

## The Waverley Council and Better Futures Inner and Eastern Sydney Supporting Young People (9–13yrs) Connection to Activities Project (SYPCAP)

### Why did we need this project?

In 2003 DoCS carried out service planning in inner and eastern Sydney as part of the rollout of the NSW Government's Better Futures Strategy.

It appeared that existing services, including youth and Out of School Hours Care Services, (OSHCs) were not connecting with children aged 9–13 and that it was important to work with this age group. In 2005, Waverley Council was funded by Better Futures to find out how best to support children in middle childhood and to develop age-appropriate program models.

The creation of a new service framework for 9–13-year-olds emerged as a key outcome from the 'Supporting Young People (9–13yrs) Connection to Activities Project' (SYPCAP). This is a model that can be used to assist service networks and local government authorities that want to engage with this age group, across urban and regional areas of NSW.

In 2009 the NSW Parliament conducted a Committee of Inquiry into 'Children and Young People Aged 9–14 Years in NSW: The Missing Middle'. The 'Waverley Supporting Young People (9–13yrs) Connection to Activities Project' model was recommended in the final report of the inquiry.

### What did SYPCAP do?

- Identified the key services and Local Government partners delivering after school and holiday activities across the sub-region and worked with them to improve programs for this age group.
- Formed collaborative 'clusters' of services that trialled after school and holiday programs.
- Asked children what activities they were interested in and used their input to design flexible and attractive programs across a range of services.
- Ran training and information sessions for youth and childcare staff that related to the specific developmental needs of 9–13-year-olds.
- Developed and shared information for parents, children and services across our networks.
- Brought children of the same age together from different schools across neighbourhoods and LGAs.
- Created a focus on the planning needs of 9–13-year-old children where little had previously existed.
- Helped services to establish tween-specific programs in OSHC, libraries, youth services and other organisations.
- Made sure that projects focused on helping children make positive transitions from primary to high school by introducing them to services that can support them as they grow into adolescence.

### What are OSHCs?

Out of School Hours Care (OSHCs) services offer before and after school and vacation care for school-aged children. For many parents, OSHC represents affordable quality childcare as for some the fees are highly subsidised. OSHC is the responsibility of the Australian Government's Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). OSHCs do not receive direct funding. The NSW Government is not involved in the operation of the majority of OSHC services but gives a subsidy to approximately 50% of vacation care programs, particularly those in rural areas. There are approximately 900 OSHC services in NSW.

## Why 9–13-year-olds?

Because there is now a better understanding of the nature of the biological and developmental changes experienced in early adolescence, the 9–13 years age group is under increasing focus. No longer wanting to be treated as small children, but still so far from being young adults, children aged 9–13 can be a difficult group to cater for.

With some of the risk-taking behavior formerly seen in 15–18-year-olds now occurring in children as young as 11, they are increasingly an important group to build positive relationships with. There is a window of opportunity with children in the pre-teen years to build resilience through relationships and strengths-based youth work. This is a critical part of how to work with them at this stage of their life.

## Why did the SYPCAP approach work?

- We listened to what the children said when they told us what they wanted to do with their leisure time.
- We trained OSHC and youth services on how to deliver what children of this age really wanted.
- We got youth services and OSHCs to work together for the first time and both learnt new skills from each other through the activities they delivered.
- We created an integrated approach to planning with local government partners by linking arts, sports and cultural bodies – bringing new talent and innovation into programming.
- We helped services offer families affordable and interesting activities for tweens across the project areas during holidays and after school hours.
- We exposed children to a range of new services and organisations that will be useful to them when crossing from childhood into adolescence.

## What did the children say about the tweens programs?

- “We love having a say in planning our own activities.”
- “It’s cool to meet kids of our own age from other schools and centres.”
- “Being able to get on a bus and go out to a youth centre where you usually need to be 11 makes us feel special.”
- “Not doing baby stuff is great.”

Through the ‘Supporting Young People (9–13yrs) Connection to Activities Project’, Waverley Council and its project partners now have a very specific knowledge and understanding of how to engage services and children in this age group. The approaches that the project has developed will be adaptable in any setting where there is an existing basic infrastructure of children’s services, youth services and/or sporting clubs.

For more information, or to implement the initiatives from the project where you work, contact:

Waverley Council Project Officer

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WEB [www.waverley.nsw.gov.au/community/young\\_people](http://www.waverley.nsw.gov.au/community/young_people)

HOLIDAY PROGRAMS [www.waverley.nsw.gov.au/things\\_to\\_do/holiday\\_programs](http://www.waverley.nsw.gov.au/things_to_do/holiday_programs)

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