

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

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**Theme:**

**Summary**

## **Committee Social Issues - Inquiry into Redfern and Waterloo**

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**To:** <socialissues@parliament.nsw.gov.au>  
**Date:** 30/04/2004 1:40 PM  
**Subject:** Inquiry into Redfern and Waterloo

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Dear Sir/Madam,

Please find attached the submission of Redfern and Waterloo-based members of the South Sydney Interagency to your Inquiry into Issues relating to Redfern and Waterloo. The submission is derived from a 'brainstorming' session that involved the representatives of member organisations from Redfern and Waterloo, as well as some community members. Some of the participating organisations and individuals will also be making their own submissions, as will our own organisation.

Yours,

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# **South Sydney Interagency**

## **Submission to the**

NSW Legislative Council's Standing Committee on Social Issues'

### **Inquiry into Issues related to Redfern and Waterloo**

This submission derives from dot points generated from a 'brainstorming' session held by Redfern and Waterloo based members of the South Sydney Interagency. The dot points raised at that session have been faithfully interpreted by Charlie Richardson of the Inner Sydney Regional Council for Social Development (ISRCSD) to form this submission. The ISRCSD has also made its own, separate submission.

The brainstorming session involved members of the South Sydney Interagency who represented small, community-based groups and larger charities as well as individual members of the local community. The session had limited time, and therefore concentrated on its common areas of expertise and interest from among the Inquiry's Terms of Reference. These were:

- *(c) non-government services and service provision in the Redfern/Waterloo areas,*

and

- *(d) strategies under the current New South Wales Government "Redfern/Waterloo Partnership Project", and the effectiveness in meeting the needs of local indigenous and other members of the community.*

The session also went on to make some more general points about social conditions and other matters affecting the area.

### **Non-government services and service provision in the Redfern/Waterloo areas**

1. There seems to be a perception in government that the major problem facing clients and potential clients is that they face a lack of information about services, or that there is no system whereby clients are referred from one service to another. It does not seem to occur to government that its own reform processes are debilitating the services, or that its funding of services is inadequate for the growth of a vigorous community sector to meet expanding local needs. In many cases, local organisations do not have sufficient paid staff time to do any more than service current clients and keep up with government's ever changing accountability requirements.
2. Though there may be a lack of formal arrangements between services, there are strong informal links between them that make referrals easy, casual and fast. It is simply a matter of picking up the phone and checking with the service provider to

see if there is the capacity to meet the needs of the potential client in the service required. There is no need for formal 'Memoranda of Understanding' between services, and nor is there a need for web-based referral systems. The informal systems work well, provided that there is capacity in the organisation receiving the referral to provide a service.

3. Government sometimes queries the fact that there exist a number of services with similar objectives and client groups in the area, and has sometimes hinted that it would like to see amalgamation for the sake of administrative simplicity. This ignores the fact that though in some ways there is a strong sense of community in the area, it is also highly 'tribal' – there are groupings of young people, for instance, who do not get on with other groups of young people. It would be a mistake to think that they could attend the same Centre and that the Centre would function well. They need to be able to attend a Centre at which they identify with other participants attending it. To a lesser extent, this also applies to the older people of the area. The diversity of organisations provides choice to potential consumers.
4. There are other great benefits to the existence of a number of community-based services in the area. These are that there are strong links between those organisations and local people. Those people have a sense of involvement with, and ownership of those organisations. Many of them are on Management Committees, meaning that initiatives arising in the population are taken up by the organisations, and that the organisations have a clear view of what is happening in the community.
5. It is very important that community services should be delivered by organisations that represent the particular community being served, e.g. Aboriginal organisations should deliver services to Aboriginal people, Women's services should be delivered by female-led organisations.
6. The small organisations operating in the area are hardworking and efficient – they are very lean organisations. The level of commitment of staff, volunteers and management is high because the organisations are good at harnessing social capital.
7. It has to be recognised that Redfern and Waterloo are particularly difficult areas in which to operate. The huge population of public tenants is quite different to what it was years ago. At one time, public tenants were simply people with low incomes, not necessarily people wracked with social problems. However, over the past two decades, the NSW Department of Housing has necessarily targetted its allocation of dwellings more tightly to people with high needs. This means that there is a concentration of people who, as well as living in poverty, have high levels of physical, intellectual and psychiatric disability. There are also remnants of the original Department of Housing population who are now becoming very old and frail, as well as people recently released from prison. There are dysfunctional families and high levels of permanent truancy, and disaffected youth who often 'look dangerous'.

8. All of these factors have greatly increased the task of the community organisations in the area, while simultaneously reducing the more general population from which community organisations might expect to receive support.
9. Funding to community organisations has certainly has not kept pace with the increased demand that the above factors have placed upon the organisations. Exacerbating the funding problem are huge increases in insurance costs, for both public liability and workers compensation, and the fact that government departments keep changing administrative arrangements without funding the costs of compliance with them. Many of our organisations have more than one government department as a funding source, each with their own funding agreements and accountability requirements. Our coordinators are spending more and more time on keeping up to date with those changed arrangements and complying with them at the expense of face-to-face time with clients. The fragmented nature of the funding to the organisations from the various departments also means that because of the restrictions that each department makes upon use of the funds, the services that can be offered are sometimes not the 'best fit' for the area.
10. Under tendering systems introduced by the NSW Department of Aging, Disability and Home Care (DADHC), services are forced to tender to serve areas well beyond the areas to which they are linked. This takes away the very things that make services delivered by a 'community based' organisation special and valuable.
11. The organisations are also very concerned at the apparent reappearance of 'Unit Costing' on DADHC's agenda. While Unit Costing has a place for, for instance, manufacturers of nuts and bolts, it is difficult to usefully apply the concept to the delivery of human services. It is likely that under any application of Unit Costing, quality of service delivery will be sacrificed for quantity. It is also likely to distort the operation of some services.
12. Across many departments, government is moving to replace annually recurrent funding with fixed three-year contracts. In doing so, government is claiming this will lead to greater certainty and enhanced ability to plan by the services because, in its view, services will have secure funding for three years instead of one. This is belied by the fact that the current annual funding is *recurrent*, i.e. the expectation is that it will be renewed annually, and has been renewed for many years on end as long as no major problem has arisen. Organisations have had this stable (though often insufficient) funding for between ten and 25 years. Recurrent annual funding has much more of the hallmarks of a 'partnership' with government than does *competitive tendering* each three years.
13. There is great concern that toward the end of a three-year contract, staff will necessarily start to look at their options for continued employment, leading to instability in the organisations' workforce, and indeed their capacity to re-tender. There is also concern that clients will be faced with a loss of continuity of style of service through change in the auspice of services. A 'familiar face' delivering a service and representing an organisation is often very important to clients.

14. Repeated administrative reforms and the many necessary discussions that take place around them are taking the focus of community organisations away from local people and the community, and moving the focus to the machinations of government funding departments. Workers are spending more and more time in front of a computer screen, at the expense of client time.
15. These same reforms, unaccompanied by significantly increased funding, are also debilitating to community management. Management Committee members face a very different agenda at each meeting than was the case in the past. At one time, the business of a Committee meeting would have been largely about how to meet local needs. It was a creative process. Now, with little increase in funding to meet rising needs, the agendas are full of items from governments' reform agendas, largely to do with accountability and complex referral systems. Is it any wonder, especially when viewed in light of the changed local population, that it is becoming harder to attract and retain committee members? It becomes worse when we add to this the fact that committee members may now face personal financial liability under new workers' compensation laws. Serving on a committee has come to be perceived as both boring and dangerous.
16. Accountability for Aboriginal organisations seems to be set at a higher level than even for other community based organisations. Whereas reporting is usually on an annual or six-monthly basis, Aboriginal organisations are expected to report each three months. Those organisations are also asked to report on more topics.
17. So far, it is difficult to see the value of the reporting that the organisations have had to undertake. It is hard to see where departments have used the reports in their planning or for any other purpose.
18. Each year, Home and Community Care (HACC) funded organisations are asked to come together and engage in a planning day. Each year, they come up with a list of priority items for funding, for instance they may see a need for more Community Transport services to cope with increased demand for transport to hospital. Each year the results of the planning day are given to the funding body, DADHC, and then, in time, DADHC makes its decisions on what to fund. It is often difficult to see any relationship between the outcome of the planning day and the decision eventually made by DADHC. This gives rise to cynicism among the organisations about the value of participation in the planning exercise, and is one more nail in the coffin of the supposed 'partnership' between government and non-government organisations.
19. But there is a further problem with planning in the non-government sector. Services are so busy dealing with day-to-day events and the reform process, and so under-resourced, that their ability to undertake their own research (upon which to base planning and with which to inform government) is being lost.

### **Premier's Department's 'Redfern Waterloo Partnership Project'**

1. There exists some puzzlement as to what the RWPP has been doing for these past few years. While it was at first very visible when it came into the area, with many

promises of very extensive consultation, little feedback is received from it regarding information it has gathered and surveys it has conducted etc.

2. The RWPP said at the outset that it would be conducting a Review of local services as part of its work, but appears not to have done anything about it until it engaged the firm Morgan Disney and Associates a few months ago. Morgan Disney now has this complex task to complete with such a tight deadline that it is doubtful that it will be able to present a full and accurate summary of the services. Despite having now been in the area for nearly three years, the RWPP was unable to supply Morgan Disney with even a list of services in the area. Unfortunately, despite the fact that there have been a number of Reviews and Reports made about Redfern and Waterloo, including about the services operating here, the funding departments also seem unable to supply such a list.
3. Despite making noises about valuing the local organisations, when it has come to awarding any contracts it has engaged organisations from outside of the area. It has not seemed to embark on constructive engagement with local services at all.
4. There is concern that both the RWPP and Morgan Disney are taking comments from a random few people as being representative of sentiments in the area.

#### **General points about social conditions and other matters affecting the area.**

1. Problems with social conditions in Redfern and Waterloo have been evident for decades, but little is actually done in the area by government. It is noted that the NSW Government established the RWPP following rioting in Waterloo, and that the Legislative Council's Standing Committee on Social Issues established its Inquiry into Issues related to Redfern and Waterloo following riots in the wake of the death of 'TJ' Hickey. This gives the impression that government is not prepared to undertake any initiative in the area until people throw rocks. What lesson does this send to the area?
2. Permanent truancy (where the truancy is such that the child is not simply taking some days off, he/she is almost *never* attending school) is at an extremely high rate in the area. We see no evidence that this is being addressed.
3. While the NSW Government has championed the notion of 'Schools as Community Centres', it has closed Redfern Public School and other small schools in the area. This was despite assurances given during the lead up to the implementation of the "*Building Better Futures*" plan that no decision on its closure would be made prior to the then-new RWPP making a recommendation in the context of its information gathering about the area in general. The fact that it was closed prior to that happening has led to some cynicism in the area about the value of engaging in government processes.
4. While the Alexandria Park Community School is very highly regarded, there is arguably still a place for a small, local school's existence, both for educational

purposes and as a 'School as a Community Centre'. Alexandria Park Community School cannot fulfil that second role, because, despite its name, it is too big and has too wide a catchment area to work as a Community Centre. It would be good to see Redfern Public School re-open, even if it does so as a campus of Alexandria Park.

## Physical Development Issues

1. There is a perception in the area that many mooted changes, such as the RWPP's 'RED Strategy', are all about real estate sales and the money flowing to government and developers from them, rather than about a social objective such as seeking '*a better social mix*' as the Premier put it when launching the RWPP. This perception is not surprising when, looking at the information made available by the RWPP, it can indeed be seen that development opportunities on government owned land, including public housing estates, may be measured in the billions of dollars.
2. Under the RWPP's 'RED Strategy', it is plain that there *will* be large-scale development in the area that could increase the population by 50% or even more. This being the case, it would be good to harness some of the money flow as a levy on development. This could be put toward the provision of a good proportion of affordable housing and to maintain and expand local community services to cope with the needs of new people moving into the area.
3. The Rachel Foster Hospital in Redfern has lain dormant for years, with very little going on there. The site has potential to be a place that could again serve the community, by housing a number of community organisations or in some other way. Perhaps it could be adapted using funds generated in the manner mentioned above.
4. It is acknowledged that this submission makes a number of broad, unsubstantiated statements. This is partially because it simply derives from a brainstorming session, and partially because our current resources and time available do not permit us to go into the detail the process deserves. This is a similar problem to one raised earlier in this submission, when it was pointed out that "*Services are so busy dealing with day-to-day events and the reform process, and so under-resourced, that their ability to undertake their own research (upon which to base planning and with which to inform government) is being lost.*" Nonetheless, the submission does capture many of the concerns felt by the community sector in Redfern and Waterloo.