

NSW Government Submission to the
Inquiry into the Impact of Violence on Young Australians

1. Introduction

In response to the Committee's request for information about NSW programs to address violence, this submission will focus on current NSW activity.

Violence has a detrimental impact on the lives of young people, whether as victims, perpetrators or witnesses. Violence, however, is not specifically a young person's problem. It is a community problem that needs to be addressed through governments, families and communities working together.

It is important to highlight that unlike younger children, young people are often both victims and perpetrators of violence. In fact, many adolescents who are perpetrators of domestic violence are, or have been, victims of domestic violence. This cycle is problematic as often young people are denied access to victims' services due to their violent behaviour. Violence committed in the home by young people is often the result of anger management and behavioural issues combined with mental health development issues. In contrast, domestic violence perpetrated by adults is most often related to the need to maintain power and control in a relationship.

Violence in the family home is also a direct cause of homelessness for a significant number of young Australians. Escaping family violence is the major reason women seek assistance from homelessness services for themselves and their children. For young people, who comprise the largest single group of Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) service users in NSW, homelessness due to violence can increase the likelihood of homelessness during adulthood. Therefore, being exposed to violence in the home is a significant risk factor for young people.

There is also interaction between the risk factors mentioned above, and the strong link between drug and alcohol misuse and violence. Young people are more likely to be involved in violence associated with drug and alcohol use, particularly young men.

Essentially, the evidence demonstrates that many factors contribute to the risk of violent experiences amongst young people. These factors, which are complex in their interaction, include (Williams et al 2009; Tremblay 2003):

- Community factors, such as low community attachment and high community disorganisation
- Family factors, such as family conflict and parental attitudes favourable to drug use and/or anti-social behaviour
- School factors, such as low educational attainment and/or commitment to school; and
- Individual factors, such as rebelliousness, favourable attitudes to drug use and anti-social behaviours, and/or interaction with anti-social peers.

The evidence also shows that the more protective factors a young person possesses, the less likely they are to engage in violent behaviours. These protective factors include (Williams et al 2009):

- Community factors, such as opportunities for positive participation in the community and rewards for this type of participation
- Family factors, such as strong family attachment, opportunities for positive participation in family life and rewards for this type of participation

- School factors, such as opportunities for positive participation in school and recognition of contribution/progress in school life; and
- Individual factors, such as peer/individual social skills and belief in the moral order.

This complexity of risk and protective factors means that strategies to reduce the impacts of violence on young people should address multiple risk and protective factors present in young people's lives, including those factors present in the individual, their family, peers and community.

In addition, these strategies should also:

- Involve young people
- Support families
- Encourage young people's engagement in education
- Be accessible and timely
- Link to existing government strategies
- Be appropriate for the communities they are supporting
- Be culturally appropriate
- Have clear goals; and
- Be sufficiently resourced to meet the needs of their target group.

2. Examples of NSW Government Strategies that Reduce the Incidence of Violence & its Impacts on Young People

2.1 Prevention and Early Intervention Initiatives

The NSW Government approach to preventing and intervening early is informed by an understanding of risk, protection and resilience. Essentially, by reinforcing protective factors and building resilience, prevention and early intervention initiatives can reduce the risk of violence in children and young people's lives and promote the development of pro-social behaviours.

The NSW Government approach is based on research which shows that problems with aggression tend to start at a young age. In fact, people display physical aggression more often during the preschool period than during any other age period. To be maximally effective, interventions that target physical aggression should start when children are below the age of five (Tremblay 2008).

As also mentioned above repeated exposure to violence in the family home is a significant risk factor for predicting violent behaviours in young people. Therefore, preventing violence in future generations is an important feature in the development of prevention and early intervention strategies.

Over the last ten years the NSW Government has made significant investment in prevention and early intervention initiatives by establishing a range of strategies and programs which involve cooperation with multiple state government agencies, such as:

- Families NSW
- Brighter Futures
- Building Stronger Communities
- Love Bites

- Anti-bullying initiatives
- 'What are you doing to yourself?' alcohol education campaign; and
- Youth Alcohol Action Plan

Families NSW (www.families.nsw.gov.au)

Since 1998, the NSW Government has invested more than \$190 million on innovative, evidence based services through the Families NSW Strategy. These services have included:

- Providing more than 250,000 home visits for new parents and babies. (more than 70,000 families are offered a home visit each year by child and family health nurses)
- Establishing 51 Schools as Community Centres statewide, to help link families with schools from early childhood
- Establishing more than 180 Supported Playgroups across NSW. (An evaluation of the Supported Playgroups initiative is at http://www.families.nsw.gov.au/docswr/assets/ffsite/m100006l30/fnsw_supported_playgroup_evaluation_june%202008_final.pdf)
- Establishing local antenatal programs to assist with the early identification of vulnerable families and the development of care pathways to improve access to services.

Over the next four years the NSW Government will build on these efforts in providing:

- An assessment for psychosocial issues and depression as part of routine antenatal and postnatal care for women in the publicly funded system in NSW
- An assessment for every pregnant and postnatal woman in NSW to identify issues that she may need extra help with, such as depression.
- Early literacy and numeracy assessment for all children as soon as they start school through the Best Start Kindergarten Assessment initiative. This will allow teachers to determine how well a child can read, write, speak and count and provide additional support if required.
- The Positive Parenting Program (Triple P) for all parents with a child 3-8 years. Triple P is an evidence based parenting program, to help parents make changes to improve their parenting skills. The program helps children and parents build positive relationships. It helps parents use simple routines to address conflict and provides tips on how to deal with problem behaviours as children develop. Recent research has shown that the program could reduce child abuse and the numbers of children in out-of-home care (NSW Government, 2009:4) ; and
- A 24 hour parenting helpline for parents with children under 18 years. Trained counsellors are available to answer a range of questions, from sleeping in infancy and managing discipline to parenting a teenager.

Brighter Futures

Brighter Futures is a targeted, evidence based program that aims to improve the level of support available to vulnerable families by providing access to a range of services, such as quality child care, case management, parenting programs and home visiting. These services are aimed at improving children's abilities at school and their skills at managing problems they encounter as they grow up.

The program is targeted at vulnerable families with children aged 0-8, with priority for 0-3 year olds, and aims to:

- reduce child abuse and neglect by reducing the likelihood of family problems escalating into crisis
- achieve long term benefits for children by improving intellectual development, educational outcomes and employment chances
- improve parent-child relationships and the capacity of parents to build positive relationships and raise stronger, healthier children
- break inter-generational cycles of disadvantage
- reduce demand for services that otherwise might be needed in the future, such as child protection, corrective or mental health services.

The Brighter Futures program is the largest early intervention program ever implemented in Australia and uses an evidence-based approach modelled on programs from the US and the UK.

An interim report of the independent evaluation of Brighter Futures is at:

http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/docswr/assets/main/documents/brighter_futures_evaluation2.pdf.

Building Stronger Communities

The *Building Stronger Communities* led by Housing NSW, is a community regeneration initiative, providing an intensive approach to resolving problems and achieving lasting change within communities. It aims to break the cycle of disadvantage in social housing estates. This is an important approach for children and young people as they comprise a comparatively high proportion of residents within the *Building Stronger Communities* locations compared to the rest of NSW.

Love Bites

Love Bites is a school-based early intervention program in the form of an inter-active and innovative for year 9 and 10 students. Workshops are run in the morning and during the afternoon facilitators work with students to consolidate the information from the workshops by working along side students to write, perform and record a hip hop song and develop posters and other resources around the issues of domestic violence and sexual assault.

This program is also being piloted with teenage parents in the juvenile justice system, where it targets issues related to domestic violence and sexual assault.

Anti-Bullying Initiatives

The NSW Government is working in NSW schools, TAFEs and workplaces to deliver evidence-based, multi-faceted prevention and early intervention strategies to reduce the incidence and impact of bullying behaviour on young people.

All NSW Government Schools are required to have an anti-bullying plan with strategies for identifying, reporting and dealing with bullying behaviours.

For further information on the NSW Government Anti-Bullying initiatives, refer to the NSW Government submission to the Legislative Council's *NSW Inquiry into Bullying of Children and Young People* (Chapter 5) at:

[http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/Prod/parlament/committee.nsf/0/07d61d4263f6c162ca25758c0083ba9c/\\$FILE/Submission%2053.pdf](http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/Prod/parlament/committee.nsf/0/07d61d4263f6c162ca25758c0083ba9c/$FILE/Submission%2053.pdf)

'What are you doing to yourself?' Education Campaign

The \$1 million NSW Health Responsible Drinking Campaign 'What are you doing to yourself?' encouraged young people to reflect on and take personal responsibility for their alcohol consumption and any anti-social behaviour, including violence that results from excessive drinking. The campaign ran from January 2009 through to April 2009 and appeared in youth street magazines, gay and lesbian community newspapers, licensed bar and night club toilets, on bus advertising, on posters around City Rail train stations and was transported around key outdoor events on scooters during the summer period.

The campaign was also supported by an interactive education and information youth website <http://www.whatareyoudoingtoyourself.com/>.

Youth Alcohol Action Plan

The *Youth Alcohol Action Plan* (Section 3) deals with issues of violence and the law. Young people are at a considerably higher risk of violence and assault, entering the criminal justice system and being victims and perpetrators of social disorder than non-drinking or moderate-drinking peers. The Plan recommends strategies to reduce the impact of violence through - controlling alcohol availability (secondary supply), responsible service of alcohol programs, Liquor Accords supporting their communities through improved patron education and safety schemes, community building / diversion programs (for example Community Drug Action Teams), and sporting programs.

Community Engagement

The *Community Drug Action Teams (CDAT)* program has played an important role in addressing issues of violence. In the last 2 years, there have been four projects with a focus on violence:

- 'Youth Engagement and Diversion' (2009/2010). This is a diversionary program with Shoalhaven CDAT involving a series of community fun days / sporting events / cultural pride workshops. It provides young people with safe social opportunities and skills to reduce interpersonal violence.
- 'Redfern – Family Days on the Block' (2008/2009). This operated based on the same model as the Youth Engagement and Diversion activity.
- 'Nimbin Anti Bullying Camp' – This camp will provide young people with the skills to avoid violence, build social support networks and recognise bullying of their peers and friends.
- 'Wagga - Alcohol & Violence' - How can the community respond - Wagga Council & CDAT held a community consultation forum on how to reduce alcohol related violence.

Recent changes to the *Education Act 1990 (NSW)* related to the school leaving age are designed to keep young people who do not enter the workforce on completion of Year 10 engaged with education or training until the age of 17 years to provide them with the best possible educational outcomes and life choices.

2.2 The NSW Child Protection System

The NSW child protection system is designed to support children and young people in NSW aged 0-18 and at risk of abuse and/or neglect.

On 3 March 2009, the NSW Government announced a package of reforms to the State's child protection system, in response to the Report of the Special Commission of Inquiry into Child Protection in NSW aimed at improving support for at-risk children and families and increasing investment in prevention and early intervention to improve child wellbeing.

These reforms, outlined in the NSW Government's five year Action Plan *Keep Them Safe: A Shared Approach to Child Wellbeing* ([http://www.keepthemsafe.nsw.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0004/57145/Keep Them Safe.pdf](http://www.keepthemsafe.nsw.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0004/57145/Keep_Them_Safe.pdf)), include:

- Changes to the child protection system (\$750m over 5 years)
 - Increasing the reporting threshold of matters reported to Community services to 'risk of significant harm', allowing DoCS to focus on serious cases and other agencies and NGOs to deliver local services;
 - Establishing a state-wide network of Child Wellbeing units in Health, Education and Training, Police and Human Services, enabling a quicker response to children who are identified as being at risk by teachers, police, health professionals and other mandatory reporters;
 - Drug and Alcohol and Mental Health initiatives to establish 'whole family teams' to address parental mental health and/or drug and alcohol issues where there are child protection concerns;
 - Home School Liaison Officers, Aboriginal Student Liaison Officers and Out Of Home Care Coordinators in the Department of Education and Training and Health so that more families are able to receive early support;
 - an expansion of sustained home visiting: specialist child and family health nurses working intensively with high-need families during pregnancy and in the first two years of a child's life.
- Enhancements to services delivered by non-government organisations (\$244 million over 2009-10 to 2012-13)
 - Prevention & Early Intervention Services, including family support, Brighter Futures (320 additional places for children) and Regional Intake and Referral Services (now Family Referral Services)
 - Improving services for Aboriginal children & young people - trialling a new decision making model that works with Aboriginal family and community members to support Aboriginal Children and Families. The 180 extra places under Intensive Aboriginal Family Based Services is to be run by the non-government sector.
 - Increasing investment in acute services - extending Intensive Family Preservation to around 420 children and young people which will be operated by the non-government sector
 - Service expansion in Out of home care services - additional out-of-home care services which will be managed by non-government organisations.

2.3 Specialist Support Programs

In addition to a focus on prevention and early intervention, the NSW government has developed various specialist support programs and therapeutic interventions, which are designed for young people who offend, young people who are considered at risk of offending and young people who are affected by violence.

A range of specialist support programs have been implemented which include:

- The Intensive Supervision Program
- Sexual Offender Programs
- Our Journey to Respect

- The Violent Offender Program
- The Youth Drug & Alcohol Court
- Youth Conduct Orders
- Anti Social Behaviour Pilot Project
- The Young Offenders Act 1997 and Youth Justice Conferencing; and
- Housing NSW Programs to address homelessness
- Initiatives to reduce domestic and family violence

Intensive Supervision Program

The *Intensive Supervision Program (ISP)* is an evidence-based program (adapted from Multi Systemic Therapy) specifically aimed at juveniles who commit serious and/or repeat offences or whose severe antisocial behaviour increases their likelihood of offending.

The program addresses some of the factors associated with juvenile re-offending, including substance abuse, financial problems, housing needs, family conflict and negative peer pressure. Ultimately, ISP seeks to promote responsible behaviour and decrease antisocial behaviour amongst juvenile offenders (Juvenile Justice 2007).

An independent evaluation of the NSW ISP program, which commenced in January 2009 is currently being conducted by the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR)

Sexual Offender Programs

NSW Health provides specialist therapeutic programs for particular types of sexual offending against children and young people, which aim to prevent violence through the reduction of the offending behaviour. These include:

- The *Pre-Trial Diversion of Offenders Program (PTDP)* for adult intra-familial child sex offenders located in Sydney West Area Health Service. The PTDP was established under the Pre-Trial Diversion of Offenders Act (1985). Recent evaluations of the PTDP demonstrated that this program is effective at reducing recidivism for clients in terms of sexual and non-sexual offending.
- The *New Street Adolescent Service (NSAS)* for young people aged 10 -17 years provides a specialised, community based program in Sydney West Area Health Service, and well as *Rural New Street* in Hunter New England Area Health Service. The NSAS is designed to address young people in the target group who display sexually abusive behaviours. Evaluation of this program has found strong evidence that the program is effective in reducing re-offending, and in protecting the target group from themselves becoming victims of crime and/or of abuse or neglect (Laing et al 2006). The NSW Government, under *Keep Them Safe* has allocated \$1.68 million to establish an additional New Street Service in Greater West Area Health Service, and to enhance the two existing services.
- The *Program for Children Who Exhibit Sexualised or Sexually Abusive Behaviours* is for children under 10 years who display sexually abusive behaviours, and is offered across NSW with a specialised service in Hunter New England Area Health Service. The program trains staff to work to with children who demonstrate sexually abusive behaviours to develop empathy and better ways of dealing with the issues that lead to those behaviours.

In addition, NSW Juvenile Justice has a number of programs that address inter-generational violence and abuse including:

- The *Our Journey to Respect* Program is a twelve-session group work program targeting Aboriginal young males aged 14 to 18 years who are currently charged with or are at risk of being charged with violent offences. The initiative aims to reduce the incidence of inter-generational violence, focusing on attitudes and behaviour related to family relationships and masculinity. Importantly, it seeks to facilitate participants' movement from relationships based on power and control, towards relationships based on respect.

Our Journey to Respect is currently being reviewed and adapted to broaden the content from an intergenerational violence program (targeted towards violence against older family members) to a core violence program. This will involve broadening the content to include violence in relationships and violence-related offending, in addition to addressing violence against older family members.

- The *Violent Offender Program (VOP)* is a specialist program that provides services to address the criminogenic needs of young people who have been convicted of violent offences. VOP aims to reduce offending behaviour through focusing on changing thinking patterns to more pro-social attitudes, teaching emotional diffusion and self-regulation skills, as well as training in replacement behaviours such as negotiation skills.
- The *Sex Offender Program (SOP)* has been re-developed following a 2006 review. The redevelopment project is being piloted at a number of sites around NSW. The review included a literature analysis and exploration of best practice interventions that focus on the individual needs of a young person, as well as the criminogenic factors relevant to a young person who has offended.

The program has been developed in such a way as to be readily adaptable to meet the participants risk needs and respond to other offending behaviour. At the same time the program targets a wider range of offending characteristics such as gender, repeat offending, high-risk offenders, family work and peer group work.

The Youth Drug & Alcohol Court

The YDAC was developed in response to recommendations of the 1999 New South Wales Drug Summit. It commenced operation in July 2000. It is administered by the Children's Court and conducted from Parramatta, Campbelltown and Glebe Children's Courts.

The YDAC aims to rehabilitate and reduce reoffending by young people with alcohol or drug problems, by addressing their broader health and welfare issues relating to their drug and alcohol use and associated criminal activities.

Youth Conduct Orders

The Youth Conduct Orders (YCO) Pilot is a diversionary, intensive and integrated case management model aimed at reducing offending behaviour by addressing the underlying causes of a young person's anti-social behaviour through integrated case management. This pilot is led by the NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet, with Housing NSW a partner agency. The two year trial of the YCO Program commenced on 1 July 2009 in the Campbelltown, New England and Mount Druitt Police Local Area Commands. Following the trial, an independent evaluation will be conducted to measure its success in reducing reoffending amongst young people.

Under the trial, young offenders charged with lower level anti-social offences can be placed on a YCO for up to 12 months. The scheme is novel in that young people can participate in the scheme whether they have pleaded not guilty, pleaded guilty or been found guilty, as long as they consent.

Orders can include strict limitations on a juvenile's movement and behaviour to ensure they are not exposed to antisocial influences. These orders include curfews, school attendance requirements and non-association orders. Offenders undergo intensive case management with their families, forcing them to confront issues such as drug and alcohol dependence. They can also be referred to treatment for mental health problems and their families may be given help with parenting support and housing. The aim is to get young offenders to work with their families in addressing the causes of their anti-social behaviour before they graduate into career criminals.

When the YCO expires, the young person will reappear before the court. If they have excelled in the program and shown a commitment to obeying the law, they may avoid a conviction.

Anti Social Behaviour Pilot Project

The NSW Government *Anti Social Behaviour Pilot Project* is operating in the same three pilot locations as the YCO program. The Department of Premier and Cabinet is the lead agency for this initiative, which is also an integrated case management model. The child or young person does not need to have been charged with a criminal offence to participate in the program. Having both pilots working in the same area will mean families can be looked at holistically. For example, if during the course of a young person's participation in the Youth Conduct Orders scheme, siblings are identified as being at risk to themselves and/or the community, but have not yet progressed down the criminal spectrum to the stage of warranting a Youth Conduct Order, or indeed may be too young to be held criminally liable, they can also receive the benefits of an intervention program and integrated case management.

Young Offenders Act 1997 and Youth Justice Conferencing

The *Young Offenders Act 1997* establishes an alternative process to court proceedings for dealing with juveniles who commit certain offences covered by the Act. As outlined above, the scheme does not apply to serious offences such as murder, manslaughter, sexual offences, drug trafficking and offences resulting in the death of a person, which can only be dealt with by a court.

The program provides:

- *Warnings:* A warning is given to a young offender by the investigating official. The use of warnings recognises that many young people who commit trivial offences do not go on to commit further offences.
- *Cautions:* A caution is given to a young offender by a police officer, or a court. The young offender is accompanied by his or her parent(s) or another adult chosen by the young offender and the police officer/court may request that the young offender provide a written apology to any victim of the offence.
- *Youth justice conferencing:* The youth justice conference is facilitated by a convenor and brings together the young offender and his or her family, the victim(s), and the NSW Police. Conference participants work towards an outcome plan, which may include making an apology to the victim(s), making reparation to the victim(s) or community, participating in an appropriate program, or other actions aimed at reintegrating the young offender into the community. The implementation and completion of an outcome plan is closely monitored and, if it is

not satisfactorily completed, the young offender may still face prosecution through the court.

Housing NSW is working with other agencies to respond to homelessness affecting young Australians through a number of initiatives, including

- *A Way Home: Reducing Homelessness in NSW Action Plan 2009-14* – which includes the priority to provide safe, appropriate long-term accommodation and/or support to people experiencing domestic and family violence, relationship and family breakdown and at key transition points
- NSW Domestic Violence schemes – Staying Home, Leaving Violence, Start Safely and the DV Court Intervention Model
- South West Sydney Youth Hub – for young people at risk of homelessness

Further information about these approaches can be found in *A Way Home: Reducing Homelessness in NSW Action Plan* at the Housing NSW website:

<http://www.housing.nsw.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/070B5937-55E1-4948-A98F-ABB9774EB420/0/ActionPlan2.pdf>

Initiatives to reduce domestic and family violence

The NSW Government has recently announced the establishment of a domestic violence homicide review panel to systemically analyse all domestic violence homicides. In NSW from 2003 to 2008, 215 people died as a result of domestic violence, which equates to 42 per cent of all homicides. Most of those who died were women.

The new panel will investigate all domestic violence homicides and provide recommendations on improving agency responses to domestic violence victims to prevent, as far as possible, domestic violence related deaths.

The NSW Government has budgeted \$504,000 this financial year to set up the panel, which will consist of government and non government experts with administrative and research support. The panel will be convened by the NSW State Coroner which will allow better access to information on domestic violence related deaths across Australia via the National Coroner's Information System (NCIS).

The NSW Government is also currently developing a NSW Domestic and Family Violence Action Plan. The Action Plan is a State-wide strategy to deal with the causes and consequences of domestic and family violence.

An extensive consultation process with key Government and non-government stakeholders has been undertaken to inform the development of the Plan, which is expected to be released shortly.

3. NSW State Plan

The NSW State Plan commits to improving child wellbeing, health and safety. Children and young people are a priority group under the renewed NSW State Plan. NSW Government has committed to improving child wellbeing, health and safety, with the following targets:

- increase the proportion of children who have a safe and healthy start to life;
- increase the proportion of NSW children and young people with age appropriate life and learning skills; and
- children and young people in NSW, along with their families, have access to appropriate and responsive services when needed.

Indicators for these targets are currently under development.

To meet these commitments, some of which are listed above, the Government, by 2011, will:

- offer all new parents a home visit by a NSW Health child and family nurse;
- offer all mothers in NSW an assessment to find any risk of mental health issues, including postnatal depression;
- offer parenting education to all parents with children aged 3-8 years;
- ensure that all children have access to two days a week of quality early education in the year before starting kindergarten;
- expand the *Brighter Futures* program, with an additional 200 places, and an extra 25 Home School Liaison Officer in place by the beginning of 2010; and
- implement the *Keep Them Safe* reforms.

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