

*This policy is currently under review.*

## **Greens NSW**

### **Children and Young People Policy**



Revised December 2012

#### **Principles**

The Greens NSW believe:

1. The "best interests of the child" are the paramount consideration when dealing with children and young people and the primary guiding principle for developing a 'Children and Young People' policy; (unchanged, included for context)
2. Government has the responsibility to ensure that the rights of children, as stated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, are upheld;
3. The "best interests of the child" has been open to varying interpretations over time. Some of these interpretations have been used to justify practices by both state and non-state institutions that have caused lifelong and intergenerational harm to vulnerable people;
4. The "best interests of the child" are served by public policies that:
  - a. Prevent harm to children and, where possible, their family relationships;
  - b. Invest in enabling families to sustain long term safety and happiness; and
  - c. Underpin self-determination by children, young people, families and communities.
5. A sustainable economic system will be improved by the promotion of youth participation in social, environmental and political aspects of the community and government;
6. Social and economic justice and meaningful and workable structures for participation in decision-making are important for all members of the community;
7. Young people have the right to a future which guarantees employment, democracy, peace and a sustainable environment;

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8. That governments alone cannot solve the problems faced by children and young people and that communities must work together to find solutions;
9. It is of paramount importance that children and young people be given the opportunity to choose and create lifestyles which are community based, self-sufficient, economically resilient and ecologically sustainable;
10. That many young Indigenous Australians and young people of non-English speaking background face extreme social and economic disadvantage and have inadequate access to resources and decision making structures;
11. Unemployment is one of our major contemporary issues. It can sap human dignity, self-esteem and identity, erode social cohesion, disempower communities, and decrease the ability of young people to mobilise their efforts to move towards a more environmentally oriented lifestyle;
12. That levels of youth unemployment vary across the State and that resources and programs should be distributed to match the resultant needs;
13. That law and order approaches such as “move on” laws, systematic strip-searching and the use of sniffer dogs unnecessarily entangle young people in the criminal justice system;
14. Education should be aimed at improving the capacity of people to live purposeful, satisfying lives and at providing the opportunity to develop communities that are peaceful, just and ecologically sustainable;
15. We should recognise the need to remove children from mainstream educational settings when their behaviour repeatedly and severely compromises effective teaching and learning or threatens the health and safety of teachers, other students or professional staff; and
16. It is of deep concern that many children when suspended or expelled from school are left without appropriate levels of support and often end up interacting with the criminal justice system.

## **Goals**

The Greens NSW will work to:

17. There should be no financial gain from the delivery of services in the areas of child protection and out of home care.
18. Children and services to children should not be commodified.
19. The price paid for service provision should not be determined by competitive tendering.
20. Recognise the diversity of young people's cultural backgrounds, economic status, educational levels, interests and creativity; and

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21. Support the desire of some young people to develop responsible lifestyles in harmony with the land, and to create an environment that uses natural resources efficiently and appropriate technology to power our communities.

## **Detail**

### **Child Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation**

The Greens NSW will:

22. Significantly increase funding to the Department of Community Services (DOCS) so it can effectively deal with the issue of child abuse, neglect and exploitation;
23. Support an overhaul of the Department of Community Services as recommended by the child welfare sector. Consideration should be given to the recommendation to separate the 3 key functions of DOCS, namely child protection, family assistance/support (prevention) and out-of-home care;
24. Increase resources to programs which are likely to prevent child abuse such as early intervention, respite care, child care for children at risk and home visiting programs which are integrated with professional services for vulnerable people;
25. Increase funding for existing non-government out-of-home care services and increased funding for services contracted to deliver intensive out-of-home care support services;
26. Support the development and funding of competency based training programs for foster carers;
27. Review foster care payments with a view to increasing payments to meet the actual costs incurred;
28. Increase funding for accessible after-care services across the State;
29. Support increased employment, education and training assistance for children and young people in or leaving out-of-home care;
30. Close remaining large institutions for children with disabilities and transfer them to community based, family like environments;
31. Acknowledge 'The Special Commission of Inquiry into Child Protection Services in NSW, by the Hon James Wood November 2008';
32. Support the recommendations of the Review of the Children (Care and Protection) Act 1987 with regard to children's employment, particularly the recommendations regarding:
  - a. 33.1 The need for licences for the employment of a child under the age of 10, and for the employment of a child up to the age of 15 if that child works more than 10 hours per week; and
  - b. 33.2 Support a ban on the use of children under 15 for door-to-door selling or street trading, working with dangerous machinery

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or in hazardous environments and carrying out activities of a sexual nature;

33. Give the Commission for Children and Young People the power to conduct independent inquiries;
34. Proclaim the remainder of the Children and Young Persons Care and Protection Act 1998, particularly the sections relating to children in out-of-home care, the oversight role of the Children's Guardian and the provisions relating to kinship care;
35. Ensure that when a child is placed in a kinship care arrangement as a result of a child protection intervention, kinship carers have the same financial entitlement as non-kinship carers; and
36. Ensure that home visiting schemes integrated with professional services for vulnerable families are developed and/or expanded, and that fully funded respite care programs are developed.

### **Children's Services**

The Greens NSW will:

37. Support increased funding for community based long day care services;
38. Support investigations into the untenably high numbers of children being reported to the Department as being at risk of significant harm as well as the high numbers of children deemed to require statutory out of home care.
39. Exclude agencies that make a profit or intend to make a profit from the delivery of out of home care services from accreditation by the Children's Guardian.
40. Support additional funding for pre-school and occasional care services to enable them to provide an affordable fee structure for families;
41. Promote a policy of free voluntary pre-school for all 4 years olds in NSW;
42. Support the allocation of additional special needs funding for state funded services to promote access to children's services for Aboriginal children, children from NESB, children with disabilities and children at risk of harm;
43. Initiate a review of the viability of all existing vacation care services with funds being set aside to address any inequities that are found;
44. Appropriately regulate outside school hours care services in NSW and the implementation of national standards for these services; and
45. Support an increase in the number of qualified early childhood children's services advisers to a level of 1 per 55 services.

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## **Housing and Homelessness**

The Greens NSW will:

46. Immediately provide adequate funding for emergency and permanent youth accommodation services;
47. Develop and implement a funding strategy for youth accommodation services;
48. Increase options for affordable, quality accommodation for single pregnant women and young mothers under 25; and
49. Increase short and long-term accommodation for children and young people in care and after leaving care.

## **Education**

The Greens NSW will:

50. Support a vision of education as a life-long process of intellectual, physical, emotional, cultural and ethical development that may take place in a variety of formal and informal settings;
51. Ensure children and young people have a right to a range of educational and training opportunities and programs to improve themselves personally and professionally;
52. Ensure children and young people have a right to educational experiences appropriate to their needs, abilities and aspirations, including the right of all people to financial support while undertaking formal educational programs;
53. Ensure children and young people are included in devising individual educational plans and strategies;
54. Improve standards in education and training;
55. Ensure teaching methods for children and young people's education and training focus on experiential learning;
56. Ensure comprehensive education methods are developed to facilitate the different learning styles of young people;
57. Ensure civic education of young people is encouraged to enable them to participate in the democratic process;
58. Ensure the special needs of children and young people from Non-English speaking backgrounds and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds are provided for;
59. Ensure the total level of state and federal funding of private schools is reduced in favour of large scale increases in the funding of public education;
60. Ensure class sizes in public education are reduced, especially in the early years;

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61. Ensure funding is increased for public schools serving communities with high levels of socio-economic disadvantage;
62. Reform the system of subsidising travel to school to ensure the subsidy is directed to children travelling to their nearest public school;
63. Fully implement the recommendations of the Vinson Inquiry into the provision of public education, especially with respect to:
  - a. 63.1 The better co-ordination of mental health services within schools;
  - b. 63.2 Increasing the number of school counsellors and specialist teachers for children with learning difficulties;
  - c. 63.3 Implementing innovative programs for schools with discipline problems and behavioural difficulties; and
  - d. 63.4 The provision of advanced education opportunities at comprehensive high schools;
64. Ensure educational plans for children in care are monitored by the Children's Guardian;
65. Expand the Department of Education Substitute Care Teachers Program;
66. Improve data and research to monitor educational performance;
67. Ensure there are adequate literacy and numeracy programs available for children and young people;
68. Ensure there is a network of youth advocates within the education system and provide additional support services to assist young people with educational, health and personal problems;
69. Abolish fees and voluntary charges at all public educational and training institutions and cancel all debts under the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS);
70. Allow children with special needs to be integrated into mainstream classrooms in cases where it would be educationally and culturally beneficial to the child and would not unduly disrupt teaching and learning in the classroom; and
71. On the issue of suspensions and expulsions, campaign for:
  - a. 71.1 Improved provision of appropriate facilities to place children who are suspended or expelled from public schools;
  - b. 71.2 Placements that are separate to the school from which the student was expelled or suspended, that are resourced to meet the needs of children with behavioural problems, and staffed by professional teachers with relevant specialist training;
  - c. 71.3 Appropriate conditions and sufficiently small class sizes to provide the attention each child needs, with incentives, if required, to attract appropriately qualified teachers;

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- d. 71.4 New opportunities for specialist placement for children beyond the compulsory school age;
- e. 71.5 Increased numbers of specialist programs staffed by specialist teachers, in mainstream schools for children with emotional or behavioural disorders (ED/BD);
- f. 71.6 Early intervention programs in all public schools for children showing the initial signs of challenging behaviours;
- g. 71.7 Training and career development opportunities for teachers specialising in the education of ED/BD children and early intervention; and
- h. 71.8 The implementation of the recommendations of the Vinson Inquiry in respect of problem behaviour, including improved coordination between schools and mental health providers and increased numbers of school counsellors.

## **72. Employment and Training**

73. The Greens NSW will:

- 74. Support the implementation of a national employment strategy for young people, to be administered at a State and local level, and involving the unemployed and the community;
- 75. Support continued youth employment training schemes to be administered in co-operation with local service providers and State Government agencies;
- 76. Acknowledge alternative, education based training and promote the implementation of alternative, non-traditional, community-based employment schemes;
- 77. Develop a Young Workers Centre to provide free advice, information and assistance to young people on working conditions and workers' rights;
- 78. Replace junior rates of pay with a competency based wage structure so that employment and training wages do not discriminate against young people; and
- 79. Develop a funding program for local job creation initiatives in areas of high youth unemployment.

## **80. Justice**

81. The Greens NSW will:

- 82. Help keep young people out of the criminal justice system by:
  - a. 78.1 Reviewing reports relating to juvenile justice published over the last decade with a view to implementing the relevant recommendations of these reports;

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- b. 78.2 Taking immediate steps to implement strategies, policies and programs which will reduce the massive over-representation of Indigenous young people in custody;
  - c. 78.3 Recognising the contribution and needs of young people and creating structures conducive to effective youth participation so young people can influence policies, decisions and actions;
  - d. 78.4 Supporting greater access by young people to resources, services and opportunities;
  - e. 78.5 Supporting additional funding for services to resource increased youth consultation, participation in and management of youth services;
  - f. 78.6 Providing adequate and appropriate care for young offenders who are victims of abuse (sexual, physical, emotional), neglect or exploitation;
  - g. 78.7 Ensuring that young offenders (under 18) are not imprisoned together with adult offenders;
  - h. 78.8 Ending police harassment of young people, especially young Indigenous Australians and young people of non-English speaking backgrounds;
  - i. 78.9 Establishing a free hotline for young people to call in to register instances of police harassment with a view to independently investigating such complaints and conducting an inquiry into the issue;
  - j. 78.10 Introducing training for all general police officers in working with and managing young people in public and private spaces, including negotiation and communication skills; and
  - k. 78.11 Repealing all laws which infringe upon the civil liberties of children and young people or prohibit young people from congregating in public places;
83. Improve communication and co-operation between existing service providers in the youth sector;
84. Establish an adequately resourced democratically elected Youth Council broadly representative of young people to encourage and provide an opportunity for young people to participate in and influence decision-making on issues which affect them;
85. Establish a Youth Advocate network across the State to be overseen by the Commission for Children and Young People;
86. Lobby to ensure the voting age is reduced to 16 years of age but is not compulsory until 18;
87. Lobby for sensible drug law reform which views the drug issue as a health and social issue and not as a criminal problem;
88. Focus on preventative strategies which impact effectively on juvenile justice issues such as early intervention, employment, education, training and a whole-of-government approach;

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- 89. Support gender equity for the age of consent;
- 90. Support introduction of accredited training (to include working with and managing young people in public and private spaces) as the base level training required to obtain the necessary licence to work in the security industry in NSW;
- 91. Support funding of court support programs for young offenders; and
- 92. Support funding for streetwork and outreach services.

### **93. Health**

- 94. The Greens NSW will:
- 95. Involve young people in the development of health policies and programs;
- 96. Adequately fund appropriate drug education campaigns for illegal and legal drugs;
- 97. Conduct research on youth suicide and obtain information from overseas with a view to implementing strategies, programs and services which have been found to be effective in reducing youth suicide in other jurisdictions;
- 98. Ensure adequate funding and support is made available for specialist Youth Health Services in urban and rural regions;
- 99. Lobby the Commonwealth Government to automatically issue Medicare cards to young people when they attain 16 years of age;
- 100. Ensure adequate funding for early intervention programs which provide universal support to parents of infants and targeted services for parents where infants may be at risk of abuse and neglect;
- 101. Expand treatment services, particularly in rural areas, for children and young people experiencing mental health problems;
- 102. Expand drug treatment services, particularly in rural areas, for young people with drug and alcohol dependency;
- 103. Expand specialist counselling services, particularly in rural areas; and
- 104. Work on strategies to increase the “youth friendliness” of generalist alcohol and other drug services, mental health services and counselling services.

### **105. Transport**

- 106. The Greens NSW will:
- 107. Provide cheaper and adequate public transport;
- 108. Implement community and public transport models, in rural areas utilising vehicles that are as sustainable and least environmentally damaging as possible, eg LP gas;

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109. Coordinate locally run community service providers through adequately funded and professionally run Community Services Departments within Local Councils;
  110. Create a Rural Youth Transport (RYT) Project Model, whose purpose is to provide adequate and safe transport for rural young people;
  111. Provide facilities for alternative transport for youth such as bicycles, skateboards and scooters;
  112. Extend transport concession fares to young people on low incomes including young people on age-based rates of pay (junior wages), apprentices and trainees, full-time university and TAFE students, job seekers, and young people in Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP); and
  113. Expand community transport schemes for young people, particularly for late night and weekend events.
- 114. Youth Culture, Entertainment and Creative Arts**
115. The Greens NSW will:
  116. Encourage and support youth activities, such as theatre groups, street theatre, youth art, cultural activities and other forms of creativity and expression;
  117. Support cultural and educational youth services to provide an opportunity for understanding within the community, as well as to promote creativity;
  118. Adequately fund new and existing youth centres and ensure that the provision of youth centres and services is adequate, particularly in outlying and expanding communities;
  119. Ensure the provision of facilities and resources which provide the opportunity for young people to take part in activities such as visual arts, music, sport, environmental activities, computer arts, education, theatre, dance, film, photography and outdoor activities;
  120. Protect youth from the pernicious and behaviour-forming effects of violent programs and films by educating the community about their possible negative effects and by overhauling the classification system;
  121. Ensure young people have adequate access to public places without harassment;
  122. Ensure young people are provided with inexpensive, appropriate recreational activities and entertainment;
  123. Allocate funding to the Department of Sport and Recreation to ensure that disadvantaged young people have free-of-charge access to programs offered by the Department;

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124. Expand information available to young people through the NSW Youth Website, including services, director of local youth services, and listing of all age gigs; and

125. Provide funding for local councils or local youth services to develop local youth service directories, which link to a state youth service director available on line.

**126. Environment Planning and Local Councils**

127. The Greens NSW will:

128. Ensure all policy decisions are consistent with the principles of ecological sustainability, in particular the principles of intra- and intergenerational equity to ensure that adequate resources and a healthy environment are available to our children and young people both born and to be born;

129. Encourage local councils to set minimum standards for the provision of youth facilities and activities in their local environment plans and in major city development projects in order to provide a place for young people to feel included and valued;

130. Expand projects which investigate ways of designing public facilities and spaces which ensure there are places for young people to socialise and congregate;

131. Require all councils to have a youth consultation and participation strategy;

132. Ensure that the Department of Local Government monitors young people's involvement in the development and delivery of Social Plans;

133. Ensure greater focus on the involvement of young people in the design of public spaces and new estates; and

134. Ensure young people are included in local safety committees and safety audits.