

**Submission
No 9**

INQUIRY INTO SERVICE COORDINATION IN COMMUNITIES WITH HIGH SOCIAL NEEDS

Organisation: Wagga Wagga City Council

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The Director
Standing Committee on Social Issues
Parliament House
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The Hon Bronnie Taylor MLC, Committee Chair
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The Hon Shayne Mallard MLC
Revd the Hon Fred Nile MLC
The Hon DR Peter Phelps
The Hon Penny Sharpe MLC

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Inquiry into service coordination in communities with high social needs

Dear Director,

Wagga Wagga City Council's social planning unit has considered the request for submissions and appreciates the opportunity to make comment. In preparing this submission we noted the areas of focus provided.

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

Wagga Wagga City Council's social planning unit works closely and collaboratively with many of our State government agencies and local service providers, in particular those with responsibility for health, education, community safety, family and community services (incorporating housing, ageing, disability). We value the work currently in progress by NSW Department of Family and Community Services, to increase service coordination and collective impact in the local area and to commence the consideration of funding agreements to allow increased flexibility with service delivery, in accordance with local need and innovation. We look forward to seeing the outcomes of these once finalised. We also value recent realignment of NSW Health and FACS boundaries to increase opportunities for collaborative service provision.

Wagga based government agencies and service providers are reasonably skilled in identifying communities of high social need, and in many cases, work collaboratively with other services to address this. Opportunities to streamline support are essential, however due to high demands on service provision, a lack of time and funding, the capacity to implement plans to minimise barriers

to access is limited. NGOs are forced into reactionary service provision that is working in the business, not on the business. Many of the issues in the communities of high social need are also entrenched and highly complex, and at times support can be addressing one issue pertinent at that time but funding, skill levels and resourcing does provide a context for a holistic solution.

Communities with high social needs have been identified in Wagga Wagga around geographical, demographic and social groups. Statistical data, local knowledge and anecdotal information has contributed to this in a number of forums. These groups include but are not limited to our Aboriginal community, women and children affected by domestic violence, humanitarian settlers and asylum seekers in Wagga. In terms of demographical groups, young people aged 10-17 have been identified as a group at risk, especially in areas where they are affected by other factors including geographical locations and socio economic status. There appears to be significant disparity in funding for some of these groups.

In regards to asylum seekers, one of the groups identified in Wagga as open to exploitation and of high social need, we understand that the picture is looking more bleak. All services currently offering service to CALD clients are saying they will not have capacity to assist holders of the new Safe Haven Enterprise Visa's. We understand existing funding streams such as Community Assistance Scheme (CAS) and the Asylum Seeker Assistance Scheme (ASAS) are being disbanded, there is concern that no replacement funding has been announced and regional areas are going to be further stretched to support these people who are already significantly traumatised, isolated and have, in many cases, have minimal grasp on the English language.

Wagga Wagga has a higher proportion of people aged between 0 and 17 years- 25.4% compared with 23.6% for Regional NSW. In Wagga Wagga youth are identified at significant risk, we have low attrition rates into the HSC, high crime rates, high youth unemployment. Yet in the past 2 years Wagga has lost considerable amounts of funding for youth and we have seen services offering case coordination for youth with complex needs ceased, for example Campbell Page, and programs aimed at increasing coordination between services, for example Partnership Brokering through Compact, defunded. We have also seen other well regarded programs removed from one agency and funding given to another with limited consultation and or significant reductions in existing funding. The spasmodic allocation of funding in the sector is reflective of the lack of functionality and cohesion in the services sector, despite many services best efforts.

Data obtained from the Bureau of Crime Statistics and research (BOCSAR) identify in Wagga Wagga local government area (LGA) youth (10-17 years of age) represent the highest percentage of offenders by age in eight out of ten crime areas, including but not limited to: assault-non domestic violence, break



and enter (dwelling and non-dwelling), motor vehicle theft, stealing (from motor vehicle, retail stores and person), malicious damage.

Another area of high unaddressed need exists within our social housing estates of Ashmont, Tolland and Koorringal. Whilst reports such as “Dropping off the Edge 2015” identify some highly important synergies and trends in entrenched disadvantage and opportunities for change, there is concern in relation to a lack of resources, coordinated localised service provision and also political awareness of Wagga’s areas of disadvantage as DOTE has predominantly assessed areas based on postcode.

If we review much of the data from whole postcodes against pockets of disadvantage in the Wagga LGA eg. sections of Ashmont and Tolland we will see parallels between the issues in these areas and areas where disadvantage sits across a postcode, and or areas within a postcode. Windale, NSW for example, has less of a population than Ashmont as a suburb and has a smaller geographical footprint, yet as Windale has its own postcode is able to generate data to indicate disadvantage in a far clearer way. If you review Ashmont and Tolland in the social housing areas we can also see similar SEIFA scores in pockets of the suburb to some of the other areas listed in the report for example one pocket of Tolland has a SEIFA score of 574.

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

Wagga Wagga has maintained an understanding of the direction of FACS to implement a database to increase service coordination through an online portal “Patchwork”. Whilst a number of service providers have expressed an interest and some have actively encouraged staff participation there remains a degree of concern in relation to possible breaches of privacy and confidentiality.

Other barriers include competing and increasing demands on a sector who are often expected to deliver more for less. Operating under a significant fiscal and human resource constraints in a competitive tender environment restrains innovative and collaborative practice. Whilst there is an ongoing commitment from the local government agencies and non-government service providers to work cooperatively, this is often dampened by inflexible government funding requiring delivery of a very specific service type.

In identifying barriers there are also significant opportunities for local collaborative service provision. Community forums and surveys to some geographically high needs community groups, continue to flag their inability to access service provision, due to the services being centralised in the city of Wagga and poor public transport solutions. Three out of four of our social housing areas have state of the art community centres but not one of these holds ongoing funding for coordination of services to community members. Whilst NSW FACS as the owners of the centres in Koorringal and Tolland are



doing all they can to increase service access at a local level, as are council in Ashmont, there is no ongoing funding for centre coordination. This leaves a status quo where centrally based service providers are reluctant to provide service from these facilities. This due to work health safety risk assessment of placing isolated workers at risk, this is coupled with a lack of trust in these areas as there is no relationship or consistent human face to assist them to navigate a complex service system. This is significantly impacting on accessibility to service for many community members in crisis, who have to tackle a limited transport offering to access much needed services.

A sense of isolation, limited education and fluency in the English language and or literacy issues also contribute to a lack of awareness of what is available and how to access it for many communities of high social need. Without locally based, culturally sensitive service provision and increased outreach this is difficult to overcome.

Considerations of initiatives and best practice models for the coordination of services

Wagga Wagga is developing innovative solutions to some of the issues identified above. A new initiative commenced in 2015 in Wagga Wagga. The “Help at the Hubs” model is an initiative of the Cooperative Legal Service Delivery Program through Legal Aid. This initiative aims to bring together support agencies to work collaboratively to bring clients legal support, financial counselling, domestic violence advocacy in one place at one time. It is run in the community centres in social housing areas for half a day a month. The premise this initiative was built on is that clients often present with complex multifaceted issues eg. risk of tenancy, financial crisis and legal issues. This initiative brings all service providers together in a less formal setting to discuss matters with clients collectively and to share resources and expertise. Unfortunately initiatives such as this are going to take time as there is significant distrust in many of these communities who have been affected by sporadic opening and closing of the community centres due to lack of consistent funding streams.

At a local level services such as the Family Referral centre program through Relationships Australia are bridging the gap for many, providing them with a single point of entry and providing a supported referral system to enable people to navigate to different service types. Also the Partnerships in Recovery model of service delivery has shown an increase in service collaboration and coordination in the area of mental health support. Unfortunately, under the National Disability Insurance Scheme, a significant portion of the funding, currently utilised for multiple sections of our community affected by a range of complex and mental health issues, will be withdrawn and targeted to only the most complex cases.



Service coordination and collaboration is very much a consideration of many of our service providers and in Wagga Wagga many child, youth and family services providers have developed a framework to coordinate a more strategic response. The Wagga Impact Network (WIN) established themselves with senior representation from many of the locally based not for profits, with one of their aims is to provide a considered localised response to competitive tenders. They are increasingly gaining traction and a voice within our locally based government agencies but also function with minimal resourcing.

Other related matters

I look forward to your responses to the above issues and opportunity to provide further comments as the matter progresses. If the opportunity arises I would be happy to participate in any facilitated discussions or panel reviews that would further assist the committee in this matter.

Yours Sincerely

Lisa Saffery
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Wagga Wagga City Council

