

INQUIRY INTO ISSUES RELATING TO REDFERN/WATERLOO

Organisation: Council of Social Service of New South Wales (NCOSS)
Name: Mr Gary Moore
Position: Director
Telephone: 9211-2599
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Theme:

Summary



Council of Social Service of New South Wales

66 Albion St, Surry Hills NSW
phone 02 9211 2599 fax 02 9281 1968
email info@ncoss.org.au web www.ncoss.org.au

abn 85001 797 137

3 May 2004

The Hon Jan Burnswoods MLC
Chair
Legislative Council Social Issues Committee
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Ms Burnswoods

Please find enclosed a submission from the Council of Social Service of NSW (NCOSS) in relation to the Committee's Inquiry into Redfern-Waterloo.

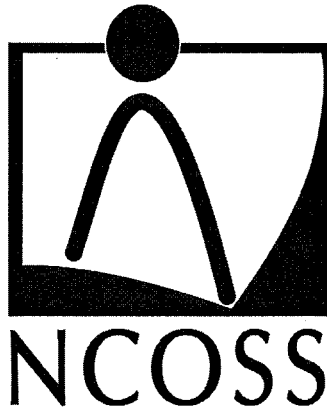
As a current member of the Redfern-Waterloo Partnership Project Community Council, and with many member not for profit community organisations operating in the Redfern and Waterloo suburbs, NCOSS is vitally interested in policies and actions which will bring a significant improvement to the quality of life of many residents in these areas over the short, medium and longer terms.

I hope that our submission is of assistance to you. If further information is required, please contact me on tel 9211 2599 or email at gary@ncoss.org.au

Yours sincerely

Gary Moore
Director

Submission to Legislative Council Inquiry into Redfern/Waterloo



April 2004

**Council of Social Service of NSW (NCOSS), 66 Albion Street, Surry Hills, 2010
ph: 02 9211 2599, fax: 9281 1968, email: <info@ncoss.org.au>**

About NCOSS

The Council of Social Service of NSW (NCOSS) is an independent non-government organisation and is the peak body for the social and community services sector in NSW. NCOSS works with its members on behalf of disadvantaged people and communities towards achieving social justice in New South Wales. It was established in 1935 and is part of a national network of Councils of Social Service, which operate in each State and Territory and at Commonwealth level.

NCOSS membership is composed of community organisations and interested individuals. Through current membership forums, NCOSS represents more than 7,000 community organisations and over 85,000 consumers and individuals. Member organisations are diverse; including unfunded self-help groups, children's services, youth services emergency relief agencies, chronic illness organisations, local indigenous community organisations, church groups, and a range of population-specific consumer advocacy agencies.

Introduction

The Redfern-Waterloo area, as recently noted by Emeritus Professor Tony Vinson (2004) in "Community Adversity and Resilience" continues to experience significant levels of social disadvantage and an increasing polarisation in economic benefits between sections of the communities.

In substantial parts of both suburbs, there are large numbers of low income families (including sole parents), long term unemployed people, and vulnerable young people living alongside an ageing population. Evidence points to ongoing above average levels of domestic violence, child protection notifications and substance abuse in both the indigenous and non indigenous communities across the suburbs, with both data and front line human services and police experience confirming the prevalence of mental health issues, homelessness and anti social behaviour in key neighbourhoods.

Over the past 25 years, several sporadic and uncoordinated initiatives have been introduced into the area to attempt to alleviate immediate social problems and possibly build longer term community well being. At the same time, a chequered history of often poor relations between Police and the local indigenous community appears to have exacerbated the underling social and cultural stress in Redfern and Waterloo.

And the growth of a myriad of Government and non government sector provided human services over the same period, whilst assisting many individuals and families amongst the indigenous and non indigenous population, appears to have done little to focus a community wide drive for long term and sustainable social and economic improvements for these suburbs.

Over the past five years, a substantial level of urban consolidation and new business activity has commenced to transform both the eastern and northern Redfern neighbourhoods, whilst the major Green Square and associated "airport corridor" urban regeneration, is placing pressure for change on the significant public housing and low cost private rental residential areas of Waterloo.

The ongoing failure of the Redfern Aboriginal leadership and successive local and NSW Governments to successfully negotiate and implement a future development plan for "The Block" over a protracted period has fuelled the tensions in, and the vulnerability of, the local indigenous community and contributed directly to the growth in substance abuse and anti social behaviour among young indigenous and non indigenous people in recent times.

At the same time, the Redfern and Waterloo communities have many assets, including the resilience displayed by residents, local businesses, local non government community organisations and front line practitioners in health, housing, education, community services and police in the face of what some perceive as “overwhelming” difficulties. As 21st Greater Sydney grows, there are opportunities to appropriately harness new business interest, public transport linkages and educational precinct expansion in Redfern and Waterloo for the benefit of the traditional residents of both suburbs.

A Vision for Urban Regeneration in Redfern-Waterloo

As indicated above, significant urban consolidation and change is already taking place in parts of Redfern, and to a lesser extent, Waterloo. In recent months, the Premier has encouraged key business sectors, including property developers, to “open up” the “southern gateway” to the City of Sydney CBD and to link the future development of Redfern and Waterloo to the creation of the Sydney Airport corridor.

At the same time, the NSW Department of Housing has commenced plans for the mixed private and public sector redevelopment of public housing in East Redfern and, in line with general policy moves to enhance social mix and meet its huge operating deficits, has also started to examine such outcomes for other public housing neighbourhoods in the area.

The Aboriginal Housing Company, legal owners of much of “the Block” have recently developed a further redevelopment concept for this area, although details of future housing occupancy, financing and construction and management arrangements are unclear.

If Redfern and Waterloo are to be home to a substantial number of lower income households in the future and are to generate new job opportunities for a fair number of local residents and a prosperous retail and general services mix, then both the NSW Government and the new City of Sydney Council will have to negotiate a comprehensive plan for the future of the areas with the indigenous and non indigenous local communities, as well as the local and external business stakeholders.

Key elements of this plan should include:

- an agreement to retaining a sizeable portion of affordable housing in the public and private sectors in the future (possibly as high as 40% of all stock);
- an agreement to redevelop “the Block” with mixed housing, services and open space. There should be specific targeting of an appropriate number of housing places for Aboriginal individuals and families. As part of the conditions for receiving funds from Government and/or the private sector to enable the redevelopment to proceed, the Aboriginal Housing Company should establish a new project management structure, which includes representatives of the Department of Housing, other Aboriginal community organisations in Redfern and Waterloo and the City Council;
- the redevelopment of Redfern railway station and its surrounds with a focus on creating an expanded retail precinct and providing direct, over railway access from Darlington and Chippendale to Redfern;
- a Redfern-Waterloo enterprise and employment development strategy which assists local businesses to expand, targets new job opportunities to unemployed and underemployed local residents (including a specific Aboriginal employment strategy) and links the efforts of all current Government assisted employment placement, business support and vocational training organisations working in the suburbs;

- a Redfern –Waterloo non government organisations risk management advice and support service, which particularly works with the myriad of small and medium mixed to encourage and deliver shared services and pooled purchasing in “the back office”. This service should be owned by the NGO sector and managed through one of its existing peak networks;
- the use of key surplus NSW Government owned properties in the suburbs by new, relocated or co-located human services and community facilities.

This scale of action requires a long term commitment from both the NSW Government and the City of Sydney Council, similar to the 10 year horizons of the UK Government, “New Deal for Communities” program or the urban regeneration projects of several US and Canadian cities and their community development corporations.

Many elements of the above plan feature in the directions being articulated by the current Redfern-Waterloo Partnership Project. The RWPP, however, only has a four year horizon at present and does not, as yet, command the broad community credibility required to drive the regeneration initiatives outlined above.

Further related initiatives

Different population groups and neighbourhoods within Redfern and Waterloo articulate both pride and despair at different aspects of their quality of life and the perception that different internal and external groups have of their neighbourhoods.

Opportunities do exist to develop and operate a highly engaging community leadership program, which brings together current and future leaders from the different neighbourhoods and encourages them to confront their differences and align their efforts for a better future. The effectiveness of such an initiative, if scoped and implemented with careful thinking and sufficient resources, could be substantial over a period of a few years.

As an ongoing number of high net worth individuals and new businesses move into the area, it might also be strategic to examine the establishment of a Redfern-Waterloo Community Foundation, or the engagement of the recently launched Greater Sydney Community Foundation in a focused task for fundraising for Redfern-Waterloo projects. Such a not for profit entity could be used to harness fiscal, skills and other contributions from new residential and business occupants towards the community development work required to change the area’s social mix and ensure that lower income households do not miss out.

Community education initiatives focusing on energy and water conservation and the immediate household and broader community benefits of locally based schemes to retrofit houses and enable low income people to purchase the most energy and water efficient appliances could be examined.

Continuing substance abuse and anti social behaviour will require firm, transparent and productive policing with long term improvements arising from increases in general neighbourhood living standards, sound police-community relationship building, consistent and fairly applied penalties and more “whole of person” services (whether delivered by one agency or through a close knit network).

A more significant use of local mentoring programs for young people and families struggling to make ends meet should also be investigated, as well as much greater coordination between the Government and non government agencies providing fiscal and other material support to people in Redfern and Waterloo.

There is a case for reassessing the option of conducting Main Street type projects and refurbishment in Redfern and Regent Streets, Redfern and in Elizabeth Street, Waterloo. Similarly, the activities of the Waterloo based Neighbourhood Technology Centre could be replicated in parts of Redfern, including any redeveloped Everleigh Street and surrounding streets.

Cross suburban community transport access for other than older people or people with disabilities should also be factored into any future transport provision in the area, along with further design outcomes which lead to more cycling and walking.

The City of Sydney Council should adopt a stringent social impact assessment process to any commercial or residential development application of scale in Redfern and Waterloo. Inclusionary zoning approaches should also be adopted to result in a greater social mix in new residential developments, with a minimum of 10% of new/redeveloped housing being affordable rental accommodation or low income housing purchase in any one development (note previous comments on overall affordable housing results)