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Neighbourhood Watch Queensland

Celebrating 30 Years of Community Partnerships**Queensland
Government**

Submission to the Queensland Parliamentary Enquiry into the Impact of Social Isolation and Loneliness in Queensland.

At the outset I would like to quote two examples which typify the issues which face many individuals and communities at any time, but which have been exacerbated during the Corona Virus pandemic.

1. I have an elderly friend – he is 94, living independently in his own home and caring for his wife, who has dementia. He will not leave his home, or his wife, until death, as he has said. He does have some support from HACC. I ring him on a fortnightly basis, and have done so for many years. (He lives a long way from here.) He made a comment a couple of years ago which has resonated with me, and encourages me to support other isolated or elderly acquaintances and friends. That comment was “You know, you are the only person with whom I can have a conversation. My family, or others who visit, are not interested in conversation – they just ask a question or two – “How are you going?” “Do you need anything done?” - never just a chat.”
2. I attended a COTA (Council of the Ageing) seminar last year and sat next to a lady from Redlands. She was attending, so she told me, because getting out of the house was the only way she could meet anyone. She had moved into a duplex nine months before and during the ensuing nine months she had not had one single visitor – no family, no neighbours, no tradesmen, not even a door knocker. That was an extremely sad case.

As a district based organisation we emphasise communication and neighbourliness. Whilst our primary objective is to diminish crime, getting people in an area or locality to know their neighbour is one way we achieve that objective. Say “Hello”. Maybe exchange a word or two in time. There’s no need to live in their pocket, but get to know them. You may consider them to be ‘rat bags’, but still speak to them! There are too many anonymous people in our community. Speak to everybody, and I do mean everybody. It will improve your neighbourhood.

Many elderly people do not have sufficient technology skills to operate a computer. Some do not even have one. Technology frightens them. Courses such as the "Be Connected" program do wonders for a number of people who have a little knowledge of communication with computers, but there are – and I know a couple personally – who have an antipathy towards technology and would not consider using a computer. Life is becoming ever more difficult for these people and they are becoming increasingly isolated.

One possible project which we, as a district, propose to develop, is to obtain sponsorship to provide a simple mobile phone with pre-loaded numbers of a neighbour, a relative or friend who each agree to receive a call from that isolated person and conduct a conversation with them. At any time the isolated person could call anyone on that list and talk. Have a chat. At no cost to them. The phone, running and training costs would be met by sponsorship. (This project differs from the "Call In" program run by the Red Cross, as the call is initiated by the lonely person. Many incoming calls to landlines these days are from marketing organisations or scammers and some people find it a hazard to answer their phone during the day!)

We are a neighbourhood based organisation. In no way do we cover everyone in Queensland, but we do cover some, and in many cases they are in those suburbs where there are older people. On the Gold Coast we have some 50 groups. We have an organisational connection with Queensland Police, and a close relationship with local Councils and their representatives. It is through those connections that people who might benefit from such a project could be identified.

This submission is provided as an indicator that there are many organisations and groups across the whole community which can, and do, provide assistance and support for marginalised people in Queensland, and they will continue to so do. It is important that there is overall recognition for those groups, even though some might provide less than others as their primary focus is on a different objective. However, secondary benefit is better than none at all.



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