

Child Protection Week

By Mandie Hale

National Child Protection Week was marked in Nimbin this month by two events, initiatives of Nimbin's Domestic Violence Committee. On 5th September a tile mural was unveiled, designed and painted by senior students of the Nimbin Central School. The idea behind the mural is to promote safe families and reduce domestic violence.

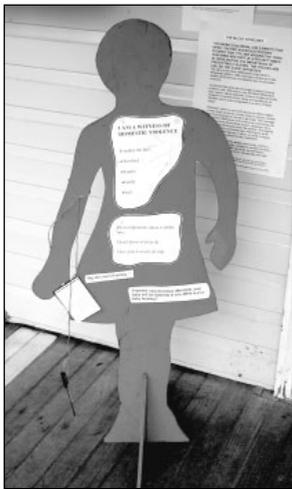
You can see the mural at the entrance to the school's administration building, near the front office (pictured, right). Another mural created by the students will be sited at the new children's playground in Peace Park.



unreported in Nimbin, for a variety of reasons. There may be fears that DoCS will remove the children, or a reluctance to 'dog on' friends. It is important to remember though that kids don't have the power to protect themselves...it is up to adults to do that and speak up on their behalf.

The 'Witnesses' received a mixed response, and generated a lot of interest. A number of people talked about their own experiences, and the feedback on many of the questionnaires that were a part of this project indicated that people were glad to see these issues raised.

However, the figure that was put at the hotel only lasted two days before being trashed. Prior to its destruction, an abusive note had been stuck to it. It obviously aroused strong feelings in someone. We realised that the figures could be confronting, but decided that if it generated discussion and made people think about the safety and wellbeing of kids, then it was worthwhile.



NIMBIN: A CHILD-FRIENDLY COMMUNITY?

A survey asking this question has shown that a lot of people are feeling that Nimbin is not a friendly environment for children. Overwhelmingly, violence, anti-social behaviour and drug dealing on the street were cited as the reasons that people felt that Nimbin is not child-friendly. Other reasons included lack of parental responsibility, dogs roaming the streets, lack of amenities, tolerance of unacceptable behaviours and a dirty town environment.

This is a challenging situation for

a community that has long prided itself on being a great place for kids to grow up, and in which a lot of people have put in a huge amount of commitment and effort to respond to the needs of kids. It's sad to hear parents talking about moving their kids out of Nimbin before they become teenagers, and it's a loss to the community when families leave with their children because they feel it's not a healthy place for kids. It's clearly important that in our personal and public decisions one of the questions we need to ask is "Will this make things better or worse for kids?"

The questionnaire also asked whether domestic violence is an issue in Nimbin, as living with domestic violence is damaging to children. Almost all respondents felt that it is. On a positive note, most people were able to recognise a diversity of domestic violence behaviours and identify at least one Nimbin support service.

Suggestions

There were many suggestions for improving Nimbin as a child friendly place including a regular police beat on the streets, more activities for youth including opening the skate park, more facilities such as shade over the children's playground, enforcing the alcohol ban in the village, mentoring programs for children, community safety street beat, a street clean-up, more positive role models, more support for victims including young males who are victims of emotional abuse, a local telephone support service, people being willing to stand up and charge perpetrators of crime, adults being more responsible for their actions, more childcare options including before and after school care, midwives at Nimbin Hospital, a clean and safe rest-room for parents, support for children who have witnessed domestic violence, more access to counselling and therapy, and less drug focus as a community.

Some of these things are already happening. The Family Centre has a clean safe space for parents to visit and change their babies, and runs groups for parents. The Neighbourhood Centre Welfare Workers offer support to all people who have experienced abuse. The Aunty mentoring program is in the process of being set up and a support program for children who have lived with domestic violence was run in Nimbin last year and can be run again if parents express

interest. A support group for victims and witnesses of violence is also in the process of being established. For further information about these programs ring Mandie at NNIC 6689-1692.

And it's not all bad...many people felt that Nimbin is a child friendly place. We know that Nimbin is more than just the problems identified and that there are many networks, organizations, communities, services and individuals who put heaps of love and positive energy into children. It's worth reflecting on what we do well, and keeping faith in our community. It needs us all to continue our efforts to make this a community where children are nurtured and protected.

Thank you to all the people who took the time to reflect on these questions, and offer responses. It is obviously an issue that people care about.

WHAT THE KIDS SAID

A survey of 42 young people of various ages at Nimbin Central School revealed that 17 felt that Nimbin was not a safe place, with a further six responding that it was safe 'sometimes'. However, a number of those who said that Nimbin was not safe still felt that it was a friendly community; 26 kids said that Nimbin was a friendly place to be.

Overwhelmingly, children identified drugs as what's bad about Nimbin. Most just said 'the drugs' or 'drug dealers' but some specifically named amphetamines as a factor in street violence, which was another frequently cited negative aspect of life in Nimbin. Other things mentioned were the swearing and fighting, people who were mentally ill on the street, drunkenness, loud doof music, Mardi Grass, kids on the street, the 'hippy-ness', too few activities for young people and lack of discipline for kids. Specific comments included, "The people on the street don't set a good example," "too much violence and drugs" and "scary drunks."

Good Points

When asked what was good about Nimbin the most frequent response was that it was friendly and that the kids' families and friends live here. Other good aspects were given as creativity, the pool, the fact that you know everyone (this was cited strongly as a positive factor for those kids who feel safe here) the shops, the



food, the bush, clean air, people who respect the environment and teach others about it, youth club, the CTC, activities such as basketball, the beauty, that it's fun and colourful.

Specific comments included "the friendly people at the Community Centre that help you out" and "You can always count on the people of Nimbin." And this: "It is incredibly unique. You have various examples of different lifestyles and it gives you an idea of what you want and don't want out of life."

In response to the question "If something or someone was making you unsafe who would you tell?" only one child said 'nobody'. Most children named at least two, most frequently parents.

Improvement Ideas

Most interesting were the responses to the question "If you could ask for one thing to improve Nimbin for kids what would it be?" I had expected that there would be lots of requests for big ticket items but the only material thing requested was quite humble - a slippery dip at the pool. All the other responses were more concerned with the social aspects of Nimbin. Getting rid of drugs and alcohol and creating more activities for kids were the two most frequent responses.

- These are a few of the requests:
- + something to take them off the street;
 - + less swearing;
 - + to get out of Nimbin for a while, sort of like a camp;
 - + for it to be cleaner and not so many drugs;
 - + support for those who need it;
 - + for it to be safe.

This was only a small survey. However, some things came through very clearly. We know what we do well as a community, and we can feel good about the fact that young people recognise the positives. However, it's important that we deal with the less positive aspects.

These are messages that must be listened to and responded to. What's more important than our children?

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