



18 July 2014

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

Dear Sir/ Madam,

**Submission to Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee**

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

I am a retired teacher and lay preacher in the Theodore community, and mother of three adult children with two grandchildren who live with their parents in England. I was a Community Support Worker in Biloela and Moura in the 1990's and am currently on the Management Committee of Theodore Community Link Incorporated.

**Social and economic contributors to crime:**

I observe continuing attitudes, values and behaviours in Australian Society that contribute strongly to making our culture unsafe for many of its citizens, including those who are arrested, tried, and jailed without any appreciable reduction in their offending behaviours. It is quite emotionally unsafe to be a child in Australia, and very unsafe for those with disability or difference, and that insecurity plays itself out in increasing levels of anxiety and body-image disorders among many who will never take up criminal activity. Others will follow the model of domination used in their family to behave cruelly to others, perpetuating the cycle of abuse and sometimes criminality throughout generations.

**1. Attitudes about the sacredness of the family**

Child Safety Departments are over worked, understaffed, underpaid, and badly supported in legislation. Children 'at risk' can only be removed in the most extreme of circumstances from violence or neglect. Funding for School Counselling is being dropped in favour of chaplaincy options, which cannot protect children from the vicious or predatory behaviour in homes where most of the criminal attitudes are fostered by parents unfit for their role. Early intervention in the struggling family is taboo. This attitude makes life for a vast number of children very unsafe, especially when compounded by other societal attitudes -

**2. Political and Media Models of Excellence and Power**

Political campaigns are conducted by setting up animosity between the two major parties in which Parliamentarians misrepresent themselves and their opposition, and tell lies about their intentions, while the major Media outlets create false perceptions of the value of those they favour and ignore or denigrate their opponents. Most of these behaviours are criminal in any business transaction between equals.

**3. Economic beliefs**

**– the Myth of Equality of Opportunity via education**

There is a widely held belief that anybody can achieve anything in our 'egalitarian' society. The logical conclusion is that it is the poor person's fault if they don't 'make it' financially, professionally or socially. The education system is based on competition right from the start, and some parents

(who have also 'failed to make it') have simply not been able to give their child the same start to educational achievement available to families like my own. Some children don't have the mental readiness at the age deemed 'right' by some educational timetable. Their failure at school can destroy any chance they might have had to 'get ahead' in life. Drugs offer some comfort, and often lead to crime or complete helplessness in which the drugged person will become neglectful of responsibilities and may also become a perpetrator of crimes in a mind-altered state.

### **- Economic Rationalism**

With the rise of Economic Rationalism over Nineteenth Century Liberalism, criminal behaviour in the manipulation of markets, the deception of the financially naïve, and the exploitation of the poor in sweat-shops aided by deceptive marketing is further disempowering the most vulnerable in our society. Multinational resource companies whose profits go to shareholders – the disproportionately rich – are favoured over local and less profitable enterprises, squandering the profits what might be invested in social equalisation projects and sustainable land management, further increasing the disadvantage of those who are given hand outs instead of being helped to benefit from developing sustainable industries.

### **- Free Trade Agreements**

'Free Trade' agreements are removing totally the 'yeoman' class of farmer who could form a stable land-based class in rural areas. The children of this class are leaving our community in droves because farms are not viable when squeezed between mining companies offering huge wages for a short time and produce values artificially reduced by currency variations and global supply and demand. With no generational continuity, rural populations lose their identity and that critical mass that produces a good mix of role models for energetic young people.

### **4.The decline of compassionate socialising influences**

Churches and community groups struggle to keep functioning as women as well as men, driven by economic necessity, seek to enter the work force and are no longer available to perform community service. The values of honesty, integrity, forgiveness, honour, hospitality, restraint, decency, 'fair go', & communal & family pride are no longer heard by children whose teachers are now so focussed on 'academic' achievement from their students that values education is off the curriculum.

### **5.The hypnotic impact of TV, advertising, and computer games**

At home, where values were previously modelled by parents, young children are neglectfully left glued to adversarial computer games and a procession of promiscuous and violent 'he-men' on their nightly screens behave abusively as they model unrealistic body-image, sexual prowess (aka rape) and domination over others. Conflict is often resolved by power rather than by skill.

### **6. Increasing availability, acceptance, and misuse of drugs**

In this hot-bed of aggressive permissiveness, it is no wonder that young men, insecure in their as yet established identity, take to performance enhancing drugs and act out the violence and aggression they have fantasised since childhood on their screens. Nor is it surprising that young women, freely plied with alcohol in venues open at all hours, become the readily available victims of these pseudo-macho men. I personally know of three young men whose 'body-building' has led to serious uncontrolled behaviour, such as has been exemplified by many football players, an Olympic Swimmer, and other sporting 'heroes'. One youth, I know was left by his companions on a town street in a completely unconscious state after having his alcohol spiked.

### **7.Untreated social dysfunction, learning disability and mental illness**

While these conditions may not be more prevalent per head of population, the diagnosis of ADHD, ADD and ODD is rapidly escalating, along with the increasing consumption of alcohol and other drugs by pregnant women (Are there studies into the impacts on the foetus of these substances?)

Another possible cause might be the fact that family size has decreased, so that most children are either the first or last child in the family, leading to an increase in competitive behaviours between two children in whom the whole family expectations are vested.) Delayed treatment of mental illness in the young because of reluctance to 'label' the child resulted in suicide for my nephew who showed acute signs of schizophrenia at fourteen, but doctors would not diagnose him until he had turned 18, by which time, he had wrecked his family's equilibrium and been led into criminal behaviour by an older and also quite disturbed man. Furthermore, he lost the opportunity to develop appropriate adult behaviours during the four years he was left in untreated psychosis and at eighteen, the mental plasticity needed to assimilate these behaviours was past.

In summary, I believe that the messages we are giving to youth encourage greed, domination, and self-gratification while increasing the anxiety of those least able to fulfil their own aspirations. In this frustration, the attractiveness of taking the short route to wealth and sexual conquest can seem very attractive, especially to those whose unready parents have already taken the criminal route and to those who don't have the mental ability to think out the consequences of their choices.

I understand that physical attacks on the person per head of population have decreased over time, (possibly because most people now travel in cars which screen them from view and don't allow easy access to people while they are travelling). Over the same time, anxiety about home invasion and personal attack has increased so people are now living in gated communities behind security screens as never before – probably because people are increasingly living singly and feel alone and vulnerable.

Child safety precautions now trump fitness concerns as children are now driven to and from school, sporting activities and entertainment. Use of mobile phones and surveillance cameras have increased safety for children in these settings, while conversely, adolescents are increasingly left alone to face their outside social challenges, for which many are not well equipped.

**My main recommendation** would be to ramp up early intervention. I once heard of a church in Chicago that had a lot of groups with activities for youth – sporting & social activities, but the crime rate kept going up until they disbanded their youth program and started a support program for mothers on the birth of their children. Workers visited the home and supported the mother in raising the child, and twenty years later the crime rate started to go down.

Secondly, I'd want **disability support for people with the mental impairment** that prevents them considering the consequences of their actions – and continuing support for youth until they develop this ability. Mental Health services for children must be funded and supported.

Thirdly I'd like the State to put some of its mining revenue into devising **computer games that model negotiating and problem-solving behaviours** and reward those who show competence in the ability to weigh up consequences in making choices.

I believe that **the alternative justice system** is the best way of dealing with young offenders, and that prison is a very poor tool for rehabilitating anyone.

Yours faithfully,

(Elizabeth) Ann Hobson

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