INQUIRY INTO SERVICE COORDINATION IN COMMUNITIES WITH HIGH SOCIAL NEEDS

Organisation: Gosford City Council

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Gosford City Council Submission to the NSW Legislative's Council's Standing Committee on Social Issues Inquiry on service coordination in communities with high social needs.

Background information on Gosford City

Gosford City is located on the Central Coast Region of New South Wales, about 80 kilometres north of the Sydney CBD and 80 kilometres south of the Newcastle CBD. The current estimated resident population for Gosford as of 2014 was 171,992, an increase of 8,582 persons since 2006. The area continues to experience a dual pattern of population growth with both mature aged persons and families with school aged children. Older people are attracted to the area for retirement; with families drawn by an affordable coastal lifestyle, whilst still having access to the Sydney Metropolitan Area. This has implications for the future pattern of demand for services. Additionally, younger people in the 18–25 age group are migrating away for work, education and lifestyle reasons, impacting the makeup, vitality and diversity of our community. Young people remaining on the Coast are faced with higher rates of unemployment.

In 2011, the Census showed that 25.4% of the population of Gosford LGA was aged over 60 which is a higher proportion than NSW (20.4%). Similarly, there are a larger percentage of seniors aged 70 – 84 yrs (10.8% compared to 8.3%) and a larger proportion of elderly aged people over 85 years 3.2% compared to 2.0%. From 2006 to 2011, Gosford City's older workers and pre-retirees (50 to 59) increased by 1,540 people and elderly aged (85 and over) increased by 1,108 people.

By 2031, the population of Gosford is forecast to increase to around 182,000 and the number of households is expected to have risen to 76,215. People over the age of 60 are expected to increase to 50,923 which will be over a quarter of the population.

Gosford City (GC) is a changing community. The 2011 Census demonstrates how the population, housing and education attainment is changing over time. For example, there are greater numbers of people born overseas and from non-English speaking backgrounds living in Gosford (5.9% compared to 18.6% for NSW) but the rate is still significantly lower than State average. Our residents are increasingly staying in school longer and more are participating in tertiary education, however our attainment of Bachelor Degrees or Higher is lower than State average (14.4% compared to 19.9% for NSW) and while 42.5% held no qualifications. Housing tenure is changing as there are more mortgage holders and renters rather that people who own their home, and medium density housing is becoming more of an option in the area. There was strong growth in both costs of mortgages and rentals resulting in more households experiencing housing stress. A higher proportion of our workers are commuting out of the area. Between 2006 and 2011 the numbers of commuters increased from 25% to 34% of our workforce commuting each day. Commuting long distances and being away from home for extended periods of time can create further stress on households.

Social Issues experienced in Gosford City

Gosford has a SEIFA index of 1006.3 which is only slightly lower than Greater Sydney (1011.3) and similar to Australia (1002.0). The index is derived from attributes that reflect disadvantage such as low income, low educational attainment, high unemployment, and jobs in relatively unskilled occupations. Within the City, suburbs on the Peninsula have a much lower SIEFA score including Ettalong 899.6, Woy Woy 921.7 and Umina 957.2.

Other areas of disadvantaged include North Gosford and Wyoming with a SEIFA score of 967.1 and East Gosford and Springfield 989.6.

Another measure of disadvantage is the Australian Early Development Index which measures the proportion of children who are developmentally vulnerable over 5 domains. Under the Australian Early Development Index Results in 2012 Gosford LGA's % of children developmentally vulnerable is on par with those rates captured in NSW and Australia.

The AEDI measures five areas or 'domains' of early childhood development. These domains are closely linked to the predictors of good adult health, education and social outcomes. The five domains are:

➢ Physical health and wellbeing
➢ Social competence
➢ Emotional maturity
➢ Language and cognitive skills
➢ Communication skills and general knowledge domain

However when we break down the AEDI Domain data for each Central Coast LGA there are suburbs that indicate extremely high levels of vulnerability up to 3 times higher than national, State and LGA averages.

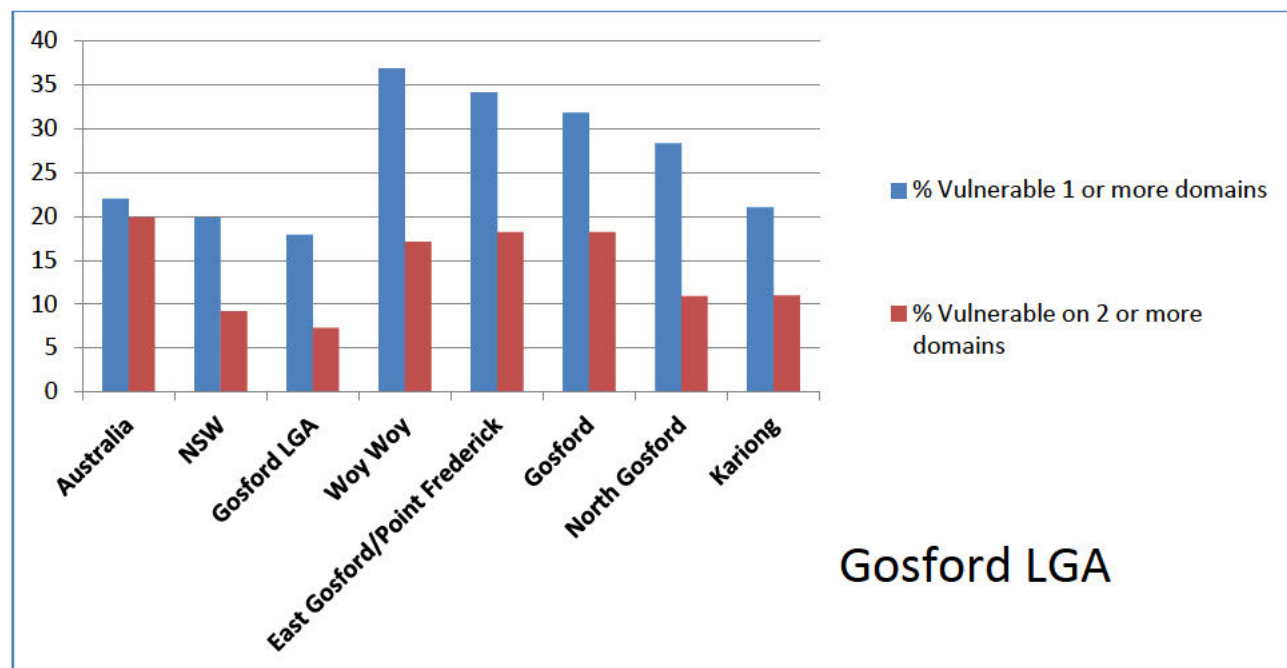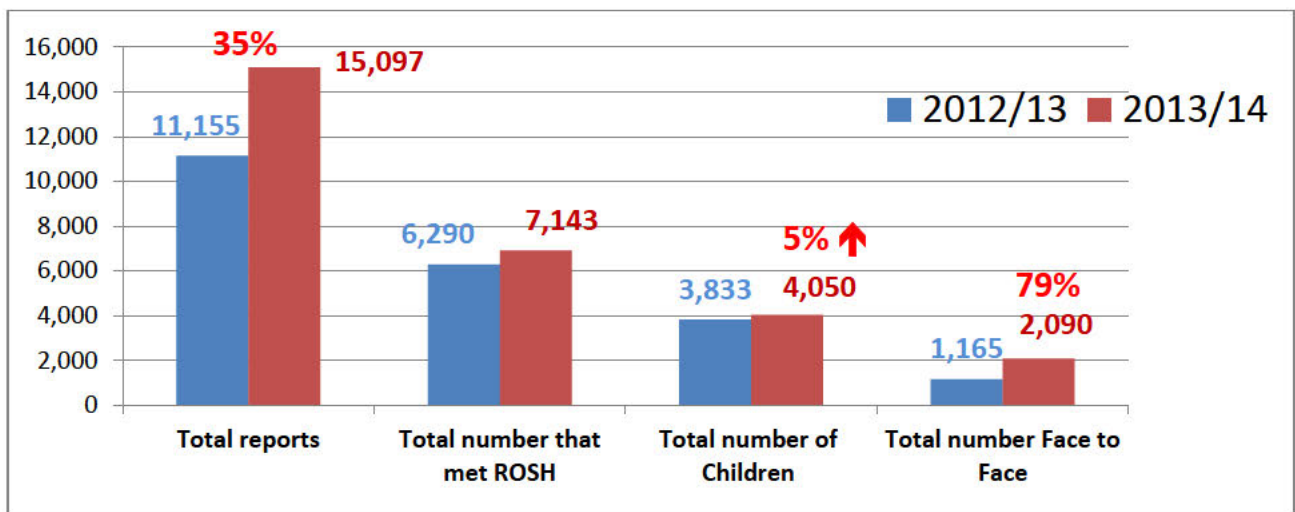**Table 1   % of children developmentally vulnerable in Gosford LGAs**

**Table 2   Central Coast Risk of Significant Harm (ROSH) Reports through the Child Protection Hotline**

In 2013/14, over 4,000 children living on the Central Coast were at Risk of Significant Harm. This was an increase of 5% from the previous year. Overall there was an increase of 35% in ROSH reports and a 13% increase in the number of reports that met ROSH. There was also an increase of 51% in face to face assessments for the year.

The top 5 reasons for reports are;

1. Physical abuse 22%
2. Neglect 20%
3. Sexual Abuse 15%
4. Domestic Violence 12%
5. Alcohol & Other Drugs 8%

Table 3   2013/14 Number of ROSH reports & Children and Young People by age.
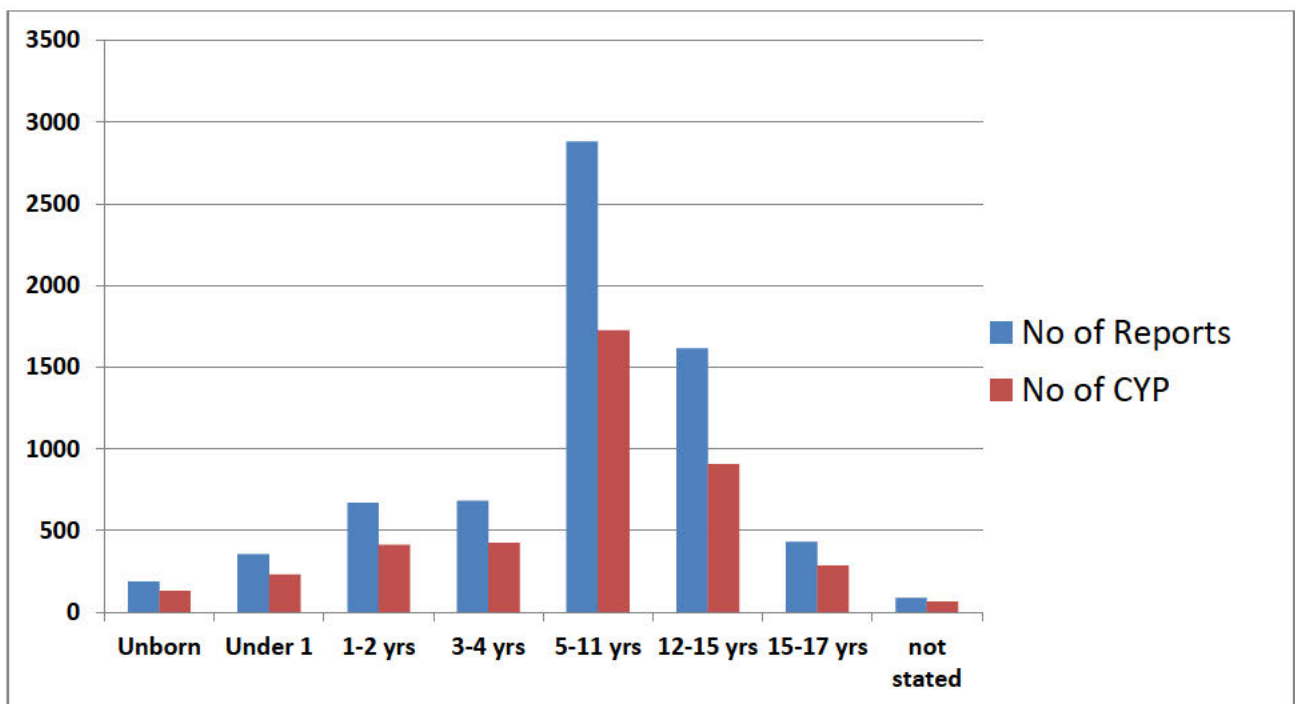
Education

There are 36,000 students in 80 schools on the Central Coast.

On average:

- 25 students will successfully participate and thrive at school
- 3 or 4 students will require personalised learning and support, and at risk of disengagement
- 1 or 2 students require high levels of support.

Between 1987 and 2013 (25 years):

- Enrolments of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have tripled
- Enrolments of students with disabilities have increased six fold
- Enrolment of students from a language background other than English has doubled.

In the same time-frame:

- Young people aged 15 – 24 years are twice as likely to be hospitalised for self-harming behaviour
- There has been an increase of children in out-of-home care from 16,500 to 18,300 and still rising
- Children with complex needs are more likely to attend mainstream schools who must provide Personal Learning Plans (PLPs)

Attendance:

- Students in NSW attend at an average rate of 92.1%
- Students in Gosford attend at an average rate of 92.9%
- Students in Wyong attend at an average rate of 91.9%

Implications for community:

- With so many more students requiring additional support, staying at school for longer (with the extended school leaving age) there is a need for a coordinate response by government, service providers and the community to improve outcomes.

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 of their particular area of responsibility.

The Central Coast is a geographically recognised region bound by the Hawkesbury River in the south, Lake Macquarie in the north, the Pacific Ocean to the east and the Mountain plateau to the west. The topography of the area makes it a natural region. The region only has two local government areas; Gosford City and Wyong Shire. In this region, local government regularly works in partnership with State agencies.

The Central Coast is now recognised as a distinct region by both State and Federal Government. This has resulted in government agencies planning, funding and delivering services on a regional basis. When State Government agencies and non government agencies are also located on the Central Coast, strong relationships are developed between the three levels of government, business, non government agencies and the community. Local staff have a good understanding of the social issues facing the Central Coast community. Many employees both live and work in the area. These relationships enable a culture of good communication, collaboration and coordination between government and non government agencies which result in improved outcomes for clients.

The Central Coast has a number of well attended interagency that contribute to a coordinated response to local social issues. These include but are not limited to;

- ➢ Aboriginal Interagency
- ➢ Central Coast Ageing and Disability Association (CCADA)
- ➢ Disability Interagency
- ➢ Domestic Violence Committee
- ➢ Homelessness Services Interagency
- ➢ Men's Interagency
- ➢ Mental Health Community Consultative Committee
- ➢ Multicultural Interagency
- ➢ Neighbourhood and Community Centres Forum
- ➢ Networks of Practice Regional Family Services Forum
- ➢ Out of Home Care Interagency
- ➢ Youth Interagency,

Furthermore there are a number of project based groups on the Coast where the Directors and Senior Managers of State Government, Local Government and non-Government agencies coordinate over a particular reform or program. Some examples of this include;

- ➢ Central Coast District Homelessness Implementation Group.
- ➢ Central Coast Youth Safety and Wellbeing
- ➢ Safe Home for Life Reform.

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

The main barrier to effective coordination is the silos in which government agencies work. Legislation, policy and practice prevent agencies from sharing information that could be beneficial to client outcomes. Whilst the intent of this legislation or policy is well intended the consequences can be detrimental to the very people it is protecting. Government and non government agencies regularly share the same clients. Each agency collects its own data on the client and is unable to share the information with another agency. This results in people having to tell their story over and over again and fill in countless forms. Each agency then deals with the client from their agency perspective rather than taking a holistic approach to the client, their family and the community they live in. One of the major findings from the Coroner when investigating the murder of a child is that there were often multiple agencies involved with the child's family, however, the agencies were unaware of one another or not working coordinated in their response.

A second barrier is where the health system and the community care system intersect. There is a lack of continuum of care despite this being raised as an ongoing issue. Regularly people leaving hospital are sent home without adequate community services in place. This is particularly frustrating when it occurs late on a Friday afternoon and community services are expected to suddenly meet the demand. Currently Central Coast Health is undertaking a major project in improving the integration of health care and community care, however, there is little known about the project in the community sector.

Another barrier to effective service coordination is that government agencies are limited in being able to respond to local issues in a coordinated way. It would be beneficial for agencies to be able to plan, fund and deliver services based on local priorities and issues rather than programs prescribed by a central State office. Whilst not all funding should be delivered in this way, providing some flexibility and capacity would enable a more coordinated response from government and non government agencies to have a targeted response on local issues that could have greater impact.

Communities are diverse. They are made up of people from all age groups and backgrounds facing a range of challenges and opportunities. However the human service system plans and delivers services on the basis of target groups, by age, ethnicity etc and defines people by the issue they are facing such as Domestic Violence or what they haven't got, such as homeless or people with a disability. People don't think of themselves in this way. They are members of families and part of a community. The silo mentality of the human service system prevents agencies taking a holistic approach to working with a person within the context of the whole of community.

While there are certainly benefits in the many interagencies on the Central Coast meeting, sharing information and working collaboratively, the groups are again based on population target groups and specific social issues which tends to reinforce the silo mentality of service provision in the human services sector. A more holistic approach may lead to improved outcomes for clients and reduce duplication of services.

Further to the issue of planning and delivering services in silos is that different population groups have access to services where others don't. People's equity of access to services should not be constrained by their age but rather by nature of the support they require for their wellbeing. The Commonwealth Home Support Program supports people aged over 65 years (over 55 years for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people) to remain living independently in their own homes. Under this program, recipients have access to personal care, domestic assistance, meals on wheels, community transport etc. The same services are not available to people aged under 65 years who may be suffering a chronic illness such as cancer or those who may have had a major operation or health issue. These people must rely on family and friends for support which is not always possible. Recently there have been number of requests from women leaving hospital following a major operation who require assistance at home. There are no services available on the Central Coast to provide the necessary support to these women. There is only one service on the Central Coast that supports a family to care for young children, 'Inhome Care' but the emphasis is on caring for the children and not the parent.

Finally, barriers are created when governments change their service delivery boundaries to also include the Hunter or Northern Sydney regions and/or relocate their offices in Newcastle or Sydney. This has an adverse impact on the coordinated response from government and non government service providers on the Central Coast.

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

Currently the Central Coast is demonstrating a number of best practice models in relation to the coordination of human services. The Family and Community Services (FACS) Central Coast District has been chosen to pilot an approach called co-design to look at potential reforms to the child protection system under the Safe Home For Life Reforms.

Safe Home For Life

The ***Safe Home for Life (SHFL) Tree Project*** will improve outcomes for children and young people at risk on the Central Coast due to initiatives being delivered through the powerful co-design work currently being undertaken between NSW Department of Family and Community Services Central Coast and other government and non government agencies.

Innovative multi-agency designed prototypes are being developed to tackle child protection and are depicted as ***Opportunity Areas*** on the ***SHFL Tree***. Gosford City Council is the co-lead on the Communities that Care Opportunity Area. Representatives from Neighbourhood Centres, Child and Family Services, Bara Barang Aboriginal Corporation, Schools as Community Centres, Life without Barriers, Central Coast Health, Department of Education and Communities and Department of Housing are working together to develop and implement projects on keeping kids safe on the Coast.

The first SHFL achievement will be the establishment of a Central Coast Multi Agency Response Centre (***CC MARC***) in October 2015, operated by Department of Family and Community Services, Central Coast Health, Department of Education and Communities, Police and the Family Referral Service that will ensure the right children are receiving a statutory response and which children would benefit from a Service Sector response.

Service Delivery Reform

State and regional leaders from across the Human Services Sector on the Central Coast are working on a multi agency collaborative approach to construct a supporting and enabling governance framework that unites the agencies involved around a set of shared outcomes, measures and indicators for integrated service delivery. The aim of this approach is to improve the outcomes for vulnerable children and young people from pre-natal through to adolescence, their families and the communities that they live in.

Patchwork

The Department of Family and Community Services in conjunction with Central Coast Local Health District, Police and service providers on the Central Coast has implemented the web application 'Patchwork'. Professionals are better able to provide services to a client when they understand and can communicate with the whole team of people around a client or family. It is a secure online tool designed to help service providers find the other professionals that are also working with the person, at any given time; giving them the contact details they need to share information as appropriate. It helps to promote cooperation and communication between the services that are working with a community member. Patchwork differs from case management systems by only holding minimal data that can be shared across agencies and sectors. It is about the revealing the people working in the team rather than case notes. Patchwork will build connections between different organisations and agencies, enabling real partnership working, earlier intervention (helping to ensure that no client falls through the gaps) and ultimately better outcomes for children and families.