

MANJIMUP FAMILY CENTRE INC.



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Tuesday, September 16, 2014

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Transmitted via email: community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Committee Members,

Re: Senate Inquiry into the Impact on service quality, efficiency and sustainability of recent Commonwealth community service tendering processes by the Department of Social Services.

We are writing to share with you, the impact of the Department of Social Services (DSS) tendering processes, on *Manjimup Family Centre*, on our board and staff and on the people in need who we support.

{If and where it applies} We are also experiencing similar problems as a result of the uncertainty caused by the lack of information, consultation and coordination concerning the recent announcement of the Indigenous Advancement Strategy Grant round.

{Manjimup Family Centre has been operating in our local community for over 37 years, with our 9 staff and 25 volunteers providing much needed family and community support services to >270 families each year. Over that time we have built up considerable goodwill in the local community, have received great support from many small businesses and have in turn been supported by committed volunteers. There continues to be increasing call on the services we offer, with many of the most marginalised people coming to us for support in their time of need. We have also worked hard over a long period of time to build strong relationships with other NFP Community Service providers and have a great network of collaborative support. This enables us to provide more holistic services as a community and strengthens and extends what we can do with the limited resources available.

The manner in which the recent DSS tender was conducted in addition to the loss of service funding has a number of implications for our service, and creates much uncertainty for the broader community.

Problems with the tender process included the lack of notice, shortness of the tender deadlines, the delayed response time coinciding with the Christmas season and summer break, and the failure to honour our request for feedback why our tender was not successful.

The impacts on our services and service users include:

- *Disappointment and some disengagement by our volunteers who have worked so hard to support our service and do an outstanding job*
- *The difficulties for our board in being able to govern the organisation with confidence and certainty as to the future sustainability of our services. They have held off making any decisions about future investment or employment until there is greater certainty on the way forward*
- *Uncertainty with our client base as to what will happen to them – who will support them and what it will mean in terms of the relationships they have built with many of our people. Change is very hard for most people, but particularly so for the vulnerable and marginalised.*
- *It was compounded by other local providers losing or federal funding and closing down, leading to extra demand and stresses put on our organisation, to try and continue support for an extremely marginalised target group.*
- *The likely implications for other local businesses as our organisation has a policy of purchasing our Emergency Relief supplies and services locally*
- *An unreasonable level of stress for all stakeholders with the announcements having been made 2 days before Christmas. i.e. senior staff needed to change their holiday arrangements, to remain on stand-by and meet the deadlines to have the new service open doors.*

We remain extremely disappointed at the poor communication from the Department about the process and lack of clarity about the next steps. There was no collaboration or consultation with us about the difference we make in our local community. The lack of information about the goals, intentions and intended outcomes of the tender and lack of engagement with local services was a missed opportunity that directly led to a massive over-subscription of tenders and a lack of coordination between them. A huge amount of work went into service design and costing for our tenders. Much of this work seems to have been wasted.

Our sense is that many of these decisions were made in Canberra, with limited or no knowledge about the regions and organisations involved, the needs of those communities or the successes of existing community services.

Should there be the opportunity to meet with the committee to discuss our experiences and concerns, we would be pleased to do so.

Thank you for taking the time to receive our feedback.

Yours sincerely

Andre K. Foulon
Coordinator
Manjimup Family Centre