



Picabeen Community Centre
22 Hoben Street Mitchelton Q 4053
PO Box 6179 Mitchelton Q 4053
P 07 3354 2555
Facebook: Picabeen Community Centre
www.picabeen.org.au

Submission to Parliamentary Inquiry into Social Isolation and Loneliness in Queensland

Submission prepared by:

Madison Smee & Jillian Warren
Picabeen Community Centre

Introduction

Picabeen Community Centre has been a part of the Mitchelton and the greater community for 29 years. Our service supports people experiencing social isolation and loneliness through the provision of an array of opportunities for people to connect, engage, and socialise. Picabeen welcomes people from all walks of life by incorporating a respectful, compassionate and holistic approach to everyone who accesses our services. We welcome the opportunity to write a submission to highlight the significant role that we and all community centres play in addressing social isolation and loneliness within our communities. We support the Queensland Families and Communities Association recommendations to this inquiry; Community and Neighbourhood Centre's are central to addressing social isolation and loneliness within communities.

Social isolation and loneliness within our community

Each quarter, Picabeen reports data that has been collected to the Department of Communities; the data includes the number of unique service users and type of interactions. Last quarter, we found that we had 501 people using our services. This is the largest number we have had in over 6 years. 311 (62%) of the people using our services have reported improved feelings of social connectedness. We believe that these high numbers are primarily due to the impact of the pandemic as well as our weekly community BBQ. Our weekly community BBQ is a free event held at Picabeen, which brings together our volunteers and local community members. It creates the



Picabeen Community Centre
22 Hoben Street Mitchelton Q 4053
PO Box 6179 Mitchelton Q 4053
P 07 3354 2555
Facebook: Picabeen Community Centre
www.picabeen.org.au

opportunity for people to check in, socialise and sit with each other over a warm meal. It is especially busy after we have experienced a lockdown; anecdotally this is due to people being eager to be out of their homes. This regular event has become a real staple in the community, attracting on average 20 people per week.

This data does not show our overall impact on the community, as it does not acknowledge our volunteers within the data. Our volunteers are the heart of the community centre. Without them, our centre would not be able to function. One of our volunteers and service- users, who has helped at Picabeen for 3 years, states:

"When I come to the community centre, it breaks up my day. It is better than staying at home within 4 walls. COVID was really isolating for me. Most of my support workers had to cancel. It was difficult. At the community centre, I get to talk to people, interact, and meet new people. I get to learn new things. I get to interact with people that I wouldn't normally interact with. I like going to the BBQ because the social interaction is important for me. I've made many friends here; I love making people feel welcome and giving them a place to feel comfortable."

A workshop teacher, who has volunteered with Picabeen for 7 years, states:

"For some people, coming to the community centre works really well. My daughter with a disability really enjoys coming here. It was especially hard not coming to the centre during the COVID lockdown. I had more of a low mood. I have made some really good friends here; people I have something in common with, like sewing for example."

Statements like these are not uncommon at Picabeen and are echoed by several other volunteers. It has been clear that COVID lockdowns have majorly affected our community members, as they are not able to attend our regular classes and events. This causes further isolation and loneliness. For many, visiting the centre is one of their only forms of social connection. Even though our centre is under-resourced, our part-time staff (there is not enough funding to have full-time staff)



Picabeen Community Centre
22 Hoben Street Mitchelton Q 4053
PO Box 6179 Mitchelton Q 4053
P 07 3354 2555
Facebook: Picabeen Community Centre
www.picabeen.org.au

and volunteers have made intentional efforts to stay in contact with volunteers and service users experiencing isolation. This has been done by making regular phone calls and Zoom meetings, however, our staff are often spread out too thin to reach all of our service-users.

Picabeen Community Centre

Each week we welcome over 120 people through our doors for social groups, youth support, play groups, activity groups and volunteering. This is alongside the frequent visitors we have to our second-hand clothing 'op' shop at a different location. Each week, Picabeen provides Emergency Relief in the form of food parcels to approximately 30 people (including individuals and families), as well as approximately 20-25 hot meals for people at our community BBQ. We hire out our spaces to run workshops, information sessions, employment opportunities, counselling, and everything in between. We host many events in the community, with our annual Christmas event usually welcoming approximately 100 people for the community celebration and another 100 people who receive food hampers. For our members that are involved in the many activities here at Picabeen, they are often expressing their feelings of joy and happiness when coming to the centre. They enjoy the opportunity to help, gain confidence, build their skills, give back, and connect with their community. One of our members states *'coming here gives me the opportunity to contribute to the community at large, to be able to help. You get to meet a diverse group of people – the students, volunteers, staff, and service-users from all different backgrounds. It's great to be involved and welcomed by everyone.'*

Our role in addressing loneliness and social isolation

Picabeen is a place of learning, gathering and connecting. This is embedded through our day-to-day interactions, our social groups, playgroups, activities, second-hand clothing 'op' shop, events, and workshops. We have numerous opportunities for volunteers and for students. We currently have 60 volunteers, and four Social Work students completing their placements with us. Our



Picabeen Community Centre
22 Hoben Street Mitchelton Q 4053
PO Box 6179 Mitchelton Q 4053
P 07 3354 2555
Facebook: Picabeen Community Centre
www.picabeen.org.au

wonderful committee members are also volunteers. Here's what one of our committee members has to say about Picabeen:

"I volunteer for Picabeen, so I am able to support a community that has limited funding to meet demand from community need, to be able to offer my skills in governance, funding acquisitions and management and service delivery contexts. Picabeen has a commitment to the community, a variety of volunteer programs, and a friendly and welcoming environment."

Picabeen holds a weekly safe space for young people who identify within the LGBTQIA+ community, or for those who are allies of the community or may be curious. This group has had a significant impact in connecting young people and building friendships. It has provided a space of curiosity, safety and acceptance. Local schools are now acknowledging the importance of these groups, as they are aware of the needs of young people within the area. The schools have asked our Youth Workers to help set up their groups. Funding for these groups has not been renewed, but we continue to provide this service (in a reduced capacity) as we recognise it is a significant need. If we received adequate funding, we would be able to provide ongoing support to the schools, rather than a single visit. We would be able to provide greater resources to encourage further engagement from the young people.

This is merely one example of how Picabeen addresses loneliness and social isolation. Bringing people together in a space where they are comfortable is within the spirit of Picabeen, it's what we see as being a major part of our role within the community.

The role of Community Centres

Community centres play a significant role by relieving social isolation and loneliness. They help reduce the need for intensive (and expensive) services through providing low or no cost activities and services. We offer a welcoming, non-clinical, non-threatening and relaxed space.



Picabeen Community Centre
22 Hoben Street Mitchelton Q 4053
PO Box 6179 Mitchelton Q 4053
P 07 3354 2555
Facebook: Picabeen Community Centre
www.picabeen.org.au

Centres provide learning opportunities by engaging groups and hosting classes that have a central focus on creating connections within the community. They open a window for networking and for people to build and form great friendships, to volunteer and to be involved. Alongside this, social action is involved to help raise community awareness, to educate and to address social injustice. Thus, more funding is required. Centres are severely under resourced and under-funded. On average, each community centre receives around \$134,000 per year from the Queensland Government.

There has been a sharp increase in the number of new people walking through our doors and needing assistance in recent times. The cost of living has increased, rental prices, high unemployment and underemployment rates (Hall,A.,2019). People report that they are experiencing greater challenges and hardships. There has been increased demand to provide emergency relief for many of the people accessing our services; this includes (but is not limited to) Go Cards, everyday grocery items and clothing. With limited resources, we do not have enough to provide for everyone.

Community Centres have been there for those who experience hardships, vulnerabilities, and isolation on an ongoing basis. Recently we have been seeing an increase in first-time service users having issues with their health, wellbeing, unemployment, and finances. Community Centres play a central role in reducing social isolation, loneliness and increasing the wellbeing and self-esteem of many people. We give people an opportunity to connect, feel safe and supported, to gain skills and build friendships. The consequences of not dealing with the current crisis might end up costing the Government millions; some of our service-users may end up in places like the hospital, the justice system, or rehabilitation.

Conclusion

Picabeen is a Community Centre for all. We provide opportunities for learning, development, connection and safety. The positive outcomes that are created from these opportunities reap many benefits, whether they be social, psychological, cultural, biological and/or spiritual. Loneliness and



Picabeen Community Centre
22 Hoben Street Mitchelton Q 4053
PO Box 6179 Mitchelton Q 4053
P 07 3354 2555
Facebook: Picabeen Community Centre
www.picabeen.org.au

social isolation have been issues that have long been recognised; it's one of the key reasons why we exist. Many people are affected by loneliness and isolation, and this has skyrocketed since the pandemic has begun. Action is needed. Funding and adequate resources are needed. We support the QFCA's recommendations to this inquiry; Community and Neighbourhood Centre's are central to addressing social isolation and loneliness within communities.

Reference

https://www.apph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/BriefingBook46p/CostLiving