

**INQUIRY INTO SERVICE COORDINATION IN
COMMUNITIES WITH HIGH SOCIAL NEEDS**

Organisation: Cabramatta Community Centre

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To: The Director
Standing Committee on Social Issues
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Cabramatta Community Centre – Service Coordination in Communities with High Social Needs

Cabramatta Community Centre (CCC) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the NSW Legislative Council's inquiry into service coordination in communities with high social needs. Effective service coordination is crucial for delivering positive outcomes for service users in communities with high social needs.

CCC is a not-for-profit community organisation established to facilitate equitable access to life opportunities for all Australians. Since its early beginnings over three decades ago, CCC has worked with a diverse range of stakeholders in and around South West Sydney to realise its mission. It provides an integrated and holistic approach to service delivery with a focus on children, youth, aged care, community engagement and settlement services.

CCC advocates for social justice, equal participation in decision making, celebration of diversity and non-discrimination in all levels of society. Over the years, our service to the community has been guided by these values.

We strongly believe that effective service coordination is critical to the effective provision of the full range of services needed by our communities. This in turn contributes to building a socially cohesive society where those that are severely disadvantaged are not left behind. For us, this is particularly important given the high levels of disadvantage experienced by many within and around our operation area of South West Sydney.

We would also welcome the opportunity for face to face consultation on this issue, and we are happy work with the NSW Legislative Council and other relevant stakeholders to enhance effective service coordination in our communities.

In the meantime, I hereby present our experience in the area of service coordination in communities with high social needs.

Yours Sincerely,

Juana Reinoso

Chief Executive Officer - Cabramatta Community Centre (CCC).

Introduction

CCC welcomes the opportunity to make a submission on the inquiry into service coordination in communities with high social needs.

CCC works in and around South West Sydney and a key operational area of ours, the Fairfield LGA, is considered one of the most culturally and linguistically diverse in Australia, with more than 50% of residents born overseas and over 144 languages spoken locally. According to the Department of Immigration and Border Protection, in the last five years, approximately 6,000 new arrivals largely from refugee backgrounds settled in the LGA. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) shows that the Fairfield LGA is lagging behind on a number of key socio-economic indicators. For instance, the Fairfield LGA has the third lowest disadvantage score in Australia with two of its suburbs (Cabramatta-Lansvale and Fairfield) rated among the most disadvantaged in Sydney. The area is also has a high unemployment rate of 9.7% (higher than the national average), and approximately 40 % of its residents live under rental stress. These indicators demonstrate that the Fairfield LGA consists of communities with high social needs. These communities are thus the target of many programs or initiatives aimed at addressing these challenges.

It is in this context that CCC, in it's over three decades of service, has always embraced the opportunity to work with other stakeholders (including government and non-government bodies as well as other communities) to address the challenges faced by our communities. Currently, we are involved in a number of initiatives focused on service coordination within our communities, one of which will be discussed in this submission.

CCC supports effective service coordination. Based on our experience, this approach contributes to strengthening the connections between services, and between people and services, in ways that enhance positive outcomes in communities with high social needs. Better outcomes for our clients and communities underpin our commitment to equitable access to services and opportunities for all members of the Australian society regardless of one's background.

CCC is however acutely aware of the barriers to effective service coordination in our area of operation. This includes issues such as changes to government funding arrangements, strict criteria for access to certain services, and limited knowledge of services amongst those in the community who need them as well as among service providers. We are committed to working with government and non-government stakeholders to address these challenges.

This submission will focus on: the extent to which CCC ensures community involvement in planning and setting our priorities, and barriers to the effective coordination of services in our areas of operation.

Identifying needs of clients: the experience of the CCC

As a client-centred organisation, we go to considerable lengths to ensure that our services are fair and responsive to the needs of our clients and local residents. We have solid accountability and transparency mechanisms in place to ensure that our resources are geared towards the needs of our clients. To this end, we use a robust rolling planning process as well as a consultation protocol to guide our engagement with our stakeholders. To ensure the relevance of our services in the

community, we undertake program evaluations, annual forums, annual general meetings, surveys and community consultations aimed at identifying gaps or issues in service delivery. The identified gaps are then incorporated into our program/project design. We have also conducted key service provider surveys since 2005 in order to gauge feedback from organisations that we work with.

Given the limited English proficiency of communities within our areas of operation, we provide language support through our bilingual welfare workers, and use of the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) to strengthen the participation of clients during community consultations and to increase their knowledge and understanding about our range of services and how they access such services.

Box 1: Example of community involvement in planning and setting priorities

The case of Cabramatta Community Centre Pre-school

Cabramatta Community Centre Pre-school is a part of our service to the community. It started over 30 years ago as an occasional child care centre where parents would drop off their children to free up some time to attend appointments. At the beginning the occasional child care service was in high demand until about four years ago when the level of community participation in the centre dropped significantly.

We responded to this by engaging families in a wide range of community consultations (surveys, verbal communication, meetings, etc.) to fully understand their needs. The result of the consultations indicated that families wanted a service that focused largely on an education program.

Given the concerns of the community, we made significant changes to the program. While we continue adhere to government legislation and policy standards, meeting the needs of our clients are also at the core of our service. We have done this by transforming the occasional child care into a pre-school, ensuring that we charge fees appropriate to the socio-economic status of families in our community and investing in our staff to ensure that our service is delivered in a culturally appropriate manner. We continue to gather information about the homes of the children and their cultural practices to inform school activities, as well as provide a range of extra support services such as translation, filling of forms, case management for families and referrals to our network of services that families may need.

At present, three years after the occasional child care was transformed into a pre-school, it provides direct service to the community five days a week and 48 weeks per year on a continual, daily basis. It has 100 positions per week, which are utilised every week, and we have a waiting list on top of that.

Adopting an ongoing inclusive approach that provides families with more information (including visual information) as well as a say on issues affecting the pre-school, has fostered a cordial working relationship between us. And this enables us to make timely and proactive changes to the service to meet the evolving needs of our clients.

Providing coordinated services for our communities: CCC's contribution

As noted earlier, CCC strongly believes that positive working relationships between service providers (including government and non-government organisations) engenders effective service

coordination. To this end, we convene, co-convene and play an active role in a number of initiatives that aim to develop collaborative ties, which will in turn deliver services in a coordinated manner. Our experience in this area indicates that this approach increases networking, coordination and learning and resource sharing, collective problem solving, smooth referrals, and therefore more streamlined and better targeted services that reach more people in our communities. It allows us to focus our efforts on the services we deliver, while being able to effectively and efficiently work with other stakeholders so that they can deliver theirs to a shared community.

Box 2: Example of the importance of service coordination

The South West Sydney Drug and Alcohol Interagency Committee

The South West Sydney Drug and Alcohol Interagency, of which CCC is an active member, consist of 13 drug health and non-drug health service representatives (including government and non-government organisations) servicing South West Sydney.

The committee is managed by a secretariat that reports to the Partnership Steering Committee. It is co-chaired by a representative from the drug health services and a representative of the non-drug health services within the committee. The committee meets monthly and its standing agenda includes feedback from the Partnership Steering Committee, agency updates and an interagency presentation.

Through this model of engagement we have experienced significant positive changes in the way that we deliver services as well as in the working relationships between service providers. This includes but not limited to:

- Increased collaboration, communication and coordination between services.
- Reduced levels of barriers for referrals and transfer of care for services and clients.
- A culture where services jointly design and undertake projects.
- Increased ability of services to collectively identify barriers and problem solve complex issues.

These achievements have helped clients and service providers to effectively access a range of services in an integrated manner in what could otherwise be a complex service system.

Barriers to effective coordination and how this impact outcomes for clients/communities

1. Changes to government funding arrangements

Changes to government funding arrangements make it challenging for clients to access needed services. They may find it difficult to keep up to date with information in regards to which organisation are providing what service in the community. It also does not create the enabling environment needed for service providers to engage in long-term planning and partnership arrangements.

In our experience, recent changes to government funding arrangements have seen organisations with the expertise required to deliver services in a culturally appropriate manner lose funding to

those with limited footprint in the community. In the Fairfield LGA for instance, the Emergency Relief Program (ERP) remains a much needed service in the area given it is a high social needs community. CCC and the Parks Network Inc. have delivered this service in the area for years. In the last DSS funding round, CCC lost funding for the ERP. The funding went instead to a large religious based service provider to cover the expansive geographical area of Western Sydney to the Blue Mountains.

While the service may be still available to Fairfield residents, the fact that it covers such an expansive area and that it is delivered by an organisation with no history of working with culturally and linguistically diverse communities in the Fairfield LGA, mean that many of our clients miss out on this much needed service. Many of our clients who find it difficult to access the ERP are now requesting such services as food vouchers.

2. Strict criteria for access to certain services

Stringent criteria around targets or reach of certain programs also serve as a barrier to effective service coordination in our area of operation. Some services target people on criteria such as one's state of mental health, the type of visa one holds, etc.

In the area of domestic and family violence for example, we provide brokerage and emergency relief for affected Fairfield residents. This includes provision of up to four days short term accommodation (which can be extended by a few more days for those who have been assessed as needing an extension) and food vouchers.

Demand for the service outstrips supply and we find it hard as we cannot refer some of our clients to other services because of their visa class. In our experience, women on non-permanent visas are particularly vulnerable as they face significant difficulty in accessing refuge shelters. Sometimes this situation forces them to return to the perpetrator. The strict criteria that most services operate within in this area, limits our ability to collaborate with some services even where we are all working in the service area with clients of similar needs and issues. Most importantly, it is our experience that some clients miss out on the services that they need.

3. Limited knowledge/awareness about services

Our experience suggests that high social need communities, such as our areas of operation, are the target of many services/interventions. Also, given the complex and fragmented nature of the service system, both service providers and clients in need of services struggle to understand and keep up to date with the range of resources and services available in their areas. The effect of this is simple – when we are not aware of a service, we cannot fill the gaps in our own services and enable our clients to access it. From our experience, this in turn results in many of our clients slipping through the cracks.

While it is challenging to keep up-to-date information about services in our areas of operation, we have taken proactive steps to reduce the challenges associated with limited awareness about services. Our strategies include provision of promotional materials about the range of services we offer, collecting information from other services, active participation in interagency forums, preparation of service directories and resource maps.

We believe it is part of our role to assist our clients to be more aware of and understand other services. For example, our bilingual welfare workers often work with clients to help them navigate other services or reach the service the client needs. We also attempt to keep clients and local residents informed by issuing newsletters, providing translated brochures and promotional materials, and displaying other services promotional material at our sites. We take steps to ensure we are not proprietary in regards to our clients, and actively refer them to other services as appropriate to their needs.

It should be noted that in our experience it is essential to be current and aware of other services in order to provide the best and most effective service to our clients. However, we recognise the need to devote some more time, resources and focus to the above activities which must be weighed against our actual service provision.

CCC will continue to engage with a diverse range of stakeholders to contribute to effective service coordination in our communities. We are committed to this approach because our experience indicates that it engenders better outcomes for our clients.