

Impact of Violence on Young Australians

Annette Ellis MP Interview

Transcript

A. ELLIS: My name is Annette Ellis. I am the member for Canberra, and I'm the Chair of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth.

INTERVIEWER: *Why are some young people more violent than others?*

A. ELLIS: It's a really vexed question to try and understand this and we heard from many experts, psychologists, educators, and sports people. A lot of people were willing to give us their views and we really needed to hear from them.

There are many reasons why some young people emerge as more violent than others. Some of it can have something to do with their environment, physical or otherwise that they are brought up in; some of it comes back to their family; some of it might come back to maybe the misuse of alcohol and substance abuse. There is a range of reasons. And our job was really to try and understand as best we could, the impacts those sorts of elements had, and how we should begin to address them.

INTERVIEWER: *Did the inquiry find any escalation in the levels of youth violence?*

A. ELLIS: That was another really hard question because the media depiction gives us a story that all young people out there at some point are going to be involved in violence. There is no doubt I think that in the mind of the committee that it is escalating. It does seem to be happening more now than it was in the past, and as I said a moment ago there are a variety of reasons as to why that could be the case. But it is also fair to say that in the majority of cases young people are not necessarily the perpetrators but the victims also of some of that violence and that's an alarm when we know that a lot of young people actually are fearful for themselves in certain circumstances. So it goes both ways I guess.

INTERVIEWER: *What impact does exposing young people to violence in the media play, and what can be done about it if it is a problem?*

A. ELLIS: There was a very strong view from many people appearing before the committee, that this is something that we need to be concerned about and worried about. We didn't disagree with that. We had a view however, that there needs to be a sensible approach to how we actually do deal with it. There's a question for instance, about how we actually classify computer games and other forms of media? Are we doing that sufficiently? Are we doing it well enough? Do people who use that form of media, and that is the young people and their parents and families, understand well enough the information that describes to them what they are actually going to see? Are we actually letting people know well enough what they are about to look at and what the impact may be?

INTERVIEWER: *What are the links between school bullying and violence and what roles do you believe mobile phones and the internet might play?*

There is a high level of concern about the use of mobile phones particularly when they are used in a camera version to record instances. There is a definite concern about that and we share that concern. Again, it comes down to educating people. The bottom line to all of this is how can we better help young people understand the responsibility they have and the outcome or the repercussions of their actions? A lot of them just don't foresee beyond the moment they are in, and we want to educate them better to understand what it is they are actually doing by using those sorts of tools and those sorts of methods in the way that some of them do. Not all of them do this, but some of them do.

School bullying is, of course, a big concern. There are some links to some degree between a young person in the school ground who may be acting out that way. If that goes unattended, then there could be consequences. But if it goes with good attention, and the processes that I have already mentioned within the education system come into play, then of course that's going to have a big affect on the outcome for that young person. Because, at the end of the day there are two victims there, in our view - the person who is being the bully and the person who is at the other end of it. And we need to attend to both of those things. If we do properly, if we increase our attention particularly at a young level of schooling, then we are very positive we can see better outcomes.

INTERVIEWER: *Are counselling services adequate for young people?*

A. ELLIS: Probably not, particularly in the schools. There are school counsellors out there and they are doing a good job. It is a state and territory level of responsibility to put them into place. It is very evident to us that we need more of them. In some cases counsellors may be appointed to a school. In some cases they are appointed to a group of schools. There could be a very good argument for having those accesses to those services increased.

INTERVIEWER: *How challenging will it be for all levels of federal and state governments to respond to this national issue?*

A. ELLIS: There are many challenges in there. I am not defeatist about it. I believe that we can in fact make many gains. One of the interesting recommendations that we have actually made up front in our report, and that we feel very strongly about as a committee, is for social teaching, for relationship teaching to become a core component of curriculum at a very young age in our schooling system. People were telling us, and young people were telling us, that if there is a process from preschool up, where children are given a better understanding of how they relate to each other, how they actually get responsibility for their actions in the way we are speaking here this morning, that that can only but help. And we believe strongly enough about that sort of approach, that we want that incorporated into the next phase of the national curriculum development. That's a really good positive

long term view, of how we see schooling and the whole process of inter-relationship personally to be improved for everybody into the future.

So along with that sort of thing, the recommendations we make right through the report are all leading, I think, to a positive outcome. But there's no doubt, we have a lot of programs out there, at a lot of different levels of government and one of our recommendations is in fact to stock take that, to have a look at exactly what's being done, to make sure that we evaluate those programs robustly and that we have an evidence-based system of programs into the future so that we don't duplicate, we make sure that they all interrelate. There is a lot of effort already being put into it. We think with better coordination, greater gains will be made. And I am very positive I have to say and very optimistic about the outcome. There are some difficulties there and many challenges, but that is what these reports are for, to put down a bottom line so that we can in fact advance the situation.

INTERVIEWER: *Do you think the young people that got involved in this inquiry, do you think their views were listened to?*

A. ELLIS: Absolutely! In fact one of the best public hearings we held was in Melbourne, where we had 40 plus young people from across the spectrum in Melbourne come and spend virtually the whole day with us. It was a terrific public hearing because we sat as a committee and did nothing more than listen to them. And a lot of the ideas that we got, and a lot of the bases for the recommendations we made, actually came from that particular public hearing where they were saying 'definitely worry about youth violence but can you stop it happening in the first place'; 'can you look at why it begins'; 'what is it that makes some of our peers behave this way'. It was a terrific forum. So I am very optimistic that the young people themselves are on side and they really want to do all they can to assist us as well as governments, and as legislators to do what we can to assist in this very big issue.

INTERVIEWER: *Thank-you for your time*

A. ELLIS: Thank-you