

Building a Middle Years Reform Agenda: NSW Initiatives

The middle years of childhood has been a priority area of work for the NSW Commission for Children and Young People since the 2009 NSW Parliamentary Inquiry, *Children and Young People Aged 9-14 Years in NSW: The Missing Middle*.

Following a series of successful seminars in 2011 on the development of children in the middle years and the risks they face, the Commission is now building support for a reform agenda with an overarching objective to...

Ensure that children aged 9-14 years in NSW reach their full potential. This means that all children aged 9-14 years in NSW can develop their physical, intellectual, emotional, social and cultural capabilities.

There will be a focus on children who often miss out, including:

- *Aboriginal children;*
- *children in out-of-home care;*
- *children with a disability or complex behaviour;*
- *children from low socio-economic backgrounds;*
- *children from non-English speaking/culturally linguistically diverse backgrounds;*
- *children in the juvenile justice system;*
- *children from newly arrived migrant or refugee backgrounds; and*
- *children living in rural or remote areas.*

During 2011 the Commission worked with other government agencies to gain a better understanding of current and future government initiatives that support children aged 9-14 years in NSW. This mapping exercise assisted the Commission to identify 10 priority areas for joint action.

An outline of each priority area is provided below, with information on the relevant strategies and goals within the NSW State Plan and a summary of relevant government initiatives. This material has been developed from advice provided by government agencies as at January 2012, and the Commission acknowledges that there have been developments in some areas since this time.

The Commission would now like to understand how a middle years reform agenda can support the non-government sector and most importantly discuss future directions and opportunities for collaboration.

Building a Middle Years Reform Agenda: NSW Initiatives

Priority Area 1	Build a reform agenda to promote the whole development of children aged 9-14 years. This should be based on research and a shared understanding of the developmental needs of children aged 9-14 years.
Relationship to NSW 2021	
Overarching strategy to return quality health, transport, education, police, justice and community services, putting customer service at the heart of service design	
Goal 13	Better protect the most vulnerable members of our community and break the cycle of disadvantage

Current NSW Government Initiatives:

A number of existing policies and strategies relate to children aged 9-14 years within NSW:

- The NSW Department of Education and Communities has a Middle Years strategy for years 5-9: *Middle Years Learners – Engaged, Resilient, Successful* (2010-2012) to support improved learning outcomes for middle years students.
- The *NSW Youth Health Policy 2011-2016 Healthy bodies, healthy minds, vibrant futures* aims to ensure the health system takes a holistic approach to the health and wellbeing of all young people aged 12-24 years in NSW.
- The Better Futures Program is a state-wide funding program administered by the Office of Communities (Department of Education and Communities). The aim of Better Futures is to improve support and services for children and young people who are at risk of disengaging from community, school, family or friends. Better Futures is currently the subject of a Ministerial review.
- The NSW Commission for Children and Young People hosted a Seminar Series on the Middle Years of Childhood in 2011 to build and share knowledge about the middle years of childhood. The seminars were filmed and a webcast is accessible from the Commission's website.
- The Department of Family and Community Services are expanding Brighter Futures and trialling a service model for vulnerable 9-15 year olds.

Future Directions

In the absence of a whole of government framework for children and young people in NSW, the Commission will lead the development of a reform agenda for the middle years of childhood. This will provide a framework to promote partnerships across government and non government stakeholders. The Commission will also establish an Advisory Panel with expertise on middle childhood. The Panel will comprise representatives from key government agencies, non-government organisations, academics, practitioners and research bodies to advise, support and champion the reform agenda.

Building a Middle Years Reform Agenda: NSW Initiatives

Priority Area 2	Ensure that children aged 9-14 years are involved in developing policies and services that are relevant to them. This should include research with children aged 9-14 years on how they spend their time between school and home.
Relationship to NSW 2021 Goals	
Goal 32	Involve the community in decision making on government policy, services and projects

Current NSW Government Initiatives:

The Commission for Children and Young People has developed a body of knowledge, expertise and resources around the participation of children and young people in decisions appropriate to their own age. These resources are currently being reviewed. The Commission also has a Young People Advisory Group and continues to build upon this body of knowledge.

Future Directions

During 2012 the Young People Advisory Group will undertake a research project exploring how children aged 9-14 years spend their time outside of school. The outcomes of this research will inform some areas of action within the reform agenda.

The Commission will continue to promote and support the involvement of children, particularly those aged 9-14 years in the middle years work.

Building a Middle Years Reform Agenda: NSW Initiatives

Priority Area 3	Build on existing outside-school initiatives to promote the whole development of children aged 9-14 years.
Priority Area 4	Drive collaboration between in-school and outside-school education and care to promote the whole development of all children aged 9-14 years.
Priority Area 5	Identify and close gaps in access to in-school and outside-school education and care for children who miss out.
Relationship to NSW 2021 Goals	
Goal 13	Better protect the most vulnerable members of our community and break the cycle of disadvantage
Goal 15	Improve education and learning outcomes for all students
Goal 27	Enhance cultural, creative, sporting and recreation opportunities

Current NSW Government Initiatives:

The Department of Education and Communities (The Office of Education and Sport and Recreation), the Department of Family and Community Services (Community Services and Ageing, Disability and Home Care) and the Department of Trade and Investment (Arts NSW) deliver programs and/or services to young people out of school hours, including:

- Universal before and after school hours care services (including vacation care);
- Sport-specific after school hours programs;
- Universal Holiday Program; and
- Arts and Cultural Activities.

There are also interagency partnerships supporting targeted approaches, for example partnerships have been forged between Sport and Recreation, Disability NSW, Education and Community Services to ensure young people in need are a priority. These include: young people with a disability or complex behaviour, Aboriginal young people and young people living in regional locations.

From January 2012 new regulatory arrangements were established for before and after school hours care services (including vacation care). A new National Quality Standard is used to assess and rate services in NSW. The Office of Education within the Department of Education and Communities is the regulatory authority.



Building a Middle Years Reform Agenda: NSW Initiatives

Youth Services

The youth sector in NSW comprises a diverse range of non-government and government agencies, private practitioners, volunteers, programs, services and organisations that work with young people or have been established to benefit young people aged 12 - 25 years in NSW.

Future Directions

These three priority areas are of particular interest to the Commission. The Commission in partnership with others would like to gain a better understanding of how children spend their time outside of school with a view to establishing improved engagement and support during this period. As described above, the Young People Advisory Group will undertake youth led research to support this work.

The Commission would like to work with both government and non-government stakeholders to understand the challenges and/or opportunities to enhance the lives children in the middle years outside of school.

Building a Middle Years Reform Agenda: NSW Initiatives

Priority Area 6	Identify and support successful models of engagement within schools that will support positive outcomes for children aged 9-14 years and develop their sense of belonging.
Relationship to NSW 2021 Goals	
Goal 15	Improve education and learning outcomes for all students

Current NSW Government Initiatives:

Quality teaching to support children in the middle years

The Department of Education and Communities has a Middle Years Strategy for years 5-9: *Our Middle Years Learners – engaged, resilient, successful (2010-2012)* to support improved learning outcomes for Middle Years students.

Transition to Year 7

The Department of Education and Communities has a *Transition to Year 7* strategy for all students in NSW government schools as they move from primary to secondary settings. Introducing orientation and induction programs into every NSW primary and secondary school is a central focus of the initiative.

School curriculum

In 2010 a new school leaving age came into effect in NSW, requiring students to remain engaged in formal education or training until age 17. Following this change the NSW Board of Studies has established a *Student Engagement and Achievement Program* and while the program predominantly targets students in years 9 to 11, it also supports schools that are repackaging their curriculum in Year 7 and 8, as an early intervention for particular students. The Board has also established a process for recognition and approval of alternative education programs offered by non-government organisations or schools to offer more tailored educational pathways for some students.

Use of internet and other technologies

The Department of Education and Communities has a number of resources and programs available to schools to educate students around the use of internet and other technology

Sexual health education

Schools are encouraged to work in collaboration with their communities, including parents and carers, to design sexual health programs that best meet the needs of their students. The Department of Education and Communities works in partnership with the NSW Ministry of Health to develop and maintain resources, support and access information for the teaching of sexual health.

Building a Middle Years Reform Agenda: NSW Initiatives

Career guidance, advice and financial literacy

The NSW 7-10 curriculum includes financial management and consumer education in a number of mandatory and elective syllabuses. The Board of Studies' *Statement of Career Education Outcomes Years 7-12* and the *Career Education Modules Years 7-10* provides a framework for implementing Career Education in NSW schools.

Student wellbeing and behaviour management

The Department of Education and Communities recognise a range of initiatives available to schools to support the wellbeing of students and assist teachers in managing student behaviour, these include:

- Universal and targeted mental health education programs;
- Suspension and Expulsion of School Students – Procedures and Good Practice Guide;
- School Counselling Service available to all students from pre-school through to year 12;
- Drug prevention and intervention is taught as a part of Personal Development, Health and Physical Education;
- NSW Police provide school-based education and crime prevention workshops delivered by Youth Liaison Officers and School Liaison Police on a variety of subjects; and
- While gender is identified as a cross-curriculum focus in NSW Board of Studies syllabuses current national and international research identifies gender as a factor that can impact on the learning outcomes of boys and girls. The Department of Education and Communities has developed the *Boys' and Girls' Education Strategy* which supports schools to explore the impact of gender on the learning outcomes of boys and girls.

Targeted programs within schools

The Department of Education and Communities has a number of initiatives to support students who are disadvantaged, these include:

- Additional resources provided to a select number of low Socio Economic Status schools;
- *Schools in Partnership (SiP)* aims to improve outcomes for Aboriginal students with a key focus on community participation and parent engagement.
- *Links to Learning* is a community grants program to support young people who are disengaged or at risk of disengaging from school;
- A range of homework and tutoring support programs; and
- Education within a juvenile justice setting, including juvenile correctional centres.

Future Directions:

The Commission will work with both government and non-government agencies to determine future work in this area.

Building a Middle Years Reform Agenda: NSW Initiatives

Priority Area 7	Identify the specific health needs of children aged 9-14 years and any gaps in services. This should include a focus on mental health, drug prevention and intervention, healthy lifestyle, sexual health and oral health.
Relationship to NSW 2021 Goals	
Goal 11	Keep people healthy and out of hospital

Current NSW Government Initiatives:

Following a recent departmental review NSW Health has become the NSW Ministry of Health, with the creation of a specialised network now focussed on Children's and Paediatric Services. The NSW Ministry of Health also maintains a network of youth health contacts across a number of Local Health Districts (LHD).

The *NSW Youth Health Policy 2011-2016 Healthy bodies, healthy minds, vibrant futures* aims to ensure the health system takes a holistic approach to the health and wellbeing of all young people aged 12-24 years in NSW. A priority action within this Policy is to develop an e-technology strategy for youth health in NSW and the Centre for the Advancement of Adolescence Health is leading this work.

Mental Health

In early 2012 new legislation was passed in NSW Parliament to establish a Mental Health Commission designed to deliver international-best practice mental health care in NSW. The NSW Minister for Mental Health will oversee the implementation of significant reforms that aim to improve services and outcomes for mental health patients, their families and carers across NSW. The government has made specific commitments to focus on the needs of children and young people in this model.

The roll-out of the Youth Mental Health Service Model in each of the Local Health Districts commenced in 2007-08, to deliver youth mental health services for young people 14-24 years of age in youth-friendly settings, co-located with primary health, drug and alcohol and other services, where possible.

Within the Ministry of Health, MH-Kids is responsible for the policy and planning of child and adolescent mental health programs and initiatives in NSW. Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) are specialist mental health services for children and adolescents up to the age of 18 yrs and their families in NSW. The aim of CAMHS is to improve the mental health of young people and to help them, their families and others caring for them to optimise their development and to build a secure base for their futures. CAMHS services vary in each Local Health District.



Building a Middle Years Reform Agenda: NSW Initiatives

A state-wide Aboriginal Child Adolescent and Family Social Emotional Well Being Policy is currently being developed by a newly appointed Aboriginal Child and Adolescent Mental Health and Well Being Manager within MH-Kids.

Sexual health

NSW sexual health services do not routinely work with children. In circumstances where children under 14 present for sexual health services, parental/guardian consent is sought to proceed with a consultation. A risk assessment exercise is conducted and services are required to work with a Department of Families and Community Services case manager whose role is to coordinate the development of a protection plan, using the interagency approach, as per the 'NSW Interagency Guidelines for Child Protection Interventions 2000' and 'NSW Interagency Guidelines for Child Protection Interventions 2006'.

In 2011/12, Family Planning NSW received funding from the NSW Ministry of Health to deliver a range of state-wide sexual and reproductive health programs, including initiatives for young people in school, clinical and other settings.

Ten local and state-wide Aboriginal sexual and reproductive health services have been established across NSW under the *National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Early Childhood Development*. In addition, the Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council of NSW is implementing a state-wide sexual and reproductive health promotion program with young Aboriginal people aged 12-19. The Program is being implemented across 13 NSW Aboriginal communities in partnership with a community development, arts based agency "Indigenous Hip Hop".

Counselling

The Ministry of Health has strengthened counselling and support for children and young people who are both victims and perpetrators of child sexual assault. This includes dedicated Aboriginal child sexual assault counselling and support positions in priority locations and additional specialist community based therapeutic services through New Street Services for children and young people aged 10-17 years who have sexually offended.

The NSW Ministry of Health is currently developing an implementation plan to progress recommendations following a review of the Child Protection Counselling Service (CPCS), Sexual Assault Service (SAS) and domestic and family violence counselling services.



Building a Middle Years Reform Agenda: NSW Initiatives

Keep Them Safe - Whole Family Teams (KTS-WFT) pilot project

Keep Them Safe funding of \$18 million over five years, beginning in 2009/10, supports the mental health component of 4 new pilot Whole Family Teams that are being established to address the needs of families where carers have mental health and/or drug and alcohol problems as well as parenting difficulties. An additional \$10 million over 5 years funds the drug and alcohol component of the Whole Family Team initiative.

Children in Out of Home Care

A Memorandum of Understanding between the Department of Family and Community Services (FACS) – Community Services (CS) Division and the NSW Ministry of Health for children and young people in statutory out-of-home care (OOHC) is in place. Eight Health OOHC Coordinators have been appointed across NSW with an OOHC Advisor based at The Children's Hospital Westmead. The OOHC Coordinators facilitate service coordination and development to provide comprehensive health, development and wellbeing assessments for children and young people in OOHC, including those 9 -14 years.

Health programs and services for young people in juvenile justice settings

There are a range of programs and services supporting the health and wellbeing of young people aged between 10 and 18 years in juvenile justice settings. These include:

- Health services provided by Justice Health;
- Counselling programs, including drug and alcohol, sex offending and violent offending; and
- An alcohol and other drugs programs addresses the needs of young people whose pattern of alcohol and other drug use is related to their offending behaviour.

Health programs and services for migrant and refugee young people

Migrant and refugee young people may suffer from a range of health problems, including oral health and mental health issues. Public schools liaise with the NSW Refugee Health Service and the Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors (STARTTS) to enable appropriate health care for newly arrived refugee students. Refugee students may also be referred by schools to the Health Assessment for Refugee Kids (HARK) clinic at Westmead Children's Hospital.

Future Directions

The Commission will work with both government and non-government agencies to determine future work in this area. The Commission is currently investigating directions for possible future work in the area of the prevention of child injury. A scoping exercise to determine priorities for this work, that will involve consultation with key stakeholders, is currently underway.



Building a Middle Years Reform Agenda: NSW Initiatives

Building a Middle Years Reform Agenda: NSW Initiatives

Priority Area 8	Develop strategies to ensure appropriate accommodation and support for children under 15 years who are using homelessness services or at risk of homelessness.
Relationship to NSW 2021 Goals	
Goal 13	Better protect the most vulnerable members of our community and break the cycle of disadvantage

Current NSW Government Initiatives:

Within NSW there is a commitment to reduce homeless and the poor outcomes associated with homelessness through the following initiatives:

The *NSW Homelessness Action Plan 2009-2014* introduces new prevention and early intervention approaches that aim to prevent people becoming homeless for the first time. It introduces new and better support for some of the most vulnerable people at risk of homelessness – young people leaving out of home care, people leaving mental health facilities and women and children escaping domestic violence.

The Supported Accommodation Assistance Program is a joint State and Commonwealth initiative to help people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, including young people. The program is a part of the Department of Family and Community Services, funding up to 400 services in NSW.

The Department of Family and Community Services are also developing an Accommodation Framework to provide a continuum of support and care for children and young people with a disability. This framework will consider how accommodation options can be shared between Community Services and Ageing, Disability and Home Care.

Juvenile Justice currently receives funding through the *NSW Homelessness Action Plan* to deliver three supported accommodation services for young people under the supervision of Juvenile Justice who are at risk of becoming or are currently homeless.

Future Directions

The Commission will work with both government and non-government agencies to determine future work in this area.

Building a Middle Years Reform Agenda: NSW Initiatives

Priority Area 9	Review early intervention and prevention programs available to parents and carers of children aged 9-14 years with a view to improving and enhancing family support programs and resources.
Relationship to NSW 2021 Goals	
Goal 13	Better protect the most vulnerable members of our community and break the cycle of disadvantage
Goal 15	Improve education and learning outcomes for all students

Current NSW Government Initiatives:

Through reforms to the Community Services Grants Program (CSGP) in 2010, the Department of Families and Community Services has established a new youth and family support service model under the Early Intervention Placement Program (EIPP). The EIPP provides appropriately targeted parenting and other support services to families and young people in NSW to reduce the likelihood of children and young people entering or remaining in the child protection and out-of-home care systems. As mentioned above, The Department of Family and Community Services are also expanding Brighter Futures and trialling an early intervention service model for vulnerable 9-15 year olds.

Living with domestic violence has a profound effect upon children and young people and may constitute a form of child abuse. The Department of Family and Community Services developed the *NSW Domestic and Family Violence Action Plan* which includes a number of strategies to address the needs of children and young people exposed to domestic violence.

In working with families to support children, it is essential that parents are provided with information they can access. The Department of Education and Communities provides interpreting and translation services for parents and carers who do not speak or understand English well and for deaf parents and carers who use sign language. In addition, a large number of key Departmental documents have been translated in up to 47 languages.

Future Directions

The Commission will work with both government and non-government agencies to determine future work in this area.

Building a Middle Years Reform Agenda: NSW Initiatives

Priority Area 10	Develop transport and urban planning strategies that allow children aged 9-14 years to move safely around their communities.
Relationship to NSW 2021 Goals	
Goal 24	Make it easier for people to be involved in their communities
Goal 27	Enhance cultural, creative, sporting and recreation opportunities

Current NSW Government Initiatives:

Transport NSW has a state wide network of Regional Transport Coordinators in rural and regional NSW. These Coordinators work closely with local transport providers (including local Councils), community groups and government agencies to develop practical transport options. Whilst recurrent funding is not available for long-term projects, Transport and Infrastructure staff develop partnerships with other organisations to help ensure that projects become self-sustaining. Within the Regional Transport Coordination Program, projects for young people are eligible for funding.

School students are eligible for subsidised travel between their home and school by the School Student Transport Scheme (SSTS). School students are also entitled to a half fare concession when travelling on public transport to locations other than between their home and school.

Transport NSW also works with local councils to develop and fund initiatives for local communities, including young people. The Community Transport Program has enabled Shellharbour City Council to provide weekly transport for child and family services, school service organisations, after school hours transport and transport for youth at risk. The Snowy River Shire Council provides an access bus for youth and other identified groups which targets villages with little or no transport in the area.

The use of *Home and Community Care (HACC)* community buses to transport disadvantaged groups presents another transport option for children aged 9-14 years.

The NSW Government are in the process of developing a long term transport plan, as part of this process Transport for NSW is now accepting submissions to help determine the best way to deliver transport services and infrastructure over the next 20 years.

The Commission is actively working in a number of areas to better understand and support the development of built environments that reflect the needs of children and young people. The Commission continues to work with local councils, NSW Government agencies, non-government organisations and industry peak bodies to promote the following publications produced and funded by the Commission:



Building a Middle Years Reform Agenda: NSW Initiatives

- built4kids
- Healthy Cities Illawarra Child-Friendly by Design Resource Toolkit

Future Directions

The Commission will work with both government and non-government agencies to determine future work in this area. The Commission is hosting a seminar series in 2012 targeted at built environment professionals and social policy makers about the importance of the built environment to children and young people's well-being.