

23 December 2009

Dear colleagues,

CSGP Proposal and its implications for LCSA members

1. Background

We are all painfully aware that 2009 is fast passing into history and is destined to become yet another year when we failed to gain any enhancement for services funded by the Community Services Grants program. However, as the year draws to a close, I believe there are many reasons to feel more confident than we did at its beginning.

As you are aware, following the 2009 budget, [LCSA wrote to the Minister for Community Services](#), the Hon Linda Burney, detailing the failed history of CSGP review and presenting two major concerns:

1. The inadequate funding of CSGP and failure to enhance the program despite successive reviews over many years.
2. The danger that the broad, community strengthening role of LCSA members would be lost in the *Keep Them Safe* reforms and that while LCSA member organisations contributed to child protection outcomes they could and should not be seen solely as child protection agencies and that their broad community development focus and purpose should not be lost.

LCSA also presented the [research](#) that we had commissioned from the Social Policy Research Centre of the University of New South Wales to the Minister.

Those of you who attended our annual conference in September will have heard the Minister speak and recognise that she both understands and supports the case we have presented to her.

Following the meeting with the Minister we were able, with her support, to hold a series of meetings with Community Services and the Minister's advisers which looked for a constructive way forward which both recognised the real work accomplished by LCSA members within their communities and enabled Community Services to present this work as a "fit" with its core business when arguing its case to central agencies, the Department of Premier and Cabinet and Treasury. As part of these meetings we were able to present the work which has been undertaken by the Results Based Accountability Pilot Project. This work has provided a useful framework to help Community Services understand the range and nature of the community strengthening work undertaken by LCSA members. It has also demonstrated that as a sector we are prepared and able to measure and evaluate the performance of our services and activities, so thank you to all member centres and services who have participated in this program to date.

2. Proposal

As a result of these meetings, and others held by Community Services with our colleague peak bodies, Community Services has presented the proposal for the re-alignment of CSGP which is contained in the 23rd December 2009 communiqué from Community Services' Chief Executive, Annette Gallard.

The essence of this proposal is that the current CSGP be split into two streams, as expressed in the communiqué:

- **services whose results have to do with 'community strengthening'**
- **services provided directly to children, young people and families**

The majority of LCSA members whose CSGP funding relates either to core neighbourhood and community centre activities or community development would be located within the community strengthening category. Members which have both this funding and CSGP funding for specific services to children, young people and families, such as family support services, would have their 'core' funding within the community strengthening stream and the specific service funding in the direct service stream in the same way that other direct service provision programs are funded.

The community strengthening services would be located in the *Community Builders* program, which is funded through the Communities and Early Years Division of Community Services (formerly Communities Division). However, the funding will retain the current features of CSGP funding (that is it will be state-wide and renewable) in contrast to the existing *Community Builders* funding from the previous Area Assistance Scheme, which is both time-limited and limited in regional scope. The stated objective of the *Community Builders* program is "to enhance community social infrastructure in order to contribute to building stronger, more resilient communities".

3. Analysis

3.1 Alignment between Community Builders and LCSA members current CSGP funded activities

If we cut through the bureaucratic language and use results based accountability principles to state the Community Builders objective in simpler and more rigorous results language we have the high level results of:

- communities are strong
- communities are resilient

Research undertaken by Communities and Early Years Division identifies the following features or attributes as constituting a strong community:¹

- people are connected - they have a sense of belonging with others in the community and with the community as a whole
- people are respectful of each other - they encourage a diversity of ideas and opinions, where alternative views are respected

¹ These have also been reworked using more rigorous results language so are slightly different in expression but the same in substance as the wording used by Communities and Early Years

- people participate – they have opportunities to be, and are, involved in areas of community life and decision-making
- people are resourceful – they have access to and use a variety of resources, where these resources are used to respond to or adapt to change and the various challenges they face
- people are trusting – they trust each other and the institutions in their community

Communities and Early Childhood also recognises evidence indicating community strengthening is an effective way of reducing inequality and disadvantage. This position is congruent with LCSA's long standing [Neighbourhood Centre Policy](#):

Neighbourhood Centres believe that the effects of social problems can be reduced or eliminated by working on the causes of problems as well as the symptoms. Neighbourhood Centres resource and support those most affected by the problems and issues to become active agents instead of being encouraged to remain passive dependants in the welfare system. Self help, mutual support, community education and collective action are Neighbourhood Centre strategies. (3.3 Community Development Role)

The current Service Activity Descriptions of Community Builders comprise three areas of activity:

- Community capacity building
- Community skills development
- Community sector development

LCSA members will recognise these activities as fundamental to their existing core operations currently funded under CSGP.

LCSA believes there are significant synergies between the core CSGP funded activities of LCSA members and *Community Builders*. Moreover, the work of LCSA member organisations generally is a better fit with the Communities and Early Childhood Division of Community Services than the statutory child protection work of Community Services, which is where CSGP funding currently resides. This understanding is not new to LCSA as it was promoted prior to 2006 and the previous round of the CSGP roundtable. It was also strongly advanced by longstanding community development workers and managers in discussions around headline results for CSGP in 2007.

3.2 Risks

There are significant risks involved for LCSA members in this proposal. In moving from the more recognisable and specific aspects of child protection work to community strengthening, LCSA members will be moving from an area whose importance is recognised by government, which has a lot of community attention and which is relatively well funded, to an area which is not as well defined, recognised or funded, even though governments are belatedly waking up to the importance

of community strengthening as an important primary aspect of prevention in relation to child protection.

The proposal being presented by Community Services is clear that currently there is no available additional funding for the enhancement of the ‘community strengthening’ part of CSGP and no additional source has yet been identified.

So one clear risk is that LCSA members may move into *Community Builders* without additional funding and may ultimately find this area of work again becomes marginalised in the thinking of future governments.

Another risk is that *Community Builders*, with its emphasis on research literature but limited on the ground experience of community development, may prove to be an inflexible structure. Communities and Early Childhood may be more concerned with preserving the shape and structure of a program which has recently gained approval than accommodating the rich diversity of grassroots community development experience and practice which resides in LCSA members across the state.

LCSA members may also perceive risks in the references to “reform” and to “performance based contracting” in the Community Services communiqué.

Too often “reform”, often used alongside “review” has been understood within the sector as implying that the funding body does not like what we are doing and is seeking overtly or covertly to change it. However, as LCSA understands “reform” it refers to the government agency’s required need to demonstrate to central agencies that the work it funds contributes to its core purpose. Unlike some other reviews to which the sector has been subjected, this proposed reform follows LCSA’s strong representation to the Minister on the role and value of our sector as it is and seeks to establish the validity of that work within the Community Services framework; as it was famously stated at our 2009 Conference, “No more bloody reviews”.

“Performance based contracting” is a universal pattern of state government funding which no sector can expect to avoid. Without wishing to be blasé or appearing to say “it’s here, get over it” LCSA believes that well run centres and services will not have any problems with performance based contracting and will ultimately welcome it as an opportunity to demonstrate the worth of their work and to secure funding on a three year rather than annual basis. LCSA will be working with all its member organisations to ensure they can meet performance based contracting requirements. The Targeted Capacity Building Project and the Results Based Accountability Pilot Project have both already done significant work toward this goal.

While there are risks in the proposed change, LCSA believes there are greater risks in “staying where we are”.

It has become clear over the past year that the current CSGP funding program spans such a wide diversity of services that Community Services finds it impossible to mount a credible CSGP wide case for funding enhancement to Treasury or Department of Premier and Cabinet. The direction of NSW government funding in the second decade of the 21st century will clearly be contracted programs

and any funding stream with “grant” in its name is extremely vulnerable to being cut altogether. Any program that has not been engaged in the “reform” process is similarly very vulnerable.

If CSGP remains as it is, LCSA members would inevitably in the near future have to align with Community Services core business by becoming primarily child protection agencies. LCSA members have consistently argued that while LCSA members contribute significantly to child protection, they are not solely child protection services and that their generalist, community development role should be recognised and valued.

3.3 Opportunities

Risks and opportunities always go hand in hand and the proposal provides a number of opportunities for our sector.

The greatest opportunity is to have LCSA member organisations formally established as “community strengthening” organisations, with a validation of the role within communities and the service system that we have traditionally claimed.

Alongside this is the opportunity to explore afresh the meaning and scope of the community strengthening role within each local context. This completely aligns with LCSA’s Neighbourhood Centre Renewal Strategy, which was presented at the 2009 conference. Here is a unique opportunity for LCSA members to reclaim their community building role which has for too long suffered from official neglect and misunderstanding.

With the work that has been done over the past 3 years by the Results Based Accountability Pilot Project, this move provides LCSA members with their best opportunity for developing evidence for the affect of their programs and of aggregating data in a way which enables the funding body to present a convincing case to Treasury.

We are disappointed and concerned that currently there is no available additional funding for the enhancement of the ‘community strengthening’ part of CSGP and no source has yet been identified. However, our contact with the Minister’s staff gives us hope she has not given up and is actively working to identify an additional source of funding.

4. The way ahead

LCSA believes that on balance, the opportunity of identifying its members’ part of the sector as ‘community strengthening’ far outweighs the risks involved.

The opportunity for renewed community development practice at the local, grassroots level is significant.

The opportunity of engaging in the government’s funding reform process through the current proposal presents less risk than remaining outside the reform process, which has become a real danger for CSGP.

LCSA also believes that the opportunity to enhance the child protection end of the CSGP spectrum through access to *Keep Them Safe* funding should not be missed.

We recommend LCSA members view this proposal as a significant opportunity for sector definition and renewal and grasp it vigorously.

Throughout the discussions of the last six months LCSA has been adamant that it must have opportunity for proper consultation with its members. We have respected a request for confidentiality while the proposal was being worked up by Community Services, but have also gained recognition for the need and place of the sector's consultative processes. Early in 2010 LCSA will seek its members' response to the proposal through a survey and a series of regional meetings. We will ensure the time period for these consultations is adequate for member organisations to participate properly following the summer holidays.

LCSA is continuing to have honest and rigorous discussions with Communities and Early Childhood that will focus on results frameworks and service activity descriptions in the new year. NCOSS, YAPA and Western Sydney Community Forum are also involved in these discussions.

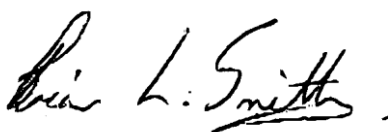
LCSA has been holding back Phase 5 of the funding campaign while these discussions were taking place so that the campaign could properly strengthen the Minister's attempt to gain enhanced funding for the sector. We shall be focusing the campaign on February and March as the 2010-11 budget will be locked in by the end of March. We shall provide more material on the campaign in early January in preparation for February and March.

5. Status of this document

As we have only received the proposal communiqué today, the LCSA Management Committee has not had an opportunity to examine or discuss it. This document currently is solely the work of the Executive Officer and staff team of LCSA who on the grounds of previous Management Committee discussions believe its statements will fairly represent the position of the Management Committee when it has opportunity to discuss the proposal. If the Management Committee does not endorse this document it will be rewritten and re-sent at the earliest opportunity (which will probably be late January).

With all good wishes for the festive season and for a lively, stimulating and innovative New Year,

Yours sincerely,



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