



INNER SYDNEY VOICE

The Journal of the Inner Sydney Regional Council for Social Development

Winter 2007
ISSUE 108



- ☐ Visit The Shack Youth Service
- ☐ Marg Barry Memorial Lecture "What is Truth?"
- ☐ Mental Health Emergency Departments

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Beck Wilschefska, Youth Worker at The Shack in Maroubra Junction

Where did they come from?

Migrants to the Eastern Suburbs 2002 – 2006

The chart below lists the three major streams of permanent arrivals to Randwick, Waverley and Woollahra between January 2002 and December 2006. These are the most recent figures from the Department of Immigration database. The chart does not cover all birth countries, only the top 27.

Skilled migrants

The majority, who gave an address in the Eastern Suburbs as the place they were going to live, were those who came under the skilled migrant stream. The largest number settled in Randwick, and we notice large groups there from China, Indonesia and Malaysia. The only large group in Woollahra was from South Africa.

■ Randwick 5487, Waverley 1712, Woollahra 1569

Humanitarian/Refugee

The humanitarian/refugee numbers are very small. Refugees are unlikely to be settling in some of the most expensive real estate in Sydney!

■ In Randwick 113, Waverley 16 and Woollahra 11.

Family reunion

Family reunion has always been an important part of the migration program to Australia. If people are going to stay and become Australian citizens then we have to encourage them to bring their families in as well.

■ Randwick had 2,616, Waverley 1277 and Woollahra 1193

		Country of Birth																										
		United Kingdom	China Peoples Rep	Sth Africa Rep	U.S.A.	Indonesia	Ireland	Thailand	Germany	Israel	Japan	Fmr U.S.S.R.	France	Philippines	England	Canada	Brazil	Iraq	India	Bangladesh	Korea Rep Of	Sweden	Hong Kong	Italy	Netherlands	Fiji	Fr Czechoslovakia	Malaysia
Woollahra SLA	Total	604	104	426	139	21	114	45	65	119	49	40	51	34	114	35	28	1	27	8	35	19	30	18	17	14	12	23
	Skilled	350	61	293	48	6	77	19	24	62	12	20	21	17	83	12	11	1	17	4	19	4	19	8	10	2	7	19
	Humanitarian		1							2										1								
	Family	254	42	133	90	14	37	26	41	55	33	20	29	17	31	23	15		10	3	14	15	11	10	7	12	5	4
Waverley SLA	Total	762	75	179	126	53	235	56	88	94	86	43	76	29	164	53	53	1	33	4	49	37	23	25	29	8	23	16
	Skilled	490	31	111	45	35	178	23	42	43	43	14	33	6	127	24	21		22	3	26	6	18	5	10	1	7	10
	Humanitarian									2		3								1								
	Family	272	44	68	81	18	57	33	46	49	43	26	43	23	37	29	30	1	11		23	31	5	20	19	4	16	6
Randwick SLA	Total	839	1223	230	130	1222	259	152	113	52	95	118	139	159	142	76	65	81	278	167	116	33	255	41	40	59	46	335
	Skilled	489	943	150	36	1000	172	58	54	28	43	44	96	84	96	25	23		218	99	85	13	206	13	12	24	16	295
	Humanitarian		2			1				2		3						61	1	4								
	Family	350	272	80	94	221	87	94	59	22	52	71	43	75	46	51	42	20	57	63	29	20	48	28	28	35	30	40

contents

Feature Articles

Employment.....	1
Health.....	2
Material Needs.....	3
Education.....	4
Environment.....	5
Citizens Rights & Safety.....	6
Family Support & Community Activities.....	7
Resources & Organisations.....	8
and heaps more!	

Regular Sections

Citizens' rights and safety.....	8
Education.....	19
Resources & organisations.....	21
Employment.....	23
Environment.....	25



UNSW Prize

The Marg Barry Prize in Social Work



This definitely is Marg Barry memorial time. Her family has sponsored a prize each year at the University of New South Wales. This year the recipient is Ruben Klaphake seen here receiving his certificate at the awards presentation on 19 April 2007.

Inner Sydney Voice is the journal of the Inner Sydney Regional Council for Social Development



Inner Sydney Regional Council for Social Development (ISRCS D) is a non-profit organisation committed to the idea of information as a tool for community development. The organisation defines Inner Sydney as being the local government areas of Botany Bay, Leichhardt, Randwick, City of Sydney, Waverley and Woollahra. The journal is funded jointly by the Department of Community Services, Randwick and Sydney City Councils, and by members and subscribers.

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Editorial

Social Justice – hard to find

The news that the Department of Community Services has required Neighbourhood Centres' work to be listed under 'disadvantaged communities' is a backward step in achieving social justice. Neighbourhood Centres (and Regional Organisations for Social Development) continually work to strengthen people's view of themselves as regular, worthwhile and valuable people who have something positive to contribute to their society. Labeling them as 'disadvantaged' helps cement the aspects of life they are struggling with, to form into a 'life script' that it is very difficult to escape from.

The feature in this 108 Edition is 'Young People'. They are especially affected by being seen in a disadvantaged or negative light. We don't seem to understand as a society anymore, that helping young people to develop into positive citizens is one of the most important things we can do from so many perspectives – housing, health, employment, law and justice, family and communities.

The recent initiatives by the Federal government to improve the remote aboriginal communities are also in danger of being driven by a negative, patriarchal and disempowering perspective. Taking the fragile strands of self esteem and self determination and building them with goodwill, ingoing adequate funding and support will have a much greater and more lasting

effect than marching the army in. Strong law and order initiatives must be accompanied by adequate money for housing, health, job creation and education to build communities. The 'disadvantaged' tag will not work here either.

Social justice is under attack through the recent changes to our legal system – citizens rights are being trampled on using terrorism laws, residents will be forced off the streets of their city during the APEC Forum. Basic legal rights of assumption of innocence are at risk.

Worst of all is the impact of our Federal Governments budget and election policies. Huge budget surpluses have been achieved on the backs of young people who can't get a fair wage, can't get tertiary training, can't get housing, can't get help with mental health issues and can't get adequate welfare benefits when they are unable to work.

Maybe a look at Victoria might prove useful – they have a Department of Victorian Communities that wants to "provide equal opportunities for all". Their paper "A Fairer Victoria" looked at how to achieve social sustainability and a better way of harnessing the potential within communities. That sounds bit more like social justice to us!

Regional Council News

Introducing Greg Hawken



Marg Barry is to blame for my involvement in Regional Council! When I started working at Leichhardt

Council in 1988 she got me assigned to help with the local planning for Department of Community Services funding to community organisations.

I believe passionately in local and regional community organisations, that assist groups and individuals to carve out a fulfilling life for themselves. I suppose it started for me in Oxford (in England), where my father was the Anglican minister of the slum parish in the dip by the river. The houses were one-up, one-down, with a lean-to kitchen and a dunny at the bottom of the yard. The area used to flood regularly, and the coal-fired gas plant made sure that everything was filthy, and your eyes stung. The slum clearance was starting, and the first fifty houses to be demolished were to build a new telephone exchange. Dad led a campaign to keep them – it was quite simple – they were the only houses with bathrooms in the area. He lost, but every time I go to Oxford I spit on the telephone exchange in Speedwell Street.

Regional Council is the nearest in Sydney to what I was used to in the UK! Most of my working life was in community organisations, many of them Settlements (like the one in Darlington that was set up by Sydney University). By the 1970's these Settlements were

moribund, mostly just rented out as halls and bedsits, with perhaps a youth centre. So young radicals took them over, and raised money to give them a new lease of life. I loved working in places that had been rooted in the community for up to 100 years.

At Dame Colet House, in Stepney in the East End of London, we ran a Claimants Union where professional fulltime (!) claimants would help those having problems with Centrelink, or at Telegraph Hill Neighbourhood Council where I was editor of the 'Telegraph' which was sold to 1000 of the 4000 houses in the area every month.

Although I was conceived in Sydney (Mum was Australian) I was born in the UK. When I first came to Sydney in 1973 I got involved with green bans and the Builders Labourers Federation in the defence of Victoria Street in Kings Cross. I felt right at home, and went back later to the UK telling everyone that the Aussies had got it right. The developed world has changed now, we don't have the ground swell for change that was glimpsed in the Whitlam era. There is too much of money, money, money – and to think that that was exactly what Marx said!

I would like to join with those in the inner city of Sydney who want to empower ourselves, and other local people, to create the kind of authentic community that John McIntyre is talking about in his article in this issue.

Enough of my rant. I will enjoy being back in Regional Council, and hope that Inner Sydney Voice will remain a voice for those who want to change the world, even if it's only locally.

Farewell to a flower of the community sector

The community sector has been very upset with the news that Trish Menzies died recently, aged 54 from a very short and severe illness. The stories told at Trish's wake spoke of a woman greatly loved by her family, friends and work colleagues. Described as an original flower child of the 70's, Trish grew into mature woman whose great beauty was matched by a spirit of love and consideration for others and a dedication to putting the world to rights. Grieving her loss is her husband, Colin Menzies and three young adult children. Colin has had a long history with ISRCSD, being the first Executive Officer in 1974, involved in trying to save the Area Assistance Plan and Inner Sydney homes from being demolished. At this time he met Trish, who did social work at Sydney Uni and had her first job at The Settlement. Both were linked to Regional Council in different ways over the years while working on their consultancy 'The Public Practise'. More recently, Trish was the Executive Officer of the Family Support Services and the Aged Care worker at Woollahra Council.

Instead of sending flowers, people were asked to bring a plant for their garden to create a living memory of Trish.

We pay tribute to the love and dedication she sowed amongst us for all those years.

Faye

Marg Barry Memorial Lecture

What is Truth? Discovering the Basis for Authentic Community

The Third Margaret Barry Memorial Lecture was held at Redfern Town Hall on 30 May 2007. There was a good turnout, great photos of Marg provided by the family, and food and drink after the lecture (of course). The lecture, summarised below, was given by Rt Reverend John McIntyre, previously the Anglican minister at St Saviour's, Redfern, and now Bishop of Gippsland.

What is Truth?

In the traditions that formed and shaped me, these words are found on the lips of a cynic. Pontius Pilate, the man who washes his hands of responsibility, asks the question, not wanting it either to be taken seriously or answered. For him, to know the truth would have been too discomfoting. He is a political leader with a problem on his hands; a social context on the edge of violence that could erupt into chaos at any moment, and a political prisoner standing bound before him with the capacity to stir the people into action against his authority.

at worst be lost. Truth is a luxury that cynical political leadership can do without.

What he and so many others like him fail to see, however, is that truth is the necessary pre-requisite for authentic community. Because people like him are not interested in authentic community, but are in the business of politics only for what they can get out of it themselves, truth is of no issue. But for those of us for whom the building of authentic community is core business, I want to claim that knowing the truth is essential.

Now I do not pretend I can come up with some neat definition of truth: that is not the purpose of this exercise. What I want to argue is that unless there is awareness of all that (in truth), makes up the situations in which people find themselves, there is no capacity for those people to build authentic community. Authentic community is community that sets all the people free to be; free to fulfill their potential; free to participate

In his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire argues the necessity of knowing the truth of what makes up the situations in which people find themselves, if there is to be liberation of the people. He calls the process of becoming aware of the truth 'conscientisation'. He speaks from within his own experience in the 1970s of the exploitation of South American countries by the United States, including his native Brazil.

A simple example of this (Freire argues) is the situation where the oppressor perpetuates the lie that the poor are poor because they are lazy, precisely because they want to veil the truth that the poor are poor because they are being exploited by the oppressor.

The oppressor perpetuates the lie that the poor are poor because they are lazy, precisely because they want to veil the truth that the poor are poor because they are being exploited by the oppressor.

A political leader whose only impetus is the will to power trembles before the possibility of losing control. What in truth he is dealing with is the furthest thing from his mind; for if truth be told, his control of the situation might at best be diminished, and

and free to celebrate fullness of life together. There are all kinds of obstacles on the path to realising this dream, and unless we can see clearly to overcome those obstacles, the dream remains nothing but a dream.



Rt Rev John McIntyre
with Edwina Tohi

But for those of us for whom the building of authentic community is core business, I want to claim that knowing the truth is essential.

How reality is perceived, clearly impacts on what action is advocated to solve community problems. When the lie about poverty is told, the action advocated by the oppressor is for the poor to simply to work harder. In such a context, authentic community remains impossible, because the truth has not been told. Freire suggests that when the truth of the matter is revealed; that poverty is a product of social exploitation, then the capacity to choose the action of wealth distribution is enabled. Ways can be found to end the oppression and liberate the poor. Only then will there be authentic community.

If truth is the basis of authentic community, how do we come to know the truth: how do we go about the business of truth-finding? This is a fundamental question for those engaged in community building. I want to suggest there are three component parts to the quest for truth.

The first component part of truth-finding is good and reliable information sources.

We need to know the facts of the matter about the situations in which we are engaged.

The second component part of truth-finding is the capacity to decipher the information we have in such a way that it

can be employed to the end of building authentic community.

This takes us into the realm of values; desirable means and ends and an understanding of the basis of those values. Information alone is not power: knowledge is power. Knowledge is not simply having good information, though that is essential: knowledge also involves having and knowing the interpretive keys to order the information we have.

The third component part of truth-finding is attitude.

Good information and knowledge without right motive and intention, particularly in leadership, do not guarantee authentic community. Unless there is right motive and intention, exploitation occurs, agendas are not transparent and there is no genuine capacity for everyone to participate in the process of their own liberation; there is no integrity; there is no basis for building authentic community. Beyond information and knowledge there is wisdom, in which truth is discovered.

If truth is dependent on good information, we in Australia have a dilemma with our current sources of information. Our popular media is so tightly controlled by parties interested in maintaining the status quo, we can never be sure we are getting good and reliable information. The recently formed media coalition, *Australia's Right to Know*, an unprecedented alliance of Australian media organisations, notes that Australia now lags dismally behind the leaders in the worldwide press freedom rankings compiled by *Reporters Without*



Frontiers. On their index, Australia is ranked 35, behind nations such as Bolivia, South Korea and Ghana. If that doesn't worry you it should, because it means we have more and more limited access to good and reliable information, the first crucial component to truth-finding.

Anyone, for example, who has seen the documentary *OutFoxed* would not have been surprised to have verified, that Murdoch's news empire has no credibility anywhere in the world for producing anything like the facts of the matter on anything you would care to know. Essentially, the message is clear: if you want to know the truth don't get your information from a Murdoch media outlet. That's easy: so far so good.

I tend now to watch SBS for my news because it would seem not only to be the most comprehensive but so far less impacted by Federal Government interference than the ABC is. Even so, recent comments about the alleged bias of SBS from some government ministers are beginning to emerge that indicate SBS may also come under the threat of manipulation by the Federal Government.

On the matter of alternative sources of media, Marg Barry's priorities certainly demonstrated an acute awareness. The ongoing value of a magazine like *Inner Voice*, in which she had such a significant hand, is to be applauded; as are similar alternative voice publications produced by others, such as *The South Sydney Herald*. Along with many sites on the internet, these sources of good and reliable information are a vital component in the matter of truth-finding.

But what these alternative sources provide is not just facts: part of their role is to interpret and



order those facts as well. As I have already indicated, this is a fundamental aspect to the task of truth-finding that takes us into the realm of values; desirable means and ends and an understanding of the basis of those values. There is no such thing as 'neutral' or 'unbiased' information: every piece of information we receive is interpreted in some way and ordered towards some end.

*Australia is ranked
35 in worldwide press
freedom, behind
nations such as Bolivia,
South Korea and Ghana*

On the final component of truth-finding, which is about the attitude in which we go about the task, this strikes me as a simple matter. I see it in so many who have joined in the struggle for authentic community in the inner city. It is about dedication, and what I would call 'self-forgetfulness'; it is that quality that makes people go the extra mile and put in that last extra effort, despite themselves and their weariness, and sometimes despite even that sense of hopelessness that feels nothing is ever going to change. Again I think Marg Barry exemplified this

attitude, sometimes frustratingly, insofar as what she sometimes expected of others.

And finally there is celebration. Marg Barry was always on about the party that must follow the campaign, whether successful or not. I reckon laughter and dancing are symbols of authentic community. Never trust the person who has no sense of humour, by which I mean the person who cannot laugh at themselves and party on. That is the true sign of the humility and grace that is the well-spring of the wisdom that is the basis of all truth, that component essential for authentic community.

Certainly the task of building authentic community is not finished, here in Redfern where I imagine you are still taking up the fight to the Redfern Waterloo Authority, and in many other places where we struggle to see authentic community born. Certainly the obstacles to it are many, not least in those who see no need for truth-finding, and like many who call themselves leaders in Australia today, seem only to be involved for what they can get out of it for themselves. But if you and I do not give up on truth-finding and the struggle to build authentic community, in whatever situations we now find ourselves to be, then there is hope.

And that's the truth.

Social Justice Songs

The Sydney Trade Union Choir sang at the Marg Barry Memorial Lecture to support John's presentation. The songs they chose show that the struggle for social justice is an ongoing effort, not all that different from 17th century England - The Diggers in 1649 and the Tolpuddle Martyrs. The words as they are presented here can stand alone. But in the form of poetry and added to music they are even more potent.

The World Turned Upside Down

We come in peace, they said, to dig and sow
We come to work the land in common and to
make the waste ground grow
This earth divided, we will make whole
So it will be a common treasury for all
The sin of property we do disdain
No man has any right to buy and sell the earth
for private gain
By theft and murder they took the land
Now everywhere the walls spring up at
their command
They make the laws to chain us well
The clergy dazzle us with heaven or they
damn us into hell
We will not worship the God they serve
The God of greed who feeds the rich while
poor men starve
We work, we eat together, we need no swords
We will not bow to masters or pay rent to the lords
We are free men, though we are poor
You Diggers all stand up for Glory, stand up now
From the men of property the orders came
They sent the hired men and troopers to wipe
out the Diggers' claim
Tear down their cottages, destroy their corn.
They were dispersed - only the vision lingers on.
You poor take courage, you rich take care.
This earth was made a common treasury for
everyone to share;
All things in common, all people one
We come in peace - the orders came to
cut them down

The second part of this song is based on the writings of Gerard Winstanley, spokesman for the Diggers - the poor, the landless, the property less, for whom the English Civil War (1642-1649) and the execution of the King (Charles I, in 1649) had changed nothing; who were forced to beg, steal, or sell their labour at a time when two thirds of the land remained uncultivated. In 1649 a small group of Diggers came with their spade and their songs to cultivate a patch of wasteland in Surrey: "We dig upon the Common to make the Earth a Common Treasury because our necessity for food and raiment require it". Harassed and attacked by the gentry, the clergy and the law, they survived there for a year before a clear analysis of the political and economic structure of society and a coherent programme for its transformation: the abolition of private property, the common ownership of the land, the abolition of rent and wage labour - this to be achieved by non-violent direct action. "Was the Earth made to preserve a few covetous proud men to live at ease and for them to bag and barn up the treasures of the Earth from others, that these may beg or starve in a fruitful land; or was it made to preserve all her children?"

Leon Rosselson

Tolpuddle Man by Graham Moore

Farewell to my family, it's now I must leave you,
That far fatal shore in chains we shall see.
Although we are taken, do not be forsaken,
As brothers in Union we shall be free.
To those who rule us, we are the dissenters.
"Do your duty; be thankful; don't complain",
we are taught.
For God in His wisdom has divided this kingdom,
For few to have much while so many have naught
As brothers together, with an oath we will bind us,
The labouring men in all England shall rise!
Though Frampton defamed us, they never will
tame us.
Arise men of Britain; we will yet win the prize!
Chorus:
They can bring down our wages,
starve all our children,
In chains they can bind us, steal all our land;
They can mock our religion, from our families
divide us,
But they can't break the oath of a Tolpuddle man.





Affordable Housing

At last there is some action on affordable housing - that is if asking a lot of questions is seen as action. And the issue has got onto the Federal Election radar with a National Affordability Housing Summit held in Canberra on 26 July 2007. Even the ABC's Difference of Opinion has looked at it and Julian Disney got a few points across, as outlined below.

There are three quarters of a million people in Australia with severe housing stress and a similar number with hidden housing issues like location difficulties. Renters are the most stressed, with 600,000 rent households being squeezed and politically, "no-one cares about renters". It was agreed that there is a crisis and it will last for a long time. The Australian dream of owning one's own home is under threat and with it, middle income security. It was agreed that a range of options will be needed to improve the situation. Basically, demand exceeds supply so you have to reduce demand and increase supply.

Some ways to do this:

- A change in tax concessions to encourage investment in rental and affordable housing
- Take the heat out of housing as an investment strategy
- Regenerate the government provision of public housing
- Provide for security of tenure for renters
- Reduce the ease of getting large housing loans
- Reduce the cost of building a home
- Make land available (in rural centres rather than city fringe)
- Infrastructure paid for over time by the government borrowing, not the new home buyer
- Get community sector collaboration projects up, like co-operatives and community housing

There are 'feast of options' on the table and all need to be considered in the right portions to get the menu right.

Inner city redevelopment

What if you don't even get on the house buying, private rent paying list?

Department of Housing tenants in Waterloo must be in the most fragile housing situation possible. The public housing supply in Waterloo is being tampered with, the latest being through the redevelopment of a series of walk-ups facing Elizabeth Street between the PCYC and Missionholme. They have been rather neglected-looking lately and reason is now clear. A Development Application for their re-development has been submitted to the City of Sydney Council for their replacement with public/private partnership units with a mix of private purchase and DoH tenants. Local services supporting tenants are concerned that DoH tenants have been moved out over time, to allow for the redevelopment and the claim that no tenants have lost their housing (a claim the RWA is also always happy make). There will be fewer housing units built on this site and with the private dwellings as well, the net gain has to be in the negative. At least these nice new properties won't frighten the developers being attracted into Redfern and Waterloo by the RWA. No-one will notice the high rises in the next street. Still a part of the old scene is the PCYC Youth Centre that has decided not to move to land at the old Redfern School after all.

The Greens annual Bad Developer Awards 2007 – Nominations open

Categories are:

- The "Golden Toaster" Award for Crimes Against Amenity
- The worst residential development
- The worst industrial development
- The most environmentally destructive development
- The worst Council
- The worst Government Department
- The most insidious industry group lobbying effort
- The best Council
- The best community campaign
- The best journalistic coverage of planning issues
- The best development

For more info, and to get your nominations in, see www.sylviahale.org.au

The main problem

Youth worker Ian Symonds, who works with WAYS (Waverly Action for Youth Services), said the 'main issue' for young people in Eastern Sydney for young people is community attitude. Youth issues and the very presence of young people is 'problematised'. They are not seen as a legitimate part of the community, but as some problem to be fixed. In the same vein, youth services are seen as being responsible for 'fixing the problem' and get blamed as well.

The reality, Ian believes, is that young people are a part of the community and everyone's responsibility. There is insufficient focus on the positive aspect of young people's interaction with the community. Older people only talk about what is wrong – skateboards, behaviour in public space (which is their space as well).

Youth problems in one LGA

Inner Sydney Voice attended a planning meeting put on by Randwick Council to get feedback on their social plan. The youth focus group did an excellent job of identifying some of the needs of young people in the municipality.

What we found was a huge need for medium to long term youth accommodation. There is only one service

helping 4 young people with medium to long term accommodation and 2 semi-independent places. What is really needed, is 13 – 18 medium to long term places and 18 – 25 semi-independent places. Young people who find themselves in a home environment that they have to leave, start circulating in the short term refuge environment as there is no crisis accommodation in Randwick. There is one refuge in Eastern Sydney, in Kings Cross, and they can soon find themselves in a worse situation than they left at home. There is medium term support and youth drop-in to be found in Waverley, but young people need to stay in the area so they can see some members of the family they have been alienated from. Services are calling for one proper accommodation service for the area run by one lead agency, with all the youth services linked in.

There are also no services for young people from a multicultural background (Bangladeshi, African, Taiwanese, Arabic) who are estranged from their own cultural communities. They learn freedom from their peers and then cannot accept traditional cultural values and discipline (like female confinement) and an emphasis on academic performance. They then lose family, language, cultural values and social inclusion. Solutions are to be found in family mediation and presenting cultural values as positive, but this needs resourcing.



Indigenous young people are presenting to services with truancy, mental health, domestic violence and health issues in higher percentages than the rest of the population.

All youth services in Randwick have Aboriginal young people as a large percentage of their target group – in 'The Shack' it is 25%. It is often unrecognised that La Perouse is one of the three longest term Aboriginal populations in Sydney.

Early Evening at Maroubra Junction

It was a Thursday at 4pm when Inner Sydney Voice (ISV) called in at one of the two youth centres run by The Shack Youth Services. This shopfront location has been turned into a youth friendly space with couches, a computer and, that day, a table full of hot pies. Through an arch at the back is an office for the youth workers and a kitchen and bathroom. Upstairs is a lounge room with a TV, and the coordinator's office. There was noise and laughter. The centre is open for drop in from 3 to 8pm for 11-17 year olds.



When Inner Voice visited, three of the young people there said they would talk to us, as long as their faces weren't in the photos, and their names were changed.

Lucy, 17

"This is a place to hang out without being hassled. I have been coming here for two years, sometimes to use the computer as we do not have internet at home. If we go to the Mall we get hassled by the security guards, here we can relax. They have helped me heaps, with accommodation and family stuff. They almost think the same way as me!"

Clive, 17

"I have been coming here for six years, on and off. I suppose I was 12 or 13 when I first came. I like

the activities – such as drama. My friends came, we just wanted somewhere to hang out."

Frank

"This is just somewhere to chill, saves being on the street, and is better than going to friend's houses. I used to get hassled and arrested...this is better."

Inner Sydney Voice also talked to staff members - Daniel Hall, Coordinator and Beck Wilschefski and Julia Thomson as well as the Chairperson Justin Henderson.

Justin Henderson – Chairperson
Daniel Hall – coordinator
Beck Wilschefski and Julia Thomson – youth workers



commercial premises but the rents for the two centres is \$75,000 a year (20% of our budget). We would love to have a purpose built youth centre, with a hall for bands to play, an indoor or outdoor basketball court, offices, teaching and activity rooms. We think that Randwick local government area needs one, and our present premises are very old, too small and not best suited to being used as a youth centre".

Shack Facts

The Shack is a youth organisation providing a safe and supervised environment for young people in Maroubra. Its two premises provide classes, training, recreation and counselling to any young people who want it. There are two full time staff – a Coordinator and Caseworker and five part-time staff who run activities and drop in.

The majority of The Shacks' funding is provided by the NSW Government through the Department of Community Services. Randwick City Council and the Federal Governments Department of Families,

Justin

"I am passionate about The Shack because our organisation has always been grassroots, with a community consultative approach and I believe in supporting diversity in community services."

"We are well rooted and engaged in this community. Young people who use the two centres go there because they are comfortable and familiar. They feel an ownership of the youth service and what is on offer. Many of the young people are limited by social and economic factors in the activities they can access in the community".

Funding and accommodation of the service are constant issues.

"Costs go up and up each year – and the funding barely keeps up with inflation. We have to lease



Community Services and Indigenous Affairs also provide significant amounts of funds to The Shack. Botany City Council contributes to The Shacks School Tutoring Program.

Maroubra Junction is a hub to local young people, so it is an ideal place for the youth centre. The other centre is the South Maroubra Outreach Project (SMOP) at Lexington Place, in the middle of the Coral Sea Housing Estate amongst the other shops. Here, from Thursday to Saturday, there are drop in and recreation activities. SMOP is very different from Maroubra Road. The services are the same, but the clients are different and many living on the estate face significant economic and social disadvantage. Parents may have no car to take them to sporting activities or no money for recreation and entertainment like the cinema. Currently twenty percent of young people at Lexington Place are indigenous (compared with 8% at the Maroubra Junction Centre).

The Shack provides out of school or holiday activities run outside the centre, such as surfing, or the ghost tour at North Head Quarantine Station. Last holidays they had a bus painting project. The bus was supplied by the STA from Botany Depot, and three days were spent next to the skate park on Maroubra Beach, painting the winning designs on a local bus.

One of The Shack's key projects is the tutoring program. Students from the University of NSW (100 at present) help young people with one hour tutoring a week in any subject they feel they need assistance with.

Shack Issues

The Shack believes that it should provide practical and positive help to young people.

Common issues that young people seek assistance with from The Shack include:

- Problems at school including truancy, suspension and expulsion
- Feelings of isolation and problems fitting in socially
- Lack of self esteem and self confidence
- Lack of life direction and any planned skill development
- A lack of adult support and interest in their lives.

The Shack tries through casework to help young people achieve their goals and realise their aspirations. Young people use the Centres as places to relate socially, to develop skills they are proud of – maybe guitar, dance or tennis – and to have youth workers that are interested in them as people.

The Centre assists young people to become empowered, confident and responsible adults. This includes helping young people in practical ways such as finding accommodation or providing support in instances of domestic violence or family breakdown. Many young people experience difficulties relating to their parents and have no other adults to relate to. Except for youth workers, their support network would be almost entirely their peers. One example is a 13 year old girl who was truanting from school, with parents playing little part in encouraging her to continue with her schooling. The caseworker was able to encourage her to enroll in an alternative program at a local school.

The Shack doesn't act as an employment agency or an accommodation service but they do help with preparing a CV, or anything else in motivating young people to successfully look for a job as well as putting them in contact with youth accommodation agencies.

The Shack believes that relationships are the most important, and the key to the success here is that the workers are interested in and committed to the young people, and want to build a trusting relationship with them. The way to do this is by providing a safe supervised environment, activities they like, and having time to talk and help.

What is this gen Y thing?

We found this article on the Youth Action and Policy Association (YAPA) website, written by Denis Muller - a social researcher and visiting fellow at the Centre for Public Policy at the University of Melbourne.

Don't be too hard on generation Y. Conventional, measured and uninterested in bold ideas? Yes, but who made them? A conservative and materialistic society, where the Prime Minister's stated ambition is to make people "relaxed and comfortable".

Focus group research conducted by Irving Saulwick and me for the Dusseldorp Skills Forum in July 2006 found gen Y is fearless and flexible. The research was based on participants in eight groups, across cities and towns in four states, aged between 15 and 24.

Consider this: when Australia last experienced a recession, in 1990-91, the oldest members of gen Y were eight or nine and the youngest were in utero. Since then, Australia has enjoyed 15 years of sustained economic growth. No wonder they are comfortable.

Yet while many reveal little interest in ideas today, who knows how gen Y might react to adversity? It can be a powerful spur, and they have a lively sense of self-interest, just like their forebears down the ages. They are very concerned about the Howard Government's industrial relations changes, and this alone among the political issues of the day has the power to arouse them.

Whether it mobilises them is another matter. They don't trust trade unions, and the idea of collective action offends their

powerful streak of individualism. Moreover, they have little sense of history.

To speak of such things as the Accord between government and unions, of the opening up of the Australian economy by deregulation, is to speak of matters as remote as the Napoleonic Wars.

Perhaps mobilisation in the old left-wing sense is unnecessary and they will just vote quietly.

Ironically, although lacking a sense of history, Gen Y have a place in history of their own: they are Australia's first truly globalised generation. Not for them the agonies of displacement and adaptation forced on their parents by the forces of globalisation and the information revolution. For gen Y the world has always been like it is now: change is the only constant, and adaptability is a prerequisite to survival. And the internet? Well, in 1994-95 when the internet became widely adapted in Australia for general use, the oldest gen Yers were 12 or 13. The youngest were not yet in school.

The contrast with their parents' generation could not be more stark. Six years ago Saulwick and I conducted a similar study among people in the workforce who were, for the most part, in their 30s, 40s and 50s.

We found the effects of globalisation had profoundly undermined their sense of job security, fairness, and personal capacity to survive. Many had felt the lash of unemployment and were determined never to feel it again. Many held their jobs in fear that yet more restructuring and technological change could see

them cast aside without warning.

Gen Y inhabits a different world. What's new about the unregulated global flow of labour and capital? People who want to work can always find it. Can't they?

But as in every generation, some in gen Y are already marginalised. Of the nine people in the group of unemployed we spoke to, one had a university degree and two had completed TAFE courses, but the rest had not completed secondary school.

In a group of carers - all young mothers - one had a university degree but all the others had left school in year 8 or 9.

Some now found themselves trapped in a vicious circle. They realised they were under-educated and therefore uncompetitive for anything other than menial jobs, but education would cost money. This was money they did not have and had no hope of obtaining because their earning capacity was limited by their lack of education.

There are other marginalised groups in Australian society whom we did not reach. These include people in indigenous communities, and people who belong to religious and ethnic minorities who are the object of current prejudice, such as Muslims and people of Middle Eastern origin.

For many in the robust middle of gen Y, indigenous people get too many favours from government. As for Muslims or people from the Middle East - and anywhere else for that matter - they should learn to speak English and be like 'us'.

In these matters, the attitudes of gen Y are no different from those of the generations which have gone before.

From our library

ROCK & ENROL

The old belief that the young were to be "seen but not heard" is back....amongst the youth. With growing concern about the number of youths not using their political voice, adults are now encouraging them to speak up.

An Australian Electoral Commission survey conducted in March this year confirmed that "youths (18-24 year olds) are less likely to be enrolled" than their seniors. Twenty-two percent of youth are not enrolled to vote, compared to two percent of 35-49 year olds and three percent of 50 plus year olds.

Triple J, an ABC radio station aimed at teenagers and young adults, is the driving force behind the latest attempt to alter these figures. Through their 'Rock Enrol' campaign, they aim to address the new voting generation on their level - through people they relate to and issues they care for.

"Basically we thought it would be really cool to get young people interested and involved in politics," says Louis Rogers, Marketing Manager for Triple J. "We don't often get off our bums and get out there, but with all the issues around at the moment we thought now was the time to do something."

The campaign consists of a number of contemporary Australian rock stars sharing their closest concerns with the nation, stressing they "care enough to vote".

"It challenges the idea that politics is somehow uncool," says Anthony Albanese, ALP Member for Grayndler. "I'm out to show young people that politics really affects them: their job, their pay, their environment....their future."

"The only reason that the politicians can say 'work for the dole' and get away with it is because so many people don't vote," he says. "If they participated more in the political system...then governments would have to sit up and take some notice."

Tanya Plibeisek, ALP candidate for Sydney, agrees.

"There are a lot [of youths] that



are very disillusioned and feel that voting makes no difference - but it does. It's the difference between getting the Liberals back or not," she says.

"When you're 18 and bearing the brunt of political decisions for the rest of your life, you should certainly be having some say in them," says Sylvia Hale, No Aircraft Noise candidate for Grayndler.

Yet so many are not.

"I'm very apolitical," says Heather of Erskineville. "I haven't voted yet and I turn 20 next month.... I wouldn't even know how to fill in a ballot form."

Many young people express indifference or ignorance about politics, ranking it as "the least significant privilege of turning 18". Others have a decidedly more negative view about the whole thing.

"I hate politics," says Peter, 21 year old of Newtown. "But I'll probably vote anyway...just so I can continue to whinge."

So shall Triple J's idea of 'rock enrolling' make a difference?

"Yeah," says 18 year old Matt. "It certainly gets you thinking about things."

Albanese attributes this success to the stars:

"Having figures like Tex Perkins, The Whitlams and Dave Graney counts so much more than some old person they don't relate to telling them to get down to the polling station."

by Dimity Leahy

illustration by Alex Farias

THE YOUTH VOTE

The Bridge Election '98
Issues & Policy File

In Prosperities Shadow

It is to be expected that a pre-election budget will be impacted on by political considerations. Many of the largest items funded by the Federal budget have to be fully in the 'middle class welfare' camp. To demonstrate this, consider the following:

Tax cuts – \$31.5 bn over 4 yrs. The cut is for most taxpayers down to the second lowest income level. The lowest level gets too little income to pay tax.

Superannuation – \$1.1 bn for 2006/2007 only

Child Care – \$1.9 bn over 4 yrs – an increase in the maximum child care benefit to \$3.37 with the most increase to high income parents. One hundred thousand low income families do not get the full benefit. Child care JET 15.4 m over 4 yrs

Climate Change – \$741m over 5 yrs plus \$3.1m for the Murray Darling basin

The other spending on social issues includes:

Education – \$1.7 bn over 4 years

Indigenous – \$743.3 m over 5 yrs for education and housing (mostly repairs). This is offset against the loss of the CDSE programme

Dental – \$450 m over 4 yrs – only for dental work that is connected with chronic or complex medical conditions.

Figures from ACOSS Federal Budget Briefing 2007

Here are some comments on the overall impact of the Federal Budget from the sector.

- ACOSS says this year's budget is being framed in a period of prosperity for the Australian economy and for those who enjoy good jobs and income. Economic growth has been strong for most of the last decade. Yet many people and basic services operate in prosperities shadow.
- Eureka Street says "Obviously the 'haves' are happy".
- The Australian newspaper talks about a "Costello Masterclass".
- Jack Waterford of the Canberra Times says the budget "ticked off boxes" for Federal Government tacticians. "The boxes are interests, feelings, constituencies and moaners and particularly those who are concentrated in the 30 or so electorates most at risk for, or now thought winnable by, the government." He said that the Government is awash with money, with so many options, all affordable.
- St Vincent de Paul National Council CEO John Falzon points out, the Budget leaves rent-poor Australians in a \$1.5 billion hole. "An average \$16-a-week tax cuts for the most deserving low income households and other sweeteners, with no indexation, provides no meaningful solution to the rental crisis." A yet to be released NATSEM study commissioned by Vinnies shows that over 405,000 Australian households are suffering financial stress arising from high rent, each year paying a combined \$1.5bn more rent than they cannot afford without going hungry.
- Frank Quinlan of Catholic Social Services Australia believes the poor will miss out on direct benefits from the money poured into education infrastructure. "Low income earners will only share in the substantial investment in education if that investment is matched by similar long term initiatives in health care, affordable housing and early intervention," he said. He conceded that some Budget measures will make life a bit easier for lower income Australians in the short term,



.....the 10 year blueprint in the Budget speech did not consider how the most disadvantaged Australians would participate in the long term prosperity of the country.

but the 10 year blueprint in the Budget speech did not consider how the most disadvantaged Australians would participate in the long term prosperity of the country.

- Catholic Health Australia CEO Francis Sullivan also thought that the Budget missed the mark, especially with its lack of attention to public hospitals.

“When the government enjoys such a massive surplus, it is astounding that they have deliberately disregarded the obvious pressures on public hospitals,” he said. It is as if the government is fiddling while the public hospitals burn.”

No funds for making Workchoices fair

The Rights at Work campaign team members have noticed a failure of the budget to support ordinary people. According to Mr Howard, every single AWA individual contract will have to be scrutinised to make sure it is ‘fair’, and people are compensated for every condition stripped away. With a thousand AWAs being forced on working Australians every day, this is a massive job.

In Tuesday’s Budget, however, the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations only received an additional 15 staff. Worse, the area under which the Office of Employment Advocate (OEA) operates will actually be reduced by 57 people. The OEA is only allocated an additional \$2.6 million. This is just a 7 per cent increase, less than half that of the previous year (17 per cent). It is clear from the Budget itself that there will not be enough resources for AWAs to be checked against the so-called fairness test anyway!

Is it a fact?

That Randwick Council’s Strategic Plan says nothing about disadvantage or social justice?

This council’s social plan is not called a ‘social’ plan – it’s called a ‘well-being’ plan?

Randwick Council does not see itself as a direct provider of community services, but a ‘coordinator of other community organisations’ – they will help NGO’s apply for funding?

Actions on community needs identified in the 2004 Randwick City Plan will not make it onto any staff workplans until 2008/2009?

Council does not have any land on which to build a purpose –built youth centre?



Welfare to work starts to impact

Nearly a quarter of a million single parents of schoolchildren have been forced to look for work under the Federal governments 'Welfare to Work' decree. The impact of this growth in people looking for work has only just started to impact on the economy. Workplace Relations Minister Joe Hockey predicted a spike in unemployment as people moved from welfare to work. He said "It is possible welfare recipients started joining the workforce in anticipation of the rule changes and have been partly responsible for the roughly 300,000 new jobs created over the past year". However, he added, "This could take a couple of months to show up in the data. We're taking nearly a quarter of a million people off welfare and creating a work obligation for them. That has the potential to spike the unemployment rate this month and maybe over the next few months more."

JPMorgan chief economist Stephen Walters says a tight labour market could result in another hike in interest rates later in 2007. Mr Walters said the unemployment rate would rise closer to five per cent in coming months, as the welfare to work program takes effect. "We think there's a case the Reserve Bank of Australia will need to raise rates again in December after the election," he said. "It takes 12 to 18 months before the tight labour market feeds through inflationary pressures."

Not Teacher's pets, but pet teachers

"The Federal Education Minister, Julie Bishop, intends to introduce a number of so-called 'performance' pay schemes for teachers into NSW public schools. These schemes have already been discredited in American states such as Florida, Houston and Minnesota".

Sydney Morning Herald

The NSW Teachers Federation said that "These schemes will cause division and disruption in schools. The Federal government's push to introduce 'bonus' pay schemes and individual contracts into NSW public schools is completely counterproductive". Schools have been threatened with a withholding of funding if these measures are not introduced.

An unfair test

The *Rights at Work* Campaign says there are some problems with the Howard Government's 'Fairness Test.' The newly introduced test supposedly ensures that people will be 'compensated' for the loss of penalty rates, annual leave loading, and other conditions. But in the fine print is the fact that workers may not get fair compensation for losing all their entitlements if:

- the employer says he or she can't afford it
- where the offer of a job is deemed sufficient compensation
- where the worker is provided with something they don't need, like pizza after a shift.

Other problems are appearing. Every single AWA individual contract is supposed to be

scrutinised to make sure it is 'fair' and people are compensated for every condition stripped away. With a thousand AWAs being signed by working Australians every day, this is a massive job. As our Federal Budget report on page 17 says, insufficient money has been allocated to the Federal Departments charged with that work, for AWAs to be checked against the so-called fairness test anyway!

A real treat for school leavers

The Howard Government has announced for the fourth time, its 10 month old plan to offer a 'gap year' experience of the Australian Defense Force (ADF) to school leavers.

The ADF describes the gap year as "An opportunity for young people to 'try before they buy' the military experience".

This year long experience, commencing in 2008, will give up to 1000 young people a chance to show their value to future employers and provides a shorter experience period than the initial service period of four to six years in the Army, Navy or Air Force. They will undertake basic training then participate in a range of limited, defense related activities. It is not intended that gap year members will necessarily be deployed.

Ed. Would feel more comfortable with a statement like "gap year members will not be deployed"

Resources & Organisations



What future do we want?

Eva Cox – Social critic, author, advocate, broadcaster, researcher and academic

There have been many polls since the eighties that have shown a loss of trust in most people and increased anxieties about the future. These studies have revealed:

- an increasing sense of inequality in our society
- distrust of many institutions, including politicians and big business;
- increased fear of crime, even when rates are going down;
- less trust of strangers.

These polls probably explain the paradox of our country both doing well economically and still feeling bad about the future.

The disappearing public sphere

What has happened to make us feel much less connected? One big change is the disappearing public sphere. As a result, we have lost secular, democratic and egalitarian assumptions that developed when the public sphere joined us together through public institutions and schools. We flogged off this precious 'family silver' and as a result we have fewer such symbols in our community. Public spaces, publicly owned services, public schools, public hospitals, sporting facilities, libraries and other services were owned by all of us, so using them was looked upon as a right, even if we didn't always choose to exercise it.

Privatised and sub-contracted services may be more efficient (though that isn't always clear), but they do not clearly

identify their offerings as public entitlements. The public sphere has been redefined as

who feel disengaged, disrupted and perturbed may feel the only safe place is their own home. The rise of more authoritarian neoconservative politics, fundamentalist religions and nationalism can be seen as reactions to too much uncertainty.

We need to recreate some of the sense of connectedness and mutuality that we had before our collectivity, belonging and interdependence were conceptually over-ridden by consumerism, markets and choices. We need ways to reconnect more widely, so we can have the good will necessary to recreate inclusive, equitable societies.

Possible roles of community groups

At their best, community groups:

- Are participatory/democratic processes
- Reflect local/relevant needs
- Are flexible/responsive to members/users/participants
- Are advocates for needs (even unpopular ones)
- Create relationships of trust with members and users
- Are creative/innovative and offer new ideas and leadership
- Fill gaps and identify needs not being met
- Allow people to develop and share skills
- Provide a forum for ideas, debates and solving of differences
- Give space for people to pursue special interests/passions
- Have a commitment to ethics/social justice in their practices and communities
- Are voluntary and selective of those who have an interest in being there.

That's the good news but there are weaknesses. Community groups can:

- Be controlled by factions/

- Exercise power for its own sake
- Exclude new ideas and "trouble-makers"
- Patronise and/or exclude the powerless
- Chase resources at the expense of meeting members' needs
- Act like a business to the detriment of services and local needs
- Be co-opted by too many government contracts or tied donations
- Act as social control agents for governments or power groups
- Follow passions that may not be for the public benefit
- Be voluntary and therefore less able to fulfill particular accountability requirements.

Government and community spheres independent

The sector needs to be independent of government – there should be two discrete sectors with different roles. Government is not a good initiator of ideas; this role is often best performed by the community sector. There are many people in the community sector who do care about more civil societies and who could be effective participants in a futures development project. We need to think about ways that groups who do care about better futures can combine to provide the type of leadership we lack at present in the sector. What this requires is deciding on the steps we need to take to make the strategy possible. Let's start with a new vision of the public sphere.

This speech was presented to the 2007 Communities in Control Conference, Cambridge

What is it about signs and posters that just annoy us?

Inner Sydney Voice decided to have a look at some of the signs in Leichhardt and Sydney because the City of Sydney has promised a new approach to park signage. Is it really needed? To quote from their statement:

New approach to park signage

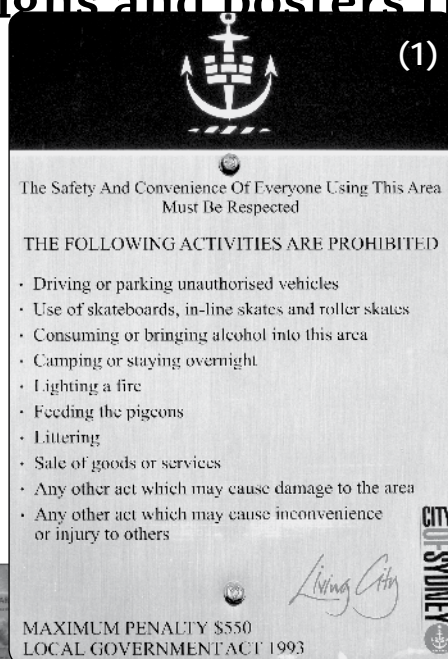
To complement our program of park upgrades, City of Sydney recently adopted new principles and designs for park signage to ensure that signs are welcoming, attractive and helpful, without adding clutter to our parks.

The amount of text will be reduced and will emphasise enjoyment of the park, rather than prohibitions. Information will relate specifically to each park and be guided by the way people use the park. Signage that prohibits activities will provide reasons and aim to encourage positive behaviour.

The guiding principles aim to reduce visual clutter by reducing the proliferation of signage of varying ages and styles, some of which contain negative as well as outdated information. Old signage with heritage value will be retained and restored.

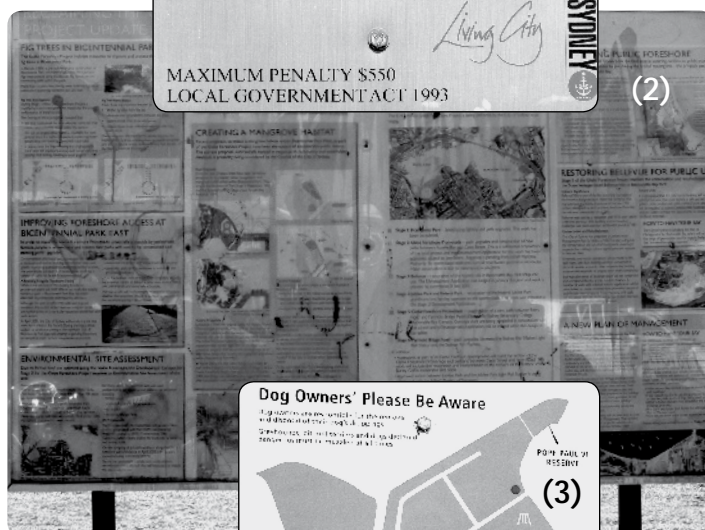
New signs will initially be installed in 18 small parks, two medium parks and three large parks by December. The initial focus will be on recently upgraded and new parks such as Barcom Avenue Reserve, Darlinghurst and Harmony Park Surry Hills.

Inner Sydney Voice sees this as a challenge, and this issue will start looking at signs in the area, and whether they are useful, useless, over-complicated, too prescriptive, funny or just plain silly.

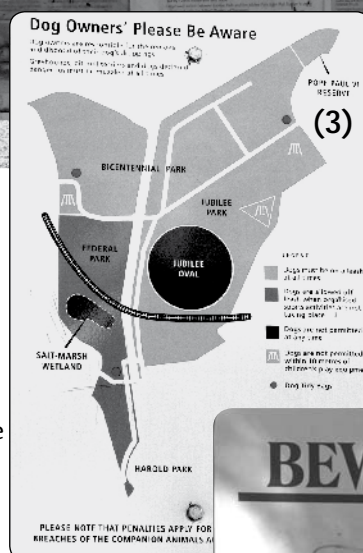


The City has its one basic prohibitory sign (1). It is on all the larger and medium sized parks, but is often missing in the smaller areas. Just look at the number of things you are not allowed to do.

In Bicentennial park Glebe (2) there is a sign with so many words and images and recommendations, and plans, that you just let your eye wander off to look at the Anzac Bridge or the birds, or anything.

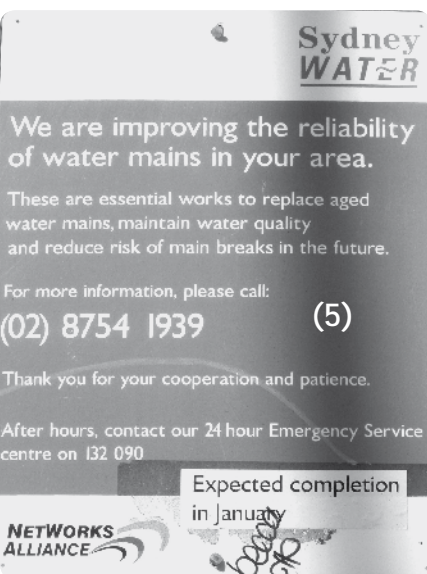


Still in Bicentennial Park (3) there is a new impressive sign for dog users, which explains where dogs are allowed, and where they are not. Mind you it still takes a fair amount of reading.



Our favourite was a small park in Newtown (4) (or was it Erskineville) where there was a sign saying 'Magpie nesting area'. We don't need any more information as most of us know that come spring mum magpie will attack us if we get too close to the nest.





A pet hate is the number of signs that just stay up well past their sell-by date. Look at this sign by Sydney Water (5). We want to know when they are going to turn off the water, especially if we have just soaped up in the shower. But what year was this sign put up? It says work will continue until January, but it is clearly not January 2008.

We complain about 'Bill Poster' and his friends polluting the landscape, maybe we need to complain

about government authorities who leave their signs up for far too long.

Then we have signs that have disappeared (6). Here at Erskineville Oval – a beautifully maintained sports ground with a proper grandstand – you come up the stone steps and in front of you is a pole with no poster. I bet it was one of the general prohibitive signs, but perhaps it said you can play any sport you like at any time on this oval.



What about road signs?

Trying to park in Glebe Point Road is never easy, and often it is only by luck (7). Then you have to check out how long you can stay, are you in the right kind of vehicle (you know – a wagon is allowed to park in a loading zone), and what day of the week it is. As I looked up at the sign above me it seemed that there must be an easier way to pass on information to us poor car drivers with cricked necks.

Some of the signs just have too little information. Look at this one in Johnston Street, Annandale (8) outside North Annandale public School. You know what it means, when you drop the kids off you are only allowed to park for five minutes, but what are you supposed to do the rest of the time?



The part of the report from the City of Sydney we can all agree with is that there is often too many signs in a confined space! So in Glebe there is this range of signs hanging on one electricity pole. No-one will ever notice them, and really is there any use in them at all? (9)

It is not just parks, but the visual clutter that is now part of our lives on the streets, in the air, through TV, internet and magazines – we are bombarded. So if council want to fix the problem, we say.....





New police powers during APEC

Police will have extraordinary powers in the lead-up to, during and after the APEC summit in the first week of September, under the APEC Meeting (Police Powers) Bill, passed by the Legislative Assembly in July 2007.

Clover Moore, Sydney Lord Mayor and member for Bligh, reported on her perspective.

"A gathering with such high-profile world leaders presents an extraordinary security challenge and Sydney's safety and security must be ensured while maintaining the right balance with civil rights". The Bill limits police powers to a specified period and within the APEC security area, and there are accountability measures that require the Minister for Police and the Attorney General to report back to Parliament on the operations of the Act. People are being actively encouraged to avoid the APEC security area. This discouragement includes stop and search powers and confiscation of certain items such as laser pointers. However, the Bill allows designation of APEC security areas without public notice and the requirement to inform the public is limited.

Clover has raised concerns about the impact on residents, businesses, services and visitors to the area, particularly because the Bill contains limited requirements to inform the public.

New electoral laws

The impact of the new electoral laws appear worse than first expected, especially when you look hard at who will be affected – young people not yet enrolled.

Federal Labor Member for Sydney, Tanya Plibersek MP, said that for the first time in almost 25 years:

- The electoral roll will close on the day the writs are issued – which can be as soon as the election is called; and
- Those already on the roll will now get only three days to update their details.
- Previously first time voters had 7 days to enrol after the writs were issued. In 2004, 423,993 voters across Australia enrolled for the first time, re-enrolled or changed their details.

"Under these new laws, by the time a young person gets home from university or work and finds out an election has been called, the electoral roll will be closed. And even for those already on the roll, three days is not a lot of time to update your details if you are studying or working full time," Ms Plibersek said.

New proof of identity requirements are more severe. Voters will now have to provide:

- Drivers licence details; or
- Have 'prescribed' documents witnessed by an 'authorised' person or have two enrolled people, whom they have known for at least a month, confirm their identity.

"When you consider over 35 per cent of young adults don't have a drivers licence, these 'reforms' will make it increasingly difficult to get on the role," Ms Plibersek said "These reforms are undemocratic

and have one aim - to keep as many people off the electoral roll as possible".

New citizenship test

Late last year, the Howard government announced it would introduce a new citizenship test. Migrants wanting to become citizens would be required to sit a formal examination in English, where they would answer questions about Australian values and national institutions. The questions would be drawn from a pool of 200 questions. (The Australian comedy scene has already devised the questions they would like – mostly around beer and footy).

The day the new test was announced, Tony Burke, Shadow Minister for Immigration, Integration and Citizenship, wrote to the then Parliamentary Secretary for Immigration, Andrew Robb, to get a copy of the test. The response was that they haven't written the test, any of the 200 questions or the book on which the test will be based.

Australia already has a citizenship test. Our current system requires applicants to attend a compulsory interview and establish that they are of good character, demonstrate a basic knowledge of English and an understanding of the responsibilities and privileges of Australian citizenship. If this test is not enough, it is important to establish how reasonable the new citizenship test will be. Hard to do this without seeing the questions!

*Sandi Chick,
Office of Peter Garrett AM MP*



In an emergency

Larry Billington looks at why hospital emergency admissions are at record high numbers in Eastern Sydney.

Activity in our hospital emergency departments has changed in nature and character in recent times, largely unnoticed by the general public. Data compiled by Sydney South West Area Health Service reveal that emergency department (ED) admissions consistently rose over late 2006, and in February 2007 the number of ED admissions was 400 more than any previous recorded month ever. There are several reasons for this increase, including people's response to an emergency, as well as use of emergency facilities by homeless people and people with a mental health crisis.

People react to an emergency situation in different ways. Some seem to have an incorrigible constitution and carry this sturdily through any of life's adverse events, while others are fragile and susceptible to the slightest setback. The interaction most people have with a hospital emergency department is fleeting and occasional. Increasingly though, access to these facilities is becoming a popular privilege.

Hospitals with emergency departments in our region are at Royal Prince Alfred (RPA), Concord and Canterbury in South Sydney West Area Health Service (SSWAHS) and St. Vincents and Prince of Wales in South East Sydney Illawarra Area Health Service (SESAHS).

A new trend in emergency hospital facilities is developing. The Emergency Departments at St. Vincents and Liverpool Hospitals have separated their emergency departments. Psychiatric Emergency Care Centres (PECCs) are situated immediately adjacent to trauma/accident EDs and are designed exclusively for mental health/drug and alcohol cases, and often homelessness, with a normal maximum length of stay of 72 hours.

We would not wish to ring 000 for an ambulance for a justified emergency admission at one of our public hospitals, to receive a prompt triage assessment over the phone, be given a number, and told to "stay where you are, take a seat, and we'll be in touch".

Despite the Burdekin Report's recommended treatment of mental health patients in the community and at home, crisis teams and emergency departments (PECCS) seem to be the response used now. Yet, there is currently no PECC facility at Royal Prince Alfred, so patients in this part of Sydney and Inner West have to go to Liverpool, however, RPA does have a crisis team. Mental health/drug and alcohol consumer advocacy

groups are lobbying against the replacement of the current 'crisis team' model that attends to people in the community, with a new centralised emergency facility, without justification.

An emergency department may not be the most appropriate place for people who are experiencing homelessness, but it is the only twenty four hour service that offers a coordinated response to the multitude of social issues often underpinning the primary medical condition of a homeless person. Is this the main reason behind frequent presentations of homeless people to the ED? Are these patients simply returning to a hospital ED because of their unstable housing and the lack of all those things that constitute a stable home?

The nature of our society's demands has changed, and people want immediate responses. The immediate challenge for our public health services in inner-city areas is undoubtedly to find solution to free up space and beds in EDs of both types, to cater for demand. It is equally incumbent on us in the community to supplement acute care with coordinated responses to multiple service needs.

Larry Billington is a board member of Inner Sydney Regional Council for Social Development Inc., a director of Mental Health Association NSW Inc. (and on its Anxiety Disorders Alliance Program Advisory Committee) and a member of the Waterloo Neighbourhood Advisory Board.

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