DEPARTMENT OF
**FAMILY AND
COMMUNITY
SERVICES**

submission 84

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Ms Gillian Gould   BY: *[signature]*
Committee Secretary
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Ms Gould

Please find enclosed a submission from the Commonwealth Department of Family and
Community Services (FaCS) to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Legal and
Constitutional Affairs Inquiry into Crime in the Community: Victims, Offenders and Fear of
Crime.

The submission outlines some work that FaCS is doing to alleviate the incidence of crime in the
community.

The Departmental contact is Mr Richard Magor, Acting Assistant Secretary Community Branch,
telephone 6212 9150.

Yours sincerely

Mark Sullivan

٦٥ August 2002

House of Representatives Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs

Inquiry into Crime in the Community: victims, offenders and fear of crime

Submission by the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services

Role of Family and Community Services

The Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS) was established in 1998 to enable a more integrated approach to social policy by bringing together income support programs with individual, family and community support services with the aim of achieving a fair and cohesive Australian society. The portfolio is responsible for income support, housing policy, community support, disability services, child care services and family issues, including family payments, child support and family relationships.

FaCS aims to contribute to better outcomes for Australians through enabling:

- strong families
    - children and young people get the best possible start in life
    - family relationships are healthy
    - families are resilient
    - families nurture individuals and are connected to their communities

- strong communities
    - communities have the capacity to help themselves
    - communities engage and support their members
    - communities thrive in economic and social ways
    - partnerships between business, community and government contribute to better outcomes for communities

- individuals to reach their potential
    - people participate actively in economic and community life
    - people participate to the extent they are able
    - people can access responsive government support when they are in need

FaCS and Crime Prevention

Increasingly, academic research is suggesting that strengthening the capacity of individuals, families and communities to be resilient and self-reliant can reduce welfare dependency and social isolation, which in turn can impact on the incidence of crime.

FaCS takes a lead role in working with all levels of government and communities themselves to help individuals, families and communities to build their self-reliance and make choices through encouraging economic and social participation, facilitating prevention and early intervention approaches to dealing with issues before they become entrenched and providing a responsible and sustainable safety net to help those in need.

Social capital theory suggests that it is through the development of social and civic interactions that individuals, families and communities can build networks of trust and reciprocity. These networks

are essential to helping them become strong and access wider social and economic participation and can influence their decision making and help them develop independence. A leading international exponent of social capital, Professor Robert Putnam of Harvard University [1], proposes that communities with good stocks of social capital are likely to:

- be more interconnected;
- have better health and well-being;
- attain higher levels of educational and vocational learning;
- have greater access to economic opportunities;
- have higher levels of civic engagement and volunteering;
- be more resilient and responsive in times of stress or hardship; and
- have lower crime rates.

Communities in which people interact less (through not knowing neighbours, or visiting family or friends) can become increasingly dependent on income support and become socially and economically isolated. Members of such communities are:
- more vulnerable to victimisation and crime
- more at risk of becoming an offender
- more vulnerable to developing a high fear of crime [2]

Social capital and community capacity building are increasingly being considered by government in policy development and implementation. There is much debate about the effect of government programs on communities and how particular interventions can positively influence a community's capacity to deal with life events and shocks such as the closure of important local businesses, and achieve outcomes in which the community and its members have an interest.

FaCS programs

There are a range of issues around crime that have policy implications for FaCS programs including: the impact of crime on homeless people, especially young homeless people; the impact of crime on people with complex needs such as psychiatric disabilities or substance abuse problems; issues around people exiting state care institutions and similar transitional circumstances; and the impact on children of imprisoned parents including criminalisation, abuse and poverty, and so on.

A particular focus for FaCS in attempting to address issues around crime is through the Department's work on prevention and early intervention approaches with an emphasis on pathways and on aspects of time and timing throughout the life cycle. Pathways are the roads through life – from conception to death – that fork out in different directions, at the kinds of crucial transition points that mark new experiences and relationships[3], for example, going to school, looking for work, marriage, having a child etc. The 1999 Pathways to Prevention Report [4] notes that there are a range of pathways that individuals may follow, for example "a person may follow an easy path to respectable middle age, or a painful path through teenage substance abuse, homelessness and early death", and that a crucial focus on pathways is that early intervention means intervention early in

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[1] Putnam, R (2000) *Bowling Alone* Touchstone, New York

[2] Shipway, C and P Homel (1999) *Safer Cities and Towns: Crime Prevention Planning in Rural NSW* Crime Prevention Division NSW Attorney General's Department – presented at the Crime in Rural Australia Conference, March 1999, Armidale NSW   AND

Westacott, J (2002), Keynote Address Housing, Crime and Stronger Communities Conference, May 2002, Melbourne

[3] National Crime Prevention (1999) *Pathways to Prevention: Developmental and early intervention approaches to crime in Australia* Attorney General's Department, Canberra

[4] ibid

the pathway, not only early in life eg. a young person who is otherwise well socialised and has rarely been in trouble at home or in school, may become involved with the wrong crowd and get arrested. Intervention at that point, through approaches like restorative justice conferences, may prevent them from re-offending.

FaCS plays a critical role in this prevention, early intervention / pathways approach through provision of income support and other interventions like family relationship support, or support for young people, at various life stages and through its focus on individual, family and community strengthening and capacity building to allow community members to make better choices at points of transition in their lives. FaCS' prevention and early intervention approach and its work on social capital and capacity building means the Department is well placed to consider crime and the impact of crime through its existing programs and interventions, through reshaping programs and in developing new approaches.

The following programs demonstrate how FaCS is contributing to reducing the incidence of crime in the community and its impacts on community members.

HOUSING

There are a number of existing Housing Support policy and program responses that impact on the assistance provided to victims of crime and take prevention/early intervention approaches for perpetrators:

Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) domestic violence services

In 2000-01 23% of SAAP services (283 agencies) across Australia had women escaping domestic violence as their primary target group. Furthermore, domestic violence was the most common reason for SAAP clients seeking assistance in that year (23% of all support periods), with Tasmania recording the lowest (14%) and South Australia and Northern Territory both recording the highest at 30%. Domestic violence was the primary cause of support periods for women with children (54%) and for unaccompanied women over 25 (45%).

National Homelessness Strategy (NHS) pilot projects

There are a number of NHS projects that are testing new ways of working with victims of crime, in particular domestic violence, and with ex-offenders. These include:

o **Indigenous safe houses pilot:** research over 12 months in Queensland looking into safe houses for women and children in remote Aboriginal communities;

o **Young Offenders Support Program:** two projects, one in Tasmania and one in Western Australia aimed at preventing youth homelessness by supporting young people making the transition from juvenile detention back into the community;

o **Waarvah Pierson Services Queensland:** a project targeting young people at risk of homelessness who have high truancy rates or contact with the juvenile justice or care and protection systems which will develop culturally appropriate information and a guide to good practice for small Indigenous organisations in disadvantaged communities; and

o **Housing Options for People with a Mental Illness**: in the NT this project supports people pre- and post-release from a psychiatric facility so as to facilitate access to appropriate housing, through the development of a best practice guide.

STRONGER FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES STRATEGY (SFCS)

The Stronger Families and Communities Strategy is about bringing people together in partnerships to develop local projects that will help families and communities become stronger. These partnerships can be made up of different levels of government, service providers, community organisations, businesses and others involved in family and community issues. Through these partnerships, the Strategy helps create an environment that provides individuals and families with opportunities to participate in community life. It builds on the concept that strong communities generate more social and economic participation opportunities for their members. It gives communities and their members the chance to think about their own local issues and what approaches they can put in place to deal with them, and supports 'bottom-up' project development and delivery.

A major emphasis of the Strategy is that prevention and early intervention in family and community issues is much more effective than dealing with crises, or situations where behaviours or patterns have become entrenched.

This early intervention approach is based on evidence about what strategies make a difference for families and communities. The Pathways to Prevention Report into crime in Australia [5] notes that families with small children that are at risk of poverty, relationship breakdown and abusive or inept parenting styles are more likely to produce teenagers at risk of criminality and substance abuse. The families initiatives under the Strategy, the Stronger Families Fund and the Early Intervention Prevention and Family Relationship Support Initiative, particularly support this approach. For communities, crime can be addressed by helping communities to become stronger through building networks and support structures, providing access to support and services and increasing opportunities for community members, including young people, to be engaged in community life.

To date, about 5% of projects approved under the Strategy specifically address crime issues. About 8% of projects address family violence issues.

SFCS case studies

Some SFCS projects that are building family and community strength and capacity and are having an impact on crime are:

o The Family Violence Prevention Program (St Kilda, Victoria) is an early intervention / prevention project with a focus on the prevention of family violence. The project works towards breaking the cycle of family violence by establishing a community education program and a number of support groups including:
  - men's behavioural change group
  - father's parenting group
  - women's support group
  - mother's and children's support group

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[5] National Crime Prevention (1999) *Pathways to Prevention: Developmental and early intervention approaches to crime in Australia* Attorney General's Department, Canberra

o the <u>Sunrise Project</u> (Port Phillip, Victoria) targets vulnerable families living in transitional housing who might not readily access mainstream parenting services or groups. Parenting groups will be provided for sole mothers of sons, parents of adolescents who are 'acting out', a drop-in informal group for parents of preschool and women and their children who have experience domestic violence.

o the Lajamanu <u>Horse Sports Project</u> (Lajamanu, Northern Territory) has been funded to encourage children to attend school and as a juvenile diversion pre-court initiative, by giving local young people the opportunity to ride and care for horses while at the same time reintroducing traditional horsemanship skills that may lead to employment on local cattle stations.

o the <u>Yuelamu Community Unity Project</u> (Yuelamu, Northern Territory) has been established to curb alcohol abuse that was contributing to increased domestic violence and petty crime. The Community has set up its own Night Patrol using local volunteers, trained by police - the Night Patrol has resulted in less domestic violence and breaking and entering. As well, Community Unity oversees activities at the Recreation Hall which provides facilities for young people such as pool tables, videos and computer access, and the Yuelamu After School Program which offers supervised sporting activities for the local young people.

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY NETWORKS INITIATIVE (FCNI)

FCNI aims to improve access to information and services relevant to families and community organisations, and enhance the capacity of communities and services to work together to more effectively address family and community needs.

A total of 67 community capacity building and one-off projects have been funded. Projects address a broad range of local issues affecting families and communities and facilitate local action to resolve needs that members of the local community identify. These projects have begun to show positive social and economic outcomes in some communities, including reducing social isolation, increasing access to services and increasing engagement in community-based activities. The program outcomes highlight the significance of community capacity building to achieve improved social and economic outcomes for disadvantaged communities.

FCNI case studies

Examples of FCNI projects that are working to build relationships, improve community capacity and attempting to reduce the potential for crime include:

o The <u>Clarendon Vale Connect Social Heart program</u> (Hobart, Tasmania) is very successful, with a broad network of community members, groups and services shaping the provision of local services from housing to family and children's support services. The development of networks between residents and the local school have been successful in improving participation in school work and sense of pride in school.

o <u>Kununurra Men's House</u> (Kununurra, Western Australia) represents a new proactive way to deal with family violence. The project was developed by men who realised that men needed help to resolve the underlying issues that lead to family violence.

o <u>Ravenswood Youth and Young Families Information, Activity and Support Centre</u> (Ravenswood, Tasmania). Funding assisted in the establishment and operation of a youth and young families centre providing information, activities and support to young people including young parents. The centre offers a range of effective learning, life skills and support services including:

- parenting programs for young mothers, young fathers and a playgroup for 1-4 year olds;
- recreational activities for young people
- tutoring for students;
- lifestyle classes such as cooking, nutrition and sexual health;
- IT training and access to computers and the Internet; and
- assistance with entering the workforce

o *Wilsonton Peacebuilders* (Toowoomba, Queensland). Peacebuilders is a program designed to help create an environment that reduces violence and establishes a more peaceful way of living in schools, organisations and communities. This is done through a coordinated approach to assisting teachers, children, parents and community members to learn to respect and value each other, to address community conflicts impacting on the school and to support the development of shared community values.

<u>YOUTH</u>

FaCS has a range of programs that focus on youth issues, including crime:

Youth Portal
The Youth Portal provides direct access to Commonwealth Government services, programs, and research for and about young people aged 12 -25 on a broad range of topics including crime.

the source
the source website puts into words young people understand, the risks involved with illegal activities, legal advice, rights and responsibilities. *the source* supports strategic partnerships that would help further its goals of providing young people with information that empowers them to make good life decisions.

JPET
The Job Placement, Employment and Training (JPET) program is aimed at assisting students and unemployed young people aged 15-21 years (with priority to be given to those aged 15 to 19), who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. Young offenders are one of the identified target groups eligible for assistance.

Issues

- Young people are frequently victims of crime as well as perpetrators.

- Young people do not report crime as often as other population groups.

- The portrayal of positives images of young people is essential to combat perceptions that young people are a threat, are anti-social, are violent and are criminal. FaCS manages a number of programs that relate to the portrayal of positive images of young people such as:
  - National Youth Media Awards
  - National Youth Roundtable
  - National Youth Week
  - National Indigenous Youth Leadership Group.

- The impact of domestic violence on young people has not been examined closely enough to develop effective strategies to diminish the cycle of violence that occurs.

- The effectiveness of restorative justice and other innovative programs should be examined in detail to develop a package of response to young people who commit crime.

- In Australia two studies undertaken on the fear of crime, or public concern about crime (Indermaur 1990 [6]; Criminal Justice Commission 1994 [7]) reveal that the general public overestimates the risks of criminal victimisation. This exaggerated fear of victimisation then attaches itself to the more visible sections of the population, including young people (Youth Action and Policy Association 1997 [8]).

- National Research on Young People and Domestic Violence [9] found that witnessing parental domestic violence has a significant effect on young people's attitudes and experiences. Witnessing was also the strongest predictor of subsequent perpetration by young people. The best predictor of perpetration was witnessing certain types of female to male violence, whilst the best predictor of victimisation in personal relationships was having witnessed male to female violence. Young people themselves believe it is significant, as 'growing up in a violent household' was the most common explanation for domestic violence provided by the sample.

Young people growing up in families experiencing marginalisation and where domestic violence is common face multiple disadvantages, and are at a greater risk of themselves becoming either perpetrators or victims (or both) of domestic violence as they enter intimate relationships of their own. Young people experience much higher rates of violence in those households where one or both carers engage in problem behaviours.

Youth case study

o The Young Offenders Pilot Program (YOPP) (completed by the former DETYA) was announced in early 1998, with the purpose of contributing to national policy and strategies for improving responses to the needs of young offenders. The target group for the program was juvenile offenders aged from 13 to 20 who were at risk of re-offending, in detention or community custody, and young people exiting detention as well as indigenous young people in similar circumstances aged from 12 years. Support under the program included financial, emotional and physical support in the areas of accommodation, family issues,

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[6] Indermauer, D (1990) *Crime Seriousness and Sentencing: a comparison of court practice and the perceptions of a sample of the public and judges* Criminology Research Council Report, Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra
[7] Criminal Justice Commission (1994) *Fear of Crime* Criminal Justice Research Paper Series, Vol 1, No. 2, Qld Criminal Justice Commission, Brisbane
[8] Youth Action and Policy Association (1997) *No Standing: Young People and Community Space Project* Research Report
[9] National Crime Prevention (2000) *Young People and Domestic Violence – National Research on Young People's Attitudes and Experiences of Domestic Violence* Attorney General's Department, Canberra

income support, training and employment. The evaluation of the program concluded that, overall, the YOPP model of intensive, coordinated support for young offenders was found to be an appropriate and effective response to young offenders with high support needs and should be considered when developing programs for young offenders with these needs.

Issues for FaCS

There are a range of issues that impact on crime that have policy implications for FaCS, including:

> The higher chance that homeless people, especially young homeless people will become victims of crime.

   Living Rough[10] cites Alder's study of homeless young people in Melbourne, noting that 92% of those interviewed feared for their personal safety, 65% had been physically assaulted and 52% had been sexually assaulted in the last 12 months. In addition, Alder and Halstead have noted that young people can be prey to victimisation from a range of people, including police, strangers and people they know, and can be reluctant to report crime for a variety of reasons.

   Such evidence is being considered in policy development around homelessness issues.

> The tendency for victims of crime to become perpetrators of crime in later life, and the problems this presents around dealing with victims separate from perpetrators. As well there are issues around the balance between punishment, rehabilitation and addressing underlying causes of criminal behaviours.

   The NSW Attorney-General's Aboriginal Justice Advisory Council[11] has reported that of the 23% of NSW female prisoners who are Indigenous, 69% had been abused as a child, 73% abused as an adult and 80% said their experience of abuse was an indirect cause of their offending. The NSW Corrections Health Service Inmate Health Survey[12] undertaken in 1996 revealed that approximately 41% of both male and female prisoners surveyed had been sexually abused by the time they were 10 years old, and a 8% of all male prisoners and 36% of all female prisoners in NSW had been forced to perform unwanted sexual activities before the age of 16.

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[10] Alder C. (1991) 'Victims of violence: The case of homeless youth' in *The Australian and New Zealand Journal of criminology*, Vol 24, No 1, pp. 1-13; Alder, C. (1989) *Homeless youth as victims of violence*, University of Melbourne; and Halstead, B., (1992) *Young people as victims of violence*. A Discussion paper prepared by the National Youth Affairs research Scheme, NYCS: Hobart. All references cited in National Crime Prevention (1999), *Living Rough: Preventing crime and victimisation among homeless young people*, National Crime Prevention: Canberra, pp. 21 and 24-5.
[11] Lawrie, R. (2002), *Holistic Community Justice A proposed response to Aboriginal Family Violence*, Aboriginal Justice Advisory Council. , pp.6-7, cited in *Prisoners & prisoners with disabilities: the barriers to their economic & social participation on release*, an unpublished internal scoping project paper prepared jointly with the NSW Department of Corrective Services and the FaCS NSW State Office, 2002 scoping project report prepared jointly with the NSW Department of Corrective Services and the FaCS NSW State Office, 2002, pp. 29-30.
[12] Butler, T. (1997), *Preliminary Findings from the Inmate Health Survey (ie. physical and mental health status) of the inmate population in NSW correctional system*, NSW Corrections Health Service, Matraville, p. 89.

From a FaCS perspective, the critical importance of the early years of life is now being recognised across a range of outcomes – health, educational, behavioural and criminal.[13] The significance of early experience as a contributor to later delinquency and crime is well documented.[14]

A number of key FACS programs have a focus on prevention and early intervention in working with families, children and young people eg Stronger Families & Communities Strategy, Reconnect, Youth Activities Services, Family Relationships Services Program. These programs aim to provide services at an early stage before problems become entrenched, to build the capacity of families and communities.

> There are issues around problems faced by people with complex needs such as people with psychiatric disabilities/mental illness and/or substance abuse problems, such that resulting behaviours can often lead to incarceration. The NSW Department of Community Services reported to the NSW Legislative Council Inquiry into the Increase in the Prison Population[15] that 40% of male prisoners and 73% of women prisoners had been admitted to a psychiatric or mental heath unit and diagnosed with a personality disorder.

> There are a range of issues around people exiting state care institutions and similar transitional circumstances – the Living Rough Report referenced Green (1993) [16]) on the relationship between child abuse, being 'in care' and youth homelessness.

The current Commonwealth and State/Territory activities around youth protocols is attempting to address social disconnectedness issues that link homelessness and a range of other social policy issues, including behaviours, such as truancy, that contribute to propensity for crime.

> There are important issues around the impact on children of imprisoned parents. Dr Eileen Baldry's (School of Social Work, University of New South Wales) recent work on ex-prisoners has noted that the NSW Legislative Council Standing Committee on Social Issues in 1997 reported that the effects of incarceration on children includes criminalisation, abuse, trauma, poverty and poor educational outcomes.

As well, issues facing former prisoners are not just those caused by incarceration but can be pre-existing social and economic disadvantages that are compounded by the prison experience. Factors that lead to or increase the likelihood of incarceration include poverty, homelessness, mental illness, drug addiction, location and Aboriginality. FaCS has a

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[13] Professor Fiona Stanley, Presentation to Prime Minister's Science, Engineering and Innovation Council, 28 June 2001

[14] National Crime Prevention (1999), *Pathways to prevention: Developmental and early intervention approaches to crime in Australia* Attorney General's Department, Canberra

[15] New South Wales Legislative Council *Select Committee: Increase in Prisoner Population Final Report* Parliamentary Paper 924, Sydney November 2001, cited in *Prisoners & prisoners with disabilities: the barriers to their economic & social participation on release*, an unpublished internal scoping project report prepared jointly with the NSW Department of Corrective Services and the FaCS NSW State Office, 2002, pp. 13-15

[16] Green, S. (1993), *Our 'voluntary' homeless: Strategies for Change.* Children's Welfare Association of Victoria Inc: Victoria, p. xix, referenced in *Living Rough* (op. cit.), p.25.

[16] cited in Baldry, Dr E. and Maplestone, P., *Barriers to ex-prisoners and their families participating economically and socially in Australian society*, Discussion paper prepared for the Department of Family and Community Services, July 2002, p. 20, as yet unpublished

number of initiatives that could benefit this severely disadvantaged group and their families, eg. the Personal Support Program has been established to assist seriously disadvantaged clients, however current policy guidelines need to be further considered to ensure inclusion for this group. As well, areas including housing, education, sport, recreation, health, families, and employment need to be considered in identifying the predictors of incarceration and developing strategies to combat them.

➤ Consideration of family and community strengthening approaches in policy and program design and delivery could have an affect on the incidence of crime, particularly in the context of welfare reform. Strong communities provide economic and social participation opportunities for their members which can lead to lower crime rates.

Planned portfolio work

FaCS is undertaking a range of initiatives that will impact on crime nad the incidence of crime in the community:

Indicators of Community Strength

The Department has produced an analysis of indicators of community strength and a conceptual framework for measuring community strength. The conceptual framework focuses on the resources, processes and outcomes associated with natural capital, produced economic capital, human capital and social and institutional capital. It emphasises the broad nature of community capacity. This work is being further developed by testing a range of social indicators in communities across Australia and analysing communities' performance against a broader selection of indicators of strength.

This conceptual framework refers to community strength as the extent to which resources and processes (including relationships, networks and governance arrangements) maintain and enhance both individual and collective well-being in ways consistent with the principles of equity, comprehensiveness, participation, self-reliance and social responsibility.

Measuring and Enhancing Community Capacity in Outback NSW: The Case of Broken Hill

FaCS is an 'industry partner' in an Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage Grant with the University of Technology Sydney and Broken Hill Community Inc -*Measuring and Enhancing Community Capacity in Outback NSW: The Case of Broken Hill*. A community social capital survey will be carried out to investigate conditions contributing to community engagement and social cohesion in Broken Hill and to improve understanding of the community's capacity to respond to changing local circumstances.

Strategic Conversations on Community Capacity Building

At its March 2002 meeting, the Stronger Families and Communities Partnership, the national advisory group for the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy, agreed to auspice a series of strategic conversations on community capacity building with the objective to develop a shared understanding and knowledge of the topic and associated good practice amongst relevant stakeholders.

FaCS – Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) Roundtable

FaCS and the AIC are hosting a roundtable on October 4 with stakeholders from health, education, employment, the National Crime Authority, Centrelink and some non-government organisations to discuss crime and the role of support programs, including identifying any gaps and discussing policy issues around factors influencing criminal behaviour.

Sport and Juvenile Delinquency

FaCS is undertaking a joint project with the Australian Institute of Criminology and the Australian Sports Commission to examine the impact of sport on deterring juvenile delinquency. The Department is currently waiting on responses from a national survey to agencies that run sporting programs for young people.