

**Submission
No 62**

INQUIRY INTO CHILD PROTECTION

Organisation: Wollongong West Street Centre

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**From: The Wollongong West Street Centre
42 West St Wollongong , 2500**

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Key Issues

The amount of and allocation of funding and resources to non government organisations for the employment of casework specialists, caseworkers and other frontline personnel and all other associated costs for the provision of services for children at risk of harm and children in out of home care.

Context to this Submission

1.What is Our Service?

The Wollongong West St Centre is a non-government community sexual assault services that provides specialist therapeutic services to children, young people and women that have suffered the insidious and long-term impacts of childhood sexual assault.

Our Centre has been in operation for 30 years and is the only specialist community sexual assault service in the Illawarra – covering an area from Helensburgh in the north to Kiama in the south.

The Centre is founded on the principles of **trauma informed practice** and employs three dedicated specialist sexual assault therapists for four days per week. They undertake the individual counselling and group work as well as the management of the property and administration duties. The level of funding defines these **skilled workers' wages that is considerably less than their peers in health**

The clients that are referred to the Centre usually suffer from complex trauma. This type of work is challenging and can require a whole team approach to provide the intensity of support required if solid productive therapeutic work is to be achieved.

West Street often receives these referrals regularly from private practitioners who are not able to do this work within a solo practice.

The centre is overseen by a **volunteer management committee** consisting of skilled local professionals who ensure the viability of every aspect of the service.

2. Our Network

WSC is member of a peak body of non-government community sexual assault services - **CASAC** – the Children and Adolescent Sexual Assault Counsellors network.

Although a peak body, **CASAC has never received any funding.** It is run by a committee consisting of therapists from the sexual assault NGO network. **CASAC** has operated successfully for about two decades as a strong, and vital network linking and supporting isolated practitioners across NSW.

Key Finding

1. NSW non-government community sexual assault services, such as the Wollongong West Street Centre, provide a viable and economical service for some of the most trauma impacted people within our community, all within limited funding boundaries

This economical nature of the NGO sexual assault service has obviously come about due to the need to operate within the boundaries of the funding limitations.

However while we may fight hard to do the best job we can within these limitations, as therapists we know that this funding situation is harming and further traumatising this already vulnerable target group.

In response to your inquiry we have outlined the impact of this current and historical inadequate level of funding as we experience it at the Wollongong West St Centre

2. Evidence of inadequate funding

Our organisation received a level of funding that allows us to employ 3 therapists for 4 days per week.

The service operates with a waiting list, with priorities being children, young people and Aboriginal people.

For the last six years the Centre has managed **a waiting list that has clients waiting up to two years, sometimes more, for a service.**

This waiting list is a direct result of the demand for a specialist sexual assault service in our area as opposed to the level of funding available. This simply means that we do not have the money to employ an adequate number of staff to meet the demands that would keep many more children and young people safer than they are now.

While we offer clients on the waiting list referrals, many choose to wait for our service due to the Centre's specialist therapeutic service provision. Further many clients have had bad counselling experiences with non-trauma informed counselling.

It is also important to note that as already stated, some clients may not take up other referrals as their level of trauma makes them unsuitable to attend other services.

(NB: If we cannot offer a service to a child within a reasonable time for their developmental level we will refer them to other local services).

It is a harmful fact that this lack of funding:

- Leaves many of these clients being caught in the fury of their trauma, unsupported. This means that parents needing support to keep their children safe from either their own abuse or the intergenerational impact of abuse remain often under the radar. Many young people remain at great risk, as this work requires focused and committed resources.
- Can Compound and exacerbate the psychological impacts of long term childhood sexual abuse by feeding into the perpetrator tactics of blame and shaming. Eg I am not worthy of treatment, I am to blame for the abuse, I am dirty and untreatable and so on.
- Expects victims to wait for a service usually after taking the courage to speak out., The counselling process is intense,

arduous and requires much courage to work toward recovery. When a victim asks for support we have learnt that this is the time they are ready to take that up. To expect victims of any age to wait for a service, can miss an opportunity for the trauma to be attended to. Often when the time has passed we have lost that family.

Solution

If we are to work at an optimal level in:

- keeping children safe from the impacts of their own abuse,
- supporting their parents to deal with the impacts of their abuse which so often puts their children at risk,
- support young people to manage the impacts of childhood sexual abuse safely,

The Wollongong west street centre requires there to be an adequate increase in funding which would increase the ratio of staff to client demand.

We would require enough funding for two additional therapists that in our case would allow the service to offer:

- a specialist child focused therapist to ensure that any child that is referred receives a timely and dedicated service,
- a dedicated therapist to work with parents of these children educating them in how to parent with complex trauma, with the view to developing safe and supportive home environments.

We believe that our track record indicates that any further funding offered to our service, as with our sister CASAC services, that money will be value added tenfold.

If you have any further questions please do not hesitate to contact the team on 4226 6441 or wollongongweststreetcentre@gmail.com.

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