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We work on Ngunnawal land

Submission to:

ACT Budget Consultation

Submission to ACT Budget Consultation 2018/19

October 2017

Beryl Women Inc. acknowledges the Ngunnawal people as the traditional owners and continuing custodians of the lands of the ACT and we pay our respects to the Elders, families and ancestors.

We acknowledge that the effect of forced removal of Indigenous children from their families as well as past racist policies and actions continues today.

Submission to the ACT Government 2018/19 Budget
Beryl Women Inc.
October 2017

This document was prepared by Beryl Women Inc. Manager
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Beryl Women Inc. welcomes the opportunity to share its views on the 2018/19 Budget.

Beryl Women Inc. is seeking funding to employ two (2) additional staff, one of these positions being a permanent Child and Youth worker and the other position to support women.

Beryl Women Inc. (Beryl) is one of two specialist domestic violence accommodation services operating in the ACT and surrounding region. Beryl is committed to providing high quality support and safe accommodation to women and children escaping domestic/family violence.

The service is funded to provide the following outcomes:

Support Services: the service will provide support services to a minimum of 13 women with or without children at any one time;

Tenancy/Property Management: the service will undertake tenancy/property management for 7 properties used to accommodate up to 9 families; and

Case Management: 100% of service users will have a case management plan, where applicable.

While Beryl is funded to provide support services and accommodation for women and their children fleeing domestic violence, nil funding is allocated to provide specialist support for children. Children are the largest client group accessing women's refuges and require tailored support services and programs to meet their needs, address trauma and prevent inter-generational violence.

Beryl strongly advocates for specific funding for children's services. The existing funding arrangements are not fully funded nor do they cater to the recognised service gap. The current funding model risks children not being seen as clients in their own right.

In this submission, we raise the following issues:

What services we believe are most important for the Territory.

How the government can deliver current services more efficiently productively to meet the needs of Canberra's.

Recent funding cuts by the ACT Government have had a direct impact on Beryl's ability to deliver its services for support to women and children who are escaping domestic/family violence and are homeless as a result.

Specialist domestic violence services should be financially capable in supporting clients. Recurrent funding should provide sustainable and long-term planning for women's refuges. Funding should recognise and reward expertise in this area, including attaining positive outcomes.

Recommendations

In making decisions and requesting input on Canberra's 2018/19 budget and providing budget allocations to ACT priority areas, it is imperative that the ACT Government considers the following:

Beryl Women Inc. is seeking additional funding to support existing services provided to women and their children living in the ACT who have or are experiencing domestic violence. The service is seeking funding to employ two additional staff, one of these positions being a permanent Child and Youth worker and the other position to support women (budget attached).

Beryl Women Inc. thanks the ACT government for the opportunity to input our ideas and opinions of priority areas for the 2018/19 budget. We look forward to continuing this conversation with the government on the essential services provided within the ACT region and look forward to continuing our partnership with you.

The following information will provide importance context for policy makers to understand the history of funding cuts over the years, the direct impact of funding cuts to frontline services (and the outcomes of service-users), the need for a significant funding model reform and prioritisation of the most important services for the community.

The ACT Government has an opportunity to redesign its allocation and structure of funding to improve service deliver, outcomes for the community and be a national leader to other jurisdictions on best practice policy.

Overview of funding cuts

Beryl welcomes the ACT Government initiative in countering violence against women and their children. However, no additional funding was forthcoming to specialist domestic/family violence accommodation services in the ACT.

While we acknowledge the Australian Government has made a funding commitment to address domestic violence on a national level, again, no increased funding towards specialist domestic/family violence accommodation services have been provided. This is particularly important given the growing number of women and children accessing women's refuges and the reduction in direct funding to frontline services in 2013/14.

1. Currently we are funded under the National Affordable Housing Agreement which is matched by the ACT Government. This funding is included into the homelessness agenda and does not take into account the complex nature of domestic/family violence. These complexities are growing, and services such as Beryl are struggling to deliver adequate services to these clients and their families.
2. The service costing model used by the ACT Government is based on homelessness service provision which has left specialist domestic/family violence services struggling to remain fully effective.
3. Beryl received a 32% funding cut over a three-year period 2013/14 with outputs remaining the same. This has placed additional pressure on the service.
 - a. As a result of the funding cuts, Beryl made two Case Management positions redundant, closed their offsite office to move to the primary refuge location (converted garage into an office space), and incurred a number of other changes in order to continue providing a service to women and children escaping domestic or family violence within a best practice and trauma informed framework.
 - b. There are significant constraints in providing high quality, trauma informed support to approximately 150 women and children a year with only a small team. Currently Beryl Women Inc. has two full time Case Manager (support worker) for its women and two children's support works. One of these positions funded from a one-off grant.
4. The majority of these funding cuts have been borne by services that specialise in responding to the needs of children, young people and adults living with the impacts of trauma. These services were often gender specific services offering a model of care that allows gender segregated support and housing options, which can be the determining factor in people seeking support.

Impact of funding cuts on service delivery

These impacts to service delivery means that we are not in a position to deliver the same level of support to women and children. The need to continue providing trauma informed care to our clients is our key priority, in order to address longer term healing. This includes addressing the initial crisis of domestic/family violence and homelessness resulting in women and children leaving the family home due to safety and security risks. It also requires ongoing support to ensure women and children at the refuge are empowered to manage future crisis, and providing outreach services.

Given that Beryl has seen second and third generation clients, it is clear that we are not reaching children effectively and early enough. It also reflects the broader social issues of dislocation, marginalisation and generational patterns.

This prompts Beryl to query how we can better provide family interventions that are more children focused. It also encourages us to reflect on what interventions are needed to improve the situation for children, and how we can improve our approaches to sustain and strengthen the children's everyday social context (connection). Beryl has also been considering ways in which we can strengthen the roles of extended families, schools, early childhood facilities, home based supports and the local community. However, without adequate funding, Beryl's ability to take action in these areas which require longer-term areas of need is limited due to our pressures in undertaking its demanding day-to-day activities in providing crisis support.

The Beryl Women Inc. Child/Youth Program provides holistic and trauma informed support to children and youth that have experienced a history of trauma and homelessness due to the significant impacts of domestic violence.

The program is critical in providing intervention for children and youth that are requiring extensive and high levels of support due to the consequences of living with and witnessing domestic violence. The children's program helps families to alleviate additional pressures at the time of crisis and continuing through to post domestic violence support.

Current research identifies that children and youth that have witnessed and experienced domestic violence to a significant caregiver or other family members are impacted across all areas of development. The program is designed to ensure that it is trauma informed, responsive, collaborative with children, youth, families and staff and informs service delivery.

One-off grants over the past three years for this program does not offer security in employment or sustainable program planning. Funding needs to be recurrent - it is difficult to plan a program year on year, due to the uncertainty of continued funding.

Children and young people are continually the highest proportion of clients in Beryl Women Inc. and it is paramount that they are provided with high quality and evidence based support to assist them in their recovery and to rebuild their lives.

Need for funding model reform

The current model and funding to the ACT Specialist Homelessness Services is inadequate and overwhelmed by demand. Presently domestic/family violence has reached a national crisis point, with media highlighting the plight of thousands of women and children; in the ACT we are not immune.

Beryl recognises increased media attention and awareness is vital to services such as ours gaining and retaining vital and adequate funding to enable service delivery at the highest standard, but as more women seek support, demand on already encumbered services will keep climbing. Dedicated funding which recognises the distinctive nature of domestic and family violence will allow specialist domestic and family violence services to deliver their core business including outreach, crisis response, crisis accommodation, safety planning,

intensive case management, legal support, advocacy and post-crisis support. Most funding for these services is delivered under housing or homelessness frameworks, and at present, some services they deliver are not accounted for.

While Beryl currently receives a three-year funding agreement from the ACT Government, this limits the service to adequately plan for structural and strategic growth or change, and does not allow for long term certainty.

A five, or ten year funding agreement will make it easier for specialist services to plan for the future instead of being caught constantly in endless funding cycles, and will make it easier to recruit and retain experienced staff in our services.

Although Beryl has received one off grants over the past three years to complement its existing Child Support Program, this funding needs to be reassessed and become part of our recurrent funding to allow for sustainability for the program and the service. Our aim is to ensure that long-term sustainable positive change is achieved for all our clients and their children. Beryl needs to be funded and recognised for what it delivers and represents for women and children, which extends beyond addressing homelessness.

Beryl's primary focus and ongoing support interventions are safety, security, social and emotional wellbeing. These areas of focus are paramount to support women and children to negotiate a wider system that does not take into account the imperative needs around safety and security (both physical and emotional). We know this can be a life or death issue and while there is the current momentum to provide early intervention and create societal change in Australia to prevent domestic violence, this will be a longer process.

While this change is being created, many women and children will still experience domestic violence. These women and children will require options that support safety and security, as domestic and family violence is a crime and this needs to be reflected in the wider community responses as such.

Services of most importance for the Territory

Beryl considers the most critical services in the ACT are those who are effective in developing and supporting long term change. While it is acknowledged that there will always be a need for crisis accommodation services, the current government's short-term expectations of client needs is unrealistic and will result in further crisis episodes. We need to place emphasis on resolving the problems, not just the symptom.

There is significant concern in the domestic/family violence sector that the sector itself is in crisis because of a lack of resources to assist women and a lack of exit points from crisis accommodation into longer term housing.

Accordingly, Beryl recommends federal and local government expand their agenda and refocus expenditure to give consideration to longer term supports for domestic/family violence, and homelessness services.

The current homelessness accommodation model in the ACT has been ineffective for Beryl's purposes, as there is no recognition of clients' needs and limited case management.

The funding model does not take into account the complexities surrounding domestic and family violence. These complexities have increased over the last three years to the point

where the service is stretched and is under pressure to meet client demand within required timeframes. Workers are having to be much more skilled in issues of immigration and family law and the subsequent consequences clients face that are dealing with these issues. As staff are dedicated and committed to assisting clients, they are working longer hours, services are beginning to experience higher burnout instances of their workers with will impacting on service delivery.

Further, the homelessness systems only support crisis episodes (3 months in nature). The majority of clients presenting at any accommodation model whether it be domestic /family violence, drug rehabilitation or homelessness have complex issues including but not limited to; mental health, care and protection, justice/legal and drug co-morbidity. Due to increased complexities clients are now presenting with, work-loads have increased massively and workers are now dealing with issues that sit outside Beryl's core business on a daily basis. Beryl provides a service that is holistic and some of these issues need to be addressed before women are able to deal with the impacts of domestic/family violence. Work-loads have increased with less support from government and other services.

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in the ACT Budget consultation process.

Robyn Martin
Manager

BUDGET OF FUNDING REQUESTED

Salaries X 2 Staff members	\$115,976.00
Superannuation	\$10,872.00
PLS-CS	\$1,831
WC premiums	\$5,219.00
Operational costs (27%)	\$49,542.00
TOTAL	\$183,440.00