

**INQUIRY INTO ISSUES RELATING TO  
REDFERN/WATERLOO**

**Organisation:** The Benevolent Society  
**Name:** Mr Richard Spencer  
**Telephone:** 02 9339 8000  
**Date Received:** 19/04/2004

---

**Theme:**

**Summary**



the benevolent society  
founded 1813

initiating change

15 April 2004

The Hon Jan Burnswoods MLC  
Chair  
NSW Legislative Council Standing Committee on Social Issues  
Parliament House  
Macquarie Street  
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Ms Burnswoods

Please find enclosed a submission from The Benevolent Society to the NSW Legislative Council Standing Committee on Social Issues Inquiry into Issues Relating to Redfern/Waterloo.

The Benevolent Society has been working with this community since 1991 and recognises the enormous strengths and challenges this area poses for residents, governments and service providers.

The Society has a deep commitment to this area of high need and would welcome the opportunity to discuss at greater length aspects of our submission. Please contact Maree Walk, Director of our Centre for Children on (02) 9339 8073 or myself on (02) 9339 8080 if we can be of assistance in any way.

Yours sincerely

Richard Spencer  
Chief Executive Officer

**Registered Office**

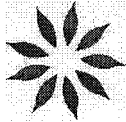
Level 1, 188 Oxford Street  
Paddington NSW 2021

PO Box 171  
Paddington NSW 2021

t 02 9339 8000  
f 02 9360 2319

[www.bensoc.asn.au](http://www.bensoc.asn.au)

ABN 95 084 695 045



the benevolent society

initiating change

**Submission to the NSW Legislative Council Standing  
Committee on Social Issues Inquiry into Issues Relating to  
Redfern/Waterloo**

**April 2004**

The Benevolent Society welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Inquiry into Issues Relating to Redfern/Waterloo. The focus of this submission will be on the 'non-government services and service provision in the Redfern/Waterloo areas' (Inquiry Terms of Reference 1(c)).

**Background on The Benevolent Society**

The Benevolent Society is Australia's first non profit organisation. Since 1813 we have worked to meet key social challenges head-on. Our mission is to anticipate changing social needs and drive innovative, effective responses in high need communities. We are a 'whole of life' charity with four key program areas - children and families, women's health, ageing, and social leadership.

Our Centre for Children has been working in the Redfern/Waterloo communities for a number of years delivering a range of services, including both preventative and child protection services. Our child protection service, Scarba, has been located in Redfern since 1996. The service has existed since 1991 serving the same client group but was previously located in Bondi. This submission reflects our experience working in both the Redfern/Waterloo community and other high need communities in New South Wales such as Campbelltown, the Central Coast and the public housing estates of the Randwick Local Government Area. A more detailed explanation of the range of child and family services we deliver is at Attachment A.

**Relevant recent research**

The recently released report by Professor Tony Vinson entitled *Community adversity and resilience* confirms the complex and multi-layered social issues confronting, in particular, the Waterloo community. This is evidenced by the fact that the community appears at least seven times in the 'top 30' positions on fourteen social indicators (such as the number of unemployed as a proportion of labour force, proportion of households with an annual income of less than \$30,000, mortality rates etc). On the general disadvantage index used by Professor Vinson, Waterloo ranks more poorly than Redfern, reflecting, perhaps in part, the recent gentrification of some parts of Redfern, which brings with it another set of challenges for the community. Whilst the two communities have much in common, this data, combined with local knowledge, is an indication of the subtle differences between the communities which need to be taken into account when developing initiatives.

The Vinson report also suggests that community 'cohesion' buffers or contains the deleterious influence of factors (such as limited education, low income and unemployment) that have been shown to be recurrent features of highly disadvantaged areas such as Redfern/Waterloo. The report notes that there is evidence that the compensatory inner strengths of a 'cohesive' community may be a formidable ally to community renewal initiatives.<sup>1</sup>

Other research released in 2003 found that non profit organisations facilitate 'inclusiveness' largely because they play an important role in providing the activities and resources which enable individuals to more readily participate in their communities.<sup>2</sup> This same research confirmed that individuals who report feeling included in the community also report a high quality of life. The Benevolent Society would see both these matters as being of relevance to this Inquiry.

The consultations undertaken in 2002 by consultant Nola Tudball for the Redfern Waterloo Family Support Service Project also offer some relevant insights. Tudball identified the following barriers to effective family service delivery in these communities:

- Families will not seek assistance.
- Families do not understand their strengths, areas for improvement.
- Families often focussed on their survival – there is a lack of sense of community.
- Workers often lack the support and skill to deal with very difficult families.
- Many families will always need a level of support – services often funded for a short time only or for short term intervention.
- The community is fractured because families are fractured.
- People find it difficult to trust anyone and it is difficult for service providers to develop trust with children and parents.

### **Our philosophical approach**

The philosophical approach which underpins the work of non-profit (and other) organisations working in communities such as Redfern/Waterloo is critical to the impact they will have. Whilst non-profits are well placed to help build trust, community cohesion and resilience, this is not automatically guaranteed and it is possible for non-profit organisations to work in ways that may build competition and distrust within the community, particularly if government funding frameworks actually work to promote competition and distrust.

The Benevolent Society's approach and design of child and family services is strongly shaped by both current research and thinking and our own experience initiating and implementing integrated child, family and

---

<sup>1</sup> Vinson T, 'Community adversity and resilience: The distribution of social disadvantage in Victoria and New South Wales and the mediating role of social cohesion', Jesuit Social Services, 2004

<sup>2</sup> Healy K Dr & Hampshire A, 'Creating better communities', December 2003, Published by The Benevolent Society, [http://www.bensoc.org.au/research/socialcapital\\_dec2003.html](http://www.bensoc.org.au/research/socialcapital_dec2003.html)

community initiatives in high need communities. We offer the following information, reflections and learnings based on our experience, as a contribution to the Committee's Inquiry.

Our work with children and families is underpinned by a philosophical approach that:

- Has a strengths or assets approach to individuals, families and communities.
- Strengthens relationships between individuals, families and communities.
- Has a focus on the systemic issues, as well as interpersonal ones.
- Is holistic, comprehensive and long-term.
- Supports long-term intervention to prevent abuse and neglect of children.
- Is committed to nurturing children and families.<sup>3</sup>

### **Key influences in our work**

The key influences on our work can be grouped under four broad headings.

#### **1. The strengths perspective**

A basic premise of the strengths perspective is working with people's hopes, dreams and aspirations to effect change. When applied to working with communities this approach sees a community's assets as being integral to any strategies for change which might be implemented. The strengths based approach to working with either individuals or communities involves a philosophical shift from practices which focus on 'problems' or 'deficits' to one which focuses primarily on the identification of the assets or strengths that exist in the individual or community. This perspective promotes a solutions focussed approach, working with the individual or community to achieve their goals through empowerment. Building trust, sustaining relationships and working in partnerships are key factors in implementing this approach.<sup>4</sup>

In communities such as Waterloo and Redfern which have experienced prolonged disadvantage and many (often unsuccessful) efforts to bring about change, this approach is challenging both for residents and staff of non-profit organisations, given the sense of hopelessness and lack of energy which can be the reality of every-day life and work in the community. Despite the challenges however, The Benevolent Society is convinced that such an approach is an essential component for all initiatives within Waterloo and Redfern if change is to be owned by the community and be sustainable.

---

<sup>3</sup> Centre for Children, Strategic Review, Feedback Document, May, 2002 internal document

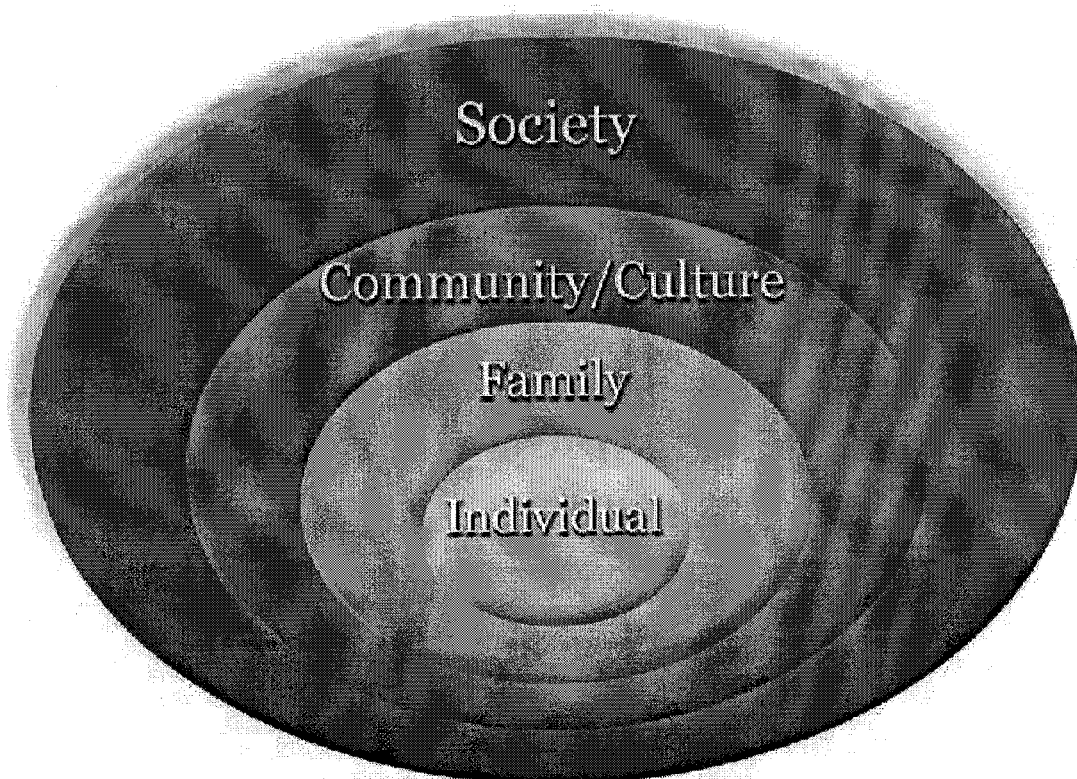
<sup>4</sup> Jeffrey K, 'Working with children and families: what the literature is telling us', The Benevolent Society, 2004

## 2. An ecological approach

Healthy social functioning of individuals is a reflection of the health of their environment (Beilharz, 2002)

Research by Garbarino (1995) and Vinson (1996) has shown that organisations such as The Benevolent Society need an approach that focuses on the individual, the family and their immediate community. The child abuse "hot spots" identified in Vinson's 1996 research convinced us that our practice needed to include a community building focus. More recently we have been influenced by the work of Isaac Prilleltensky, whose work in early intervention stresses the need for inter-connected multi layered approaches which include a focus on the child, parent and family, community and society. We now understand, and our practice reflects the fact, that where people live contributes significantly to individual and family health and wellbeing and our therapeutic and family support work now occurs within an understanding of the importance of 'place'. The Benevolent Society would argue that such an approach is relevant for a broad range of areas of service provision other than just child and family services. This includes services for young people, drug and alcohol and employment services, just to name a few.

*A systems model of Human Behaviour (Ref: W. Huitt: 2003)*



### **3. Building social capital on three levels**

The Benevolent Society understands that social capital 'facilitates community wellbeing by enhancing an individual's opportunity for social belonging'.<sup>5</sup> We know that social capital is a critical factor in the wellbeing of children, families and communities. In response, we have adopted Michael Woolcock's <sup>6</sup> model which identifies three key components for building social capital:

- Bonding – referring to social connections that build on similarity, informality and intimacy, for example close family relationships
- Bridging – to a wider network within the community (for example peers, neighbours, volunteers; links between individuals based on common interest rather than personal closeness.
- Linking – to institutions, government and business. Alliances between communities and individuals or groups with formal power, particularly over resources required for social or economic development (for example government, business, media, employment, non-profits etc).

Historically, organisations providing child and family services have focused on supporting and facilitating bonding between clients and families. We now know this approach, whilst important, is limited in promoting the long term health and wellbeing of children, families and communities. To be effective, any agenda for enhancing community wellbeing, particularly in high need communities, must work to build social capital on the three levels. As with the ecological approach, The Benevolent Society would argue that social capital creation should be a goal of a broad range of services as well as child and family services.

Further, current research by The Benevolent Society and The University of Sydney has identified the key (but often overlooked) role of building both intra and inter community links in order to build community resilience and wellbeing. Communities like Waterloo and Redfern, despite being located within a large metropolitan city, can become inwardly focused and 'an island', disconnected from other parts of the city. Whilst local networks are an important part of individual wellbeing and are positively associated with quality of life, they are insufficient for building long-term individual, family and community resilience. Efforts to create links between communities are vital for areas like Redfern and Waterloo as these links can be a source of ideas, opportunities, resources and support, as well as reducing feelings of isolation and alienation. This is confirmed by Professor Vinson's report which notes that for positive movement to occur, attention needs to be paid to both a neighbourhood's internal and external functioning.

### **4. Attachment theory**

Relationships are vital to all work with children and families, but particularly at risk children and families. As Shonkoff and Phillips note:

---

<sup>5</sup> *Social Capital in Practice*, Seventh Australian Institute of family Studies Conference, July 2000, Karen Healy, The University of Sydney Anne Hampshire, The Benevolent Society

<sup>6</sup> World Bank sociologist

*Children grow and thrive in the context of close and dependable relationships that provide love and nurturance, security, responsive interaction and encouragement for exploration. Without at least one such relationship, development is disrupted and the consequences can be severe and long-lasting.*<sup>7</sup>

Building positive attachment between children and their parents/carers and others is a significant component of a number of The Benevolent Society's child and family services.

### **Attributes of highly effective programs**

As well as the above key influences on our work, The Benevolent Society's Centre for Children agrees with and utilises the work of Elizabeth Schorr, who identified the following key elements of successful programs.

"Successful programs:

1. Are comprehensive, flexible, responsive, and persevering
2. See children in the context of their families
3. Deal with families as parts of neighbourhoods and communities
4. Have a long-term preventive orientation, a clear mission and continue to evolve over time
5. Are well managed by competent and committed individuals with clearly identifiable skills
6. Have staff who are trained and supported to provide high-quality, responsive services. This is staff who are prepared to enter into partnerships with parents and children, who are there long enough and are persevering enough to promote change. This also refers to volunteers and mentors.
7. Operate in settings that encourage practitioners to build strong relationships based on mutual trust and respect."<sup>8</sup>

This list of attributes may be of value when considering service delivery generally within the Redfern/Waterloo communities.

### **Our experience and insights from working in Redfern/Waterloo**

#### **1. The strengths of the Waterloo/Redfern communities**

The Waterloo and Redfern communities have significant strengths and assets which can be utilised to help bring about positive change. These include: a population in which all ages are well represented and which is culturally and linguistically diverse; excellent public transport; a diverse economic mix; a strong history of diverse local organisations serving the community; and significant and growing public and private resources within the community.

---

<sup>7</sup> Shonkoff J P & Phillips D A (eds) (2000) in *From neurons to neighbourhoods*, National Academic Press

<sup>8</sup> Schorr, L, *Common Purpose, Strengthening Families and Neighbourhoods to Rebuild America*, 1997, Anchor Books, New York, p18.



In addition, as noted above, Redfern in particular, is experiencing significant gentrification, in some part, because of the attraction of living close to the Central Business District. Whilst the influx of significant numbers of more affluent residents has the potential to create tensions with long-term and perhaps less affluent residents, it also potentially offers a significant economic benefit to the whole community. A key factor in whether this occurs will rely on whether the 'assets' within the community can be harnessed in a way that keeps the benefits (or at least some of them) within the community. There is now a strong body of work from researchers and practitioners, such as Dewar, McKnight and others, that assets based community development (ABCD) can have a profoundly positive impact on communities. Whilst the temptation may be to dwell on the 'deficits' within Waterloo and Redfern, there are a range of very significant community 'assets' which can be harnessed for the enhanced wellbeing of the community as a whole.

## 2. The Redfern and Waterloo Partnership Project

The Redfern and Waterloo communities have experienced significant government and non-government attention in recent years, particularly through the Waterloo/Redfern Partnership Project. The Benevolent Society supports the need for an integrated multi-partied approach for communities where there are complex and long-standing social and economic needs. The *Community adversity and resilience* report notes that:

*...where an accumulation of problems makes a serious impact upon the wellbeing of residents of a disadvantaged area, locality-specific measures may be needed to supplement general social policy... The stage may now have been reached where expertise and authority needs to be vested in a lead agency to promote and refine ongoing audits of community wellbeing.*<sup>9</sup>

The Benevolent Society is conscious of the complexity of effectively establishing an initiative such as the Redfern Waterloo Partnership Project and the time required to do so. Our experience of this Project however, is that whilst some movement has been made in developing relationships to work on critical community issues such as Family Support and Youth, there is not yet much evidence on the ground of such partnerships or change. A key missing ingredient to date appears to be a vision of where the community wants to be which is relevant to all stakeholders and which they are all committed to achieving. Related to this is the absence of a coherent set of specific goals that address key issues and for which relevant agencies take both shared and specific responsibility for achieving. Thus whilst there is goodwill amongst agencies involved in, for example, the Redfern-Waterloo Family Taskforce, The Benevolent Society as a participant of this Taskforce has experienced it as more of an administrative entity, rather than a place where collective action is taken.

---

<sup>9</sup> Vinson T, 'Community adversity and resilience', page 15

The Benevolent Society is mindful that ensuring results and performance accountability in communities such as Waterloo and Redfern, where there are a range of complex and inter-connected issues and multiple agencies, is extraordinarily complex. However we would suggest that the Framework offered by Mark Friedman of the Fiscal Policy Studies Institute ([www.resultsaccountability.com](http://www.resultsaccountability.com) and [www.raguide.org](http://www.raguide.org)) may offer some valuable insights in how to address this. Friedman's work clearly distinguishes between population wide results and performance accountability for programs, agencies and service systems, whilst identifying how the two are related. This framework has been recently endorsed by the CEOs Group of the NSW Departments of Human Services.

### 3. The challenge of partnerships

The Benevolent Society holds the view that developing and sustaining partnerships between organisations that deliver services within a community is an essential but extremely challenging task. Our experience is that this is particularly challenging in communities such as Redfern/Waterloo where there is a long history of complex needs, a significant indigenous population and a mix of small and large service provider organisations. Successful partnerships are very resource intensive, in both the development and sustaining phases, and it is most often the part of service delivery which is not funded by government, even when there is a stated preference by government for a partnership approach. In some cases, government processes such as competitive tendering, can in fact undermine a collaborative approach to service delivery. This is compounded when there is little clarity about governments' strategic goals for the community. Expectations that non-profit organisations will both compete and collaborate simultaneously whilst operating in an environment where there are multiple and often disconnected policy initiatives to address systemic issues is highly fraught.

For smaller organisations in particular, where funding may not be recurrent or where the weight of governance issues is enormous, the demands of partnerships, however desirable the possible outcomes, may be too great to bear. This is only exacerbated if there is a lack of clarity about an overall government agenda for the community.

The issue for organisations working in these communities, is not (as is sometimes the case in high need communities), to increase their networking – in some senses there is almost a sense of organisations being 'over-networked' in Redfern/Waterloo. Rather, the challenge appears to be how to use this networking for collective action and how to help staff and residents to maintain a sense of energy and hope in the face of the daily challenges with which they are faced.

The Benevolent Society believes that the children's organisation Barnados, has done a good job in working in a respectful way to build trusting relationships with both large and small organisations in the community to implement its new Intensive Family Support Service.

The Benevolent Society would also suggest that the Childcare Network which we have established is an example of a low-cost but effective form of partnership which can have a positive impact on working relationships between staff from different organisations which in turn has a positive impact on the children and families with whom they work. The Network provides an opportunity for Directors of Childcare Centres in the area to come together for mutual learning and development and to share and reflect on their work with children and families,

The Benevolent Society would also draw the Inquiry's attention to other models which are operating in other regions and which may have useful applicability to Redfern/Waterloo. These include the Networks of Practice on the Central Coast where the funder is playing a role in assisting the service capacity of small local organisations. Assisting and promoting co-location of services can also contribute to an improvement in service capacity and a reduction in service barriers.

#### 4. The challenge of service delivery in Redfern/Waterloo

The governance and management challenges facing all organisations have significantly increased in recent years. A range of factors are contributing to this including increased accountability and reporting requirements, legislative changes at both State and Federal levels, the administrative burden generated by multiple funding agreements, occupational health and safety issues, insurance concerns, information technology requirements and attracting and maintaining key staff. Some would also argue that government is expecting 'more for less' from service delivery organisations, particularly when funding agreements have expectations that services will be delivered in partnership with other organisations. It is very often the partnership building phase and the maintenance of these partnerships which are not funded by government. This can place significant stress on organisations.

The Benevolent Society would argue that the issues identified above impact to varying degrees on all organisations, regardless of size. They are the type of issues which can be debilitating for both staff and Boards/Management Committees, given their complexity and the time and effort required to address them. They can often feel disconnected from the 'real' business of an organisation – that is, meeting the needs of clients and/or the community. It could also be argued that these issues impact even more acutely on smaller organisations that have few infrastructure resources to dedicate to these functions. This is particularly the case where organisations only receive short term and/or non-recurrent funding. Whilst being mindful of the need for organisations to be accountable for public funding, The Benevolent Society would argue that when such accountability negatively impacts on an organisation's capacity to deliver the service for which the funding is received, steps need to be taken. We are aware for example of some organisations in the Redfern/Waterloo area that have quarterly reporting requirements and this can be very onerous and serve little purpose.

Another emerging issue in delivering services in the Redfern/Waterloo area is the availability (or lack) of affordable premises which are accessible to clients. As the area continues to grow in attractiveness to developers and others, this problem is likely to be exacerbated. The Benevolent Society would highlight the importance of retaining some public property (eg Redfern Public School) for the use of the community as these sites can be important places of connection, activities and social capital creation. The possibility of using some of the funds secured from developers for this purpose and the provision of community services generally could be explored.

## **Attachment A**

### **The Benevolent Society's suite of child and family services**

The Benevolent Society offers an integrated suite of child and family services across the risk continuum:

- PlayPower – a hands-on, low-cost guide to effective parenting and healthy child development
- Targeted prevention programs
  - i. Volunteer home visiting – volunteers provide families with an extra pair of hands or some extra support in the home on a weekly or fortnightly basis.
  - ii. Ante-natal groups – we work with women expecting a baby who are at risk of perinatal or post natal depression.
  - iii. Parents Connect – an informal support group which allows parents with young children to meet other parents.
  - iv. Supported Playgroups – strengthens the relationships between children and parents and connects families to social and emotional support networks in their community.
- Early Childhood Centres: early childhood learning for children and parents. Our early intervention in a childcare setting supports children to form positive attachments with peers and significant adults, paving the way for successful transitions to school settings. We also work with families to help them develop links and supports with each other and community services they may need.
- Intensive early intervention and child protection – home-based and long term support for high need families.