

INQUIRY INTO SERVICE COORDINATION IN COMMUNITIES WITH HIGH SOCIAL NEEDS

Organisation: Blacktown City Council

Date received: 13/08/2015

10 August 2015

The Director
Standing Committee on Social Issues, Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000
Attention: The Hon. Bronnie Taylor MLC, Committee Chair

Dear Ms Taylor,

Inquiry into service coordination in communities with high social needs

Thank you for your invitation to lodge a submission in response to the above inquiry.

Blacktown City is home to 332,424 people making it the largest city by population in New South Wales and also one of the largest in Australia. We are a diverse city with some of the most advantaged and disadvantaged communities in Australia. The city is experiencing rapid growth not only from urban regeneration but from the North West Growth Centre which further highlights the inequities between new communities and communities with high social needs.

Blacktown City does regular community engagement to monitor our community's needs. Through these activities we have gathered information about the issues and barriers to the coordination of services for such a large and increasingly urban population.

Please find attached our comments in response to the Inquiry's terms of reference.

If you would like to discuss this matter further, please contact Carol Ashworth, Social Planning Coordinator

Yours faithfully,

NSW Legislative Council's Standing Committee on Social Issues

Inquiry into service coordination in communities with high social needs

Response prepared by Blacktown City Council

August 2015

Background

Blacktown City is a vibrant and dynamic City comprising 48 residential suburbs and is home to 332,424 people. It is the largest city by population in New South Wales (NSW) and also one of the largest in Australia. Around 1 in every 71 Australian residents resides in Blacktown City.

The city is rapidly growing and this growth is set to continue over the next 25 years with most of the North West Growth Centre located in city boundaries. The population is currently increasing by approximately 7,000 new residents a year. This recent rapid change and growth within and around the City has impacted on the population's socio-economic profile and levels of advantage and disadvantage.

There is considerable cultural diversity within the population. Residents of Blacktown speak around 170 languages in addition to English and were born in 176 countries in addition to Australia. In addition Blacktown City has the largest Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population in NSW, many of whom form communities with high social needs.

Blacktown City has the following socio-economic characteristics that reflect communities of high social need:

- There are approximately 8,677 households (9% of total households) living in social housing, predominantly within our Mount Druitt precinct (ABS Census 2011)
- 58.1% did not have a post school qualification compared to 48.1% for Greater Sydney (ABS Census 2011)
- Unemployment is 7.1% for Blacktown City, higher than in Greater Sydney (5.7%). In addition over 11 suburbs have over 10% unemployed and the suburbs of Bidwill, Lethbridge Park and Tregear over 22% unemployed (ABS Census 2011)
- It is estimated 40,000 people and 12,319 children are living in poverty (NATSEM)

Blacktown City works closely with government and non-government agencies in responding to the needs of our city and is well placed to provide the following information in relation to service coordination in communities with high social needs.

Submission

Our submission is referenced against the three main areas of inquiry being:

- a. *The extent to which government and non-government service providers are identifying the needs of clients and providing a coordinated response which ensures access to services both within and outside their particular area of responsibility*
 - b. *Barriers to the effective coordination of services, including lack of client awareness of services and any legislative provisions such as privacy law*
 - c. *Consideration of initiatives such as the Dubbo Minister's Action Group and best practice models for the coordination of services.*
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- a. **The extent to which government and non-government service providers are identifying the needs of clients and providing a coordinated response which ensures access to services both within and outside their particular area of responsibility.**
 - i. ***The extent to which government and non-government service providers are identifying the needs of clients.***

Blacktown City identifies local needs and priorities of residents through the development of a social plan every four years. The social plan informs the development of our Community Strategic Plan, a requirement under the Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework, in line with Local Government requirements. Whilst councils are no longer required to produce a separate social plan Blacktown City is committed to this process as a key way to identify the needs of residents. Council allocates social planning resources for this purpose.

We use a number of strategies to identify community needs including community surveys, community engagement activities, focus groups and service provider consultations. We also gather and monitor city-wide demographic and socio-economic data. Having access to accurate and timely data on the high need groups within the city is essential to monitor changes in demographic and socio-economic profile.

The Blacktown City social plans have been used by government and non-government agencies who work with high need communities across the City to inform their service and program planning.

It is our experience that state and federal government agencies rarely produce local level needs analysis and this activity is mostly beyond the capacity for non-government services.

Non-government services are mostly only able to measure the need of their current client group for whom they are funded. This often falls short of those who are not engaged with that particular service.

The Blacktown City Social Plan is widely used across the human services sector as a reference for identifying need.

We are currently finalising Blacktown City Social Plan 2016. For more information on Blacktown City Social Plan 2012 please use the following link [http://www.blacktown.nsw.gov.au/Discover/Blacktown/Statistics/Blacktown City Social Plan 2012](http://www.blacktown.nsw.gov.au/Discover/Blacktown/Statistics/Blacktown%20City%20Social%20Plan%202012).

In the rapidly changing environment of the city we see the ongoing identification of need within high need groups as essential for improving overall community wellness. It is essential to plan access to services for all residents and especially individuals with high social needs. Social and community planning ensures a focus on addressing the needs of local communities in an equitable way. It is our view that local government is best placed to take a coordinating role in identifying the needs of its local communities but that many local governments are limited by the resources available to them.

ii. The extent to which government and non-government service providers are providing a coordinated response which ensures access to services both within and outside their particular area of responsibility.

There are very few agencies, either government or non-government, that take on a coordination role outside their particular area of responsibility.

In Blacktown City there have been some good examples where this has, and is, taking place and some examples are described below under Blacktown City - Best Practice Examples.

It is our view that there is no consistent mandate for any 'one' agency to undertake service coordination on a city-wide scale. Where this mandate has periodically existed, it has usually been focussed on a specific geographical area, specific target groups or issue. These initiatives work very well but are dependent on ongoing funding which impacts on their sustainability. Often the period of funding is not sufficient for long term impacts to be achieved.

The community development unit at Blacktown City role is often to bridge the gap. Our core role is:

- Providing direction through our social planning priority setting processes
- A limited coordinating / facilitating holistic approaches to local issues, for example homeless persons hubs

- Building the capacity of the Blacktown human services sector to respond to issues and to deliver effective human services
- Assisting Federal and State agencies to engage local communities in their planning processes and service delivery
- Overseeing human services and facility planning for new release areas on behalf of Council
- Facilitating and / or participating in urban renewal processes and programs
- Delivering community development programs, events and services that promote community participation, community harmony and pride
- Supporting community management of Council's neighbourhood centres and community hubs
- Championing community engagement processes and practices across Council
- Coordinating and supporting volunteering and volunteer programs across Council
- Operating the Mount Druitt Hub and Emerton Youth and Recreation Centre
- Providing information to residents through provision of service directories and through community development staff initiatives
- Support to key Interagencies including Home and Community Care Forum, Blacktown Combined Interagency, Mount Druitt and Blacktown Youth Services Network
- Delivery of social infrastructure: Ropes Crossing, Mount Druitt, Bungarribee, The Ponds and Glenwood Community Hubs.

b. Barriers to the effective coordination of services, including lack of client awareness of services and any legislative provisions such as privacy law.

Blacktown City Social Plan 2012 summarised the following issues in relation to service development and service coordination. They included:

- Funding of human services including the short term nature of funding and demand outweighing availability of services
- Cost shifting placing increased demands on local government as a result of changing policy and reduction of funding to local organisations, agencies and groups from Federal and State Governments
- Need for shared planning for the strategic development and delivery of services to meet community needs. The service sector is perceived as being fragmented with no clear direction
- Size of non-government organisations and current funding environment limits their potential to be sustainable and strategic
- The need for community facilities and opportunities for Community Resource Hubs, particularly in the Blacktown CBD, and / or coordination of those Council owned community facilities that are available
- S94 levy capping - no new community facilities (or venues) for service delivery in growth centre precincts.

During 2015 over 2000 residents of Blacktown City and 156 local human services workers took part in community engagement activities to inform the development of the Social Plan 2016. The following findings provide an overview of some of the issues and barriers to effective local service coordination.

- Service coordination in communities with high social needs within Blacktown City is largely absent
- The human services sector is perceived as being fragmented with no clear direction and there is an identified need for shared planning for the strategic development and delivery of services to meet community needs
- There is no consistent mandate for any 'one' agency to undertake service coordination on a city-wide scale. Where this mandate has periodically existed, it has usually been focussed on a specific geographical area, specific target groups or issue. These initiatives work very well but are dependent on ongoing funding which impacts on their sustainability. Often the period of funding is not sufficient for long term impacts to be achieved. (see examples below under Blacktown City - Best Practice Examples)
- The size of many non-government organisations, limitations of funding and the current funding environment limits the potential for services to be sustainable and strategic
- Uncertainty of funding has meant that many local services are not able to plan ahead strategically and are therefore unlikely to prioritise building relationships and networks which is essential to effective service coordination
- Funding is often one-off, reactive and politically driven and in some cases is allocated with no long term goals attached
- Short term funding (1 – 3 years) is a major barrier to building relationships within communities especially those experiencing high social needs. Respondents argued that successful relationships take time to develop and funding agreements often do not recognise the length of time needed to establish links and trust with the community
- Community workers identified that as a result of competitive tendering for funding agencies are more likely to operate in competition rather than in partnership or in a coordinated way
- Different funding sources reinforce silos across the human services and other sectors
- Rapid changes across the sector have impacted on service delivery. Workers expressed concern at the increasing amount of time needed to keep up with frequent sector changes
- Increasing client case-loads has reduced the time workers have available for networking and collaboration with other workers and services providers
- Reduced staffing levels and turn over across the sector are impacting on the sector's capacity to deliver services in high need areas. Services across the sector are experiencing frequent staff turn-over due to funding changes and an aging workforce. Services with uncertain funding are increasingly moving to a casual

workforce. In this context, clients are faced with constantly having to adapt to services changes and getting to know and trust new workers who may have limited knowledge about the local area and referral networks

- The use of technology in the sector has increased substantially across the sector and has created new opportunities for networking, information sharing and service coordination. At the same time however, workers are experiencing greater demands on their time for documentation and administration as services move to 'paperless' systems. Workers note that technology support is not keeping up with these demands so deskwork hours are increasing
- Information on service availability was found to be a barrier for many residents particularly for residents from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, youth and older people. The move to 'myGov', 'serviceNSW' and similar technology based information provision does not appear to be reaching local communities with high social needs and residents raised this as an issue
- Access to interpreters for people who face language and cultural barriers in using services remains an ongoing issue in across Blacktown City
- Services for LGBTIS communities in western Sydney are non-existent and can only be accessed by travelling out of area to the Sydney CBD.

c. Consideration of initiatives such as Dubbo Minister's Action Group and best practice models for the coordination of services

There are a number of initiatives operating across Blacktown City aiming to identify and improve service coordination in order to address service gaps for individuals and groups with high social needs. These examples have similarities to the Dubbo Minister's Action Group in that they see a lead agency take on a role of bringing together key partners around either an issue or a particular community group.

Blacktown City - Best Practice Examples

FOCUS Lalor Park

FOCUS (Facilitating Outcomes for Community Unity and Strength) Lalor Park is a partnership initiative focusing on the suburb of Lalor Park in the Blacktown City local government Area. It brings together residents, stakeholders, business, government and community organisations to improve services, facilities and opportunities for all people living in the Lalor Park community, and to support and collaborate on local initiatives.

FOCUS Lalor Park promotes the development of partnerships and the empowerment of people living in the Lalor Park to support community events, community engagements and community programs that address identified community needs and

service gaps. FOCUS Lalor Park is also responsible for conducting local community consultations to inform members on identified issues and to attract other service providers where the need for particular services and/or partnership programs is identified.

In 2014, FOCUS members include representatives from Ability Options, Anglicare, Blacktown City Council, Blacktown Community Health Centre, Blacktown East Presbyterian Church, BREED Partnership Brokers, Care Connect, Common Groundz Community Café, Community Resource Network, Families NSW, Housing NSW Local Client Service Team, Lalor Park Public School, Lalor Park Community Garden, Lions Club Kings Langley, NSW Police, Blacktown LAC, Red Cross, Relationships Australia, Richmond PRA, TAFE Western Sydney Institute, Nirimba College, Threads of Hope, WentWest, Western Sydney Partners in Recovery, WS Family Referral Service, University of the Third Age (U3A)

The Hive – Mount Druitt

The Hive – Mount Druitt is a collective impact project with the aim that every child in Mt Druitt should have the opportunity to reach their full potential in life – to be healthy, happy, learning, safe, equal and growing up in a positive environment.

The Hive Approach is designed to support agencies and community members to:

- Form a common agenda
- Draw on our collective strengths
- Develop and test new ways of working
- Achieve long term change at individual, family, community and system levels.

Commencing in January 2015 the Hive has quickly gained support from community and agencies and its achievements to date include:

- Agreement on an overarching goal
- A collaboration structure
- An interim Leadership Group that will guide decision-making and help find the strongest group of leaders from the community and other organisations
- Networked Action Teams on:
 - o Holistic school readiness
 - o Child-friendly community
- Enabling Groups formed to undertake:
 - o Community connections Data research and evaluation
- A roadmap (action plan) to guide the journey ahead

Building Stronger Communities Community Regeneration Plan - C2770 including Lethbridge Park community kitchen.

The Community 2770 was a community management board that covers suburbs in the Mt Druitt area identified by the 2770 postcode. The Community 2770 comprised residents, government agencies, community organisations and local businesses.

The suburbs covered by the Community 2770 were: Bidwell, Blackett, Dharruk, Emerton, Hebersham, Lethbridge Park, Shalvey, Tregear, Whalan, Willmot and Mt Druitt.

The Community 2770 was the result of a partnership agreement between Housing NSW (Greater Western Sydney division), NSW Department of Community Services (communities division), Community Services (metro west regional), Sydney West Area Health (Centre for Population and Health), NSW Department of Aging Disability and Homecare, NSW Premier and Cabinet (strategic projects division) and Blacktown City Council.

The project disbanded when funding ceased.

Community Resource Network (CRN)

Community Resource Network (CRN) is a sub-regional peak body for the community sector in Blacktown City, The Hills and surrounding local government areas that exists to build the capacity of local organisations. CRN works to alleviate the impact of social, economic and locational disadvantage by empowering local communities to have their say, building capacity of communities, providing leadership and direction to services and groups, promoting and supporting evidence based and strengths practice and building collaborations and partnerships between groups and services to meet changing needs.

Western Sydney Community Forum (WSCF)

Western Sydney Community Forum (WSCF) is the regional peak organisation for the Community Sector in Greater Western Sydney. The forum works to build strong, organised communities by bridging the divide between communities and policymakers at the local, regional, state and national levels. Western Sydney Community Forum has over 200 member organisations, comprising of both funded and unfunded community based services in Greater Western Sydney. It is funded to deliver projects which resource and develop the Community Sector in Greater Western Sydney.

Conclusion

Service coordination and service development means greater support for community services within Blacktown City. It means bringing services together to enhance communication, networking and integration to meet community need and community development strategies. In a frequently uncertain funding environment it is clear that an increased focus on community services within the city is required to begin to address issues of gaps and unmet need in current levels of service provision and information fragmentation.

This includes:

- Support for effective collaborative inter-agencies
- Cohesion
- Information sharing
- Fostering engagement between services
- Economic development in community development strategies, strategic planning, and business planning.

As a local government service provider, we have a regional perspective on gaps in service coordination and provision and how this impacts on overall well-being across the city and at the local community level. In recent years, cost shifting and funding cuts are placing increased demands on local government to address the needs of residents. It is our view that local governments are well placed and have a strong interest in this work but could be better resourced.
