

**Submission
No 23**

**INQUIRY INTO SERVICE COORDINATION IN
COMMUNITIES WITH HIGH SOCIAL NEEDS**

Organisation: Lifetime Connect Inc

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

About Lifetime Connect

Lifetime Connect is a not for profit charity which was established in the Nambucca Shire in 1972. The organisation has grown from a group of committed volunteers providing a “Meals on Wheels” service with the assistance of local service clubs and the Macksville and District Hospital to a multi-million dollar agency providing a broad range of programs and services on a regional basis.

Services provided include the Commonwealth Home Support Program, Veterans Home Care, Community Development, No interest Loans Scheme, Community Garden, Men’s Shed, a School Readiness Program, and we support breakfast clubs at two local schools.

Lifetime Connect has commenced a merger process with the Nambucca Valley Children’s’ Group Inc. which will encompass Family Support Services, Supported Playgroups, an Early intervention Service, Family Day Care, and a local Victims of Crime Service. The two organisations have a formal partnership agreement and work closely on some activities. The Bellingen Nambucca Reconnect Service is jointly managed under a consortium arrangement.

In 2012, the then Nambucca Valley Neighbourhood Centre merged with Lifetime Connect. Whilst some local programs have ceased due to changed funding arrangements, namely a local crisis accommodation service and a specialist family support service, ongoing information and referral services are maintained in a limited sense, as well as Community Capacity Building. The local community centre, the Family and Community Information, centre ceased operating in November 2014.

The combined history of Lifetime Connect, 43 years, Nambucca Valley Children’s Group, 29 years, and the Nambucca Valley Neighbourhood Centre 28 years at the time of merger, represents unique experience in directly addressing the demands of service coordination in a disadvantaged area across the ever-changing landscapes of community needs, government policy priorities and associated funding programs, as well community services industry reforms.

Lifetime Connect is committed to ensuring the continuation of locally owned and managed community services based on robust community engagement. Understanding and building on local support systems is vital to ensure people continue to be able to identify and respond to their own local needs.

About Nambucca Valley

Nambucca Shire is located on the NSW Mid North Coast half way between Sydney and Brisbane. The 2011 ABS Census estimated the population as 19,655. Approximately one third of all residents live in a rural or non-urban area. There is a very large proportion of older and ageing adults with some 57% of the population aged 50 years or over, and 32.2% aged 65 years or over. There is a significant number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, 1,359 or 7.29%, which is much higher than the NSW average of 2.4%.

The Nambucca Shire is clearly disadvantaged. The 2011 Census indicated 38.16% of households earning less than \$600 per week, and unemployment at 10.7%. Current unemployment rate is 9.4%.

Work by Professor Tony Vinson and the Jesuit Social Services since 1999 and more recently in the latest Dropping Off The Edge (<http://www.dote.org.au/>) report has consistently identified the Nambucca Shire as disadvantaged, with the Shire postcodes of 2449, 2447, 2448 and 2441 all classified thus.

About the local service system

The Nambucca Valley service system is small but robust.

The population profile demands a broad range of aged and community care services working closely with the Mid North Coast Local Health District via the Macksville and District Hospital and the associated Community Health Centre. A new Community Health Centre, "Health One" is currently under construction at Nambucca Heads.

Local disability services have more recently undergone a series of realignments and amalgamations to consolidate local capacity in readiness for the introduction of the NDIS.

The largest not for profit in the Nambucca Shire is Nambucca Valley Care with a major focus on residential aged care. There is another residential care provider, Uniting Care, who also operates some community care services.

The next largest not for profit is Lifetime Connect which encompasses Aged and Community Care Services including Consumer Directed Care packages, Veterans Home Care, a No Interest loans Scheme (NILS), Men's Shed, Community Garden and a Community Development Service.

Child and Family services are provided mainly by the Nambucca Valley Children's Group Inc. which include Family Support Service, Early Intervention, Family Day Care, Supported Playgroups and a Victims of Crime Support Service.

Lifetime Connect and Nambucca valley Children's Group have a formal partnership agreement and have just commenced a Shire-wide school readiness program, Ready Set Go. These organisations have resolved to merge and already share a common financial management system.

Nambucca Shire Council provides no direct human/community services but does employ 2 community development staff with funding provided by FACS under the Community Builders Program.

Youth Services are a source of concern, with there being no funded general youthworkers with case management capacity in the Shire. The Nambucca Youth Services Centre at Nambucca Heads has funding for a Links to Learning program only and provides other services utilising volunteers. The local Reconnect Service has a part-time youthworker based at the centre providing support to young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Aboriginal operated services are few with limited services provided in Bowraville form Miimi Aboriginal Corporation and valley wide coverage provided by Ngurrala Aboriginal Corporation.

A large number of services outreach to the Nambucca Shire from Coffs Harbour, and some services come from Kempsey. Each of these centres is 50k average distance from the Shire.

Regional services such as Partners in Recovery, Personal Helpers and Mentors, Ability Links, and a range from North Coast Medicare Local, provide support locally to clients via outreach from other areas. There are limitations with this approach, since the local service system is small and often at capacity.

About Network

The Nambucca Valley Network is the Nambucca Shire community services interagency. It has met consistently since 1985. The current terms of reference are attached. These are reviewed annually by the Network and have not changed very much over time. The fundamental purpose of Network is to share information and assist in coordinating community services across the Nambucca Shire.

The Network has met 8 times a year, on a rolling six-weekly basis for the past decade. It is currently convened by Community Development Coordinator as part of service contract with FACS under the Community Builders Program.

Participation in the Network meetings varies. The range of community Service agencies attending is very broad and includes both local and regional not for profit NGOs, Nambucca Shire Council, local church leaders, local volunteers and from time to time TAFE students. Participation in the interagency by NSW Government agencies is irregular but covers a range of agencies; however there are few NSW Government Agencies with local offices in the Nambucca Shire. Local NSW Health services attend occasionally when client demand allows. Again however the management and planning functions related to these Primary Health services are located outside the Nambucca Shire.

This following encompasses the general discussion of the Network meetings over the past 7 years including a specific facilitated discussion held at its last meeting on 28th July 2015.

Coordination should address the following:

- Clients need to feel that they are not captured in silos which do not communicate with each other
- Services communicating with each other formally, regularly and structured as well as , informally and unstructured
- Integration of the way services work including collaboration between services; holistic approach to clients; and communication of what is happening to clients
- Clients want collaborative care that is person centred
- Interagencies are pivotal to coordination, collaboration and planning
- Interagencies need to include participation by not for profits, State and Federal departments and agencies and Local Government
- Coordination and information services need to be resourced specifically, it is a specialised area
- Community engagement is critical to improving the knowledge of the services system and to engender local actions to address gaps and emerging needs

Problems:

- Services having to compete for funding creates a lack of trust
- Loss of locally based services means that other agencies that remain are taking up the slack
- Lack of services; lack of money; lack of workers; lack of particular services
- Very few services based in the local area
- Lack of coordination or generalist services e.g. Neighbourhood or community centre
- “Can’t coordinate better if we don’t have the services”.
- Limited government agency presence in the Shire. Government Access Centre at Nambucca Heads RMS office but service provision extremely limited.
- Lack of money for training of volunteers (who are often providing services) and in some cases for paid staff
- Lack of venues and spaces in small areas for service outreach
- Needing more comprehensive needs analysis and community engagement processes to identify real needs
- Gathering and maintaining information requires resources. It is an going and somewhat complex process
- Mobile phone coverage is an issue for many parts of the Nambucca, also cost of services is an issue for many
- Internet connections are variable and in some cases poor quality. Access to hardware, i.e. computers and/or smartphones is also a barrier for many.
- Procurement process do not demand collaboration at a local level; lack of monitoring or measurement about how this happens
- More services funded on a regional basis tends to limit outreach activities due to demands at larger regional centres and perceived time and cost issues regarding travelling.
- Lack of appropriate referrals; wrong information; wrong service referred to; not timely; allocated lower priority.

- Facebook and social media have limited coverage across the age range; also requires monitoring and updating
- Web based referrals not consistent in terms of information or response times

Possibilities:

- Support for and recognition of flexible and different case management models and tools that span boundaries of different organisations
- Standardised consent tool for clients with list of local services – protocol to support this across a wide range of services
- Procurement models that have more specificity in relation to service linkages collaboration and partnerships and that do not discriminate against smaller and/or local organisations
- Resources and/or funding support for local information/coordination services with direct links to community engagement capacity and with a defined (and funded) role for Local Government
- Expansion of current email list operated by Community Development Coordinator based on interagency attendance for regular distribution of information to and between services
- Support for “One FACS” place based planning process to be undertaken by FACS Mid North Coast District on a Local Government basis in partnership with Local Government and not for profits in each area. Planning based on a strong community engagement methodology which encourages local collective action.
- Increased usage and promotion of Facebook and/or other social media to support above initiatives and to encourage participation in information sharing and general community engagement
- Provision of training and support for social media engagement for some groups
- Support for broader whole of government coordination initiatives beyond single agency activities. All these activities need to be grounded in robust community engagement practices and involve local not for profits as well as government agencies.
- Exploration of the role of Regional Development Australia committees to promote activities around joint planning with all levels of government at a local level including resources to support this.

In conclusion it must be said that regionalisation of both Government and non-government service provision has created identifiable local areas of disadvantage due to lack of access to services, lack of information about services, decreasing number of local service outlets and, in some cases, a decreased service provision. This is exacerbated by the continuing practice of many government agencies to think and plan in silos. Often new initiatives result in another coordinating process driven from afar and paralleling if not duplicating existing local processes.

It is not all negative however, with some local initiatives such as the Nambucca Valley Against Domestic and Family Violence representing across agency collaboration to educate the local community, raise awareness and advocate for more localised crisis and support services. Another initiative that shows some promise is the recently established school readiness program, “Ready Set Go” which has tried to generate much closer collaboration between schools, pre-schools, parents and other agencies to ensure that at Kindergarten year, children benefit from all the school has offer rather start and remain behind.