

INQUIRY INTO SERVICE COORDINATION IN COMMUNITIES WITH HIGH SOCIAL NEEDS

Organisation: Local Community Services Association

Date received: 16/08/2015

NSW Legislative Council

Standing Committee on Social Issues

Submission to Inquiry into service coordination in communities with high social needs

by the Local Community Services Association (LCSA)

The Local Community Services Association is the peak body for neighbourhood centres in New South Wales. LCSA was founded in 1974 to act as the representative coordinating body for neighbourhood centres. LCSA provides resources and communications networks for neighbourhood centres, advocates on issues affecting neighbourhood centres' communities and service users and represents neighbourhood centre interests to government. LCSA specialises in assisting its members with community management, community development and community engagement strategies. LCSA is a member of the national Australian Neighbourhood House and Centre Association (ANHCA).

LCSA's submission aims to highlight the following points:

1. Neighbourhood and community centres form an integral part of the Social Services System and play a vital role in providing community-based services and non-stigmatising access to the broader service system.

... All Neighbourhood Centres share some common principles and philosophies about their purpose or role. These come under three broad categories:

- affirmative action towards disadvantaged people and groups
- local participation and control
- community development role. ...

(reference: LCSA Neighbourhood Centre Policy 2003, please see attached)

2. The same policy states that "Neighbourhood Centres recognise that resources must be directed towards the most disadvantaged and least powerful groups in the community. The development of community networks, mutual support and collective action can improve quality of life for an entire community."

The coordination of the service system should always have the best interest of the clients and the community at heart. While competitive tendering processes have their own merit it often creates a competitive and distrustful relationship between potential partners servicing a certain locality.

3. One crucial element of service coordination is the premise of engaging community members in the decision making, program design and implementation of actions that affect their lives. In order to engage with community authentically we promote community principles as outlined in the LCSA Neighbourhood Centre Policy.



“Neighbourhood Centres are uniquely placed to provide a range of social and community services to their locality and to specific target groups within that community. This includes:

- identifying gaps in existing services
- developing new services
- consolidating, adapting or improving existing services
- ensuring community and consumer participation in the development, management and evaluation of services.”

4. LCSA has been working in partnership with the Harwood Institute for Public Innovation to further enhance the capacity within the community services sector ensuring that the aspirations and knowledge of communities drive the policies and programs which affect their lives. Our work has the purpose to provide practical options for the policy and program development processes of government which further the attainment of the vision, and to integrate community owned services into these program development processes.
5. LCSA strongly believes that the traditional role and functions of neighbourhood and community centres as expressed in the Neighbourhood Centre Policy document of 2003 fit well within a collective impact framework. Traditionally neighbourhood and community centres have performed the role of boundary spanning organisations, linking between the expert knowledge of specialist services and the public knowledge that is embedded in their communities.

The processes and tools developed by the Harwood Institute come from over 25 years of practice and reflection on community engagement and community strengthening. They are therefore uniquely suited to enable neighbourhood and community centres to prepare themselves to function within collective impact frameworks. They also contain unique insights on community rhythms which are not to date properly understood or used in Australia and which are vital to determining the appropriateness and likely success of a specific initiative within a particular community.

6. A collective impact approach holds enormous promise for bringing about meaningful change – but only if such action is taken with communities, not apart from them.

Currently within the community services sector in Australia, and particularly in NSW, collective impact is seen as an effective framework to coordinate existing resources in order to tackle complex social issues collaboratively. Observation and analysis of the use and success or failure of collective impact initiatives within the USA demonstrates the importance of considered and

effective community engagement. Rich Harwood said “The Institute and I deeply believe in collective impact, but one caveat, collective impact without community engagement is just an exercise in professional alignment”. This perspective is available in more detail through the April 2014 Stamford Social Innovation Review article [Putting Community into Collective Impact](#).

7. Strong communities have a high level of trust, respect, connectedness, resourcefulness and participation. The majority of LCSA members receive various levels of Community Builders funding provided by the NSW Department for Family and Community Services. This funding program provides a platform to engage and work with communities to achieve these community strength outcomes. It recognises four service activity areas, namely Information and Referral, Community Capacity Building, Community Skills Development and Community Sector Development. Overall Community Builders funded services work across service silos with a Community Development approach to create boundary spanning organisations that gather and become stewards of community knowledge.
8. Based on Results Based Accountability TM implementation combined with tested community strengthening principles LCSA developed Results Based Community Planning as a powerful grassroots collective impact approach for use in local communities. LCSA has trialled this approach in various communities. While there is strong anecdotal evidence this approach creates local cross-sector and cross-industry collaborations, it requires a more extensive trial for proof of effecting community wide change long term.

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Sydney, 16 August 2015