

Submission No. 43

(Youth Violence)

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**STANDING COMMITTEE
ON
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FAMILY, COMMUNITY,
HOUSING & YOUTH**



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Tuesday, 27 October 2009

Secretary of The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family,
Community, Housing and Youth
House of Representatives,
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Secretary Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth

RE: INQUIRY INTO THE IMPACT OF VIOLENCE ON YOUNG AUSTRALIANS

Thank you for the opportunity to submit a letter to the Committee investigating the impact of violence on young Australians.

This submission will seek to highlight the community concern for the young people who reside in the Municipality of Hume and to discuss perceptions of violence and community safety, and the broader effect on young people in the community. It will also propose strategies to reduce violence and its impact on young Australians.

Hume City Council supports a nationally coordinated strategic response to reducing the impact of violence on young Australians.

Demographics of Young People in Hume City Council

By 2030, Hume's population of young people aged 10 to 24 years of age is expected to grow to 50,863, which is 22.1% of the population. This will increase from 36,843 at 2006.

Hume is currently ranked 4th most disadvantaged of the Local Government Areas in Melbourne. Residents in Hume are below the Metropolitan Melbourne average for school retention, employment and for achieving a tertiary education. It also has a higher proportion of young people who are not engaged in fulltime study or employment.

The Youth Disengagement rate in Hume is 11.9% compared with Melbourne Statistical Division of 7.4%. Between 2001/02 to 2007/8 Hume has experienced higher rates of youth accessing mental health services compared to Victoria.

Young people are consistently over represented in crime statistics both as victims and as offenders in Hume. Crimes against the person have increased from 992.4 in 2006/07 to 1,098.7 in 2007/08 (per 100 000 population persons aged 15 – 24 years). The most common alleged offences experienced by youth in Hume during 2007/08 were Assault, Theft and Justice Procedures.

Perceptions of violence and community safety among young Australians and the effect of violence on young people and the broader community

In a recent Community Safety Survey (2008), the Hume Community indicated very poor perceptions of young people. An increase in risk taking behaviour, peer pressure and popular cultures, may be contributing factors to pushing boundaries, risky behaviours and experimentation leading to poor health and wellbeing outcomes for some young people.

The factors outlined above contribute to poor perceptions of community safety amongst young people. Local and State media reporting of recent violent events in Hume involving young people, has exacerbated poor community perceptions. Often a small incident is compounded by the magnitude of attention received; leading to young people feeling more unsafe and victimised in their community. Negative stereotyping of young people devalues their place and contribution to the community. A sense of belonging and connection to the community is an important predictor of safety perception and reduced connection results in a greater perception of living in an unsafe community.

Hume has the 2nd highest incidence of Family Violence in Victoria. Family Violence also has a lasting effect on the health and wellbeing of children and young people who may witness or be victims. Children, who develop in violent families and communities, may as an adult lack problem resolution skills and experience family issues which result in violent relationships and high incidence of community and family violence.

Under-age drinking is strongly associated with increased risk of injury and violence, and is a strong contributor to poor perceptions of young people. Interventions should seek to promote responsible use of alcohol and address secondary prevention. For example programs which are place-based and concentrate on the railway lines may help to address the association between travelling to the common sites of violence fuelled by alcohol.

Strategies to reduce violence and its impact among young Australians

Hume supports a combination of strategies and interventions which work at every stage of governance and includes individuals, families and communities. To take an early interventionist approach and prevent the cyclical effect of violence. This could include the following programs and strategies:

Strengthening resilience: through the meaningful participation and engagement of young people. To strengthen the capacity of young people to negotiate the transition from adolescence to adulthood, and to also adapt to stressful life circumstances. To ultimately increase a young person's sense of connectedness, value and belonging in the community. For example FREEZA is a youth participation program lead by young people and promotes drug and alcohol free events.

Breaking the self-fulfilling cycle of negative perceptions and violence: through social marketing initiatives aimed at addressing poor perceptions of young people in the community, with an emphasis on young people guiding the development and the delivery of the campaign. Campaigns should also emphasise equal and respectful relationships and that reject violence in the community in any form.

A positive intervention strategy has been the Hume Youth and Referral Team (HYART). It has been developed in collaboration with Victoria Police, Dianella Health Services and other services in Hume for young people, and is yet to secure ongoing funding. This program seeks to break the cycle of violence by providing pathways into early intervention services for young people aged 10 to 18 years of age who come to the notice of police because they are at risk, have been a victim or crime or are a first-time offender. The aim of this project is to support young people through a diversionary program established to build protective factors and reduce risks associated with contact with the Criminal Justice system.

Hume City Council is currently conducting community consultation to inform the Youth Strategy 2010 – 2013. The discussions held in focus groups to date have identified a need for research to be conducted into the emerging issues of perceived 'gang' affiliate crime. Along with this research there will be a need to conduct education for young people on the consequences associated with violence. With the increase in newly arrived young people, there is also a need for education on community expectations and the laws which govern Australia.

Hume City Council commends the Federal Government for initiating this inquiry into the impact of violence on young Australians and awaits the positive outcomes for the community which I am sure will be derived from the submissions received and the willingness to work together to reduce the impact of violence on young people in Australia.

Yours Sincerely,



DOMENIC ISOLA
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER