effectiveness in achieving social as well as other crime prevention objectives.

An Example of community safety outcomes from one

neighbourhood centre in Canterbury City

Canterbury City has some funded centres that provide excellent examples of what can be achieved in changing offending behaviour. Centres like Riverwood Community Centre and Belmore Youth Resource Centre work with their communities to link individuals and families at risk with programs that can avert further involvement in crime. Below are three case studies that highlight community safety outcomes of just one relatively well funded centre in our City - the Riverwood Community Centre.

Case Study : **Riverwood Community Centre**

Program 1: Riverwood Youth Service Riverwood Youth Service is part of the Riverwood Community Centre. It's a locally focussed youth service providing recreational, social and educational programs for youth in the Riverwood housing estate. One of the programs offered by the service is called Youth Links, funded under the NSW government's Helping Early Leavers Project (HELP). In 1997, the program offered support to 35 unemployed youth (15-24yrs), providing courses, social and practical support to assist them into jobs or further education that would enhance their job prospects. Almost two-thirds (23) of these young unemployed were long term unemployed, two fifths were of non-English speaking background. By the end of the program almost three-quarters (26) of the participants had successful outcomes. 16 had enrolled in TAFE, apprenticeships and other work related courses; 10 of the participants had jobs. Of those who did not complete the program, all faced significant drug, emotional, medical, child care or other family support needs and were provided other appropriate forms of assistance. In qualitative terms, the youth worker case reports, indicates the community safety benefits of this program for just one of the clients: *Ahmed is young Arabic man of eighteen years. He was involved in a fatal car accident whereby his female passenger was killed. Ahmed suffered deep depression, guilt and great remorse due to this accident; he was in intensive care for twelve days and nearly died. Ahmed came to the Centre to do his community service hours. He was known to the Centre as a person who attended basketball. Ahmed carried out his community service hours in a hard working manner. All staff who were involved with him were impressed. As his supervisor I developed a closer relationship with Ahmed. Gradually I was able to get him to trust me and he was able to let go of some of his grief. After many discussions he enrolled in the HELP program and was of great assistance to the teachers in this program, whilst at the same time, increasing his skills. Ahmed is interested in youth work and the Centre has such faith in him that we are talking to him about a traineeship. This story could have been very different due to his depression and the environment it is quite likely that Ahmed could have become involved in drug taking. I believe the contact with the Centre, the support and care in looking at his needs prevented this.*

Program 2: Riverwood Family Support Service Family support offers assistance to women involved in domestic violence. They operate a group to provide women with information and a safe, supportive environment where peer support facilitates action against domestic violence situations. Statistically, the Riverwood family support centre has assisted 171 families in the last 12 months. This work includes domestic violence support, refuge placements, Department of Housing advocacy, child care placements, medical support, group work with children who witness domestic violence, women and families of NESB. The importance of this work for any one family is significant in social justice and community safety terms, as exemplified by the following case report: *Probation and Parole referred Jenny to the Riverwood Family Support Centre. Jenny was on parole for offences relating to drug use. Jenny had a young son aged three. Jenny had very poor self-esteem and was on a very high dose of methadone when she was referred. Jenny had very little family support. We arranged childcare for her son and she began to attend a women and relationships group. Jenny was a real asset to this group and was able to share her life experiences with the group. She had held down a very responsible position before she became addicted to heroin and was now trying to get her life back to where it was before her addiction. Jenny had enormous feelings of guilt about the effects of her drug addiction on her family and friends. She feared these relationships were irreparable. Jenny began drug and alcohol counselling on a regular basis and began*

volunteering at the Community Centre. After a year, she works two mornings a week, remains drug free, is reaching her goal to become methadone free and is slowly but surely repairing relationships from the past. Jenny is also a very active member of her son's Parents and Citizens Association and was President of her sons pre-school Parent committee. Jenny has made many valuable friends from her contact with this Centre.

Program 3: Riverwood Community Support Extract from a letter to the centre: *"My name is Kevin and I am 50 years old, my friend is writing this for me. I came to the Riverwood Community Centre three years ago. The ladies from the St George Building Society sent me to the Community Centre. I was confused and kept trying to draw my pension out of a closed bank account. I am on a disability pension. I was sleeping in the clothing bins or on the trains. My parents lived in Riverwood until they died...After making contact with the Centre they sorted out my money and got me a flat in Riverwood from the Department of Housing. I love my flat. They organised with my sister for her to look after my money, pay rent, electricity and send money to the Centre for my shopping and spending money...Peter the bus driver from the Centre takes my shopping and I get frozen meals, they are nicer than the others. Home Care help me a little bit with my housework. I go to the Centre everyday to get my money to buy things. I have now joined a basketball group at the Centre that I love and we are going on a camp and I can't wait. I help at the Centre doing different jobs. The best thing of all is I am now learning to read and write... I reckon I will be able to get a job soon."*

From a community safety perspective, the benefit of this work is that neighbourhood centres directly deliver programs targeting the most disadvantaged in a community including families and individuals already involved in crime. They do this while they provide constructive cultural and social activities in a positive community setting, to reduce the fear of crime, and at the same time act as early detection services in a non-threatening, supportive environment.

B. Preventing Criminal Behaviour:

How do neighbourhood centres affect

Community Safety & Crime Prevention?

In delivering a range of services appropriate to local needs, neighbourhood community centres play a vital role in building support and friendship networks essential to the functioning of a healthy community.

Increasingly, this work is being described as investing in the “social capital” of the community:

“Social capital refers to the processes between people which establish networks, norms, social trust and facilitate co-ordination and co-operation for mutual benefit.” (Cox, 1995).

There are seven elements to “social capital” that can be promoted through community development:

- Participation in the local community
- Developing feelings of Trust and Safety
- Establishing neighbourhood connections
- Promoting family and friendship connections
- Promoting tolerance of diversity
- Encouraging pro-activity in the social context
- Valuing life.

There is a clear connection between investment in these activities and a reduction in the fear and incidence of crime, and the promotion of community safety.

Even with only 286 centres across New South Wales, an indication of the extent of their reach into the communities they serve may be gleaned from the census of centres conducted by the NSW Local Community Services Association. In one week in 1996, these services provided:

- 26,500 information and referral contacts including 18,500 phone contacts and 8,000 face to face contacts.
- 7,000 face to face interviews / counselling services
- 8,860 aged care services in the home
- 1,450 home visits for family support
- 1,375 occasions of emergency relief and material assistance
- 2,650 preschool child care places
- 5,600 outside school hours care places
- 2,000 playgroup places
- 300 self help groups
- 3,410 young people attending youth clubs and youth camps.
- 390 support groups (including domestic violence/family support)
- 600 adult and community education groups
- 160 social advocacy groups
- 130 pre-vocational and employment related groups / courses
- 3,100 people using community transport provided by the centres.

These services also involve the community in providing for their own needs, drawing on 7,100 community volunteers in one week from the local area. The centres also build friendship networks vital to supporting and sustaining families in need.

**C. The type and level of assistance needed
to change offending behaviour**

To date there has not been any attempt or commitment from State or Federal governments to establish a well-funded, comprehensive network of centres in any LGA, nor to measure their impact in the achievement of crime reduction objectives.

Many local Councils have provided or planned facilities for local communities, but are reluctant to further develop these centres without the commitment to capital and stable recurrent funding from other levels of government.

Services need to be funded for both facilities and adequate levels of staff. Existing services need enhanced funding and many areas do not have centres in reasonable proximity to local populations.

i. Impact of Inadequacies in the level of funding in Canterbury City

Having recognised the role of these centres in promoting community safety, it is important to highlight the ad hoc nature of service funding, and its impact on the development of services across a local government area.

The lack of availability of youth programs across Canterbury, for example, highlights the impact of ad hoc funding without minimum standards of staffing and programs.

Canterbury city has three neighbourhood community centres at Lakemba, Earlwood and Riverwood. Only Riverwood receives specific funding for a neighbourhood youth program - only one corner of Canterbury city receives funding to develop activities in a local geographic area that can have the type benefits outlined above.

There are other services for youth in Canterbury - those that focus on 'juvenile justice', or 'youth with disabilities', or 'youth with health problems' or 'muslim youth', but these services are targeted at particularly disadvantaged youth across the whole of the city, and cannot develop preventative programs for youth outside their specific target group.

They play a critical role in addressing the needs of youth-at-risk, but these centralised services, with limited resources, also face real limitations in reaching out to youth in local neighbourhoods; to undertake "primary prevention" - before youth become involved in crime or other at-risk behaviours.

Neighbourhood centres like those Council provides in Earlwood and Lakemba cannot develop activities for youth because they do not attract the same level of funding and do not receive program funds for youth activities. These areas face particular youth problems of involvement in crime, unemployment, failure in education, cultural conflict and drug and alcohol abuse.

The Earlwood and Lakemba centres provide venues for older people, counselling, food parcels, community information and family support activities; they also provide venues for community self-help groups. But in communities with recognised high youth needs they do not have the youth work staff expertise or program funds to deliver activities to prevent crime, involve youth in constructive pursuits or develop their talents.

Beyond the gaps they experience in delivering youth activities, many neighbourhood centres are funded with inadequate contributions to staff resources they need to effectively service the full range of community safety target groups.

Designated positions are needed in all centres to perform core roles with community information and social support, youth programs, families and children's support, and activities with healthy older people.

Beyond this, specific resources may be required to address high needs unique to local communities such as unemployment programs and those addressing the needs of people of Non - English speaking background, but funded from other appropriate government programs.

This demonstrates the need for minimum standards of funding for all centres to ensure an adequate range of programs can be delivered to all target groups; but

delivered in ways that are appropriate to local needs, while harnessing other community and government resources.

These resources include voluntary contributions of community members in committees, activity leaders and administrative roles. It means local business, community service groups and charities.

They also include key partnerships that have already been established in many areas with local Councils to contribute land, facilities, recurrent maintenance and management costs.

Many Councils have shown a willingness to participate in well co-ordinated and appropriately funded initiatives to better serve the interests of their community and community safety. We believe the State and Federal government should join with us and provide the core resources required to sustain the partnerships with local government and our local communities.

ii. Inadequacy of funding for existing services

There has been no real growth in the level of funding available to community neighbourhood centres from the NSW Department of Community Services since 1988 and no provision of enhancement funding to the states to support recurrent funding for these programs from any Federal source.

Although there have been some minor increases as a result of cost-of-living adjustments, they have largely been less than CPI, and have barely kept pace with significant increases in government and other charges such as superannuation, insurances and worker's compensation.

The NSW Council of Social Service in their Pre-budget submission to the government has estimated that an additional \$5.5 million program funding is required in the Community Services Grants Program to meet these increased costs and meet existing client demand. A further \$1.5 million dollars is also needed to address additional demand currently unmet by these services.

In addition, the LCSA survey estimated that \$19.4 million dollars was required to improve capital facilities for existing services. These funds could be provided over a three-year program but are urgently needed to provide adequate bases for this important work.

Currently, these centres operate with varying levels of resources depending on the success of local community management and Councils to secure funding in a fragmented and unco-ordinated funding environment.

A whole-of-government approach is needed to address this issue, as many government departments now benefit from these facilities and the work already undertaken to establish community committees to manage local programs. The community safety role for neighbourhood centres could also be enhanced by

providing venues for government programs such as parole and juvenile justice programs, not currently delivered at a local level.

iii. *New services to address gaps in the network of centres*

In addition to meeting the capital and recurrent funding needs of existing centres, there are significant gaps in the availability of centres in many areas and growth funding should be provided to enhance the network of facilities available in local areas, particularly in high need local government areas.

Attempts have been made to develop standards that are being used by local Councils and government departments to establish benchmarks for the availability of neighbourhood centres in local communities. These standards generally range from between one centre per 3,500 residents in the population to one centre per 10,000 persons. Currently there is one centre for every 21,114 persons in NSW.

Although it is unrealistic to expect that the preferred standard could be achieved rapidly, there is a need for a commitment to make significant gains in service availability over 3-5 years.

To make a significant improvement in the level of new services in both capital and recurrent funding, the Local Community Services Association survey of services estimated that an immediate injection of funds totalling \$20.4 million

would be required. This would fund another 25 new centres and fund an equivalent of 400 full-time staff across New South Wales.

Conclusion

From the extensive experience of service providers, the extent to which community centres can directly target specific crime issues in their community is dependent on the availability of resources provided.

There is a need for more stringent evaluation research on the link between the activities of these services and community safety objectives; but there is ample evidence of the effectiveness of local neighbourhood centres in successfully intervening to support families and prevent the further incidence of crime.

Within the neighbourhood centre model, funding can be tied to target high need individuals with juvenile justice or family crisis needs, and there was some evidence at the launch of the Inquiry seminar that these programs can best be provided in the context of the local communities in which people live.

However, funding that merely targets services which respond to incidents of crime, only prevent people already breaking the law from further involvement in crime and at-risk behaviour.

In addition to this important area, program funding is needed for 'primary prevention'. This includes funding to address the need in the broader community

for access to activities such as basic information and referral services, parent education and constructive cultural and recreational pursuits that can support the functioning of ordinary families, address the fear of crime and eliminate the need for crisis support.

All of these services fit within the neighbourhood centre model and create an environment which is more welcoming and less threatening to those in need.

This submission argues that access to facilities and programs is limited in many local areas. In response, there is a need for a whole-of-government-and-community approach to deliver a more comprehensive network of facilities and programs in the interests of community safety.

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