

RLC RESPONSE TO THE DRAFT HUMAN SERVICES PLAN FOR REDFERN-WATERLOO

Summary Of Recommendations

Priority 1 – Improve The Health And Wellbeing Of Children

RECOMMENDATION: That additional affordable child care places be provided through public sector funding.

Priority 2 – Lift Local School Numeracy And Literacy Levels

RECOMMENDATION: To lift local school numeracy and literacy levels a public and transparent process be adopted for the selection of an agency to deliver literacy intervention programs and that this process acknowledge the work of existing local agencies in this area.

Priority 4 – Improve Support For Vulnerable People

RECOMMENDATION: In addition to the actions to improve support for vulnerable people, trained staff resources be provided to community agencies to assist in dealing with mental illness, drug and alcohol problems.

Priority 5 – Reducing The Incidence Of Family Violence

RECOMMENDATION: That the Authority consider funding a Domestic Violence Intervention Response Team (DVIRT) to address the problem of family violence in Redfern-Waterloo.

Priority 7 – Increase Young People Training And Employment

RECOMMENDATION: That the community sector be included in the strategy for increasing access to training and employment opportunities.

Priority 8 – Reduce Drug And Alcohol Misuse

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- (a) To reduce alcohol and drug misuse the existing Rachel Foster Hospital facilities should be used for family-friendly residential detox and rehabilitation.
- (b) Services should be planned and delivered in collaboration with the Aboriginal Medical Service.
- (c) That these services not be combined with general health services for young mothers with children.
- (d) Planning should include consideration of the needs of older alcohol-affected and homeless people

Priority 9 – Reduce Offending And Recidivism

RECOMMENDATION: That the Circle Sentencing Program for Redfern commence immediately and that the auspicing body, management committee and staff for the circle sentencing program be allowed to perform their duties to the best of their abilities and in the interests of the community unfettered by interference from the RWA.

Priority 10 – Build Community Capacity

RECOMMENDATION: That the community capacity strategy initiatives be properly resourced and that expectations of additional activity by community based organisations be accompanied by the recognition that additional reporting requirements should also be resourced.

Appendix One – Youth Precincts Implementation

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- (a) That suitable premises infrastructure and facilities be provided for youth services as soon as possible
- (b) That more than one service be resourced to provide crisis and therapeutic intervention services
- (c) That any plan for consolidation of services include mechanisms to protect client confidentiality and prevent conflicts of interest.

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Background:

Redfern Legal Centre (RLC) has been a prominent part of the local community-based non-government sector in the Redfern-Waterloo area for over 25 years¹. Occupying the old Redfern Town Hall building on Pitt St and housing six services with nine funding sources as well as numerous projects and programs that have grown over the years to take on independent identities, RLC is well placed to participate in and to comment on a project that aims to

“develop an improved service delivery culture supported by a framework for joint activity by government, non-government services and other stakeholders... produce a more integrated and effective human service system that focuses on delivering positive outcomes. .. through improved service co-ordination and standards.”(DHSP2)²

Redfern Legal Centre has also been chosen to represent the community sector on the Redfern-Waterloo Partnership Project (RWPP) and Redfern-Waterloo Authority (RWA) Human Services Advisory Committees.

The recent history of the area, the development aspirations, social upheavals, local government changes and withdrawal of services such as the local court, school and hospital have been well documented elsewhere and will not be re-stated here.³ Redfern Legal Centre has developed and provided community legal education materials and training to assist community members and groups to engage with these change processes.⁴

It should be noted at the outset however that a review of human services was conducted by Morgan-Disney in 2004 and much of the material informing the draft plan was garnered from that review. RLC and many other service providers were dissatisfied with that review process and the accuracy of elements of its report. To the extent that the DHSP has taken elements of that report as its starting points we would assert our dissent.

“...more than 100 government and non-government human services organisations deliver 190 services to the Redfern-Waterloo community. The NSW government alone spends almost \$10 million per annum providing services through non-government organisations. The capacity of some of these services to respond to the cultural diversity in Redfern-Waterloo is limited. Some non-government services, in particular, small organisations, are facing real challenges maintaining good governance.” (DHSP iii)

¹ We acknowledge that we work on Aboriginal land, traditionally the home of the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation.

² Throughout this paper we will refer to the Draft Human Services Plan for Redfern-Waterloo, Redfern-Waterloo Authority October 2005 with the acronym DHSP and where quoting from it will follow with the page number.

³ See proceedings of the Upper House Inquiry into Redfern-Waterloo, NSW Parliament 2004, particularly RLC submission and transcript, South Sydney Interagency Submission, and NSW Government response.

⁴ www.rlc.org.au/aboutus

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We have been unable to obtain reliable data to confirm these assertions and so far as we are aware there are fewer than twenty locally and voluntarily managed non-government organisations providing services to Redfern-Waterloo with significantly fewer resources than stated.

It is important to note this at the outset because the organisations targeted for 'reform' report that they feel they have been scapegoated for social problems that are in fact the result of mainstream service provision failures by government agencies, and that the media image created by these statistics creates a false impression of a sector awash with cash that fails to perform.

Our response starts with the question:

What agencies, delivering what services, receive what funding? And is the burden of reform proposed by this plan proportionate to that allocation of resources?

Secondly:

To what extent is the alleged limitation of capacity and governance caused by the failure of the funding and accountability organs of government to adequately resource community organisations to deliver the required services?

And most importantly:

Can this plan deliver reform that will enhance service delivery to the diverse communities we serve and avoid imposing an additional layer of reporting and accountability requirements on the community sector?

About the process that has led to the release of this document it must be recorded that it bears little resemblance to the reported outcomes of the public consultation process through the cluster groups and other meetings. It does not appear to meet the objectives set out the Redfern-Waterloo Authority Act,⁵ or the Redfern Waterloo Partnership Projects e-newsletters about the intentions of the plan⁶. Nor does it appear to reflect the outcomes of the work done by the Advisory Committee.

The fact that this document was promised for July/August, that the committee (and the public) heard little of its progress or cause of delay, that we are now confronted with an unfamiliar document and given less than four weeks to respond to it, does not reflect well on the Government's stated commitment to the development of a plan that would

"give the Redfern community more control over what services and projects are needed in the area."⁷

⁵ Redfern Waterloo Authority Act s.15(4)

⁶ RWPP Human Services Review #2 December 2004 p.4

⁷ RWPP Human Services Review Bulletin #2, December 2004, p4 – which also committed to no reduction in funding.

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Outline

The DHSP does not offer any overarching statements of visions, values or goals as we might expect from a strategic plan. It starts by acknowledging that it is a part of a bigger plan for Redfern Waterloo which will include separate processes for planning for urban infrastructure and planning and for employment. It is not clear how the DHSP will fit into these other processes and plans.⁸ It offers key outcomes which arise from its consultative processes and which have widespread community support:

- keeping families and children safe
- improving employment opportunities
- improving school retention
- reducing criminal and anti-social behaviour
- providing ATSI appropriate services
- improving medical and mental health services
- improving drug and alcohol rehabilitation
- improving mental health services

To the extent that this plan calls on the mainstream education, justice and health systems to improve their performance and, we hope, to dedicate additional resources, to achieve better outcomes for the children, young people, families and ATSI communities of Redfern-Waterloo we can only applaud its aims and look forward to some outcomes against measurable performance indicators.⁹ We note with concern however the lack of information about how these initiatives will be resourced. If there are no additional resources to be brought into the area, what other activities or programs might have to be removed or reduced to cover this?

The lack of realistic cost-planning is also evident in relation to housing. While the DHSP mentions the importance of the home environment (DHSP8), suggests provision of housing and support packages (DHSP12), post-release accommodation for women (DHSP 22) low-income households (DHSP 31) and homeless people (DHSP 33) no thought appears to have been given to the housing shortage problem in Aboriginal communities. No mention is made of the most contentious issue – the future of the Aboriginal Housing Company. Every one of the phase one priorities could be just as adequately addressed if the issue of Aboriginal housing was made a priority for the Redfern-Waterloo Authority.

We welcome the provision in this plan of some demographic data which will be of benefit to community based organisations for their planning and funding applications. We take this opportunity to reiterate our plea for compatible data sets across all levels of government and simplified processes for demonstration of need and acquittal of funding grants. A 'new federalism' in this area would in itself without any additional resources significantly enhance the capacity of the non government sector to deliver services to our communities.

⁸ RLC raised early in the process the question of how human services could be planned without reference to employment. We continue to assert that these issues are inextricably linked and that the community sector should be seen not only as a 'cost' to government but also as a generator of employment and training opportunities, particularly through its role as an attractor and trainer of volunteer workers.

⁹ Performance Indicators were considered during the HSAC process and we are disappointed that these have not been included in the public draft.

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Overall, however, this plan does not appear to deliver integrated service delivery for Redfern-Waterloo. The approach appears to entrench 'silos' of different services, there is no commitment to pooled funding, nor indeed any transparency of funding arrangements, and the proposed Charitable Trust appears if anything to further fragment and distance the promised local accountability of service provision.

The proposed Trust raises further concerns about withdrawal of funding for core social responsibilities. The role of the donor to direct how funds might be spent and the role of the trustees in administration (and accountability?) for that expenditure is a governance model that is neither democratic nor efficient.

There is a high risk of discretionary direction of funding towards the more palatable or badgable of causes (such as sport or children) over the more needy (such as domestic violence or mental health.)

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Approach

Generally the Plan is divided into categories of priority, issue, strategy, rationale and actions. For the purpose of this response and to assist the reader we will list all priorities but comment only on those about which we feel competent. From the point of view of community-based organisations the important material does not appear until the appendix and some readers may want to move immediately to that section.

PRIORITY 1 – IMPROVE THE HEALTH AND WELLBEING OF CHILDREN

RLC has provided evidence to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Redfern-Waterloo about our concerns with certain practices of the Department of Community Services and the impact this has on the perceptions young mothers might have about the support to be offered which will not be re-stated here. We support the proposal for links with the Aboriginal Medical Service and *CONNECT REDFERN* initiative. (DHSP6).

We query the proposal for the provision of additional affordable childcare places. If this is an identified need (and we believe that it is) why is it not a core service delivery responsibility of government? The proposal that this initiative will only be funded if a private donor comes forward appears to undermine the sincerity of this commitment.

We recommend that additional affordable child care places be provided through public sector funding.
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PRIORITY 2 – LIFT LOCAL SCHOOL NUMERACY AND LITERACY LEVELS

Overall we support this initiative. To the extent that these programs within the mainstream education system, such as Families First, have not already been made available to the Redfern-Waterloo community we would suggest that the recent focus on the alleged failings of the community sector, rather than the government, has been misplaced.

However, while generally the DHSP refers generically to 'NGOs' in its recommendations, one particular agency, the Exodus Foundation, has been named in this section. We question the transparency of the evidence to support this selection.

We recommend that to lift local school numeracy and literacy levels a public and transparent process be adopted for the selection of an agency to deliver literacy intervention programs and that this process acknowledge the work of existing local agencies in this area.
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PRIORITY 3 – LIFT LOCAL SCHOOL ATTENDANCE AND RETENTION RATES

No comment.

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PRIORITY 4 – IMPROVE SUPPORT FOR VULNERABLE PEOPLE

The proposal for integration of drug, alcohol and mental health services and the need for the link to housing and support packages is welcome. However we note with great dismay that there is no indication of any additional resource provision for this. We are aware of many supportive policy statements and protocols that actually do not translate into any meaningful service provision for these most vulnerable members of our community.

In research conducted for its recent submission to the Senate Inquiry into Mental Health, NSW community legal centres found that approximately 30% of clients were in need of legal assistance as a result of the effects of living with mental illness.¹⁰ Most of this contact with the legal system could be avoided if these people were provided with appropriate support services to live in the community. In Redfern-Waterloo there is a very high concentration of high-need clients as a result of Department of Housing policies.

It is particularly challenging for community-based organisations to respond appropriately to the needs of these clients when we have little or no response from the health system unless the client is requiring urgent restraint or hospitalisation. We understand that this is due to lack of resources. We also note with concern that while the Department of Housing claims to care for people with mental illness, their recent initiatives in regard to 'acceptable behaviour' conditions on leases often has the effect of rendering these people homeless.

While the recommendations are welcome, we urgently need them to be accompanied by the commitment of appropriate and adequate resources for service delivery. Further, local non-government agencies need to be augmented with suitable staff and training.

We recommend that in addition to the actions to improve support for vulnerable people, trained staff resources be provided to community agencies to assist in dealing with mental illness, drug and alcohol problems.

PRIORITY 5 – REDUCING THE INCIDENCE OF FAMILY VIOLENCE¹¹

The Draft Human Services Plan for Redfern-Waterloo proposes four Aboriginal Community Liaison Officers at Redfern Police Station with 'specialised training in family violence'. This might suggest that family or domestic violence in the Redfern-Waterloo area is confined only to the Aboriginal community. According to the statistics that Redfern Women's Domestic Violence Court Assistance Scheme collects, this is not the case. However, it is well documented that Aboriginal women and children face many barriers when they attempt to seek protection from family violence.

We recommend that the Authority consider funding a Domestic Violence Intervention Response Team (DVIRT) to address the problem of family violence in Redfern-Waterloo.

¹⁰ Submission to the Senate Inquiry into Mental Health, Combined Community Legal Centres Group of NSW, September 2005

¹¹ This section was provided by the Women's Domestic Violence Court Assistance Scheme auspiced by Redfern Legal Centre. The Scheme employs an ATSI Assistant Co-ordinator who pioneered the 'Blackout Violence' Program and runs the Inner Sydney Domestic Violence Committee.

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The team – like the Community Liaison Officers – could be housed at Redfern Police Station. Where DVIRT operates in other areas, the team works with the police to follow up with families after the police have been called to a domestic violence offence. They aim to contact victims within 24 hours of an event, then they provide ongoing support and referrals to families, and act as liaison between victim and police.

Central Coast Women's Domestic Violence Court Assistance Scheme auspices a Domestic Violence Intervention Response Team which is based at Gosford Police Station.

- The team consists of one full time and one part time worker (civilian, not police).
- The team was initially funded by the Premier's Department and is now funded by the Department of Community Services.
- The team has its own office at Gosford Police Station, right next to the DVLOs office.
- When Gosford and Wyong police attend a domestic violence incident, they ask the victim whether they will consent to having their name and phone number passed on to the DVIRT team.
- The team then aims to contact the victim within 24 hours of the event. The team can also ring victims who have not consented to contact, and speak to them on behalf of the police Domestic Violence Liaison Officer.
- The team has access to COPS. They check each morning for domestic violence events.
- The team supports victims (male and female, to comply with police requirements) and offers referrals and information.
- The team works in close contact with their auspicing agency, Central Coast WDVCS, and attends court on AVO list days.
- According to Legal Aid statistics, Gosford Court has one of the lowest rates of withdrawal of Apprehended Domestic Violence Orders in the state.

PRIORITY 6 – INCREASE PARTICIPATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE

The aim is valued. We would welcome the opportunity to review the evidence that has lead to the conclusion that a precincts-based model is the preferred strategy for achieving the outcomes sought. In our experience the most vulnerable young people are those who do not feel comfortable with or attached to the dominant group of young people in their area and indeed may be the victims of harassment, bullying or crime by the dominant group. For this reason we support the principle of choice in service provision.¹²

We understand that the action in relation to the City of Sydney Youth Council may be inappropriate in that there is no such body.

In relation to service provision we urge immediate attention to enhancement of facilities and infrastructure. This will require the provision of additional resources. For further comment please refer to our response to the appendix.

¹² This was established as a principle in the Human Services Advisory Committee but does not appear to have been incorporated into the draft plan.

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PRIORITY 7 – INCREASE YOUNG PEOPLE TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

We have stated elsewhere our concern that human services planning has been separated from employment strategy. It would be appreciated if the community sector was acknowledged and supported for its role in providing work experience, mentoring and job search assistance to people young and old in a wide range of skills-development contexts.

Redfern Legal Centre engages with over 300 volunteers per year and offers students significant workplace skills training as well as jobseeking assistance. The role of RLC and many other community agencies in assisting sole parents, people with disabilities and people who have been made redundant to improve their capacity to enter or to re-enter the paid workforce should not be underestimated.

We recommend that the community sector be included in the strategy for increasing access to training and employment opportunities.

PRIORITY 8 – REDUCE DRUG AND ALCOHOL MISUSE

We note with concern that despite considerable attention to this issue during the consultation (and non-consultation) process there is still no outcome about a community health facility. We repeat our previous submissions on this issue:

To reduce alcohol and drug misuse the existing Rachel Foster Hospital facilities should be used for family-friendly residential detox and rehabilitation
Services should be planned and delivered in collaboration with the Aboriginal Medical Service
It is not appropriate that these services be combined with general health services for young mothers with children
Planning should include consideration of the needs of older alcohol-affected and homeless people

PRIORITY 9 – REDUCE OFFENDING AND RECIDIVISM¹³

The issue identified is high crime rates, the strategy is to increase community safety by preventing crime and reducing anti-social behaviour. The rationale refers to high visibility policing, prevention of re-offending, and circle sentencing, which has

“a positive impact in reducing the likelihood that young Aboriginal men who come into contact with the criminal justice system will end up as inmates in correctional facilities.” (DHSP 22)

The recommended actions include investigating the application of circle sentencing and Community Justice Groups in Redfern-Waterloo. (DHSP 22)¹⁴

¹³ The response to this section was provided by Jenny Munro, Co-ordinator of the Redfern-Waterloo Aboriginal Community Justice Committee, a program auspiced by Redfern Legal Centre.

¹⁴ The lead agency is the Attorney-General's Department, the support agency the Department of Aboriginal Affairs. There is no reference to NGO participation.

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This recommendation might be considered redundant given the facts to be set out below. It also strongly suggests a disturbing lack of awareness of and sensitivity towards community based initiatives in this area.

Redfern Legal Centre was the successful applicant to host a Community Justice Group in August 2005. It is funded by the Attorney-General's Department. Jenny Munro was appointed Co-ordinator on 5 September 2005. She wrote to Robert Dom of the RWA on 26 September to introduce herself and the program. She wrote again on 20 October to introduce herself again and to propose the use of the Redfern Court House for Circle Sentencing. No response has been received.

This experience raises the following questions:

- Is the Redfern-Waterloo Authority intending to take over the Aboriginal Community Justice Committee program?
- On what basis has the Authority determined that circle sentencing will commence in March 2006, (DHSP Action Implementation Schedule 16) given that this is more information than has been provided to the Co-ordinator by the Attorney-General's Department?
- Why should this not commence immediately?

We recommend that the Circle Sentencing Program for Redfern commence immediately.

We further recommend that the auspicing body, management committee and staff for the circle sentencing program be allowed to perform their duties to the best of their abilities and in the interests of the community unfettered by interference from the RWA.

PRIORITY 10 – BUILD COMMUNITY CAPACITY

Redfern Legal Centre is an enthusiastic participant in the recent initiative to develop a consortium of community-based organisations in the local area. We note the comments about the 'fragmentation' of services (DHSP23) and observe that we were not divided into cluster groups based on target populations until the RWPP and RWA came along. Until the 'revitalisation' of Redfern-Waterloo and the amalgamation of our local council into the City of Sydney, local community-based human service delivery agencies had a functioning South Sydney Interagency that facilitated both community capacity and integrated service delivery. It may be an appropriate moment to reflect that the reform process has actually diminished community capacity in the past few years. That process, including this response, is undertaken on a voluntary basis on top of the full time tasks of workers in the community sector. It is sad to note that none of the demands on the sector by way of consultation and evidence provision has been recognised as real work that actually draws workers away from building community capacity and in to responding to the government.

While we have no objection to any of the activities suggested,

We recommend that the community capacity strategy initiatives be properly resourced and that expectations of additional activity by community based organisations be accompanied by the recognition that additional reporting requirements should also be resourced.

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APPENDIX ONE – YOUTH PRECINCTS IMPLEMENTATION

We are concerned to note that there appears to be no background provided for the basis of the decision that youth services will be the ‘first step towards improved integration of the human services system in Redfern-Waterloo.’ This lack of evidence base is of further concern when it is asserted that this will ‘provide a template for future consolidation of services for other client groups. (DHSP Appendix 1, 1).

While there is evidence of inadequate service delivery to young people in Redfern-Waterloo, the connection between this and the structure and resourcing of the existing youth services is unclear. The case for moving to a precinct-based model has not been established in the Plan¹⁵, nor is the connection established between place-based groupings of like services and the integrated service delivery model the plan purports to implement.

Given the supposed emphasis on integrated service delivery and that organisations such as RLC to ensure that our services are open to all – for example, that young people have access to legal, financial counselling, domestic violence and family support services in an integrated service environment, it seems peculiar that the plan focuses only on dedicated youth services in its reform strategy.

From our knowledge of the youth services available in the area, the most outstanding need is for improved infrastructure and facilities. It may well be that following the provision of such, many service integrations will follow. Until there is a commitment of resources it seems inappropriate to hold these marginal youth services and their staff responsible for the impacts of the failures of mainstream systems such as health and education to deliver for young people in this community.

We remain unconvinced that the proposed model will actually meet the diverse needs of young people in our community. For example, It appears that there is only one service that will be able to provide crisis services (SSYS). If this is the centre frequented by the perpetrator of a crime such as a sexual assault it is unlikely that the victim would approach that same service for support.

Young people, as much as any other member of society have the right to privacy and to choice of services. This proposed consolidation removes both. Effectively many marginalised young people will be deprived of access to a service if its dominant user group is perceived as hostile or unwelcoming. Gender, homophobia race and ethnicity all need to be considered to ensure that services are genuinely accessible to all. Young people who happen to inhabit the same geographical area should not be presumed to share identities of interests.

Young people may also need to access different services for different purposes. For example a young person may not wish to approach the same service for job seeking assistance as they have previously contacted concerning a drug or alcohol problem. No matter how professional the staff approach is the young person is likely to perceive that knowing ‘too much’ about them will impact on the opportunities provided.

¹⁵ “Creating hubs or precincts is currently considered to be the optimal way to provide quality integrated services to clients.” (DHSP Appendix 1, p.2) Who considers this and on what evidence?

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In many circumstances the promise of absolute confidentiality is the only way of reaching alienated or traumatised young people at all. Any system requiring shared intake and data processing is likely to operate as a barrier to access for such people.

On the other hand it may be that providing common points of entry and referral may enable youth services to reach young people in need more effectively. We are aware that a range of views has been expressed about the merits of the proposal. It is therefore of vital importance that reform proceed on the basis of evidence rather than rhetoric and ideology.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That suitable premises, infrastructure and facilities be provided for youth services as soon as possible.

That more than one service be resourced to provide crisis and therapeutic intervention services.

That any plan for consolidation of services include mechanisms to protect client confidentiality and prevent conflicts of interest.

Finally, we note with concern that during the period for public consultation on the draft plan a proposal for the sale and change of use for Redfern Public School was announced. This initiative has not been the subject of consultations nor does it appear (apart from a general mention of the Exodus Foundation), in the draft. It is difficult to believe that this process was not underway and known to the Authority during the drafting of the Plan.

The proposal as announced in the media release of 30 October contemplates the eviction of the current tenants of the school site (with the exception of Murawina), and the imposition of the Exodus Foundation to provide services from the site.

This does not appear to be consistent with the draft plan in the sense that it reduces the viability of the precinct model, it increases rather than decreases the number of service providers and service duplication, and appears to have overlooked the existence of locally community based services offering training and support programs for Aboriginal young people. There does not appear to have been any transparency of planning process behind the selection of Exodus for this role, and while we make no comment on whether and to what extent Exodus might be the best provider of such services it is unfortunate to say the least that existing local services and indigenous owned organizations were not offered to chance to bid for the opportunity to offer services from the school site.

The Redfern Aboriginal Community Justice Group met on 5 November and discussed the Plan. It affirmed the commitment to the principle that training for indigenous youth should be conducted by an indigenous organization. Redfern Legal Centre supports this principle.