

5th May 2008

Submission to Parliamentary Inquiry into Children and young people 9-14 Years in NSW

Spyns Inc is a medium sized non-Government organization who receives between \$750,000-\$1,000,000 worth of funding from the Department of Community Services covering various funding streams including CSGP, Families NSW, Brighter Futures, Better Futures and Aboriginal Child Youth and Families Strategy. Our organization covers the Penrith LGA & has over 20 staff and works from six locations.

Current evidence shows that Young people aged 9-14 are at a critical time in their lives, they are in the process of transitioning from Primary to High school and childhood to adolescence. This is a time when young people are experiencing a lot of anxiety about who they are and where they are going.

It is a time when young people need a lot of reassurance about themselves, that they are OK and normal. At the same time young people need this reassurance they are also in a time of attempting to assert their independence and testing the boundaries with risk taking behaviours. We particularly know that boys brain development contributes to a lack of capacity to negotiate risk.

As we know there are protective factors such as a loving and communicative family, connectedness to school and community, supportive peer group, financial stability and skills and talents. And there are risk factors for young people. They include experiences of Domestic Violence, Substance abuse either by the young person or their family, abuse and neglect, bullying at school, poverty, poor community connection, violence and crime and social or cultural discrimination. These experiences can inhibit the young person and provides barriers to navigating their transition from child to adolescent.

Young people who are at higher risk due to dysfunctional family factors or dysfunctional peer factors, poor physical or mental health or school failure require much more support from other significant adults in their life such as youth workers and teachers.

Additional time and Government spending needs to be focused at this age group both in terms of school partnerships between teachers and youth workers and external to school in the form of programs and activities to enhance resilience and protective factors in a young person's life.

Young people may be at higher risk if they have a learning difficulty or birth injury or other disability or are affected by early childhood trauma which requires additional services and support to enhance resilience.

Programs have been developed which support and enhance resiliency in young people. **Rock and Water** has been evaluated and is transferable across cultures. Programs that are able to be provided universally to all young people tend to work best, programs in the past only worked with identified trouble makers which tended only to reinforce that stereotype.

Best practice supports evidence based programs provided universally to all students to allow for role modelling and leadership to be exhibited by peers and observed by all participants.

Department of Community Services NSW provides some funding through Better Futures initiative, however there needs to be a continued enhancement and renewal of this program to build on existing practice. Future enhancement of the CSGP program for youth activities to provide evidence based early intervention programs particularly for 9-12 year olds can also be considered. Also improved links developed with the Department of Education and Training to enable CSGP youth services better access to provide programs within the school context.

Evidence based resilience building programs must be expanded through all Primary and High schools and youth services to ensure that we have healthy strong young people who are resilient, supported and confident. Explanation of some programs follows:

Boys in this age group respond well to positive male role modelling and can benefit from programs such as '**Rock and Water**' - <http://www.newcastle.edu.au/centre/fac/rock-and-water/workshops.html> (a martial arts based program which develops social skills, self-awareness and self-esteem in boys), which can be provided as an in school program by youth services.

Girls in this age group would benefit from '**Body Think**' - <http://www.campaignforrealbeauty.com.au/dove-self-esteem-fund/body-think.asp> (body image/self esteem program which aims to help young people feel better about their bodies. Components include increasing self-awareness; identifying personal strengths; examining the effects of stereotyping in the media; and challenging stereotypes etc). It is interesting to note that in a recent survey conducted by Mission Australia on the issues of concern to young people 11-24 yrs in 2007, Body Image was of concern to 32.3% of the 29,000 respondents.

Other resilience building programs maybe tailored to assist particular situations for students as identified by schools including **Friends for Life** – <http://www.friendsinfo.net/> Which assists children and young people to develop life skills; to cope with difficult situations; builds emotional resilience and problem solving; encourages peer learning and builds peer support networks; promotes self confidence effectively prevents anxiety and depression.

Girls can Do anything - http://www.spyns.org.au/youth_schools.html Spyns has also launched a program called Making Tracks which is funded by Better Futures to support Aboriginal young people at school. Making Tracks promotes school connectedness through hands-on learning projects, resilience building activities and family support and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural activities.

RAP the Resourceful Adolescent Program - <http://www.hlth.qut.edu.au/psyc/rap/>

Kinks and Bends - http://www.aifs.gov.au/acssa/ppdb/kinks_bends.html this program is for an older age group the program explores issues of violence and sexual safety, it teaches young people how to avoid risky situations and support friends. Some aspects of the program maybe appropriate for 14 yr olds depending on situation.

Statistics on young people under 15 who work are not available, however Spyns Inc that many young people undertake informal work with families in family owned businesses. They also undertake work within the home and share newspaper deliveries with parents assistance and do child minding activities. Much of this work is informal and pay is dependant upon relationship and skill level.

YAPA (Youth Action and Policy Association) have produced an in school kit for years 7-10.

Girls@Work: Getting a Fair Go provides an introduction to workplace issues for high school aged students, focusing on issues that affect young people in general, as well as the particular needs of young women.

Young people may have a limited understanding of the rights they have in the workplace, have lower paid jobs requiring only basic skills and are more likely to put up with poor pay and conditions instead of looking for another job.

For young women in particular, these issues can be heightened. Young women may be less confident in negotiating better pay and conditions with their employers and can be exposed to increased incidences of bullying and harassment.

To help with these issues, this resource aims to give practical information in a straightforward manner to young people, especially young women, who may soon join the workforce. The resource also provides checkpoints to ensure their understanding of the materials provided. It also provides young workers with a number of sources for further information should they experience difficulties in their workplace. For more information see

<http://www.yapa.org.au/youth/facts/girlsatwork.php>

Or The Commission for Children and Young people have produced a report on Children and Work see

<http://www.kids.nsw.gov.au/director/resources/publications/specialreports.cfm?itemID=78FB286FE1FC4D521F46B908A2374156>

I hope that this information has gone some way to provide information which will be helpful to this inquiry and to assisting young people 9-14 yrs to get the support they need.

Thank you

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