

Submission No. 56

(youth violence)

A.O.C. Date: 2/12/2009

PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA – HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES STANDING COMMITTEE ON
FAMILY, COMMUNITY, HOUSING AND YOUTH

Inquiry into the Impact of Violence on Young Australians

November 2009



Parliament of Australia – House of Representatives

Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth

Inquiry into the Impact of Violence on Young Australians

Terms of Reference

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth shall inquire and report on the impact of violence on young Australians with particular reference to:

- perceptions of violence and community safety among young Australians;
- links between illicit drug use, alcohol abuse and violence among young Australians;
- the relationship between bullying and violence and the wellbeing of young Australians;
- social and economic factors that contribute to violence by young Australians; and
- strategies to reduce violence and its impact among young Australians.

1. Introduction/Background

The Tasmanian Government regards violent offending by young people, victimisation of young people, and young people's exposure to family violence, as significant issues within the community. Youth violence can impact significantly upon the lives of victims, offenders and their families. Extensive research confirms the devastating impact family violence can have on children's and young people's lives, and their physical and emotional development. Violence affects children in many ways, whether it is directed at the children or directed at other members of their family and witnessed by the children. Violence can be both physical and psychological, and is usually caused by a number of different factors. Peer pressure, cultural differences and the use of alcohol are just some of the factors that may lead to acts of violence involving young people.

Assessing the impact of violence on young Australians is an important, but difficult task. Addressing violence upon, and perpetuated by, young people frequently involves consideration of complex social issues. The Tasmanian Government is working across government and the community in order to drive both short and long-term social and cultural change. However there is potential to further improve the coordination and communication between government and community organisations to increase service coordination and delivery to young people with complex needs in Tasmania.

The remainder of this submission addresses each of the Inquiry's Terms of Reference:

2. Perceptions of violence and community safety among young Australians

The *National Survey of Community Satisfaction with Policing 2008-09* conducted by Roy Morgan Research provides information regarding perceptions of safety in each state and territory as compared to the national average.

In 2008-09, 93% of Tasmanians felt safe walking or jogging in their neighbourhood during the day, and 64% after dark. This compares favourably to the national averages of 90% and 60% respectively.

When further analysing the data:

- 98% of young Tasmanians (15-17 years) and 94% (18-24 years) felt safe walking or jogging in their neighbourhoods during the day, and
- 57% (15-17 years) and 70% (18-24 years) felt safe walking or jogging in their neighbourhood after dark.

Respondents to the Survey during 2008-09 were asked how worried they were about being/becoming a victim of physical assault in a public place:

- 32% of Tasmanians said that they were worried about being/becoming a victim of physical assault in a public place compared to 40% nationally; and
- 27% of young Tasmanians (15-17 years) and 36% of (18-24 years) said they were worried about being/becoming a victim of physical assault in a public place.

Perception of Violence Data

Worried about being/becoming a victim of:	Tasmania % (all ages)	15-17 years	18-24 years	National % (all ages)
Domestic Violence	10	15	11	12
Physical Assault	32	27	36	40
Sexual Assault	11	11	13	18
Perceptions of problems in your local area	Tasmania % (all ages)	15-17 years	18-24 years	National % (all ages)
Domestic Violence	19	17	19	24
Sexual Assault	10	8	9	19
Physical Assault in a public place	30	42	31	39

**National Survey of Community Satisfaction with Policing 2008-09 conducted by Roy Morgan Research*

From the data above, 42% of the 15-17 year age group perceive that physical assault in a public place is a problem in their local area (all Tasmanians 30%), but are less worried about themselves being/becoming a victim of physical assault in a public place (27%) than Tasmanians overall.

A review of Tasmania Police data over a five-year period indicates an increase in the rate of violent youth offending, and an increase in the proportion of violent crimes committed by youth. This violent crime includes assaults, robberies and vandalism.

The number of total offences against the person committed by youth has increased from 633 (2004-05) to 791 (2008-09). Notably, assaults by persons under the age of 18 years increased from 530 (2004-05) to 605 (2008-09).

The *Department of Police and Emergency Management Corporate Performance Annual Report 2008-09* indicated an increase in the number of assaults against police, and a significant link was made between the misuse of alcohol and drugs and public place assaults. Tasmania's increase in violent offending by youth is consistent with the experience of other Australian jurisdictions, including New South Wales and Victoria.

The 2008-09 data from the Tasmania Police Family Violence Management System indicated that the number of juveniles present at incidents of family violence in Tasmania has stabilised on 2,981 (2007-08) and on 2,953 (2008-09).

3. *Links between illicit drug use, alcohol abuse and violence among young Australians*

Tasmania Police identifies a strong link between youth violence and excessive use of alcohol and other drug use. Whilst males are more highly represented in this group, Tasmania Police is seeing an increasing number of young females exhibiting violent behaviours, again frequently fuelled by alcohol and/or other drugs.

Tasmania Police coordinates the Illicit Drug Diversion Initiative (IDDI). This initiative seeks to divert minor (non-violent) drug offenders from the criminal justice system, through referral to counselling and treatment services. The number of persons under the age of 18 years diverted by Tasmania Police under the initiative in 2008-09 was 267, or 17% of the total number of diversions (1,570).

In the years 2006-07 to 2008-09, there was little change in the overall number of persons under the age of 18 years being diverted through this initiative. Males are more significantly represented in the data.

4. *The relationship between bullying and violence and the well-being of young Australians*

From both a victimisation and offending perspective, there is a significant body of research that supports the link between youth violence and alcohol and/or other substance abuse. The research clearly documents aggressive bullying among juveniles as a predictor for violence in later life. Importantly, bullying is also recognised as being symptomatic of the impact of risk factors that the young person has been exposed to within their home and social environment.

Tasmanian Police is the lead Agency for Inter-Agency Support Teams (IASTs) which provide a multi-agency case coordinated approach to intervening with young people that are offending and demonstrate complex social needs. Many of the clients who exhibit bullying behaviours are referred to the IASTs through the school system.

5. *Social and economic factors that contribute to violence by young Australians*

It is widely recognised that social and economic factors contribute to the level of crime and violence in communities. In September 2009, the Tasmanian Social Inclusion Commissioner, Professor David Adams, released the report *A Social Inclusion Strategy for Tasmania*; that served to document the level of disadvantage experienced in Tasmania. The Report considers the impact of disadvantage upon individual development and the ability to function within accepted societal norms. Disadvantage is a strong predictor for juveniles to become both offenders and victims of crime and violence.

In December 2008 preliminary findings were released from the study *The Concentration of Offending and related Social Problems in Tasmanian Families*, undertaken by Dr Vanessa Goodwin, Tasmanian Institute of Law Enforcement Studies. This study examines familial links and criminal activity. The study focussed upon six families in Tasmania and indicated that there was a very established pattern of intergenerational offending. It also highlighted the enormously challenging and complex social problems evident in these families. Effecting and motivating change in these individuals and family groups requires significant effort in engagement, and in the provision of broad strategies and programs involving the government, non-government and community sectors.

Tasmania Police deals with young offenders and victims from these familial groups. There is strong recognition that determining better outcomes for young offenders cannot be effected through a criminal justice model alone. Studies such as Dr Goodwin's highlight the need for a continued focus on approaches such as the IASTs and broadening the responsibility across Government and the community for addressing these complex problems, to effect longer term change.

6. Strategies to reduce violence and its impact among young Australians

The Tasmanian Government employs a number of strategies across various agencies to address the needs of young victims and young offenders. The focus of these programs range from prevention and early intervention, to treatment, support, counselling and rehabilitation.

A Social Inclusion Strategy for Tasmania, Commissioner's Report and the Tasmanian Government's Preliminary Response 2009

In September 2009, Tasmania's Social Inclusion Commissioner, Professor David Adams, released *A Social Inclusion Strategy for Tasmania*. It contains 10 strategies and examples of actions that could be taken by government, business and the community to create a more inclusive Tasmania. In the Strategy, the Social Inclusion Commissioner defines social inclusion to mean:

"...a fair go at having a decent education, skills, meaningful work, access to services, good relationships and a say on what matters to us. It's about the relationships in life that make us healthy, happy and productive."

Approximately 13% of Tasmanian face complex and enduring barriers to social inclusion. These barriers include personal factors (such as health or homelessness), access factors (such as to transport and health services), and structural factors (such as intergenerational poverty and locational disadvantage).

"Personally social exclusion plays out as lives unfulfilled, unhappiness and stigma. Socially it is playing out as higher levels of violence, substance abuse and mental illness."

The Strategy makes the significant connection that individuals and groups who face these barriers and are at risk of social exclusion, are more likely to be subject to violence and stigma.

In October 2009, the Tasmanian Government released a Preliminary Response to the Commissioner's Report. The Response forms part of the Government's commitment to implement *A Social Inclusion Strategy for Tasmania* over the next four years to pursue all 10 of the strategies identified by the Social Inclusion Commissioner. It highlights the short-term priorities to improve the opportunity for all Tasmanians to access good nutrition, transport, financial help, be enterprising and participate in their community.

(i) Department of Police and Emergency Management

Tasmania Police supports specific youth intervention teams and programs and coordinates a multi-agency approach to dealing with young people who are offending or 'at risk' of offending, and their families.

Inter-Agency Support Team (IAST) program

The IAST program is an important Tasmanian Government initiative which provides a collaborative, multi-agency approach to the case coordination of those young people and their families in Tasmania

with complex needs. These young people are frequently known to police and other government agencies, have histories of offending, and are recipients of a broad range of government services.

IASTs are convened and led by Tasmania Police, and bring together key government agencies and local government. Through the coordination of service delivery, the IAST model seeks to avoid duplication, identify and respond to gaps in service delivery, and provide a tailored response.

The first IAST was established in 2005, and currently 24 IASTs operate in Tasmania. In 2008-09, 258 juveniles statewide (185 males, 73 females) were being managed under the IAST program. Tasmania Police supports two positions to assist in the coordination and administration of the IASTs.

To date, there has been limited formal evaluation of the IAST program. Informal feedback from stakeholders indicates that the model has delivered a number of effective outcomes:

- positive interventions for children and young people;
- better working relationships and sharing of information between government agencies;
- increased number of children and young people being diverted away from the criminal justice system and/or engagement with education or work; and
- improved relationships between families and government agencies.

Safe-at-Home

Safe-at-Home commenced in 2004 and is a major whole-of-government initiative that was developed in response to family violence. In consultation with other key stakeholder groups, an integrated service delivery system was developed, built around the principle of primacy of safety of the victim.

This initiative seeks to achieve a reduction in the level of family violence in the medium to long-term and, in the short-term, to improve safety for adult and child victims. *Safe-at-Home* also seeks to change the offending behaviour of those responsible for the violence. Police work collaboratively with the Department of Justice (DoJ) and the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS).

In Tasmania, family violence is legislatively recognised as a form of child abuse. New statewide support services for children and young people affected by family violence are also included in *Safe-at-Home*. The Family Violence Counselling and Support Service (DHHS) through the Children and Young Persons Program assists children, young people and their care givers who have been affected by family violence. The Court Support and Liaison Service (DoJ) provides support for children and young people required to participate in the court system for family violence matters.

U-Turn

U-Turn is a Tasmanian Government diversionary program for young people aged 15-20 years, with a history of motor theft, or who are 'at risk' of becoming involved in motor vehicle theft. Through participation in the *U-Turn* program, these young people are offered the opportunity to gain 'hands on' mechanical training, while addressing a number of life skills and personal development issues.

The program gives young offenders support in making different life choices, and in a number of cases has provided participants with employment opportunities. Mission Australia is currently contracted through Tasmania Police to deliver this program until June 2010.

Community Respect Order Program

The Community Respect Order Program (CRO) is a Tasmanian Government initiative that commenced in 2008. The program is based on restorative justice principles, and targets 13-25 year old offenders who have been apprehended for damage to property, mainly graffiti. Under the CRO program, offenders take responsibility for their behaviour and demonstrate reparation by performing work in the community.

Tasmania Police has also established a relationship with the University of Tasmania to address issues of racial violence targeted at international students, and other migrant groups residing and studying in the State. The Tasmania Police Multicultural Liaison Officer participates in University Orientation days, communication forums and other activities where safety issues can be raised.

The overall coordination of District Early Intervention and Youth Actions Units (EIYAU), Public Order Response Teams (PORT) and the Victim Safety Response Team (VSRT) officers, provides the ability for these services to identify risk factors in young people that come to the attention of police, and their families. These services are able to work together to consider risk factors in an holistic way, to prioritise the needs of the young people and their families, and to then implement appropriate intervention and referral strategies to better address their needs.

School Programs and Initiatives:

Tasmania Police is committed to working with educators from the State, Catholic and Independent Schools' education systems to foster a restorative justice approach when working with children and young people. Police from EIYAU and teachers work together to ensure young people are accountable for their actions, which accords with the long-term goal of reducing the incidence of youth crime.

Tasmania Police has entered into a number of partnerships with various educational institutions to effectively deal with violent behaviour and incidents in the school environment.

Programs such as *Police in Schools*, *Adopt-a-Cop* and the EIYAU in each of the four geographic police Districts, play an important role both in the prevention and intervention of behaviours that may manifest as violent offending and victimisation. This approach is undertaken from primary school level through to the College (years 11 and 12) environment.

Police in Schools

The *Police in Schools* Program was originally piloted in 1998 at Elizabeth College in Hobart. The program has extended and now operates successfully statewide at Hobart, Hellyer, Don, Launceston, Rosny and Claremont Colleges.

The objective of the program is to strengthen the relationship between Tasmania Police and young people, providing benefits to the whole community. The presence of a police officer at these campuses at times during the school day provides a role model and source of advice for students and staff, as well as contributing to the security of the college.

Adopt-a-Cop

Police officers are encouraged to become involved in the *Adopt-a-Cop* programs that are conducted in Tasmanian primary schools. The presence of officers in primary schools has the potential to influence behaviours among students and promote anti-bullying cultures.

Other programs such as the *Schools Assault Initiative*, a partnership with Learning Services North (Department of Education) in northern Tasmania, are concerned with serious incidents of violence that occur within the school environment. The Northern EIYAU delivers a number of tailored intervention strategies to tackle localised anti-social/offending issues at both individual and entire school year cohorts.

(ii) Department of Education

The Department of Education has a statewide Flexible Provision Forum delivered through four regional learning service areas across the state.

In Learning Services North programs and approaches utilised in schools to reduce the incidence of violence rest on restorative practice and a joint focus with Police. This project provides an opportunity for those affected by violence to resolve the issue. This project provides a pro-active approach from the Department of Education and Tasmania Police to change the culture of bullying and violence occurring in primary and secondary schools whilst keeping offenders out of the criminal justice system.

In Learning Services North West, two specific programs have been implemented. This first program was developed around grade 8 and 9 students (boys and girls) from Ulverstone High School, whose behaviour in school was precipitating greater periods of time out of school, either through disciplinary sanction or unauthorised absence.

A mentor was employed to work with the students in on and off site activities, with significant support from the school's social worker. The second program developed in 2008 through a partnership agreement between Flexible Provision (Department of Education), Youth Justice (Department of Health and Human Services) and Centacare to support a group of secondary boys who were not attending school, were known to Youth Justice and were aggressive and/or assaultive in their social relationships. Eligibility for the group was determined by the DoE and Youth Justice and consisted of 10 secondary aged boys. The group was closed and allowed the opportunity for each member to leave the group and re-enter in recognition of their often volatile circumstances. The program was activity based and focussed on developing positive relationships between participants and the group facilitators, reducing incidents of violence, reducing offending and to committing to attendance.

Learning Services South are supporting schools in implementing a School Wide Positive Behaviour Support program. School Wide Positive Behaviour Support (SWPBS) is a values-based approach for creating safe and effective learning environments for all students. It focuses on four key elements:

- evidence-based practices;
- data-based decision making;
- systems to promote efficient effective and sustainable intervention; and
- accountability through measurable outcomes.

SWPBS is a model which acknowledges the need for a continuum of support. This includes the implementation of whole school, targeted group, and individual student interventions. The four key elements run through each of these levels of intervention.

Learning Services South also provide a personalised learning program *Youth Arc PLP* in partnership with the Hobart City Council for students who currently cannot attend mainstream school. Many of these students are violent. The program is personalised and self-paced with support from family and other agencies, youth workers and mentors. The program aims to re-connect young people with mainstream education or training and is highly successful.

Individual schools within Learning Services South are also implementing a range of strategies and programs to reduce the impact of violence in schools such as *Mind/Matters*, restorative justice programs and utilising flexible approaches to teaching and learning which are better able to meet the needs of individuals.

Distance Education Tasmania provides individual education programs for a diversity of students as identified by specific criteria including 'exceptional circumstance' which, in many cases are students, for whom the high school environment has become unsuitable. In 2008, 19% of Distance Education's enrolment fell within this criterion. Teachers report that many of these students lack a fundamental and robust sense of self worth and often also do not have realistic and positive aspirations for their vocational and personal future and find it difficult to establish relationships built on trust.

Same-sex attracted young people in Tasmania have reported that homophobic bullying sometimes results in physical violence (Latrobe University research papers *Writing Themselves In* 1999 and *Writing Themselves in Again* 2003). The Department of Education has utilised two programs to lessen the occurrence of homophobic bullying in the secondary years; *Pride and Prejudice* and *Challenging Homophobia, Affirming Diversity* (CHAD). *Pride and Prejudice* was evaluated in 2006 and the findings suggested that students who completed the program had more positive attitudes towards gay men and lesbians. These programs focus on exploring difference, discrimination and gender issues. They create a safe environment in which difficult questions can be addressed. CHAD aims to provide a greater understanding across the whole school (parents, students and teachers) of gender identity and sexual orientation.

(iii) Department of Health and Human Services

Within Disability, Child, Youth and Family Services (DCYFS), the Family Violence and Counselling and Support Service (FVCSS), provides the *Children's and Young Persons Program* (CHYPP), a statewide therapy service for children and young people who are affected by family violence. DCYFS has also been instrumental in rolling out the LOVE BiTES program in northern Tasmania. These programs are both successful strategies to reduce the impact of violence on young people.

FVCSS provides counselling, therapy and support services for adults, children and young people who are affected by family violence. It is an important component of the Tasmanian whole-of-government *Safe at Home* program which integrates and coordinates responses to family violence around the criminal justice, safety, practical support and counselling needs of victims.

The CHYPP forms part of the FVCSS and is one of a number of partner agencies working with the *Safe at Home* Services. CHYPP was developed following the commission of a background research report, prepared by the Australian Childhood Foundation. This report included an extensive review of current

practice and knowledge regarding the impact of living with family violence on children, including their post-trauma needs, and the need for specialised and informed intervention and support (*Safe and Sound Service for Children* model: Tucci et al: 2005). CHYPP also uses features of the *Wellbeing Enhancement Framework* developed by the Victorian Department of Human Services. CHYPP therefore works within a framework of family violence that acknowledges power and gender, and cultural issues and has a child centred focus. The Tasmanian service only provides therapeutic intervention for children and young people where the primary issue for the child or young person has been their exposure to family violence and the safety and protective issues have been largely resolved. *Safe at Home* recognises family violence as a form of child abuse under the *Family Violence Act 2004* and *Children, Young Persons and their Families Act 1997*.

CHYPP is the only service of its kind in Australia and is staffed by a professional, multi-disciplinary team who work collaboratively on program development and case issues. Assessment, crisis management, intensive trauma resolution, integrative therapy, emotional support, practical support, and group counselling are provided for children and young people from ages 0-17 years.

Family Violence most often has an impact on the relationship between the non-offending parent and the child. CHYPP aims to help the care giver understand the impacts of family violence on their children and provide parenting strategies. CHYPP also works with the child or young person and their primary care giver on improved attachment and strengthening their relationship with each other following family violence.

The *LOVE BiTES* program is being rolled out in selected schools in Northern Tasmania. Elements of the program will also be used in the Ashley Youth Detention Centre in Tasmania.

LOVE BiTES is an extremely successful school-based sexual assault and family violence prevention program and is based on best practice standards for education programs as recommended by the Federal Government funded Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearing House.

The program will directly impact on school communities through the training of key teaching (drama and welfare coordinators) and social work personnel. *LOVE BiTES* is focused on students from grades nine and ten modelling respectful relationships between male and female students, teachers and workers. The main focus of the project is to increase knowledge and understanding of the issues of family violence and what constitutes a healthy relationship.

LOVE BiTES promotes the concept of safety and the need for individuals to intervene early when issues of family violence/child-maltreatment arise. The fundamental component of the program is a whole-of-school approach to the prevention of violence against women and children. It aims to engage young people on the issues of and to change attitudes toward family violence/child abuse in a non-segregated environment with male and female facilitators. It challenges gender stereotypes, assesses values, and attitudes and deconstructs myths that exist in local communities regarding family violence and child-maltreatment.

LOVE BiTES provides young people with a creative setting to explore the impact of family violence and child abuse on their communities as well as building social capital and resilience. It raises awareness of family violence and child abuse, by providing support staff and teachers with a skill set to engage a vulnerable group. Through this innovative program student and school communities can take a lead in engaging the local media and communities on their strategies for preventing violence.

7. References

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