

THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC COST OF ILLICIT DRUG USE IN THE CITY OF FAIRFIELD

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This submission addresses the social and economic costs of illicit drug use in the City of Fairfield with particular reference to: workplace safety and productivity; crime and law enforcement; and family relationships.

The prevalence of the illicit drug trade, especially heroin, is an ongoing concern for the local community, particularly Cabramatta.

Workplace Safety and Productivity

Discarded needles and syringes have had the greatest impact on workplace safety and productivity for Fairfield Council employees. Risk management strategies have been put in place to safeguard staff from risks including specialised training, protective clothing and equipment, Hepatitis A & B immunisations, and modified work practices.

The collection and disposal of more than 100,000 needles per year is also a financial burden on the rate payers of Fairfield.

Crime & Law Enforcement

Crime and safety was identified as the issue of most concern to Fairfield residents. This may be attributable to individual experience as a victim of crime; imbalanced media reports; as well as personal observations of illegal drug activity and use. This represents an intangible social cost.

Council has shown its commitment to strong law enforcement by installing and operating a major closed circuit television cameras street surveillance system in Cabramatta which, along with additional Police resources, has reduced crime in the CBD.

Council has improved the urban environment which has had a major impact on actual and perceived safety. Initiatives include installation of CCTV; upgraded public infrastructure such as seats, litter bins, footpaths; improved lighting in public spaces; installation of needle disposal bins; improved street cleaning programs and enforcement of food and environmental standards.

The Cabramatta Cares Project (a joint project between the NSW State Government and Council) was initiated in 1998 and focuses on 4 priority areas: drugs and crime; education, training & employment; economic development (tourism); and urban planning, safety and infrastructure.

Family Relationships

Not only is there an economic cost associated with harmful drug use, but there are also intangible social costs, for example damage to family and other relationships.

Fairfield is one of the poorest areas of NSW, with a median individual income of just \$260 per week. Fairfield also has the second highest unemployment rate in NSW and high housing occupancy ratios, in part due to high rates of multiple family occupancy.

It is well established that poverty and overcrowding contribute to family breakdown and premature leaving home by children. Young people need to be diverted away from the drug culture. This can be done by ensuring that they have an adequate level of education, including English language skills to access the employment opportunities.

Appropriate counselling, treatment and rehabilitation facilities also need to be available.

Intervention, diversion and prevention should receive additional discussion and resourcing.

INTRODUCTION

The social and economic cost to Fairfield City due to substance abuse, particularly heroin, cannot be adequately quantified in the scope of this submission.

It is suffice to say however that it has had a devastating and penetrating impact on the social and economic fabric of our City.

The whole City, particularly the suburb of Cabramatta, has suffered and continues to suffer, due to the ready availability of heroin and other drugs, and the devastating impact this has had on the community.

This submission attempts to highlight this devastation.

What Will this Submission Address?

This submission will address the social and economic costs of illicit drug use to Fairfield City with particular reference to:

- *workplace safety and productivity,*
- *crime and law enforcement,*
- *family relationships.*

These issues have been selected as Council has had extensive experience in managing these issues in the past and can offer this experience to the Committee for consideration.

This is not to say that the other issues are not significant in our local government area, or that there are not major harms to our community in terms of safety, relationships and health care costs associated with licit drug use such as tobacco and alcohol. Simply our area has been effected more than most in Australia as a result of illicit drug use, and as such we offer this experience to the Committee.

WORKPLACE SAFETY AND PRODUCTIVITY

The prevalence of the illicit drug trade, especially heroin, is an ongoing concern for the local community, particularly Cabramatta.

Needle Distribution Programs

Council acknowledges and supports the harm minimisation principles underpinning the introduction and implementation of the Needle Syringe (Exchange) Programs. The achievements in containing the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Australia is testament to the significance of its introduction, with less than 1% of the injecting drug users attending Needle Exchange Programs in NSW, in 1998, testing positive for the HIV virus (Professor Ian Webster, 2000). This represents a significant saving to the Australian community both in terms of health care costs but also in terms of the social impact.

Having acknowledged its effectiveness in containing the spread of blood borne viruses throughout the intravenous drug population, there are nonetheless by-products of these programs which have a detrimental effect on our community.

By-products of Needle Syringe Programs

As part of the harm minimisation strategy intravenous drug users are supplied with the necessary equipment to inject their drug of choice. This may include one or all of the following depending on where the injecting equipment is obtained from:

- *sterile needles and syringes,*
- *sterile water,*
- *spoons,*
- *packaging*
- *Fit Pack (form of safe disposal)*

Unfortunately, it is these by-products which the community is frequently left to contend with. Of most concern is the discarded needles and syringes which pose a serious health risk to the community due to needle stick injury.

Extent of the Problem

It is estimated that more than half a million needles and syringes are distributed in Fairfield City per annum.

A significant percentage of these end up on the streets of our City, in our parks and in the properties of residents and/or businesses.

Some businesses have been affected by the wide use of injecting equipment. Business operators

find used syringes hidden in shelves, in toilets, even in bed sheets in hotels and motels.

Used syringes have been used as weapons associated with crimes such as robbery. Taxi drivers, services station attendants, coffee shop operators and local residents in their own homes have been threatened with syringes, some apparently filled with blood.

Inexperienced users or those under pressure to inject prior to interruption (sometimes due to police patrols) often inflict injury to themselves. In addition to the trauma to the addict, this regrettably leads to blood being splashed upon walls and the floor of toilets and other buildings.

These conditions make use of these facilities by others such as school children, visitors, tourists or members of the local community unpleasant. This may result in these people not wanting to return to the area or convince the local community that their world has less worth than other parts of Sydney. This contributes to a loss of self esteem or optimism for the future by some, particularly in young people.

Implications for Fairfield City Council

1. Occupational Health and Safety Issues

Table 1 illustrates where discarded needles and syringes have been found in the workplace throughout the local government area and the occupations which are at most risk from obtaining a needle stick injury.

Table 1

Sites where discarded needles and syringes have been found and the occupations most at risk

Site	People Most At Risk
Toilets (breeze blocks, toilet bowls, basins, needle bins, floors, lights and electricity boxes)	Cleaners Builders Electricians
Litter bins	Waste collectors
Temporary accommodation for the homeless eg Parks	Cleaners
Parks	Cleaners Gardeners Builders
Child Care Centres	Staff and children
Waste Collection Vehicles (street sweeper)	Mechanics

Site	People Most At Risk
Roof Gutters	Builders
Roller Shutters	Builders
Sewers/gutters	Plumbers

Due to the occupational health and safety risks associated with many of the daily tasks of Council staff, staff at risk must attend a specialised training program. This program outlines the risks associated with discarded needles and syringes, for both the employee and the community, and how to avoid these hazards. This results in a loss of productivity.

There is also loss of productivity in many routine tasks, such as mowing lawns, or weeding a flower bed, to ensure that there are no needles and syringes lying around which could act as a missile in a lawn mower, or inflict an injury if weeding. Specialised protective clothing and equipment must be provided to safeguard staff and as outlined above many work practices have had to be modified to accommodate the risks of working with inappropriately disposed of needles and syringes.

All at risk staff are offered immunisation against Hepatitis A and B, which is an additional economic cost for the Council. These costs include serum, consulting doctors fees and blood tests to confirm that the vaccination has been successful.

Should a needle stick injury occur in the workplace there is an additional economic and social cost to the employee and employer. The employee and his or her family generally experience high levels of stress. To assist in managing this a counsellor and urgent medical advice are provided by Council. A workers compensation claim is usually submitted involving costs incurred through loss of time on the job, medical visits and tests, and possible rehabilitation should the employee need to be relocated.

There is also management time involved in developing policies and procedures to educate and improve workplace safety for staff, visitors and contractors, as well as the development of risk management strategies.

Industrial issues concerning the collection of discarded needles and syringes have been a problem which has an impact on staff morale and thereby an indirect impact on productivity rates and job satisfaction.

Other factors include stress to staff who may be confronted or threatened by drug users or who may come across people requiring medical assistance, or see very young children being inappropriately supervised by a drug affected person. These can be every day experiences for some workers. There must be a social and economic toll associated with this.

The needles and syringes collected from the various sources also need to be properly disposed of

by incineration which is also a significant cost.

All these costs are borne by the ratepayers of Fairfield City.

What Has Been Done to Address the Problem?

1. Fairfield City Council

Council has had to allocate significant resources to combat the problem of needles and syringes being discarded inappropriately. Additional staff have been allocated the task of collecting this contaminated waste from our streets, parks, gardens and playing fields.

Council has installed 30 needle disposal bins in a variety of locations throughout the City and now pays for the disposal of more than one hundred thousand (100,000) needles that are not returned to the point of distribution.

Most public toilets have been provided with disposal bins because many syringes were left in cubicles after use. Information about disposal facilities is now provided to users and the overall strategy has reduced the risk from needles to the community.

2. Partnerships with Other Stakeholders

Fairfield Council, the NSW Health Department and the Department of Corrective Services have been working together to reduce the number of used syringes disposed of in parks, private buildings, vacant blocks of land, Council's library and the public toilets.

The Cabramatta Drug Intervention Service operates a HOT line which the community can contact to have syringes removed and this service has been very useful however a program using Periodic Detainees has proved to be the most effective system, with approximately 17000 needles collected by 2 people during 1998.

Recorded instances of needles and syringes collected during 1998 by Council, Department of Health staff and the Periodic Detainees is included in the table below.

Table 2

Needles and Syringes collected in 1998

Organisation	Locations	Number
Fairfield Council	Streets, parks and public Toilets and other buildings	88,500
Periodic Detainees	Public streets, laneways, parks, other public places	18,400
Needle Disposal Hotline	Public streets, schools private flat buildings, Parks and reserves	1,600
	TOTAL	108,500*

* *Many more syringes are removed by staff and community members, but they are not counted and go unrecorded.*

Approximately a third to half of the total number collected were disposed of safely in Needle Disposal Bins.

Sources of Injecting Equipment

In Fairfield City injecting equipment is mainly distributed through three sources:

- *Government operated services eg: Mobile Needle Syringe Program*
- *Guild Pharmacy program*
- *Other pharmacies*

The source which has ramifications for the community is the pharmacies that sell injecting equipment for profit, and who are not part of the guild pharmacy program. These pharmacies sell the equipment for commercial gain and often exploit drug users by varying the price of equipment subject to the availability of injecting equipment from other sources.

Further, they do not provide information or equipment for safe disposal nor offer access to intervention programs such as health care etc. In some instances injecting equipment is wrapped in a page ripped from the Sydney White Pages telephone book.

These pharmacies do provide a service in that clean injecting equipment is accessible at times when other needle distribution services are not, thereby playing a part in the reduction of the spread of blood borne illnesses. The lack of safe disposal equipment such as a Fit Pack however encourages drug users to dispose of their drug using equipment irresponsibly.

Between the hours of 8 pm and midnight there is only one Guild pharmacy open in the City of Fairfield which has a population close to 190,000 people.

Council has worked closely with the South Western Sydney Area Health Service regarding the establishment of the Cabramatta Drug Intervention Service which is a front line drug treatment and counselling facility. It was originally proposed that a Needle Syringe Program would operate from the service however community concerns about intensifying the impact of this service on one location led to the establishment of the mobile program.

This program uses a van that travels to 4 locations around the Cabramatta Town centre. The locations are well known to users and were selected to ensure access, safety to staff and clients, and to minimise the impact on surrounding business uses and the general community. The locations were developed in consultation with many services including Council, health, the Police and business groups. The locations were trialed and later varied to minimise community impact while still meeting the needs of the staff and users. The process was not without some strong aggravation between some of the parties however it seems to be working well.

CRIME AND LAW ENFORCEMENT

Introduction

Fairfield Council in partnership with the NSW Police Service and other community stakeholders have demonstrated significant commitment to community safety and the prevention of crime in recent years.

Community Concern for Safety

Crime and safety was identified as the issue of most concern to residents in a community survey conducted by Fairfield Council from 1994 - 1999. More than 5,000 responses were received. Specifically residents identified:

- *Theft and burglary*
- *Violence and vandalism on streets and in public places*
- *Sale and supply of drugs*

as the issue of concern (1999 Fairfield Community Profile).

According to the 1999 Fairfield Community Profile factors that influence the level of concern for crime and safety in the Fairfield community include:

- individual experience as a victim of crime
- excessive and imbalance media reports of crime occurring in the area, and
- personal observations by residents of illegal drug activity, particularly dealing in public places, or evidence of drug use, such as the presence of used syringes in public parks, streets, and toilets.

In a survey of young people conducted by Fairfield Council, crime and safety concerns were found to be higher than the general population (Fairfield Youth Survey, 1998). This finding illustrates another social cost to the Fairfield community due - at least partly - to the illicit drug trade in the area.

Perception of Crime

Extensive media coverage (both locally and nationally) of the incidence and prevalence of crime in the Fairfield LGA has resulted in a negative image of the area. This has a direct link to community perceptions about crime.

Crime Statistics

Table 3

NSW Recorded Crime Statistics: January- December 1999

Type of Offence	Fairfield LGA 1999 rate per 100,000 population	Sydney 1999 rate per 100,000 population	New South Wales 1999 rate per 100,000 population
Possession &/or use of cocaine	14.7	4.5	3.0
Possession &/or use of narcotics	550.1	59.2	46.6
Possession &/or use of cannabis	164.1	121.5	177.5
Possession &/or use of other drugs	52.4	32.4	35.3
Dealing, trafficking in cocaine	3.1	4.7	3.0
Dealing, trafficking in narcotics	121.7	14.3	13.3
Dealing, trafficking in cannabis	7.9	9.5	15.0
Dealing, trafficking in other drugs	5.2	8.4	8.6
Cultivating cannabis	8.4	12.0	29.9
Importing drugs	0.0	0.7	0.5
Other drug offences	83.4	32.0	46.9

Source: NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research

As can be seen from Table 3 drug detection rates are extremely high when compared to Sydney, and New South Wales in general. Narcotic crime statistics are particularly high being up to 10 times that of NSW.

It should be noted that increased drug detection incidents and arrests are a direct result of

increased levels of targeted policing operations, however the fact remains that these incidents for drug related crime have taken place in Fairfield City. These rates give some indication of the scale of the problem being faced by the local community.

Background Information

In 1995 Council was concerned about the impact of drugs in Cabramatta and commenced an investigation into what needed to be done to combat the problem.

Discussions with many stakeholders including the NSW Police Service, local members of Parliament, business and community groups indicated that drug trafficking had significantly reduced the ability of the Cabramatta township to function at even a minimal level.

The community looked to Council to implement strategies to reduce the impact of drugs and crime and to restore the town centre to a viable business centre.

Police seemed overwhelmed by the intensity and magnitude of the problem. The Local Area Command appeared adequately resourced to deal with regular problems, but not the additional problems associated with drugs in Cabramatta.

While minor increases in police strength occurred through 1995 and 1996, it was not until the Closed Circuit Television Cameras (CCTV) were installed that the full extent of the problem was documented and significant additional resources were provided in 1997.

The CCTV was introduced as part of the TownSafe project which was the first initiative of the Council to attempt to deal with the problems being faced by Cabramatta and indirectly, the City of Fairfield. TownSafe is discussed in more detail in the Urban Design section of this submission.

CCTV was installed as a joint initiative of the Council and the State Government with each party contributing half of the \$650,000 capital costs. The Council currently pays for all of the annual operating costs which are now at \$400,000 per year.

A high profile police operation known as Operation Puccini was introduced at Cabramatta on 14 July 1997 and continues today. This operation has resulted in Cabramatta becoming a safer place.

Police estimate that in the first 12 months of Operation Puccini between 50 and 60% of all arrests in the Central Business District were either directly or indirectly linked to the use of the CCTV.

The effectiveness of the surveillance system in assisting Police arrest criminals has reduced over time, as criminals gather intelligence on the capabilities of the system, and change their behaviour. Despite a reduction in its effectiveness in drug related arrests, it is still a valuable tool for the Police and Council to improve public safety in the surveillance area as well as acting as a deterrent.

That is not to say that the drug problem has been removed from Cabramatta. In fact many indicators show that drug trading continues to be a major problem in Cabramatta, however the area is now a safe place to work, live or visit. This is assisting in Council's efforts to reestablish economic development, particularly through rebuilding the tourist industry.

What Are the Greatest Concerns About Enforcement?

The concerns are that:-

- *The volume of drugs for sale appears to remain at the same level as three years ago.*
- *The number of people coming to Cabramatta from outside of the city to purchase drugs appears to be at the same level as three years ago.*
- *Significant numbers of young people many of them locals appear to be entering the drug culture.*
- *Large numbers of arrests continue.*
- *Anti social behaviour of drug intoxicated people roaming the streets aimlessly. Many of them being very young.*
- *The significant number of the same people regularly appearing on the street, day after day, who are involved in the sale &/or distribution of drugs and injection equipment.*
- *The inability of even the existing numbers of police to deal with this problem.*
- *The number of business people who participate willingly, or under duress, with the sale of stolen goods within their premises. This involves direct hawking to customers within restaurants by users, resale of stolen goods at competitive prices by retailers, and the purchase of stolen goods by business operators as a form of income subsidy which is seen as warranted due to the decline in overall business activity.*
- *The costs to the local community in continuing it's commitment to fund the CCTV and how long this level of support to a policing strategy can be sustained at the expense of urgent infrastructure, maintenance and economic development activities.*

The current cost of operating the CCTV system is \$400,000 per year. This is \$150,000 more than the total funds available for upgrading infrastructure each year. These costs are too great for the Council to sustain if it is to continue in its efforts to improve the physical amenity and appearance of the City. Alternative monitoring and reporting mechanisms have been considered and rejected due to their limited effectiveness. Some form of cost sharing arrangement needs to be explored by the NSW Police Service and Council.

Future Directions for Enforcement

- *Additional work is clearly required to reduce the volume of drugs reaching Australia and therefore Cabramatta.*
- *More resources need to be applied to identifying the people involved with the importation, distribution and sale of drugs in Cabramatta.*
- *Action to reduce the numbers of drug intoxicated people roaming the streets and engaging in anti social behaviour.*
- *Programs to educate young people and their families about the problems associated with drugs and how to develop a future which does not have involvement in the drug trade.*
- *Programs to eliminate the amount of stolen goods for sale in the businesses of Cabramatta.*
- *Action to remove regular participants in the drug trade (be it sale, or some other role such as directing or linking buyers to sellers in locations outside the CBD) from the streets.*
- *More action to link local Police to the community and to achieve a better understanding of the cultural implications of various policing strategies. Not just drug related, but general policing. This will improve relationships between Police and the community.*
- *A commitment from the State Government that the current policing efforts will not be reduced in the forceable future.*
- *A review of the current arrangements for funding the CCTV system with a view to the Police Service contributing a proportion of the annual operating costs.*

- *The role of the National Crime Authority needs to be given a close review given that the volume of drugs for sale in Cabramatta appears to remain at the same level as it was three years ago. The community of Cabramatta is not even aware if the National Crime Authority is even operating in Cabramatta.*
- *The role of the Customs and Federal Police needs to be reviewed given that the volume of drugs for sale in Cabramatta appears to remain at the same levels as three years ago.*
- *A significant effort is required in establishing a uniform data collection system across agencies. The current system does not allow for ready development of key indicators against which individual programs can be measured. A small list of key indicators needs to be developed to allow evaluation of various strategies under the National Strategic Drug Framework and each of the National and State Action Plans to be completed.*

URBAN DESIGN

General

Local government plays an important role in maintaining the amenity of an area through the implementation of planning controls under its jurisdiction.

A Picture of Community Decline

In 1995 a Community Safety Audit was conducted by Council together with a number of agencies and individual community members. This audit identified a range of problems that reflected the physical condition of Cabramatta and the impact of crime and drugs in the area.

A vicious cycle of neglect and fear had taken over the town.

Cabramatta looked tired. Streets were unclean. Infrastructure such as litter bins, public seats, public toilets, street signage, footpaths and street lighting were not being adequately maintained - this contributing to the feelings of despair and helplessness associated with the problems being faced by the town. Street trees and bushes had not been trimmed and overhang added to the inefficiency of street lighting.

Landscaping on private property added to the problem and offered hiding spots for undesirable activities. Many private buildings had lapsed into disrepair, fences, garbage bin storage areas and letter box structures were damaged, many falling over. Lighting, carpet on stairwells and windows were often broken and in a dangerous condition. The owners of these buildings, many of whom are small investors with single unit holdings, seemed unwilling to re-invest in property that was not increasing in value and where rents were relatively low.

Business operators began using roller shutters to enclose their shop fronts and a siege mentality took over the central business district. Internal lighting and even advertising lights were turned off when operators went home in an attempt to remain in business by reducing insurance and energy costs. Proper waste management practices were dropped and waste was simply left on the footpath for collection by a contractor working without proper safety standards and on a very small margin, one which the more professional operators could not match.

Waste got into drains, drainage pits became clogged and in summer gave off a very distinct and unpleasant odour. A significant rat problem developed. Rodent and vermin control for food and other premises became impossible.

Vendors delivering fresh fish to the city became a major contributor to the foul smell of Cabramatta by dropping water from vehicles onto the street. This water was contaminated by small amounts of fish juice and some blood. Flies became a serious problem during summer time in both drains and garbage storage areas.

Needles were in every street and public space.

The community was responding to the run down conditions by contributing to the problem. Littering became the norm, spitting developed as a problem, household rubbish was dumped on the streets as tenants moved out. Tradespeople contributed to the problem by simply leaving old stoves, hot water heaters, washing machines and the like on the street with other rubbish instead of taking the material away. This also kept their costs down so owners and managing agents did not complain.

Council's Response to Cabramatta in Severe Distress

TownSafe

In 1996 Council responded to the problem by developing an urban design response called TownSafe. TownSafe was a series of strategies to improve the image of the centre and to reduce crime and drug related activities. Central strategies included:

- *The installation of the Closed Circuit Television System to improve the efficiency of Police operating in Cabramatta.*
- *The implementation of an improved cleaning and maintenance strategy for the streets and public toilets.*
- *The implementation of an asset and infrastructure structure maintenance and replacement program.*
- *The upgrading of lighting in public places.*
- *Increased monitoring by staff of food premises and waste management practices of private business.*
- *An education and enforcement program to encourage people not to litter or spit in the street.*
- *A program to encourage building owners to carry out minor repair to shopfronts and yard areas to improve the appearance of the street scape.*

Cabramatta Cares Project

In 1998, the NSW Government in partnership with Fairfield Council, established the Cabramatta Cares Project.

Using a place management approach, senior managers were appointed by both organisations to co-ordinate and improve the activities of both organisations in four priority areas:

- *Drugs and Crime*
- *Education, Training and Employment*
- *Economic Development (Tourism)*
- *Urban Planning, Safety and Infrastructure*

The results of the action teams put in place to address these priorities have been very encouraging.

Cabramatta has significantly improved over the past 4 years, however more is required. The continuing impact of drugs on business makes it difficult for Council to encourage business to re-invest in the future of Cabramatta.

A recent review of the Safety Audit has shown that the vast majority of the issues have been addressed by Council.

The Way Forward

The challenge for the future is for all stakeholders to work together including Council, NSW Police Service, community centres and agencies, the business sector and other government agencies such as schools, health agencies. This will provide a collaborative way to reduce crime and improve community safety throughout the City of Fairfield.

FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

Introduction

Not only is there an economic cost associated with harmful drug use, but there are also intangible social costs, for example damage to family and other relationships.

Family members may have to take on the role of carer for someone affected by harmful drug use.

Families may have reduced disposable income because the money is being spent on drugs, or people may engage in criminal activity to finance their drug use.

Both the individual engaged in a pattern of harmful drug use and other family members may be stigmatised, which may lead to loss of relationships with extended family members and friends (National Drug Strategic Framework 1998-99 to 2002-03).

The need to have enough money and find sufficient space to live are basic pressures to leave home. Social and economic stress has also been shown to exert an indirect effect on juvenile participation in crime by disrupting the parenting process .

Young people need to be diverted away from the drug culture. This can be done by ensuring that they have an adequate level of education, including English language skills to access the job network.

Appropriate counselling, treatment including detoxification and rehabilitation facilities also need to be available.

Unemployment and Income Levels

The most likely way of keeping people away from drugs is to provide them with meaningful and worthwhile employment. One of the problems for many of the young people in Cabramatta is that they do not possess the necessary skills to get normal work. In many instances children are dropping out of school into the drug culture as they cannot continue in school due to poor literacy levels.

Some facts:

- *There are more people out of work in the Fairfield LGA than the entire population of the Hunters Hill LGA (NSW).*
- *Fairfield's unemployment rate (15.1%) continues to be more than double the Australian rate*
- *Unemployment amongst migrants also continues to remain high (17.9%)*
- *27% of 2 parent families in Fairfield have neither parent working. Therefore 12,004 dependent children are living in households where no parent is employed.*
- *Local businesses are in decline particularly in manufacturing, construction and commerce which account for 60% of employment in Fairfield*

In many instances the parents of local children are not employed. They do not know how to assist their children navigate the educational network and rely on their children to bring in money to support the family. In some families, the father is long term unemployed. This can make it difficult to maintain the position as head of family which can make it very difficult to gain or retain the respect of the children, and unfortunately discipline can be difficult to maintain.

Income Levels

- *People in Fairfield live on lower incomes than the "average Australian"*
- *The average individual income in Fairfield is \$179 less than the Australian average (\$313 compared to \$492)*
- *The average family income in Fairfield is \$100 less than the Australian average (\$768 per week compared to \$868)*

Education Levels

- *One third (33.5%) of Fairfield's population have either never attended school or left by the age of 15 years.*
- *Only 19.8% (27,309) people in Fairfield aged 15 years and over have post-school qualifications (undergraduate, postgraduate or vocational qualifications) compared to the average of 40.3% for the Australian population*

Literacy Standards

- *Almost 30,000 people in Fairfield can speak English 'not well' or 'not at all'. This is the same number as the entire population of Bathurst (NSW)*

- *The proportion of 'poor English' speakers (31.2%) is three times the Australian average (10.8%)*
- *Over 85% of school leavers consider English to be their second language*
- *Newly arrived migrants have the highest number of 'poor English' speakers (59.4%)*

Research at the local level indicates that many school leavers are not able to demonstrate an adequate level of literacy to gain entry to basic level employment. The Cabramatta Project has been establishing links with TAFE to address this problem.

Local industry leaders have expressed concern that they are unable to employ many Indo-Chinese young people in the manufacturing and chemical based industries because they lack the necessary literacy skills to read and comprehend safety instructions. Training and literacy levels have proven inadequate to gain entry into retail or the hospitality areas and training has been arranged for many young people from Cabramatta through TAFE.

Rehabilitation

The number of drug dependent people in Fairfield City necessitates much better access to rehabilitation and treatment. Fairfield has no rehabilitation facilities within the city and is unaware of any plans to provide any such facilities. This situation needs to be addressed.

A major detoxification centre was opened at Fairfield Hospital last year however it has not been able to operate to capacity due to problems securing staff to run the facility.

Additional resources are required to help people rehabilitate once they have been through detoxification. Most importantly, facilities are required to provide basic life skills to users who are looking to make a change away from drugs.

The required facilities include comprehensive rehabilitation services that can take a person to a point where they can see a future, including the will and ability to enter the work force and maintain a quality life style. This may include education in matters such as simply getting out of bed 5 days a week and committing to some type of self-discipline and training. Some parents will need to get assistance in parenting skills. In many instances child support will be necessary for those with young children. The type of life education required will be at the most basic level and could take at least 6 to 12 months to acquire.

Street Activities & Counselling

Many people come to Cabramatta every day to purchase and use drugs. One of the more obvious differences between Cabramatta and other more established inner city locations is the complete lack of facilities for these people to go to when they have nothing to do.

Some of these users tend to be involved in criminal activities such as fare evasion, selling small amounts of stolen goods, shop lifting, and minor dealing. Others are involved in assaults and

theft. Others engage in anti-social behaviours thereby disturbing the amenity of the area by roaming the streets, yelling and swearing at others (often their companions) or simply just begging and making a nuisance of themselves.

These people need somewhere to go. When they commit minor crimes the opportunity should be taken to intervene in their lives and give them a chance to change away from drugs.

The Next Generation (Stroller Brigade)

On any given day a large number of drug affected people walk around the Cabramatta Town Centre pushing strollers, often with very small children by their side.

The future for these children can only be imagined, as the role models they have to emulate, rightly or wrongly, are not impressive. If so many young people from relatively stable families are entering the drug culture, what is the future for these children? The new lost generation.

Urgent facilities are required to deal with this problem before it is too late. Special effort needs to be given to ensuring these children have access to proper care. The Department of Community Services must act to ensure that children are protected. This may mean that children are removed from individuals who are deemed unfit or incapable of making the correct life style decisions for those too young to decide for themselves. Naturally every attempt should be made to keep families together, however the future generation must also be protected.

Information and Education (Parents and Kids)

It is clear that many children are still not aware of the harm that drugs can do to their lives, and the lives of their family and friends. Equally many adults have grown up in a different era and may not have been exposed to the problems of drugs including the early tell tale signs that their children are experimenting. Additional information is needed for both parents and children about the effects of drugs, how to detect when children are experimenting with drugs, and what to do if parents suspect that their children are being exposed to drugs.

What Needs to Be Done in Cabramatta?

- *A major recreation facility is urgently required to provide activities for the large youth population of Cabramatta and other parts of the city.*
- *A cultural centre is desired to allow the history of the city's diverse cultures to be celebrated and enjoyed. Such a facility would be used to increase tolerance and understanding by the mainstream population, many of whom have been indoctrinated by anti-Asian comments.*
- *A project to review the existing open public spaces and provide additional innovative public space areas is considered to be of high priority.*

CONCLUSION

The work that has commenced needs to be continued and new initiatives are needed. Education, training and employment are key factors in providing young people with opportunities that are rewarding and enjoyable.

Intervention, diversion and prevention should receive additional discussion and resourcing.

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