

INNER SYDNEY REGIONAL COUNCIL

for SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT Inc.

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**Response to The Redfern-Waterloo Authority
Draft Human Services Plan
from the
Inner Sydney Regional Council for Social Development
11th November 2005**

Timeframe

The short time frame for response to this document has limited the capacity of our organisation and other affected community organisations to respond to this plan in as much detail as we would have liked.

Overall comments

We understand that this plan has been written to achieve sign off from the Chief Executive Officers and Directors of the NSW Government Human Services Departments. We appreciate the fact that the RWA intends to negotiate with local services over time and negotiate on how to implement the plan. While this approach is appreciated, 'Regional Council' needs to take the opportunity provided in responding to this plan to outline some of our concerns. What we are dealing with here in the end comes down to local people and local problems and with respect, Human Services CEOs do not have a deep knowledge of these problems.

Our fundamental concern is that the plan, as a government initiative, provides a bureaucratic approach to solving human service issues in the Redfern and Waterloo area. The main response proposed by the document is to restructure community organisations. When trying to find the rationale for this approach, we are confronted with the several concepts that we find concerning and counter productive:

- an underpinning attitude that existing human services in the area are underperforming based on inadequate or inaccurate information
- the assumption that restructure will fix the serious socio-economic issues in this community caused by poverty, poor health (including mental health), drug and alcohol addiction and violence
- the inclusion of state government departments current 'in-favour' issues such as back office savings, co-location, electronic referrals
- the assumption that there are sufficient resources in community organisations (or that may be achieved by integrating them) to deal with the huge demand in this area and that no additional resources are needed.

Our response to the 'restructure option' is below.

"We trained hard, but it seemed that every time we were beginning to form up into teams. we'd be reorganised. I was to learn later, that we tend to meet any new situation by reorganising; and a wonderful method it can be for creating the illusion of progress, while producing confusion, inefficiencies and demoralisation"

Gaius Petronius 75AD

Morgan Disney Report

It is disheartening for local service providers, that this Draft Human Services Plan still contains underpinnings from the Morgan Disney Report, even though the RWA says they are taking a fresh approach. This includes the critical tone and the discounting of any positive work that community organisations are currently undertaking. Despite this, there was some good information given at the cluster meetings that would be of benefit and we would like some of this to be brought forward. It also has the value of using the ‘voice’ of local people, making it easier for them to feel a connection with what is being planned. We regret the decision to ‘absorb’ the input of local services.

A preferred approach

Inner Sydney Regional Council believes that the social problems in Redfern and Waterloo are long standing, deep seated and complex, and in the end are about both systemic disadvantage and lack of a significant high level response over a long period of time. **The adjustments proposed in this plan will have little effect on the lives of people living in this area.** This is disappointing, as we may not have such a good opportunity to make a real difference for some time.

We would like the Redfern Waterloo Authority and those working with Human Services Reform to take a different approach.

1. Take a more supportive view of the work of community organisations in Redfern and Waterloo
2. Visit these organisations and see that we do that works – lessons that have been learned over many years of working with the local community
3. Look at the importance of quality relationships and building of trust as outlined in literature describing social capital
4. Consider the value of individual positive interactions by workers at ground level, over along period of time
5. Advocate (as we all do) for systemic fairness at all levels of government.

Outcomes

RWA has stressed the importance of achieving Key Outcomes in discussions with ISRCSD. In general, the Key Outcomes in this plan are ones we support, though there may be additional ones that can deal with the more deep-seated problems more effectively.

The biggest concern we have about outcomes is that they are of a fairly high level in any hierarchy of outcomes **This means there is a big gap between these desirable outcomes and the actions that have been set out in Phase 1 Priorities to achieve them.** There needs to be an analysis of how the Phase 1 Priorities will lead to the required outcomes, based on an extensive knowledge of the local community residents and services. We also think there are many other important actions that need to happen to achieve the outcomes. For example, the outcome “*improve the capacity of services to meet the needs of vulnerable people*” will need more than just the “integration, co-location and common referral procedures” that are proposed in the plan. These strategies are government priorities and the way that the plan wants them implemented has the capacity to be destructive. Local community services could come up with a whole different list of what will “*improve the capacity of services to meet the needs of vulnerable people*”.

We are concerned that throughout the document, many of the ‘improvements’ are ambit claims, rather than well-analysed strategies that link what is happening at present, with the practical steps required to achieve the outcomes.

Youth services

Looking at the Youth Services, which were nominated in the report as “the most in need of review”, this distinction between the plan and the real world is clear.

Whichever way youth services are organised, “*the needs of vulnerable(young) people*” are best met by workers on the ground, interacting with them in a positive way in a safe environment, with a sufficient variety of programs and intake points to allow them some choice of programs that they feel comfortable with. This costs money. There is no argument that improvements in the existing youth services can be made and it is also true that existing youth services have been keen about

making improvements over some time. What is lacking in the plan is a knowledge and respect of what has been learnt and developed by the existing services and a process of building on that. Community services are often prevented from developing new initiatives, because they have insufficient discretionary funding or a tightly targeted government designed agenda.

Making young people's recreation facilities more accessible during evenings, weekends and school holidays and improving these facilities is a laudable action, but good youth services are also about relationships. You can have the best extended programs and state of the art facilities, but if the relationships between the services and the young people are not good, these initiatives will not work. We also want to point out that government departments must be included in any analysis or planned actions, since the current service configuration is a result of previous government initiatives.

Building Community Capacity

We have special concerns about the approach of this Priority. We cannot accept that community strengthening *"is a process whereby communities, governments, business and philanthropic organisations work together to achieve agreed social economic and environmental outcomes and share ideas"* All the experience and literature that describe community development and building social capital talk about it being local and about process. It is the people who identify their needs and are facilitated to work out solutions to their problems and issues, supported by those who have resources. This is about building power in people to act in their own best interests, not having people with power exercising it over them.

We totally reject the assertion that this area has had "few opportunities for community development and improving social... conditions". We would be happy to have the opportunity to provide the RWA with historical feedback on the long history of community strength that allowed earlier generations (and allows current ones) to survive the extremes of deprivation people in this area have endured.

We would like the RWA to demonstrate in this plan and in their actions, the community building aspects of:

- trust between people
- ownership of issues by the community
- involvement in the management of community services

We would also like to point out that community capacity building is different from building the capacity of community services. Regional council has considerable expertise and experience in building the capacity of community organisations. **We are concerned that many of the initiatives in the plan if implemented will reduce the capacity of small local NGO's**, yet it is small NGO's that allow ownership of issues by the community and involvement of local people in community management. We are particularly worried about integration, co-location, combining administration and have no idea what is meant by "service sharing".

The lack of a deep understanding by the RWA of community development shows in the chosen strategies of developing community leadership and group events. We would like the opportunity to work with the RWA to develop a better understanding of community development and effective strategies to achieve it.

Other Concerns.

Regional Council is also concerned about the precinct model for youth and other services. but think other organisations have a better knowledge to comment more fully.. We also have not had time to consult with Aboriginal services and people in the community to find what they think of the plans for their services, but wonder if training, monitoring and leadership will do the job!