



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 *Carnarvon Family Support Service Inc. (CFSS)*, on our board and staff and on the people in need who we support.

CFSS mission statement is;

- ***“To increase the capacity of families to cope with daily living challenges and to enrich family and community life”.***

CFSS has been providing services since 1989, including management and recovery from trauma in the community of Carnarvon, with outreach into the surrounding Gascoyne Region commencing 25 years ago. The current CFSS staff is a mixture of Indigenous and non-Indigenous employees and has Indigenous representation on the management committee. This gives CFSS staff considerable access, trust and credibility with the Carnarvon community.

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 Chief Executive Officer, Finance Officer, Community Counsellor, Financial Counsellor, Public Tenancy Support Service, CSARS Officer and Administration Officer are based at Carnarvon Lotteries House which is central to the Carnarvon CBD. The Womens Refuge is located some 3 km away in Morgantown, a residential suburb of



Carnarvon, but work closely with the rest of the team at Lotteries House.

The Sobering up Centre is located near the Carnarvon Hospital located 1 km from the CBD of Carnarvon and also work closely with the team and GWR and Lotteries House.

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, the lack of consultation with service providers about program and service design, the timeframe for tender responses, the lack of opportunity for collaboration with other local services to align and coordinate services to achieve collective impact, the delays in tender announcement, lack of information about local service changes and restrictive confidentiality provisions within tender contracts.

The impacts on our services and service users include:

- *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;*
- *A lack of information about which other local providers were losing or gaining services made it effectively impossible for us to transition existing clients or gives them any certainty about whether they would have any ongoing support. Taken together with restrictive confidentiality provisions it also made it impossible for us to negotiate sub-contracting arrangements where we have been asked to deliver services in areas we had not tendered for;*
- *A lack of communication as to why we were unsuccessful after delivering for many years what we have constantly been advised by the Department, were high quality services;*
- *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.*



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 to the extent that many of the actual service offers are quite different in the scope of services, geographic areas covered and amount of funding provided - requiring us to rapidly re-cost and redesign services before being able to negotiate a service offer.

Our sense is that many of these decisions were made in Canberra, with limited or no knowledge about the regions and organisations involved and 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

JULEE WESTCOTT NELSON

CEO

Carnarvon Family Support Service Inc.

11 March 2015