

INQUIRY INTO SERVICE COORDINATION IN COMMUNITIES WITH HIGH SOCIAL NEEDS

Organisation: Shoalhaven City Council

Date received: 24/08/2015

The Director
Standing Committee on Social Issues
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Sir/Madam

Inquiry into Service Coordination in Communities with High Social Needs

Thank you for the invitation to make a submission to the inquiry into service coordination in communities with high social needs.

Following is Shoalhaven City Council's submission:-

- 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.**

The Shoalhaven has a long history of interagency work in identifying the needs of clients with high social needs and providing a co-ordinated response. The following are examples of a few:

Anti Poverty Committee: Anti Poverty Week has been a part of the Shoalhaven calendar since 2005. In 2007 a number of community sector and Government agencies were invited to a preliminary meeting to determine who would be interested in organising an Anti Poverty awareness raising event in the East Nowra area. As a result of this meeting a committee was established to organise and run an event during Anti Poverty Week. The resulting forum included information stalls, workshops, entertainment and food, a community forum and a discussion panel, which included, the local Federal Member of Parliament, Federal candidates from other parties, a local Aboriginal community worker and a representative from a local community legal service. The forum was also facilitated by the editor of the local newspaper. After this forum a report was developed and the Shoalhaven Anti Poverty Committee was formed, to not only organise an annual event but to start noting and addressing the issues of poverty in the community.

The Anti Poverty Committee concluded that the Shoalhaven community has a number of identifiable determinates associated with deprivation and social exclusion. These were identified as:

- higher levels of unemployment when compared to the national average;
- lower than average levels of income;
- increasing housing prices both for rental and owner occupied dwellings;
- significant levels of disability or health related conditions usually related to poverty;
- drug, alcohol and gambling abuse
- significant levels of reported domestic violence; and
- high numbers of early school leavers.

The Shoalhaven Anti Poverty Committee is committed to advocating on behalf of residents of the Nowra/Bomaderry community for adequate and effective resources for their community, facilitating processes that will empower the residents to create a sustainable, healthy community and working with groups, organisations, government agencies and individuals to eradicate illiteracy within the community. To achieve these goals the committee works with the community and other partners in co-operation, using a regularly updated plan to address some of these issues. An important feature of the Anti Poverty Committee is the empowerment and involvement of local residents in identifying the issues relating to them and working on ways to address poverty and social isolation. Some of these projects have included:

- Surveys and consultations with local residents
- Initiating local markets
- Regular community events including Anti Poverty Week celebration
- An “Equality for a Fair Go” project
- A volunteer based “Yard Assist” project
- A strengths based local residents “Neighbourhood Pride” group

Whilst place based initiatives are proven to be quite successful, the issue of poverty and disadvantage also requires a whole of government and non-government services approach.

Shoalhaven Homelessness and Good Living Conditions Interagency: In 2010 a Homelessness Interagency group was formed and in 2011 a forum was held at which over fifty people attended with the aim of bringing together as many agencies as possible who are working to resolve homelessness issues in the Shoalhaven to work in a co-ordinated way toward improving housing prospects for people in the Shoalhaven, particularly vulnerable and disadvantaged people who are homeless, at risk of homelessness or are housed in unsuitable accommodation. The group also aims to strengthen the voice of the Shoalhaven in the Illawarra Homelessness Action Plan. The key issues identified included:

- Insufficient affordable accommodation due to:
 - Long waiting times for public housing
 - Lack of affordable rental properties
 - Isolation of many towns/villages in the Shoalhaven and lack of transport
 - Caravan parks are either too expensive or “no go” zones
 - Lack of short term accommodation and crisis accommodation, especially for youth
- Lack of crisis facilities
- Lack of after hour services
- Lack of support
- Discrimination, especially for young people, single unemployed and people with mental health issues.

The group has continued to work in a collaborative way to raise awareness about homelessness, advocate for essential services and provide a seamless referral process for clients in the Shoalhaven.

Families NSW: Families NSW is the NSW Government’s overarching strategy to enhance the health and wellbeing of children up to eight years and their families. The key to the Families NSW approach is that of strengthening prevention and early intervention to help achieve better outcomes for children to develop sustainable and inclusive service networks that operate effectively for their community. This is achieved by working collaboratively with a range of government and non-government services who work with children.

Families NSW and ACYFS Networks aim to:

- Build a picture of the diverse needs of children and families in their community, particularly those most at risk of poor outcomes;
- Develop systems that will identify children and families with risk factors at key points in the child’s development;
- Provide a range of effective services and community supports for these families; use the information gathered through evaluation to continuously improve the service network.

Families NSW and ACYFS achieves these through:

- Helping parents to build their skills and confidence in parenting;
- Supporting parents and carers so they can respond to problems early;
- Building communities that support children and families;
- Improving the way agencies work together to make sure families get the services they need.

The Shoalhaven network has organised area planning days and developed an interagency plan using relevant data to monitor the strengths and issues relating to children and families in the area, organised group training, coordinated information about parenting courses and other information for parents, lobbied for key services and been a conduit for service information exchange.

Shoalhaven Aboriginal Community Interagency Alliance Group (SACAI): There are numerous Aboriginal community focused bodies and interagency groups within the Shoalhaven established to address social, economic and cultural development.

Many of the focus groups address specific issues of health, housing, education, employment and training. The groups provide a vital opportunity for local Aboriginal people to play an active role in decision making processes, identifying key issues that impact on local Aboriginal communities, determining effective Aboriginal community capacity building strategies and working partnerships.

One of the focus groups is the Shoalhaven Aboriginal Community Interagency Alliance Group (SACAI) established to work towards building stronger working relationships and effective collaborative approaches through networking, sharing information about programs, projects and issues affecting communities. SACAI encourages representatives from community agencies, non-government and government bodies responsible for developing and implementing culturally appropriate programs, projects and the provision of services to Aboriginal people within the Shoalhaven. This group particularly encourages service providers who are located outside of the Shoalhaven area (Illawarra & Sydney areas) and responsible for servicing Shoalhaven Aboriginal communities, as they may not be fully aware of the local community issues and community protocols.

This group is based on a commitment by community agencies, non-government and government service providers to participate and volunteer to host a SACAI meeting.

Information is shared about programs, projects and any issues that may impact on local communities from lack/increase of Aboriginal involvement, programs identified to address specific issues or targeted communities for instance, accessibility to services & community resources, isolation, women, men, children, youth, Elders, age and disability, education, employment and training, housing, health etc)

SACAI meetings are held bi-monthly and the mid-year meeting is hosted by Prime Minister and Cabinet South Coast Regional Office and Aboriginal Affairs NSW Batemans Bay office to provide updates and/or any changes to Aboriginal funding and programs. It is an opportunity for issues to be raised by agency representatives.

For Aboriginal community members there is an increase of targeted programs and accessibility of mainstream services which allows for community members to have a choice in the type and suitability of services available to address their needs.

- (b) barriers to the effective coordination of services, including lack of client awareness of services and any legislative provisions such as privacy law**
In the past there were a lot more barriers than there is now currently due to services different criteria and inability of workers (or not wanting) to be more flexible towards clients, to ensure clients get the services they need rather than restrict the services to what the provider wants to give.

Now that the "Person Centred Approach" has been rolled across the sector, and that the Departments of Aged and Disability Home and Community Care, Housing and Family and Community Care have amalgamated, clients now receive a more streamlined and personal service than they may have received in the past.

There are still some concerns about just having one central "Gateway", eg My Aged Care, as many people are not very computer literate and waiting times can put a lot of people off.

Through forums like the SACAI interagency group and other agencies such as Aboriginal community committees and advisory groups, it has been identified that there seems to be still some duplication of programs offered to targeted communities through the lack of communication, collaboration and promotion.

The biggest barrier to effective coordination of services is the result of State and Federal Governments reducing or ceasing funding support services. The Homeless Hub service, for example is the lowest funded homelessness service in the state, yet they have had to cope with the cutting of a youth homelessness service and the extra demand from people released from the South Coast Correctional Centre at Nowra as the 'COSP'/house built in front of the prison which was intended to be a "halfway house" accommodation for ex-prisoners to be housed until they became independent, is not being used because funding for it was cut.

Related to this are changes in government policy and legislation. For example, the changes in the "Staying Home, Leaving Home" policies have taken away funding for crisis accommodation services and put a pressure on budget motels to provide this type of accommodation, which they are really not setup to provide.

The Shoalhaven (like many areas) have very little affordable rentals. Anything the government can do to encourage more affordable rental properties, would be a good idea.

Following from this the following is evident:

- Local services coordinate effectively BUT
- This is hampered by inadequately funded services and changes in government policy
- These result in increased pressures on services and increase the problem of homelessness
- In addition to providing increased funding to adequately support necessary services it is important for government to look at a legislative base to ensure greater levels of affordable housing is made available.

(c) consideration of initiatives such as the Dubbo Minister's Action Group and best practice models for the coordination of services

The Dubbo Minister's Action Group has had some successes due to a collaborative, place based approach. This has activated an area, by having a fulltime community centre with a number of activities, an idea our local Housing NSW is considering, as well as having a good clean-up, another thing that Shoalhaven City Council has done locally.

The concern is if/when people are evicted from social housing or selling of houses to private owners and/or turning those vacated properties into the community centre, what happens to the evicted families?

Some great work is being done locally in collaboration with Housing NSW, Illawarra Forum, with the tenants and supported by Council in Numbaa Way Nowra to work with the tenants to re-activate the space and make the area more liveable. The key to success in these types of projects is genuine engagement with the residents.

Summary

Services work together in high social needs area to provide the best service to clients that they are able to do. However, changes in government funding arrangements and changes in policy restrict the extent and effectiveness of this service provision. The example of the "Staying Home Leaving Home" policies, cited earlier, have resulted in increased pressures on service coordination with those in need often forces to find accommodation in unsuitable locations that may not be appropriate or safe. The result is an increase in social problems such as homelessness which then place increased pressure on services and communities.

As such, we would request a further review of these service programs so that the needs of the target user groups are met and not just used as a tool to rationalise spending. Part of this review would need to include examining ways that what services can and cannot provide can be more readily communicated to other agencies to prevent unnecessary duplication of services and so that the person is referred to the most appropriate service to meet their needs.

Yours faithfully

Russ Pigg
General Manager
20/08/2015