

Susan Savage

16 July 2014

**Research Director
Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee
Parliament House
George St
Brisbane Q 4000**

Dear Sir/ Madam,

I write in response to the call for submissions to your committee, in particular to the terms of reference relating the social and economic contributors to crime, the effectiveness of crime prevention strategies, early intervention, alternative dispute resolution, and the experience of victims and offenders of their interactions with police and prisons.

I thank you for the opportunity to respond to this inquiry.

I write from the perspective of a Social Worker employed at Community Health between 1993 and 2006 and as a community member since then observing the changes in community dynamics that young people, including my children and grandchild, are facing.

In this time, I have seen what I believe is an increase in

- Families with very poor communication skills, domestic violence, poor parenting, increasing use of alcohol and other drugs.
- Changes in society's attitudes to under age sex and teenage pregnancy, (particularly after Costello's hand outs for babies)
- Contradictions in standards and failure to consider the dynamics of the families involved -
 - there are enquiries and more public outrage against child abuse, while permissive sexual attitudes are encouraged
 - men are more targetted for abuse than women whose behaviours may be highly provocative, but less physically obvious.
- Domination of men – sometimes under twenty themselves - with increasing access to movies and video games that expose them to sex and violence as the norm.
- The rapid decrease of jobs available to unskilled and uneducated labour, so young families are sitting at home in squalor, drinking alcohol or on other drugs, watching violent movies with children present.

- Mental health issues, possibly related to marijuana, which is in common use, or to other psycho-active drugs, including body-building substances, commonly used by young males with an image problem.
- Very poor eating habits and nutritional deficiencies with readily available fast food (MacDonalds, Hungry Jack's burger and chips followed by soft drinks and coke.) Nuggets and chips are very poor nutrition for the growing brain. The poor in India eat better.
- These children are having children and major problems are developing into the obesity and anxiety epidemics.
- I have experienced young men returning from prison with major anxiety disorders following prison rape.
- Young women disordered when first-time experiences of sex are little more than rape, which they are seen to 'ask for' by going out drinking or taking drugs.
- Judges and magistrates are overworked,
- Some police are judgemental and suspicious (probably because of burn-out), and show poor communication skills and aggression.

Recently a friend's son went to prison. He was raped more than once on the first week. Other inmates put him through a form of initiation, not letting him have food and pissing in his porridge. He was moved to another 'pod' where he was taken under the wing of a bikie gang leader, opening the possibility of an after-prison association.

Suggestions for improvement -

- Police that can communicate & connect with kids at risk and early offenders
- Extend Juvenile Justice approach.

Prisons

No TV / movies

More Prison Farms teaching prisoners -

- how to grow (community gardening) and
- cook their own food,
- develop fitness,
- coaching in life skills,
- anger management, and
- strategies for returning to work / starting a business
- funding and support for prison- work transition

Keeping people out of Prison – as above to prevent re-incarceration, plus

- fund and support more community service sentencing
- use Community Justice strategies – offender face to face with those injured, to hear the impact on them and on the significant others in offender's life. Elicit genuine remorse and desire for restitution in the offender. Avoid adversarial justice which makes the offender feel like a victim of the system.

- Maintain, fund and support early intervention (0-5) by Child Health in **all** families with newborns to ensure appropriate nurturing parenting behaviours and a community network for children, and
- Fund support for children entering / changing school to reduce the impacts of teasing, bullying, racism, sexism, elitism on children.
- Increase staff at Department of Families to take on more early intervention and support roles.
- Fund and support supportive adoption (intra-family where desirable) in cooperation with child's parents for single-parent or families at risk particularly where drugs or mental disorder and domestic violence create additional stresses on one or both parent/s.
- Strengthen the foster care system to ensure that children are not returned to natural parent/s until significant improvement in the family environment can be shown to be firmly in place, and relapses can be rapidly addressed.

I believe that a government that had the courage to take action to prevent, rather than to punish, community violence would leave lasting and cost-effective legacy, the fruits of which would be most evident when its first supported children become young adults.

It is my belief that strong families engaging in valued and meaningful activity are the key to a safe community, and that the proliferation of prisons is an admission of defeat.

Yours faithfully,

Susan V Savage B SocWk.

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