



LIVINGWATERCOMMUNITYCENTRE

"A Family for Everyone"

Inspiration towards a life of faith that builds lives and transforms communities.



28th June 2010

Inquiry into the Child Protection System
in the Northern Territory
GPO Box 1708
DARWIN NT 0801

Ref: Child Protection Inquiry: Submission

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We welcome the opportunity to make this submission. We have some knowledge of the shortcomings in established systems that preceded the need for this inquiry. We make no comment beyond recognizing the need for much stronger support of those systems, those who work within them, and those they are intended to help.

This submission is also a response to a call for more foster parents made by His Worship the Mayor of Palmerston, Robert Macleod, at a public forum on anti-social behaviour last year (2009) and also in response to the Coroner's Reports on the deaths of children under the care of the Minister for Child Protection. The widely recognized need within our own community has been a catalyst for action.

The following is a brief introduction of Living Water Community Centre, followed by a means by which a commitment to engage in assisting the addressing of recognized shortcomings towards safeguarding Territory children and, in particular, the children of Palmerston, can be achieved.

Living Water Community Centre (LWCC) has functioned for over ten years in and around Palmerston, during which time men's; women's; children's; youth; young adults and general family programmes have been established. Over the last five years the land in Bakewell, granted to us by the Northern Territory Government has been significantly developed and is now under a perpetual lease agreement. We run our programmes from our building on that land.

Our centre has systems of accountability, including towards the Apostolic Church Australia; a Board of Elders and; associated networks. LWCC is an active member of both Darwin Christian Minister's Association and Palmerston Ministers' Fellowship, and has enjoyed strong relationship with Palmerston City Council through the terms of office of Mayors Annette Bourke and (currently) Robert Macleod.

LWCC's members have long searched to increase meaningful community service in an arena of genuine, critical need. It is believed that the circumstances leading to this inquiry constitute such a critical need.

This submission addresses the following over arching issues as identified in the web based page *Making Submissions to the Inquiry*

1. What is the role of the child protection system with respect to child "wellbeing"?
It is trusted that the submission shows a strong interest to bolster present systems to the end that NTFC referred children will have opportunity for increased "wellbeing".
2. Child protection roles and responsibilities of all government and non-government organisations and individuals. According to present national standards and policies LWCC seeks at all time to operate above recognized benchmarks.
3. Family support and child wellbeing services. LWCC seeks to uphold and lend support in light of the recognized, serious "overstretching" of present services.
4. Ongoing case management of and service provision for children, young people and families identified as being at risk. LWCC's commitment is to engage meaningfully in strengthening the work of service providers towards those identified by them as being at risk.

LWCC's intention is to collaboratively develop an **Early Learning Centre** using the Integrated Model as a basis for the plan. To that end:

LWCC is currently formulating a proposal aimed at addressing the aforementioned shortcomings in the current systems, described as follows:

- The goal of this ELC is to provide holistic care to indigenous children and their families within the Palmerston and rural area to meet the growing needs of those at risk. In addition, the centre will provide support to foster carers and their families as they support and care for children from indigenous families.
- It is understood that the ELC recognize the need to liaise closely with the Northern Territory Families and Children to help meet the needs of those at risk. Integral to that is the need for collaborative relationship between NTFC and LWCC in developing the ELC that would lend itself to confident referrals by NTFC of children at risk. An on-going effective collaboration will be a commitment in meeting positive outcomes for the children at the centre which of necessity includes strong support for families – both natural and foster.
- The ELC will provide a coordinated approach to care and case management to ensure consistency. Case management will include oversight of (including, but not limited to): medical/health centre and vaccination appointments; social worker and other counseling appointments; speech therapy; physiotherapy; psychology and; CentreLink appointments – in order to promote and maintain general wellbeing.

- Whilst the ELC will work closely with families, the primary goal is to meet the physical, social, emotional and psychological needs of the child. The care emphasis will be on the child while being mindful that for a child to thrive family context must be optimal. An holistic care to children and families will be delivered. It is evident in reading recent Coroner's reports that aggressive and forthright family members can deflect services and thereby prevent intervention and investigation to the detriment of the child/children.
- Part of this holistic approach will include transportation to and from the centre, and to and from relevant medical and other appointments as required. Transport between home and the ELC will provide a natural link between with families/foster families allowing for brief non-threatening contact and home visitation. Again, from the recent Coroners reports, it is evident that home visits are not always able to be attended by NTFC given other competing demands and resource issues. Expectation for any reporting necessary out of such contact will follow established procedures.
- Through the provision of relevant programmes parents; families; foster carers and; foster families will access support and information towards empowerment in meeting their children's needs and strengthening the family unit.
- The development of strong communication, reporting and liaison with relevant stakeholders and service providers will ensure consistent, appropriate and holistic care be provided to children and families and further ensure the transparency that LWCC and the ELC will strive to maintain.
- Advocacy services will be central to the care and support provided to children and families, the emphasis being on the wellbeing of the child. It is recognized that in many situations it is the child who has no voice and for this reason is at greater risk of harm and 'slipping through the gaps in the system'. The ELC will seek to strengthen relevant networks and assist in minimizing such gaps.
- Incorporated into the day to day activities of the ELC will be appropriate referral systems established and maintained to health professionals, counseling, social workers, financial advisors, community networks and other organizations as appropriate to meet the needs of the child and his/her family or foster family. Transportation to and from these appointments will also be available
- The ELC will be pro-actively form partnerships in its planning, establishment and ongoing maintenance stages, including with training organizations to offer Children Services traineeships for indigenous youth. This will have a twofold benefit – a) training and developing of indigenous young people to empower them to impact their community whilst b) ensuring a sustainable work force within the ELC that is generic and understands the issues for children and indigenous families as well as the culture within LWCC.
- It is intended that the ELC be a safe place that children, young people and families will always feel comfortable returning to throughout their lives, knowing that they can access services in a non-threatening, friendly, welcoming and

supportive environment that will remain non-judgmental whilst seeking to *build lives and transform communities*.

Living Water Community Centre will develop the Early Learning Centre in a number of stages with the first stage anticipated to cater for 20 children aged 0-5 years of age. Stages two and three would incorporate a further 40 child care places and the addition of an Outside of School Hours Care programme. Respite care is obviously integral to the services that the ELC will provide.

Further, it is hoped that this project can become a model other service providers can use as a pilot programme, adapting to meet specific and local needs.

Work is currently in progress to develop partnerships with such bodies as Non Government Agencies such as the Australian Red Cross; World Vision and other care providers; and with Federal, Territory and Local Government departments. LWCC has a strong commitment to broad collaboration with those practitioners who have worked in relevant arenas both government and non-government. Enhancing this collaboration, within LWCC membership there are strong human resources: doctors; a lawyer; special education and other teachers; nurses; a midwife; administrative and management personnel (including in specialist areas of education and health); financial advisors; and beyond immediate membership there are strong relationships to practitioners in various fields including psychology and child psychology. Many of these are long- term practitioners in their fields within the Northern Territory and have much to offer and whose care extends beyond the confines of their work hours and/or expected work commitments.

We also have the resource of available land. This proposal fits with the desired use of the land to genuinely make a strong contribution towards the welfare of the community and towards its children in particular.

In conclusion, LWCC members have a desire to help meet the needs of our city's children. Many regular members have expressed long term concern for the welfare of our city's children. However with the recognized shortfalls in the present systems members have felt overwhelmed at the thought of offering individual assistance. As a community centre, members believe that with a combined effort they can contribute meaningfully towards fulfilling our motto: **Building lives/transforming communities**.

We would welcome the opportunity to expand upon the content of this submission.

Yours sincerely



Jessica Barrett
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