

# Senate Inquiry into Suicide in Australia

**Submission from Rev George Davies  
Community Youth Consultant  
Perth Inner City Youth Service**

## INTRODUCTION

The author has had a long and deep involvement with youth suicide and related issues. His final trigger to leave high school science teaching [1963] was the inadequate school response to the suicide of one of his students. He entered theological college and specialised in youth and youth at risk issues. Work at the Wayside Chapel [1968] was followed by Methodist Ministry in NSW country towns [‘70-‘76] including street contact and sharing his home with young people at risk. He became a State Youth Consultant [’77-‘99] with the Uniting Church in WA, specialising in drug, street, homelessness, crime issues and media advocacy and helping to initiate a number of major youth services in metropolitan and regional WA. During this time he continued to utilise his own home for accommodation and drop-in with young people at risk, including the conducting of funerals for network youth suicides. Delivering training state-wide in youth depression and suicide and other involvements in the youth field including ongoing face to face work have continued to the present.

## SUMMARY

Conventional wisdom appears to focus on individual characteristics such as depressive illness and training around recognition of and response to indicators of suicidal ideation.

The author believes there is need for greater attention to environmental and contextual issues which generate and/or accentuate fragility and vulnerability and also the counter-productive impact of policies which are applied to vulnerable and marginalised young people.

Examples include:

- Move-on policies which give a message of exclusion and rejection to young people critically in need of the well documented significance of belonging.
- Curfew policies which demonstrate a superficial and simplistic understanding of why many young people are street present.
- Punitive graffiti policies which address the occurrence of graffiti without strategies to understand adequately, if at all, the psychological motives of those engaged in graffiti.
- Stop and search powers to police which are likely or certain to be applied disproportionately to marginalised and vulnerable young people.
- The experience of the police bust in drug related action which demonstrably has deepened the alienation and suicidal ideation of many young people subject to such action.

A poor understanding by public figures such as political leaders and senior police contributes significantly to a poor understanding by the public of key issues for vulnerable young people. The pressure then by an uninformed public for punitive measures around “anti-social behaviour” reinforces the cycle of unconscious incompetence.

Many agency personnel relate poorly to vulnerable young people. This can include interviewing physicians and psychiatrists and some emergency protocols.

The rhetoric of “it takes a village to raise a child” needs to have much more realistic application if conditioning circumstances for the vulnerable are to be alleviated. This is akin to saying we need to address the river as well as the fish, or the soil as well as the wheat plant.

---

Supplementary material in the submission will spell out the basis of the above summary.

*Rev George Davies  
Community Youth Consultant  
Perth Inner City Youth Service  
26 Blencowe Street  
West Leederville WA 6007  
0411 784 638  
georged@westnet.com.au*