

4 November 2005

Mr Robert Domm  
Chief Executive Officer  
Redfern Waterloo Authority  
PO Box 3332  
REDFERN NSW 2016

Dear Mr Domm,

**Barnardos Australia comments on the draft Human Services Plan for  
Redfern-Waterloo**

Barnardos Australia welcomes the opportunity to comment on the draft Human Services Plan for Redfern-Waterloo. As a non-government service provider in the area for over twenty years; including most recently auspicing the Intensive Family Support Service (IFSS) via Redfern Waterloo Partnership Project funds; we are able to provide the following information from direct experience in meeting the needs of families and children in the area. Barnardos has participated in the Morgan Disney Review and regularly attended Child and Family Taskforce and Cluster Group meetings.

Barnardos supports the overall objective of an improved service delivery culture, supported by a framework for joint activity and a focus on positive outcomes for children and families living in Redfern and Waterloo. Agency experience in delivering intensive family support; comprising home visits, community development (via the Kids Speak family activity program), advocacy and case co-ordination; for in excess of three hundred families over the past two years, leads us to highlight the following key issues of importance for the further development and implementation of the Human Services Plan.

**Support for Families (Priority areas 1 & 4)**

Improving the health and well being of children identifies actions re:

1. Antenatal care, particularly re Aboriginal parents, community health and AMS.
2. Implementation of NSW Families First and Aboriginal Child, Youth and Family strategies.
3. Facilitating access to affordable childcare.
4. Enhancing services for parents of 0-5 year olds.

It is important, when considering development of the above, to prioritise the needs of disadvantaged and at risk families who will not easily engage with services unless facilitated by an outreach approach. Barnardos' experience is that the most vulnerable families will not easily connect with services, such as antenatal care or family resource workers within childcare centres, unless they already have an active connection with a support worker, who attends with them in order to establish and consolidate a connection.

An outreach approach and ability to home visit and follow up on missed appointments is required. Office or Centre based support workers are generally not sufficiently responsive to be able to perform this function.

### **Education (Priority areas 2 & 3)**

There is no “quick fix” solution to the problems of poor attainment and literacy levels. The currently limited provision of alternative educational provision for Redfern-Waterloo children who are not managing mainstream schooling must be addressed, in conjunction with strategies to improve poor school attendance levels. A plan aimed at attaining and sustaining long-term change in this area is beyond the scope of short-term privately funded initiatives and requires a coordinated response involving all government agencies.

Educational deficits in the community require a “whole of government” response, which will be greatly enhanced via active partnership arrangements. We believe that a well coordinated plan aimed at meeting the needs of children in Redfern-Waterloo is long overdue. It would be extremely useful if there was a significantly greater connection between the community, families, schools and education officers; aimed at coordinating and planning individual education plans for children, which are reviewed on a regular basis.

### **Common Assessment and Referral Frameworks (Priority area 4)**

Priority area 4 “Improving support for vulnerable people” identifies actions re:

1. Establishment of the DoCS Early Intervention Team.
2. Improved coordination of access to services.
3. Development of joint protocols and systems.
4. Implementation of a joint service agency case coordination framework.

The experience of the initial pilot DoCS Early Intervention Teams in other parts of the Sydney Metropolitan area is that families do not easily transfer, ie accept referral to support services. Take-up rate of referrals made by these pilot EI teams has been poor. This is likely to be because these are voluntary clients ie there are no statutory orders requiring them to accept referral and take-up services. Use of a common assessment and referral framework in Redfern-Waterloo will assist the referral process and subsequent case coordination process. In 2004-2005 IFSS assisted 76% of all referred families (116 out of 153) via a case management approach using the SCARF (Supporting Children and Responding to Families) system, this model is supported by Family Services Australia which is currently initiating pilot SCARF implementation with FSA member agencies.

UK research and protocol development for common assessment and referral tools and frameworks, with which Barnardos is familiar and has received intensive briefings, fits well with the SCARF system. These protocols could provide a strong starting point for discussion of common assessment tools, joint agency work, and case coordination. Barnardos’ experience in the Redfern-Waterloo community is that a multi-focussed approach is crucial to assessment protocols and case coordination, in order to capture the strengths of families in their community, in parallel with individual assessment.

### **Family and Domestic Violence (Priority area 5)**

Actions listed under Priority area 5 fail to identify the need for a support group for domestic violence victims; such a group has not existed in Redfern-Waterloo for several years. A DV support group for women is a current joint initiative of IFSS and Mudgin-gal, also supported by the Inner City Domestic Violence Group. It is important that family violence initiatives address a range of individually focussed strategies, including discreet interventions for both women and men in addition to community awareness raising, and also includes projects addressing the particular needs of children and youth. Focus groups held with Redfern and Waterloo children as part of the IFSS evaluation indicate that children living in the area want to feel safe, and expect workers to take an active role in promoting this.

Barnardos IFSS is currently involved in Court support for DV victims, Inner City Domestic Violence Group and regularly supports Blackout Violence activities. We support the development of a Domestic Violence Intervention Response team in partnership with the police and there are extremely effective NSW models such as the DVIR in Gosford. We would recommend the setting up of such a model here whilst also welcoming the proposed increase in numbers of Aboriginal Community Liaison Officers at Redfern Local Command.

In designing services to meet the needs of children and young people in need of support and assistance after hours, it is important to thoroughly investigate the strengths and deficits of a variety of program types. For example, “safe houses” may be seen as an immediate alternative for young people who are on the street perhaps because of violence in the home, however such group settings can exacerbate violent behaviour by placing disturbed and acting out young people together, thereby increasing risk. Residential settings are extremely high cost and difficult to manage and maintain, adjoining neighbours commonly find living near groups of youth who are coming and going a community disturbance. The general lack of medium to long-term care and accommodation options for older primary aged children and adolescents in Sydney may mean that it is difficult to move on clients who have accessed emergency care. It is certainly the experience in the UK that such models have been fraught with difficulties, including staff safety issues.

### **Community Capacity Building (Priority Area 10)**

Barnardos has auspiced the Kids Speak family activity program on Friday afternoons on Waterloo Green, since July 2003. This is an effective community capacity building initiative, which contributes to the development of social capital via engendering links between families and fostering a sense of community ownership of activities, and neighbourhood belonging. Evidence from the IFSS evaluation undertaken by UNSW indicates that children themselves are requesting more community-based activities such as Kids Speak.

A recent evaluation of Kids Speak undertaken by IFSS shows that parents who attend Kids Speak each week (approximately thirty) indicate that they would like this activity to be available more often and particularly during holiday times. We propose the extension of Kids Speak during school holidays from a once a week activity to twice or three times per week. An increased need for resources could in part be met by the commitment from other services to make staff available and an obvious link is with youth services (the Street Team previously committed two workers to Kids Speak). Such a link would assist in building transition paths between child and youth focused services in Redfern-Waterloo.

Finally, Barnardos wishes to comment on service integration, including location and co-location issues. In our experience service integration is supported and enhanced by co-location and also by proximity to essential services within the community. In seeking premises for the IFSS office base Barnardos was aware of the geographical considerations within the Redfern-Waterloo community, ie situating the service in the eastern section (in or closer to Waterloo) would mean that Redfern residents and, particularly families living on The Block, would not utilise the service as a drop in facility. Likewise if the IFSS office was located closer to Redfern Station and The Block, then Waterloo families would not use the service. The choice of central location on Redfern St and directly opposite the Commonwealth Bank has enhanced accessibility by all families regardless of suburb, as a large number of residents visit the Commonwealth Bank particularly in the week when Centrelink benefits are paid.

The IFSS shopfront has maximised opportunity for “off the street” and “drop in” clients, approximately 25% of families using IFSS in 2004-2005 have fitted this category. An assertive outreach strategy is proven to be most successful in attracting vulnerable and hard to reach families. The percentage of self referrals to IFSS in 2004-2005 (45%) is testament to this. Families in Redfern and Waterloo are frequently suspicious of services; levels of disadvantage cause many to be mistrustful of agencies and are, therefore, only willing to engage with services to a limited extent. 100% of IFSS clients during 2004-2005 were also involved with other local agencies, although not necessarily directly referred by them; many families expressed a preference that services not know how many agencies they were involved with, because of fear and mistrust. This issue must be addressed in any attempts to integrate new and existing services.

It is important to note that there are particular sections of Redfern-Waterloo that are highly territorial in their behaviour in that a certain group or extended family will access only one geographically located range of services. Rivalries with other groups and/or families are prevalent and, therefore necessitate the need for client choice as a basic principle for accessing services.

Barnardos staff are available for clarification and/or discussion of any of the matters raised as above. Please do not hesitate to contact me on 9281 7933, should this be required.

Yours sincerely,

**DEIRDRE CHEERS**

Senior Manager Barnardos Australia (South East Sydney)