

INQUIRY INTO SERVICE COORDINATION IN COMMUNITIES WITH HIGH SOCIAL NEEDS

Organisation: Community Resource Network (CRN) Inc
Date received: 14/08/2015

Response by Community Resource Network to the:

Inquiry into Service Co-ordination in Communities with High Social Needs – NSW Legislation Council, Standing Committee on Social Needs (June 2015)

1. That the Standing Committee on Social Issues inquire into and report on service coordination in communities with high social needs, including:
 - (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 of 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, and
 - (d) any other related matter.
2. That the Committee report by 11 December 2015.

Committee Membership

The Hon Bronnie Taylor MLC	The Nationals	<i>Chair</i>
The Hon Greg Donnelly MLC	Australian Labor Party	<i>Deputy Chair</i>
The Hon Shayne Mallard MLC	Liberal Party	
Revd the Hon Fred Nile MLC	Christian Democratic Party	
The Hon Dr Peter Phelps MLC	Liberal Party	
The Hon Penny Sharpe MLC	Australian Labor Party	

Community Resource Network (CRN) Inc.

Community Resource Network (CRN) is a sub-regional peak organisation working mainly in The Hills and Blacktown LGAs and was established in 1980. CRN is funded through the NSW Family & Community Services Community Builders program. CRN supports local community sector organisations in their work through various resources and expertise. It sees its work with these organisations under four key areas: Capacity building; Representation; Information & Referral; and, Communications.

CRN welcomes this Inquiry and is interested in the outcomes from submissions.

NOTE: The term “disadvantage community” was not clarified as part of the reference documents, so assumptions have been made generally in this response.

1. (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 of their particular area of responsibility

CRN Response:

There is much work being done in local communities around co-ordinated responses. Some examples of this will be mentioned further in this response.

CRN sees that place based responses are integral for real change in communities, that is, that communities have the knowledge to solve their own issues. This is often facilitated by smaller local organisations that work closely together with their communities. CRN sees that it is integral to continue to fund locally based community organisations directly as they

are often the most trusted by the community and offer the most immediate response. Government contract models are moving towards person centred funding, which in theory, should be providing services directly but the contract models don't match the principles as these contracts are often awarded to larger organisations that have very controlled systems and often become depersonalised service providers.

To respond to community issues in a holistic way, services need to have flexible funding requirements, as one model does not fit all. There are often rigid requirements around framing community responses to disadvantaged communities and it has been shown that there can be a need to change original strategies.

Many programs have compliance obligations, both legally, and morally, whether they are funded by government, or through other means. Government has its data portal requirements under funding deeds, which are varied, depending upon federal and/or state, and further down to lack of common reporting needs between departments. There needs to be co-ordination of data capture. While government must report on its accountability to the public, organisations have an obligation to report to the communities that they are working with.

Assumptions that locations are being over serviced or "why has so much money been put in and nothing has changed". Structural and systemic change is needed. Funding, be it public or private, is often short term but many of these disadvantaged communities need a long term commitment. Often funding is based upon preconceived planning, that is very structured. The project has to be fully thought out before its implementation. While some of this can happen, communities are not fixed entities and funders need to allow more organic and flexible ways of doing things when working with disadvantaged communities. There are still a lot of marginalised communities that sit on the edge of well supported areas, these communities have had long term issues around access to transport (public and private), to appropriate childcare, healthcare access, etc. When these issues have been with us a long time why do we continue to let them be ongoing?

There are often assumptions that disadvantaged communities are being over-serviced with public money and "why has so much money been put in and nothing has changed?". This is often media driven and policy should not be driven by this but by the people working and

living within the community. Structural and systemic change is needed not only by government but organisations, the public and communities.

As a sector development organisation for over 30 years, CRN has participated and still participates in many collaborative works, with federal, state, local government, other community organisations, the private sector and, most importantly, the community. Some of the more recent examples are:

- **Community 2770** (funded under Community Solutions State Government): Concluded in June 2014 as funding finished. This was a successful committee made up of state and local government, non-government organisations and local residents. Community 2770 looked at issues and changes around Mt Druitt. Residents had a very strong say in the direction of the committee and capacity building was done around training for community leaders. CRN sat as a non-government organisation on this committee.
- **Thrive@5**: This is a more recent local initiative, which sees not only local community organisations (CRN included), working to have healthy, happy and safe children in the Doonside community, but also has the local primary healthcare network, a local general practitioner, Aboriginal elders, the health district and others. Murdoch University is researching this project and has released a first report.
- **Local Interagencies**: Many initiatives have come out of collaborative practice through local Interagencies. These groups are not just a place for local information share but common issues are discussed and strategies looked at, e.g. Healthy Relationships Forums that have been developed out of the Hills Domestic Violence Prevention Committee.

The above are just some brief examples, there are a plethora of very successful community outcomes through collaborative practice being done with disadvantaged communities, and most importantly, they have community participation.

1. (b)

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

CRN's response will be in dot points:

- Trust plays a very important role in communities accessing services and supports, more so, than awareness. This trust and relationship is integral for organisations to have in working with community members in disadvantaged communities as if this linkage cannot be established then residents will not work with organisations. Communities liked to be “worked with” not have things “imposed upon”. Funders should consider when providing future funding to organisations working with communities the following, does the organisation have a community engagement framework, policy or similar to the support processes of community engagement? Is there a high level of understanding of, and commitment to community engagement within the organisation and is there a willingness to use more innovative engagement processes? These kinds of considerations need to be introduced into organisations’ Key Performance Indicators.
- Lack of review and evaluation of existing programs before tenders and new contracts are called, have become a major issue. CRN is not saying that the procurement process is wrong but tenders are being called as part of the reform process without seeing if the existing funders, and or the program, has meet the community need and changed that community in a positive way.
- Then what if successful, often as mentioned previously, funding is short term and a very successful program is finished. It is no use saying that the program should be “sustainable” at the conclusion of funding. Many disadvantaged communities will need very long term support to turn them around. Short-term funding also lends itself to a transient workforce, which makes establishing and maintaining long term relationships with the community more difficult.
- We need to have continued supports for organisations working in communities. With this you need to continue to fund the community organisation peaks who are the backbone of

the sector and, therefore, the community. Sector Development organisations, like CRN, and other regional and state peaks are close to the ground with organisations working with disadvantaged communities. They initiate collaboration, distribute information, are representatives of their communities, develop partnerships, provide information and many other things. They often convene and sit on multi-faceted committees and have a helicopter view of the community that they work in. One recent collaboration that CRN led was a number of workshops titled, Partnering4Change. The leadership team was made up of CRN, Family and Community Services, Blacktown City Council and two other community organisations - WESTIR Ltd and childrenfirst. This had organisations from across the local area meeting up to discuss funding reform and the potential effects on organisations. It looked at partnerships and allowed for senior management of local organisations to network and discuss issues, concerns and strategies.

- Government has gradually been handing over responsibility for community services to community organisations, and in some cases private companies. Recently, at a state tender briefing it was heard government say that we are “moving from delivery to commissioning”. CRN is not saying that this is not correct. What we are saying though, is that full funding has not come with this from government. There is a concerted effort for organisations to seek out private funding, matching funding and other means to make up this reduction or to have continued funding in high needs areas and disadvantaged communities. This seeking of funding takes organisations away from their direct service work. Some organisations in the community, including disadvantaged ones, do not have Public Benevolent Institution and/or Deductible Gift Recipient status, therefore, they are ineligible for many private grant programs. So funding is virtually impossible to attain. (Acknowledgment is made here that this is an issue for the organisations and it is also a Federal Government matter.)
- Another point that comes with this change is that community organisations are increasingly commenting on the lack of communication between themselves and government departments. It is difficult for workers to provide a ‘wrap around service’ to clients with complex needs, if there are serious barriers to the sharing of information. There is so much literature that states the need for government departments (notably FaCS Child Protection) and NGOs to work together, i.e. Section 16A of the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1988. This Section allows information to be exchanged between prescribed bodies despite other laws that prohibit or restrict the

disclosure of personal information, such as the *Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998*, the *Health Records and Information Privacy Act 2002* and the *Commonwealth Privacy Act 1988*.

- Separately funded organisations compete with each other, often to deliver similar programs within the same community space, and in the context of an increasingly limited funding pool. Therefore, creating a competitive environment that is not conducive to collaboration. Competitive tendering models are further fragmenting the community sector.

1. (c)

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

CRN's response:

In regard to the Dubbo Minister's Action Group. Is the decentralisation, through relocation, of a public housing estate a way of defining success? With the reforms to public housing in NSW, which means the selling off of some public housing, is only going to further marginalise the most disadvantaged in our community. Are we driving a change for the community or just moving people further onto the fringes of our communities?

Often the issues we see amongst public housing residents are multi-generational, these cannot be solved overnight and, therefore, we need long-term funding cycles, with regular reviews to solve long-term entrenched problems, which was mentioned in Point 1(a) of this response.

Locally, CRN has seen relocations of public housing tenants out of older suburbs into newer properties. Some of this was forced, others welcomed it. Many of the older residences are now being left with fencing around them and unoccupied. They have become a source of

graffiti and vandalism, while the community waits for information around what is happening to them. CRN would suggest that any further decisions around public/community housing be made with local consultation in the relevant communities and turn-around times for redevelopment shortened.

Measurements are based on outcomes that measure “how much” for “what dollar” but do not measure the really important data of how a community was changed, e.g. Results Based Accountability™ was introduced, by government into the community sector about seven years ago, which looks at turning the curve of “is anyone better off?”. Although, the accountability requirements of state government funding are based around how many times you ran something and how many people attended. (<http://www.lcsansw.org.au/currentprojects/rba>) It doesn't seek to measure the outcome and improvement in communities. For example, the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) which is a nationwide data collection of early childhood development at the time children commence their first year of full-time school. The AEDC highlights what is working well and what needs to be improved or developed to support children and their families by providing evidence to support health, education and community policy and planning but has taken time to evidence change as it is only held every three years and is only its second iteration. Therefore, the measurement tools that community organisation report on do not really measure actual, change. (<https://www.aedc.gov.au/about-the-aedc>)

CRN did some research where we had a number of focus groups of community workers who have worked in the sector for 10 years plus and we asked them did they feel more connected to each other as organisations, the response was “no”. This was due to competitive tendering, more stringent funding requirements, the political move/funding against advocacy organisations – thus, limiting opportunities to collectively come together around a common cause. (*An unpublished document.*)

Current shared measurement tools, available in the marketplace, are cost prohibitive to many community organisations. Organisations are hesitant to invest in large infrastructure purchases when their future funding cannot be assured.

1. (d) any other related matter.

While an organisation can take the responsibility of coordination of services in a community, it should be remembered that residents in a community develop relationships with the people of that organisation, not necessarily the organisation itself. This is the same for collaboration between organisations working in disadvantaged communities, workers connect to other workers.

The following quote sums up CRN's perspective in relation to service co-ordination in disadvantaged communities:

'The social sector, however, has not yet changed its funding practices to enable the shift to collective impact. Until funders are willing to embrace this new approach and invest sufficient resources in the necessary facilitation, coordination, and measurement that enable organisations to work in concert, the requisite infrastructure will not evolve.' *(from Kania J and Kramer M, Winter 2011, Collective Impact, pg 41 Stanford Social Innovation Review.)*

While the quote mentions the trending "collective impact" it is applicable to whatever framework that is taken up.

CRN thanks the Committee for the opportunity to respond to the Inquiry.

Prepared by:

Sarah Featherbe, Project Officer-Capacity Building
Margaret Tipper, Manager
Community Resource Network (CRN) Inc.

14th August 2015