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**Submission to the NSW Legislative
Council inquiry into service coordination
in communities with high social needs:
response to Questions on Notice**

www.benevolent.org.au

benevolent SOCIETY

Contact:

Joanne Toohey

Chief Executive Officer

T: 02 8262 3400

E: joanne.toohey@benevolent.org.au

The Benevolent Society

Level 1, 188 Oxford St

PO Box 171

Paddington NSW 2021

www.benevolent.org.au

Questions on Notice

- 1. Do you think it would be useful – in terms of your own service specifications in the programs that you participate in and also within agencies and perhaps further up the line in terms of management – if there were defined requirements for collaboration and participation at a local level? Are you aware of any that exist in any of your contracts? I am looking for some reflections about embedding collaboration at a local level through the funding mechanism.**

As The Benevolent Society manages approximately 159 different programs we are unable to answer with absolute certainty about the content of all of the contracts covering those programs, but as far as we are aware, contracts for services do not include defined requirements for collaboration and coordination at a local level. Some agreements, such as the overarching Funding Deed with the Department of Family and Community Services New South Wales, include a standard provision requiring input into Family and Community Services planning processes when requested (clause 3.4 9b).

The Federal Government funded Communities for Children (C4C) program includes funding for 'Facilitating Partners'. Facilitating Partners are non-government organisations (NGOs) which are funded to develop and implement a strategic and sustainable whole-of-community approach to early childhood development in consultation with local stakeholders. Facilitating Partners establish C4C committees with broad representation from community stakeholders. Facilitating Partners oversee the development of community strategic plans and annual service delivery plans with the C4C committees and manage the overall funding allocations for the communities. Funding is then allocated to Community Partners who deliver the activities identified in the community strategic plans and service delivery plans.

The Benevolent Society is the Facilitating Partner for C4C programs in three locations across New South Wales (Rosemeadow/Ambarvale, Kempsey and Wyong).

- 2. What is the means by which we can assess the quality of services? Is it a departmental list? Is it an industry list? Who is providing this quality accreditation you are seeking?**

The Benevolent Society supports minimum quality standards to ensure that there is some guarantee of quality when funding or referring clients to other service providers in the community.

We do not believe that centralised, formal legislated standards would be appropriate, as they can in some cases, be static and do not reflect the need for ongoing continuous quality improvement. Similarly, requiring annual or regular independent accreditation against nominated industry standards may be prohibitively costly for small service providers.

We would suggest adopting a system whereby funding bodies require funding recipients/service providers to meet agreed standards (which may be set by the funding body, developed by an industry body or may be set by a recognised independent organisation- or be a combination of these approaches, appropriate to the level of funding). The funding recipient/service provider would be required to conduct self-assessments and report on compliance with the approved standards. The funding body would have the power to audit compliance with the relevant standards for all organisations which are required to comply.

For example, the Department of Social Services (DSS) has introduced The Family Support Program (FSP) Administrative Approval Requirements which are a set of 15 quality service standards covering the five key risk areas of governance, financial management, viability, performance management and issues management.¹ DSS notes that as a quality assurance framework, ongoing self-assessment against the Approval Requirements will provide DSS, staff of the organisations, and families accessing services, with

¹ <https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/families-and-children/programs-services/family-support-program/family-and-children-s-services/program-guidelines-and-related-information/fsp-administrative-approval-requirements>

assurance that quality services are being delivered and staff are supported.² Under the DSS system funded organisations may also be externally assessed against the Administrative Approval Requirements.

The Benevolent Society recognises the importance of service quality, but also acknowledges that quality is only one piece of a larger picture. Effective practice, though evidence based activities, is also important in ensuring trust between agencies which will support further collaboration and coordination of services.

3. Do you have examples where you have actually seen progress happening with whole communities that have embraced that holistic bottom up approach to dealing with a range of complex issues within them? Is there evidence that by approaching it holistically from the ground up, buying into the issues that are important and then pushing up from there and having that longer term perspective that does turn things around?

The Benevolent Society has been facilitating Communities for Children (C4C) in Rosemeadow/Ambarvale for nine years. At the time C4C program started the community was fractured after a number of troubling events within the community which generated significant (and somewhat negative) media interest in the area. At this time, problems within the community included:

- It had the highest rates of domestic violence within the Campbelltown local government area (at twice the national average);
- Significant Australian Early Development Index (AEDI, now known as the Australian Early Development Census) vulnerabilities against a number of domains
- Significant numbers of Risk of Significant Harm (ROSH) reports and high rates of removal of children

As the Facilitating Partner under the C4C program, The Benevolent Society worked with the community, using a community development capacity building model, to identify issues that mattered to the community. The community led the development of strategic priorities and services were funded as a result of those priorities. Under this model, community members are part of the decision making process- they sit on the C4C Committee, they established the Kids Committee, and they sit on selection panels for staff and funded services. The community were also actively involved in the establishment of the Rosemeadow Ambarvale Community Interagency (RACI) and the sub-groups of that interagency (child and family, employment and learning, aboriginal people, youth, mental health, drug & alcohol and community safety). RACI developed a Community Action Plan (CAP) that is reviewed every 2 years, taking into account the changing needs and priorities of the community.

The following positive results have been recorded in the community following the commencement of the C4C program:

- AEDI data for two or more vulnerabilities decreased by 3% from 2008 to 2012
- More than 90 per cent of children enrolled in Rosemeadow Public School for Kindergarten attended a transition to school program
- More than 60 per cent of children enrolled in Thomas Acres Public School and Ambarvale Public School for Kindergarten attended a transition to school program³
- Decrease in incidences of crime as reported in NSW Police Statistical data; reduced incidents of domestic violence

² <https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/families-and-children/programs-services/family-support-program/family-and-children-s-services/program-guidelines-and-related-information/fsp-administrative-approval-requirements>

³ Transition to school programs introduce pre-literacy, pre-numeracy and key social skills children require to be able to participate effectively at school or be 'school-ready'. It introduces skills such as writing names, using scissors, recognising letters, holding books and turning pages. Our education system assumes that all children start kindergarten with these basic skills but many vulnerable children have not attended childcare or preschool to have developed these skills.

- 90 per cent of people that have attended a C4C activity or event have reported that they now know where to go to get support and information when they need it - this is reflected consistently in surveys conducted between 2009 and 2015
- Members of the community who have experience of mental health issues and/or drug and alcohol abuse established the MADD (mental health, drug and alcohol) Action Group in 2010 to take action on these issues. MADD members worked with The Benevolent Society to identify priorities, develop Expressions of Interest (Eoi), review EOI's, interview respondent service providers and select recipients of funding to deliver services in this area.
 - o This has resulted in a number of innovative projects being delivered such as: a healthy relationship program for teenagers in Thomas Reddell High School and Ambarvale High School; a Say No to Violence Community Campaign; and the establishment of Aboriginal Women's Healing and Art Group.
- The establishment of a Kids Committee which has undertaken projects such as: working with Council on the design of park; a campaign to put bins along main streets because they did not like the rubbish in their community; and a campaign for a skate park.

The C4C program in Rosemeadow/Ambarvale demonstrates that tangible change can occur when the communities are involved in identifying and taking ownership of problems and are given a voice in resolving the problems.

4. Is there any evidence that the C4C program works? In the evaluation does it show, for example, that more kids are getting immunised, that more people are going to preschool? In terms of the project at that macro community level, have you been able to show improvement? Can you provide evidence to the Committee?

An independent national evaluation of the C4C initiative was undertaken in 2009. It found that:

- C4C has had a significant impact on the number, type and capacity of services available in the communities in which it is based; and
- service coordination and collaboration has improved between services within the C4C communities.⁴

The C4C evaluation found that overall there were positive impacts from the C4C program, including:

- fewer people were living in a jobless household;
- parents reported less hostile or harsh parenting practices; and
- parents felt more effective in their roles as parents⁵.

The response to question 3 above includes some further details about the positive effects of the C4C program in Rosemeadow/Ambarvale.

The C4C evaluation found that service coordination increased in C4C communities. The evaluation data found that between July 2006 and December 2007, 89 per cent of C4C activities were conducted in partnerships consisting of two or more organisations or groups⁶. It also found significant increases in collaboration between staff from different agencies in C4C communities: 34 per cent of agencies worked closely together in 2006, this rose to 66 per cent by 2008⁷. The evaluation found that:

'the number and strength of networks increased, as did trust and respect between service providers, which helped to break down previous silos. This coordination and collaboration helped service

⁴ Muir K et al. (2010). *The national evaluation of the Communities for Children initiative*. Family matters 2010 No.84.

⁵ Muir K et al. (2010).

⁶ Muir K et al. (2010).

⁷ Muir K et al. (2010).

providers to solve problems, increase their skills and capacity, identify the best providers for different services and minimise duplication'.⁸

The C4C evaluation found that aspects of the C4C model - specifically the Facilitating Partner and funding - were particularly important in contributing to positive impacts on service provision and children and their families.⁹

The Benevolent Society is also participating in research lead by Griffith University which is looking to develop structures and processes that can be used to achieve 'Collective Impact'.

Collective Impact is a coordinated approach that brings organisations together from across government, community and the business sector to solve difficult social issues and achieve important social change. The underlying premise of Collective Impact is that no single organisation can create large-scale, lasting social change alone. Sustainable change which addresses complex issues requires people from different sectors, different functions, different cultures and diverse geographies to come together to be part of the solution. C4C is an example of a collective impact approach.

⁸ Muir K et al. (2010).

⁹ Muir K et al. (2010).