

Woden Community Service Budget Submission

Mr Andrew Barr
ACT Chief Minister and Treasurer
ACT Legislative Assembly
GPO Box 1020
Canberra ACT 2601

Dear Mr Barr

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this submission to inform the drafting of the 2018 – 2019 Budget. Woden Community Service (WCS) acknowledges the financial constraint under which the ACT Government is working and the imperative to find savings in existing programs to enable the funding of new initiatives. WCS also acknowledges the level of funding providing by the ACT Government to community sector organisations to address the growing disadvantage experienced by some 10 per cent of the ACT community.

WCS proposes that in some cases, as outlined below, ACT Government investment in the earlier intervention into social problems will deliver significant future savings. An example of such an approach is the actuarial model used in New Zealand which calculates the cost of unaddressed social challenges over a person's life time and the savings that are made by early intervention. I am sure that the ACT Government is aware of the changes across the Tasman and the impact it is having on the NZ community.

Of the three proposal recommended by WCS, two have been made in previous Budget submissions, however WCS continues to believe that investment in these services will reap longer term savings for the ACT economy. Each also addresses the key points requested in the budget submission process – their importance to the Territory, the delivery of more efficient and productive services and making Canberra a more liveable city.

Yours sincerely



Chris Redmond
CEO
Woden Community Service
24 October 2017

1. Hoarding Response Service

Recommendation: Provide a Hoarding Response Service that provides a single point of contact for participants and workers, participates in a multi-disciplinary response and continues research on current hoarding intervention models.

Background

Woden Community Service (WCS) has a wealth of knowledge, expertise and recognised experience in assisting and working with people who experience hoarding and squalor, through its work across tenancy support, peer support and mental health programs.

WCS auspiced several Capital Health Network funded projects which aimed at building the capacity of the Canberra Living Conditions Network (CLCN) from 2014 - 2016. These projects went a long way to increasing understanding and awareness in the community of the complexity of the issue of hoarding and how it crosses across many sectors. It also developed tools to assist the sector, including developing a website with centralised information for the ACT community, specialised training modules relevant to the local legislation which are continuing to be developed and regularly presented, and hosting internationally renowned speakers for forums and workshops.

These projects also introduced the internationally successful peer support program, Buried in Treasures, a structured 20 week program, for people who want to have more room for themselves in their homes, but just can't seem to get started. Each week peer facilitators lead discussion around a skill from the book, Buried in Treasures (BIT), and complete challenging and rewarding exercises. In the last three years WCS has run seven BIT courses. In some cases, participants are reporting that they receive more value from the Buried in Treasures groups than they do from individual cognitive behavioural therapy sessions.

In 2018, WCS will continue to support Buried in Treasures courses and post support group meetings to ensure Buried in Treasures graduates can stay engaged and maintain the skills gained through the program. There is also a growing network of peer workers and facilitators emerging from the Buried in Treasures program, who assist with facilitation of the groups, raising awareness through sharing their recovery through the media and training, and supporting some participants.

The CLCN activity from the last two years has contributed to increasing awareness of the issues of hoarding and squalor across the ACT and a heightened expectation that there are services available to assist. Services that do work in this area, such as the Supportive Tenancy Service (STS), are at capacity and also often not specialised to be able to engage with the complexity of the issue and address the underlying causes, such as mental health issues. These gaps cause frustration for the participant, the workers and the wider community and often mean that the issues represent within a short period of time.

WCS has been researching best practice from around the world. To be able to build on this experience and expertise and also to address a clear gap in service provision in the ACT, WCS proposes that the ACT Government consider approving financial support for the following Hoarding Response Service. Activities will include:

- 1. Information and referral for hoarding in the wider ACT community.** This service provides support and information to a range of stakeholders within the community: people living with the issue, families and friends, neighbours, services and government agencies, and helps to coordinate services where needed. It would provide information on how to approach working with a problem of hoarding and where to go for assistance (support services, mental health expertise and peers support groups). It would also help to coordinate responses where multiple services (government and non-government) are involved but unaware of each other. The Hoarding Case Management Group, hosted by Health Protection Service, is presently managing this inconsistency within the ACT Government services. The Hoarding Response Service would extend this to the wider community service sector, and then direct the enquiry to the best starting point.
- 2. Provide a community response service for people living with hoarding.** This would include the following:
 - a. Provide assistance to ACT Government directorates when they need to provide a regulated response to a hoarding crisis.** There is a rising need for a community organisation (community workers) to work collaboratively with the government agencies and directorates and provide a point of difference when they need to respond to a crisis situation. An alternative person attending from outside government can help with engagement as the person living with the hoarding issue is often more willing to participate with community services. The community worker can attend with government services or be a liaison point between client and government, and help to refer to further supports to help address underlying issues. There are many examples of forced clean-ups only being a short term solution. We are presently working with City Services and Health Protection services with long term crisis cases within the ACT community.
 - b. Build a supported team of workers and volunteers.** A coordinated, trained and fully supported volunteer workforce can work in collaboration with workers to assist with cleaning out, maintaining the property and establishing supportive routines over time through providing regular and consistent assistance and guidance. WCS is already establishing a specialised taskforce of volunteers and workers in this area, developing training and

building a peer support network to ensure positive results for all involved - the client, the worker and the volunteer.

- c. **Collaborate with and assist existing services across Canberra.** Many services in Canberra are already overwhelmed with people/ properties connected to the issue of hoarding. WCS is involved in the current process of public housing relocation across Canberra and has shown that there is a clear role for a supportive hoarding response service to collaborate with others, such as the Public Housing Relocation Taskforce. We are committed to ensuring a coordinated community response that works alongside and engages with participants outside the government role.

WCS provides trained workers and volunteers to assist tenants involved in the relocations and support them before, during and after their move. WCS has a long working relationship with Supportive Tenancy Service, Housing ACT, Health Protection Service and the Hoarding Case Management Group, and many other community services working in the area and will continue to foster these relationships to the benefit of all concerned.

- d. **Research.** We have established relationships with both Australian National University and Canberra University and are collaborating to further research in this area. With assistance and guidance from academic experts and WCS contributing de-identified case studies, Canberra has a real opportunity to lead the way in hoarding responses that are based in real world application.
- e. **Brokerage Fund.** Often small costs are a barrier to continuous care and can de-rail progress for the client, government and community. A brokerage fund would assist in alleviating this barrier.

2. Youth Mental Health Program

Recommendation: Fund two non-clinical community based Youth Mental Health positions in each of the four Child Youth and Family Service regions: Belconnen, Inner North/Gungahlin, South Weston and Tuggeranong.

It is estimated that nearly half the burden of disease in young people is attributed to mental illness, with 50 percent of these occurring before age 21, and 75 percent occurring before 25 years of age.¹ Undoubtedly, mental ill health is the most significant health issue facing young Australians.

WCS has self-funded a youth “wraparound” services since the Australian Government's axing of the Youth Connections program in December 2014. This initiative has worked with a number of primary and high schools in the Woden Valley to assist the transitions of children from primary to high school and addressed transitions of students in high school. WCS has developed partnerships with Torrens and Duffy Primary Schools and Melrose and Stromlo High Schools to assist children, identified by the schools as being at risk of disengaging from school. This initiative has identified an underlining concern about the mental health of young people in the 8 – 16 age group that is not currently being addressed by the service systems – ACT Health, ACT Education or the community sector – and the sizable waiting time for access to the clinical youth mental health service, headspace.

WCS is also acutely aware of the gaps in service being created by the transition of Commonwealth and State/Territory funded mental health services into the NDIS. Young people are at particular risk with these shifting services as they are unlikely to be NDIS participants and are often needing short term early intervention support to help avoid further crisis in later years. WCS has made a conscious effort to focus remaining resources in mental health programs to work with this group (aged 16 – 25), although these resources are due to finish in mid-2018.

With on the ground experience combined with the gaps that are emerging with the closure of programs, it has become evident to WCS that a specific focus on youth mental health is crucial. Young people face with many transition points in their lives and these are critical periods where they are at greatest risk of mental health distress and onset.

The proposed program would engage mental health trained youth workers to work across this spectrum from 8 – 25 years old.

¹ Kessler, R.C., et al. (2007). Age of Onset Mental Disorders: A Review of Recent Literature. *Current Opinion in Psychiatry*, 20(4), 359-364 and Kessler, R.D., et al. (2005). Lifetime Prevalence and Age-of-Onset Distributions of DSM-IV Disorders in the National Comorbidity Survey Replication. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 62, 593-602.

Target groups

The target groups are children/young people aged 8 – 25 years with low to moderate mental illness concerns at risk of disengaging from school, education and work.

The middle years of 8 – 12 years has already been identified as a service gap given that early childhood services focus on 0 – 8 years of age and youth services focus on 12 – 25 years of age. Young people experience transition at 8+ years from primary school and 12+ years on transition into high school. There is another key transition from high school to college with some young people who have only marginally been engaged at high school not making the transition to college, despite their requirement to remain at school until 17 years of age or until they are “released” by the Education system. There would also be a focus on the transition into young adulthood and vocational support.

The program would work in collaboration with CAMHS, Child Youth and Family Case Management, Youth Programs, Mental Health Programs, and local schools to identify individuals who are in need additional non-clinical community based assistance.

Presenting issues

Issues to be addressed include:

- Anxiety and depression – early onset which leads to school absenteeism, refusal and disengagement
- Body image
- Self-harm - risk taking behaviour including suicidal ideation
- Transitions to another school or vocational setting
- Authority/parental relationships

Elements of the program

The program would aim to work with a young person for a concentrated period of time to address specific needs, and then aim to step them down to other services for continued support and monitoring.

The elements of the program will include:

- Intake and assessment
- One on one short term case management
- Group work
- Liaison and engagement with schools
- Recovery planning
- Step down planning
- Co-locating mental health staff with Youth and Child and Family workers
- Outcome measurement and feedback mechanisms

The range of supports offered would include:

- Connecting with psychological services, clinical support, drug and alcohol services, housing, financial counselling or medical support etc.
- Assisting with goal setting, decision making, communicating and problem solving
- Working with or providing information and support to family, friends and carers where relevant
- Psychoeducation and management of stress, general health, diet and fitness
- Support to re-engage or remain engaged in school, volunteering, training or employment
- Connecting to community activities including social, spiritual or leisure activities
- Assistance managing interpersonal relationships
- Creating a safety plan or keeping well plan to assist after completing the program
- Support managing everyday tasks such as housekeeping, managing finances and accessing use of public transport
- School transition programs

WCS seeks to build the mental health service continuum to promote access to existing universal programs as appropriate, support parents whose child is at risk of disengaging or displaying concerning behaviours that indicate risk and engage with schools and colleges to provide an additional resource to those already within the school system.

WCS will consolidate existing relationships with schools as an early intervention approach to keep students engaged at school and involved with appropriate services (delivered appropriately) to minimise school disengagement and corresponding anxiety and longer term depression. The service will also make referrals to other relevant services, run groups with Cognitive Behaviour Therapy basis to promote self-reliance, resilience, capacity building and service engagement.

3. Homelessness and Affordable Housing Response – 24/7 Support and Emergency Accommodation

Woden Community Service, as active participants in the ACT Housing Summit on 17 October 2017, proposed (with the Early Morning Centre) that a possible solution to people sleeping rough in the ACT was the establishment of an emergency accommodation service for people who could not access crisis accommodation on any given night.

While such an approach might be regarded as a step back into the boarding house model, key points of difference would include the provision of after hours on site support, common living areas, female and male accommodation, limited tenure until more

permanent accommodation is obtained, provision of meals, showering and clothes washing facilities for people not wishing to stay.

The service would be closed during the day, to encourage people to access other services (such as the Early Morning Centre) and ensure that it is not seen as an accommodation option, just shelter and a pathway to services.

The model is based on those currently operating successfully in other parts of the world based on integrated service delivery, especially for people who are chronically homeless.

This approach expands the continuum of care model as some of the people that OneLink have contact with have difficulty engaging with the current service system and this would provide an entry point, providing safety and shelter for people when they choose to access it and with a low barrier of access (no forms to sign, minimal rules to agree to), as well as the opportunity to build relationships with service providers to be able to connect with the broader service system when they choose.

Services such as the Living Room and Safe Haven, operated by Breaking Ground's service partners in New York, provide 24/7 shelter for people who are homeless (Living Room) and semi-permanent accommodation for people transitioning from the street (Safe Haven).

The former provides "sit down" accommodation for people seeking safe shelter, meals and access to personal hygiene and washing facilities. People accessing this service are also offered case management support to address the issues that have led to their homelessness or that they may be currently facing, such as mental health or health.

It is a fully regulated service, staffed by workers experienced in working with people who are homeless. Additional services are attached to the Living Room, such as a visiting medical service (as it currently the case with the Early Morning Centre).

The Safe Haven is the next step in housing support for people who are ready to move into more permanent accommodation, again with the supports above.

These two options which can be combined as a single service offer addressing critical gaps in service delivery by assisting people to move off Canberra's streets (and parks). It will provide a pathway out of homelessness and access to services to support people change their circumstances.

While there is still high demand for permanent accommodation individuals are still offered accommodation in the Safe Haven service while assessed for permanent housing (by an

independent service – such as OneLink) and then placed on a waiting list for housing placement.

Service integration lies at the core of all housing solution efforts. The service system, while fairly well resourced, is not integrated. There is no discernible continuum of care in operation in the ACT. This creates great inefficiency in the use of resources and in achieving enduring housing outcomes for people experiencing homelessness. There is no evidence of the service system working well together. While it was hoped that OneLink might provide this catalyst it is accepted that the work load it is dealing with prevents staff from assuming this role.

In this proposal a primary point of integration is between the housing outreach service, currently provided by St Vinnies Street to Home Program, and the emergency accommodation service. As in other parts of the world the outreach service is attached to the proposed accommodation so that outreach staff can bring people into the Living Room at short notice, particularly in periods of extreme heat and cold.

4. The ACT Government maintain its commitment to the establishment of a community service hub in the Woden Town Centre precinct

Recommendation: WCS requests a recommitment to this initiative as the redevelopment of the western side of the Woden Town Centre is gathering pace.

WCS is seeking to confirm the ACT Government's commitment to a community service hub, including a new community centre and office accommodation for WCS's staff, for the Woden region as outlined in previous budgets. An architect's report has been completed on the potential uses and designs of the Callam Offices, which appears to be the preferred site for the service hub.

Woden Community Service

Woden Community Service requires new accommodation for its operations. The continuing organisational growth that WCS is experiencing is putting increased pressure on our client facing operations, which are now undertaken in 26 Corinna Street, the Youth Centre and office accommodation leased from the Smith Family in Launceston Street.

WCS has recently been required to lease additional space in Callam Offices to accommodate our non-client facing Corporate Support services. This only became affordable by leasing the whole floor even though we only needed half the floor, and we

are now negotiating the sub leasing of unnecessary space. This is costing the organisation an addition \$100,000 per year.

The ACT Government has allocated \$750,000 for the feasibility and design phases of a new community centre in past budgets which identified a number of potential sites and generated architectural designs for those sites. The draft town centre master plan references the need for a new community centre, however has not identified a potential location for the centre.

Representations made to the ACT Government in the recent past have outlined a community service hub accommodating a range of services to create a better integrated service response for people across a diverse service range.

WCS's preference is for office accommodation close to the proposed intertown transport hub near to Callam Street – one site was identified in the feasibility study. Our preference is also to host and manage the community centre, which we regard as a key WCS community capacity building responsibility.

There has yet to be any determination regarding this unresolved issue, despite extensive representations, ACT Government undertakings and funding for feasibility and draft design concepts and the engagement of AMC Architects to investigate the repurposing of Callam Offices. The latter has yet to be publicly released.