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Submission to the Redfern-Waterloo Authority on the Draft Human Services Plan

Greens NSW
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Overview

The Greens recognize that the land encompassing Redfern-Waterloo is the traditional land of the Gadigal people or the Eora nation. The Greens acknowledge the dispossession of the Indigenous people of their land following Europeans coming here. Not acknowledging this, and the unique history of the Redfern Waterloo area, will undermine any plan for human services.

A human services plan without adequate resources will not be successful in improving services.

The Greens are concerned that the Plan proposed by the Redfern Waterloo Authority (RWA) is based on an assumption that changes to service delivery must either be made without spending any extra money, or that extra money will be found through private sector donations. The call for a private trust to be set up suggests that government is abdicating its responsibility to provide core services.

With insufficient funds, or by relying on intermittent funds from private sources, there can be no real improvements made in Redfern-Waterloo. While many of the Plan's aims are laudable, just how its goals will be realised, and how progress will be measured, is not spelled out. To pretend that real progress can be achieved by scrimping and saving on services here and there, but not committing any extra public resources, is dishonest. It also makes unrealistic demands on already stretched community services to 'do more with less' when in fact they are forced to do less with less.

For The Greens, spending money on people by offering services that increase the chance of their leading decent lives is not a negative. Providing jobs for community service workers, as well as training, apprenticeships and jobs through employment programs to local residents, should not be seen as costs that must be continually reduced. Over time, spending that gives people access to better education, employment, housing and health care, will produce less social inequality and less dependence on assistance. Those OECD countries that redistribute resources equitably not surprisingly have greater indicators of well-being, lower crime rates, better education levels and lack of deprivation amongst their populace. Those counties that spend less on social services, such as the USA, have higher levels of crime, drug and alcohol use, teen pregnancies, and poorer health.

The evidence is there; it is no mystery that treating people decently and providing opportunities will result in a more cohesive and more equal society. Piecemeal changes and spending on community services at levels less than what is actually required will not produce results. While there may be certain instances where efficiency of service delivery can be improved marginally, the main issue is the overall quantum of funding. If the final Plan does not also commit adequate and realistic funding to fulfill its stated goals, then The Greens do not expect much to improve.

A human services plan that does not reflect the real needs, views and wishes of the community, will not be successful in gaining community support.

The second concern The Greens have about the DHSP process is that the final plan will not reflect the comments and wishes of the community or 'cluster groups'. We note that the Settlement has not made a submission and has explained why, in its view, making a submission may be a useless undertaking. The Management Committee of the Settlement believes that the RWA will not take into account any viewpoints other than its already-preconceived ones. It has been told, moreover, that despite the submission process,

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no substantial changes will be made to the final report. If this is indeed the case, then the content of submissions by The Greens and other organisations will be immaterial to the RWA and will not be reflected in the final Plan. The Greens are concerned that consultation is simply tokenistic if the views of others are not actually taken seriously.

We also note that the Settlement describes the DSHP as a "band-aid over a gaping wound at best, scapegoating of the hard-pressed volunteer sector at worst". The Greens are also dubious as to how serious the Government and RWA is about making any real attempt to improve the lives of people in the Redfern-waterloo Area, given the evidence to date. The failure to discuss the Block and the Aboriginal Housing Company, for example, and Minister Sartor's recent divisive approach and dismissal of the Pemulwuy Project, does not give us confidence that either the Government or the Authority is serious about engaging with Aboriginal organisations.

A Human Services Plan that does not include measuring devices or targets will not be successfully assessable.

The third major concern the Greens have is the lack of targets or measuring devices to enable assessment of whether or not the Plan is meeting its goals. The NSW and Australian governments are notoriously reticent in setting any kind of targets or indicators for social matters such as health, poverty, employment, etc. This is not the case elsewhere and we note that the Blair Government in the UK often uses targets as a way of ensuring that the government is actually making progress in areas requiring improvement.

While government departments in NSW seem happy to subject community organisations to an ever-increasing barrage of performance indicator and reporting requirements, it seems loathe to apply such stringent requirements to itself. The lack of any method of measuring whether or not the Plan's aims have been achieved suggests that the Authority does not want the progress of the Plan to be assessable.

The consultation process and Draft Human Services Plan are flawed.

To sum up the concerns that The Greens have abut the DHSP and process attached to its drafting:

- Without adequate funding, services cannot be improved.
- Relying on a Trust Fund for extra money is deeply flawed; it is no substitute for direct and adequate funding by government of government and community services.
- There are no performance indicators in the plan, rendering it almost useless because progress cannot be measured. There is, therefore, no way of knowing if the plan is working.
- Consultation is only meaningful if it genuinely feeds into the process and it there simply to provide a tokenistic, legitimating device.

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Comments on the Plan's Priorities

The Greens support much of what is said in this section of the DCHP. In order to implement the suggested actions, however, extra funding will be necessary.

1. Improve the health and wellbeing of children.

The Greens agree with the importance of antenatal and postnatal care and accept that substance abuse contributes to a greater incidence of low birth weight babies.

The Greens note there are tensions about the way in which DOCS services are being carried out in Redfern. The Greens will continue to work for the adequate finding of DOCS and training of DOCS workers.

The Greens support the proposal for links with the Aboriginal Medical Service and CONNECT REDFERN initiative.

If additional childcare places are needed, the government should fund them, rather than their being dependent upon private sector donations.

2. Lift local school numeracy and literacy levels to at least the state average.

The Greens support calls for the selection of agencies to deliver literary intervention programs being subject to a public process.

We note that it is the primary responsibility of the Department of Education, rather than the private sector, to provide programs designed to improve literacy and numeracy.

Face-to-face contact with parents is, in our opinion, more effective than the proposed information kiosks and written material. We support the proposal to host workshops with young parents.

3. Lift local school attendance and retention rates to at least the state average.

The Greens are broadly supportive of the actions listed in the DHSP.

4. Improve support for vulnerable people.

We support many of the actions recommended, and agree that outreach services are vital.

We agree that human services are largely reactive, but many have insufficient time or staff capacity to be proactive, and are often prevented by funding agencies from undertaking much community education.

A number of Inquiries and the recent 'Not for Service' report on mental heath services indicate that such services are massively underfunded in NSW.

The Greens support the integration of drug, alcohol and mental health services with housing and support services. But, in the absence of additional resources (for example supported or semi-supported housing for

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people with a mental illness), success in improving people's lives will be limited. Creating stability is essential when addressing people's needs, particularly if they suffer from a mental illness.

We note that there is an increasing concentration of high-needs people in the Redfern-Waterloo area, partly as a result of the Department of Housing's allocative mechanisms, and tightening eligibility requirements.

The Department of Housing's policies on acceptable behaviour and nuisance and annoyance often result in mentally ill people who live in dense public housing complexes being evicted because of the behaviour that results from underlying illness.

There are not enough support services available. Only absolute crises, rather than preventative measures or ongoing clinical assistance, are responded to by the Department of Health. There is a substantial body of evidence to show that, in the aftermath of the deinstitutionalisation that followed the Richmond Report, the paucity of community-based services has left the community badly served.

Dual diagnosis, detoxification and rehabilitation facilities could be located at Rachel Foster Hospital.

The HASI initiative is successful but, once again, it requires greater funding if the number of people who can be assisted is to increase.

Workforce integration for people with a mental illness is important, but The greens do not support a punitive welfare payments regime whose aim is to force people into accepting any job. Rather, we support a basic, livable income for all and a jobs guarantee model so that those who want to work in the formal economy, can work[1].

5. Reduce the incidence of family violence.

We are supportive of many of the recommendations but agree with Redfern Legal Centre's submission that locating at Redfern Police Station four Aboriginal Community Liaison Officers specializing in domestic violence may send a message that domestic violence is solely an Aboriginal problem, when we know it occurs disproportionately in all low-income communities. There is a need, however, for culturally sensitive approaches in view of the over-representation of Aboriginal people in domestic violence statistics.

The Greens would support a Domestic Violence Response and Intervention Team containing Indigenous and non-Indigenous workers being funded and located at the Police Station. We endorse Redfern Legal Centre's detailed recommendations.

6. Increase participation and involvement of young people in the community.

The Greens do not accept the characterization of youth services as being poorly coordinated. It may be that existing services do not have the funds to provide as broad a range of programs for young people as they would like. Where after school programs exist in modern buildings, such as at the Redfern Community Centre in Hugo Street, they seem well attended.

A precinct model may not provide choice for young people.

[1] See the work of William Mitchell from the centre of Full Employment and Equity, University of Newcastle. http://e1.newcastle.edu.au/coffee/

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There should be an enhancement of a diverse range of youth facilities and infrastructure.

The Greens support the offering of the range activities suggested in the DHSP.

The actions suggested in regards to activities cultural activities for Indigenous youth are supported. Drawing young people into decision-making structures will give them a greater voice in their own services. We agree with the suggestion to work with the City of Sydney to draw young people into taking on active roles within different organisations.

In regards to health and substance abuse, The Greens support a harm minimization approach, and education strategies that assist young people to understand the harm that substance abuse can do to them.

Once again, it is vital that the current state of mental health services in NSW be rectified as a matter of urgency and this will require additional resources.

7. Increase numbers of young people accessing employment

The Greens recognize that young people with poor educational standards and employment prospects are often made to feel discarded by society. The lack of apprenticeships is a case in point. Unfortunately, unemployment is seen as acceptable and as a way of keeping wages and inflation down. It is outrageous that governments no longer have any commitment to full employment, and in fact adopt fiscal and economic policies that almost guarantee a level of unemployment.

Young people used to be able to enter the labour force through apprenticeships and entry-level jobs. In the 1970s, the unemployment rate for Redfern-Waterloo was , at about 4 per cent, only slightly above the average. Now it is above the average, and the overall unemployment rate for young people has risen.

We accept that there is no locational disadvantage, but for people with low skill levels or inadequate education, job prospects have been reduced.

While it helps to be prepared for work, the reality is that where young people compete for jobs, those without year 12 or university education are at a disadvantage.

We support those recommendations in the DHSP that will produce real jobs. Overall, however, the Greens contend that, in the absence of government intervention, not all young people will find employment. We support, therefore, a jobs guarantee for those who have been unable to find work, and a basic income for all.

We note that the privatisation and shrinking of the public sector has reduced the opportunity for young people to find work. To reverse this trend, the Greens recommend that every government department offer paid traineeships and apprenticeships for young people.

Education is the other area that needs to be addressed. It is becoming prohibitively expensive. Even TAFE fees are rising. These costs discourage people from furthering their education. Studying and working should be more rewarding than being on Newstart: at present, working casually or part time and studying are a recipe for ongoing poverty because of the effective marginal tax rates and low level of Austudy payments. We note that the federal Government has not addressed this problem.

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8. Reduce drug and alcohol misuse.

The Greens support a harm minimisation approach.

Persons who are unemployed, depressed and with little self-esteem are more likely to use excessive amounts of alcohol and drugs.

The Greens note that other submissions draw attention to the lack of agreement on the proposed community health facility.

We endorse the suggestions in other submissions that the Rachel Foster Hospital host a detoxification and rehabilitation facility (which must allow for dual diagnosis and therefore be integrated with mental heath services). We also note that generalist health services for women and children should be located elsewhere.

This facility should be delivered in consultation with the Aboriginal Medical Service.

The Greens recognize that this is a complex issue and there is no easy solution. Education about health, and general improvements in standard of living, are part of the solution.

9. Reduce offending and recidivism.

We note that alienation, neglect, and associating with other offenders are some of the key predictors of crime. We support the general recommendations for action to promote preventative measures. The less a person comes into contact with the gaol system, the less likely they are to be caught up in a cycle of recidivism and incarceration.

We support the actions suggested but note again the need for extra resources to implement them.

We note that representations were made by Jenny Munro, co-ordinator of the Community Justice group, hosted by Redfern Legal Centre, to the RWA about using Circle Sentencing for Aboriginal offenders. The RWA has said this will begin in March 2006. The arrangements already in place through RLC could facilitate an immediate start of Circle Sentencing and we support the RLC's recommendation that this begin immediately.

10. Build community capacity.

We note that the DHSP seems to accuse NGOs of being too numerous and insufficiently co-ordinated. While there may be elements of valid criticism within this, the purported 'solution' of rationalizing, consolidating, not spending any more public money, and relying on a new Trust Fund is not convincing. Many of the NGOs already receive donations. We note that other submissions claim that the DHSP overestimates the number of local services in existence.

The assertions about lack of co-ordination seem somewhat exaggerated. Interagency forums existed previously. If the reasons underlying comments in the DHSP about rationalising and consolidating services are more about cost-cutting than improving actual services, then The Greens do not support this initiative because it is simply an unjustifiable rationalization for cost-cutting and job-slashing.

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We also note that NGOs have not been represented at the higher levels of the RWA and in other processes. Government is happy to fund NGOs to produce services for them at a considerably lower cost, so it should also include those organisations in high-level discussions about the form the community sector is to take.

It is not all doom and gloom in Redfern. A good example of a successful, well-run and well-resourced community centre is that of the relatively new Redfern Community Centre in Hugo Street. This Centre offers a wide variety of activities and is used by many groups. It is always full of young people and has remained free of vandalism and graffiti. The Centre has a state-of-the-art sound recording studio and offers young people programs to attend after school hours.

By comparison some of the other facilities available to youth in the area are run down and inadequate.

We also support Redfern Legal Centre's contention that young people need a choice of service. Having South Sydney Youth Services as the only point of call for crisis services is not sufficient. If a perpetrator of sexual violence frequents this one-stop shop service, where else is the victim to seek assistance?

There are issues of confidentiality when youth services are co-located or consolidated. It is reasonable to assume that there is a need for different services for different circumstances, and choice for young people as to which service they frequent.

The needs and views of young people should be taken into account by the RWA.

The Greens note the lack of consultation as well as community opposition to the sale and change of use of Redfern Public School. We note the increasing reliance on church-based groups such as the Exodus Foundation and lack of transparency in how such service providers have been appointed. There may be more appropriate Indigenous organizations able to provide training for Indigenous youth.

Once again, the community sector and government services need to be adequately resourced if community capacity is to improve.

In conclusion

The State Government should not abdicate its responsibility by placing the provision of services in the hands of private donors. Those donating to a Trust will dictate what programs the money is spent on, by choosing to donate to some and not to others. This is unacceptable.

While there are many worthy actions suggested in the DHSP, the RWA must listen more closely to the community it is supposed to be assisting, instead of treating the community like a troublesome interloper in its grand plan. Many community submissions are critical of the RWA and believe their views are discounted.

The Greens will continue to monitor the RWA and work with local community groups in trying to produce the most just and socially equitable outcomes. Blaming the community sector, and starving it and government services of funds, is not the best way to produce a better community in Redfern-Waterloo. A frank recognition of the problems, and real commitment to improvement via adequate funding and measurable targets, is the best basis on which to proceed.