

28<sup>th</sup> September 2009

Committee Secretary  
Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth  
PO Box 6021  
House of Representatives  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600  
AUSTRALIA

<p><u>Submission No. 6</u> (Youth Violence) A.O.C.   Date: 29/09/09</p>
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To the Committee Secretary of Family, Community, Housing and Youth

Please find attached, a submission addressing the current inquiry into the impact of violence on young Australians.

The submission is based on a snap shot survey of young Australians with whom I work with and their experiences/key themes. Whilst the snapshot is taken from a smaller group of participants, these findings are a typical experience of a larger proportion of those alike.

My contact details are as follows;

Amanda Beattie

I work within a program that assists young Australians to support those classified most at risk of disengaging from school or whom have recently disengaged from their current education system.

It is expected that the young people participating in our program have been deemed at risk through individual assessment and presenting as experiencing multiple barriers that impact on their abilities to engage. Such factors include:

- poor literacy/numeracy, low academic performance, disenchantment with school, Bullying and alienation;
- mental health issues, medical conditions, disabilities, substance abuse, low self esteem, depression, poorly developed social skills, inability to conform to acceptable community standards to an extent that they cannot participate in education, training or employment, or
- social, cultural and community issues such as homelessness, family violence, history of criminal behaviour or institutionalisation

Definition of "at risk" Youth Pathways 2007 – 2008 Programme Guidelines, page 8.

Our role is to support the young person to make a successful transition with their education through to completion of year 12 or to source alternate education, training or employment options whilst further developing their skills through active participation within their community.

As a part of developing their knowledge on community, their participation was utilised to undertake a snap shot survey on their experiences with violence and the impacts that may have occurred to the individual as a result.

On an average, each participant was interviewed for an approximate time frame of fifteen minutes. Each participant was asked to carefully consider the attached group of questions and were further encouraged to expand on each answer provided.

All participants were taken through the appropriate privacy principles, were willing and gained value in learning that their input could potentially shape their community and its safety.

Snap shot survey questions attached.

## **Participant findings**

68% of participants surveyed described their perceptions of Violence as being both Physical and Verbal. 100% of participants surveyed commented further on the damaging effect of verbal and physical violence and the consequences for the victim. Participants reported their views on the consequences as having resulted in depression for the victim and to a larger extent, the victim often becoming socially withdrawn.

A high proportion of survey participants revealed that larger shopping complex's and frequently used bus malls were the main areas where violent incidents occurred. Survey participants general understanding around the perpetrators were that a high proportion of those were people that had disengaged from education or employment and generally "hunted" in packs.

Participants were questioned on their views around strategies on how to address the reported violent acts. 76% of participants stated that having a greater police presence as a means to minimise this risk would be effective. Further to this finding, participants went on to say that this official presence would be a significant deterrent to those groups wishing to engage in violent acts. In addition, participants identified the "hot spots" as hitting peak times effectively around the completion of school, again with most in agreement that an official authoritative figure, such as a police presence at peak periods, would be seen as being effective. However a small proportion of participants continued on to report that in their experience, the person committing the violent act would rapidly learn allocated time frames for such support.

68% of survey participants identified violent acts as being fuelled by drugs and alcohol. 100% of participants felt that violent acts were often as a result of the community/social surroundings that the perpetrator had experienced within their personal life. Further discussions were held around this result with statements such as "that is what the person has grown up watching, they don't know any other way" highlighting the cyclic effect that can often occur within social groups.

84% of participants felt that a person who appeared affluent, in a relative sense, was more likely to be a target of violence by others who felt a level of envy towards these more affluent individuals.

Alarmingly, 52% of participants disclosed that within their peer group violence was accepted. Typically this would result in attracting spectators rather than people attempting to intervene due to concern for their personal safety and fear of recrimination from such gangs.

This snap shot survey has clearly identified the high level of violence that young Australians experience on a regular basis. The feedback given was strong in regards to their view on effective means of intervention and emphasis on the necessity of intervention to be of an authoritative nature.

However the reality would appear to be that governments are unable to commit extra resources due to fiscal restraints and competing priorities for scarce resources. Therefore a solution maybe to introduce a systematic presence of part time authoritative figures such as experienced Army reservists to patrol such areas.

In conjunction with this strategy, local shop owners brought together to form a retail/business adaptation of the Neighbourhood watch program could act as "safe houses" where a victim could safely retreat to until Patrol arrived for intervention. Those businesses involved could see the reduction of crime within their local precinct as a result of their participation and support.

1. What is your perception of Violence
2. On a scale of 1 – 10, do you feel safe within your local community?  
1 = not safe at all, 5 = moderately safe and 10 very safe.
3. Is there an area in particular that you feel unsafe, i.e. skate park, bus malls, shopping centre
4. Do you have any thoughts on how this may be addressed - discussion
5. Within your peer group is violence accepted - discussion
6. On a scale of one to ten, is violence a common experience. 1 = never, 5 = sometimes and 10 = daily
7. In your experience, have you observed the violence to be fuelled by alcohol or drug use - discussion
8. Do you think that bullying and violence has an impact on an individual's well being - discussion
9. Do you feel that social factors contribute to violence? - discussion
10. DO you feel that economic factors contribute to violent acts? - discussion