



Deception Bay Neighbourhood Centre Inc.

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Submission to Parliamentary Inquiry into Loneliness and Social Isolation.

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Introduction

In the early 1990's, the Deception Bay Neighbourhood Centre (DBNC) emerged from a grassroots movement to support community needs. Since then, DBNC has developed and delivered services, activities and initiatives that enhance social inclusion and employment opportunities for vulnerable people impacted by hardship.

DBNC utilises a person-centred approach using '*Relationships and Dialogue within a Community Development Framework*'. The approach works on the concept of seeing through the eyes of another by 'listen to hear' don't 'listen to respond'.

The Centre is a 'connector' to the community working collaboratively with its partner organisations, services, and community organisations to support the Deception Bay community especially families, children, seniors and the marginalised and disadvantaged.

DBNC, like all Neighbourhood Centres, plays a key role in our local community by reducing social isolation through volunteering, providing a space and connection for social activities, and self-help groups.

Social Isolation in Deception Bay

Deception Bay has a small but growing population of 22,446 (Census 2016) predicted >28000 by 2031. Deception Bay experiences more socio-economic disadvantage compared to the rest of the State (SEIFA data). In 3 of the 4 SIFA domains, Deception Bay ranked lower in 2011 than in 2006. There are:

- High levels of housing stress
- High need for emergency relief
- High unemployment (double the national average)
- High transient population

In 2019/2020 over 16440 people accessed DBNC representing over 70% of the total population of D'Bay.

Social isolation has been an ongoing issue within the Deception Bay area. Key factors that attribute to this is the high transient population, high unemployment, homelessness, and mental health issues. Place based groups and programs address these issues including Garden and Chatter and Walking Groups, Morning Teas and Community Care Days. These groups/programs maximise how interactions can be a positive experience and have a positive impact on those who engage with DBNC.

This was most noticed during **COVID-19 Pandemic**.

DBNC was the only centre in the Moreton Bay Region to keep its 'doors open' during the lockdown period. Two major themes developed in people presenting at the Centre:

- People seeking social, emotional connection and
- People in crisis

Through connection to DBNC, the staff and volunteers were able to develop innovative ways to keep the community connected during the COVID lockdown period. Some of the initiatives were:



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'Staying connected with Craft'

DBNC sought funding to develop craft kits for adults and children (over 400 distributed).

One community member came down to the Centre every time there was a new pack available to collect them for all the kids in her street and would leave them at their doorstep.

Facebook was an important medium for keeping people connected in the local D'Bay community.

Parents collecting craft packs and fresh bread were especially thankful for the free resources, as families with small children struggled to keep them entertained during lockdown.

Our approach to Loneliness and Isolation

DBNC provides services, programs, activities and events and welcomes our diverse community. All our social groups have been established by people from our community wanting to connect.

The Centre's statistical data indicated during 2020, over 1000 community members each month visited the Centre during 2020. 300 of these came to participate in social activities or group sessions.

One example is the **Garden and Chatter Group**, an initiative of DBNC which developed into more a social communication construct than just gardening.

A member of the group said: *'I understand that loneliness existed before the pandemic, but the further impact of isolation due to the pandemic has had a growing effect on my wellbeing. This group has made me feel less alone and I enjoy the company of others while doing something I love to do.'*

The Centre hosts a '**Community Care Day**'. Members of our local community come to enjoy various activities provided by several services in D'Bay. All agencies that support this event provide a fun activity for families and children, plus free laundry, and shower facilities for the homeless. It's a great opportunity for the community to come and connect with each other and feel part of the community. This is a growing event, as community members have expressed an interest in providing their own activities. An example is the local community members who now run Rock Painting and Art and Craft workshops.

DBNC also reaches out to the community to connect with people who don't have the capacity to come to the Centre. An example is the work DBNC does are regular BBQs at the local Caravan Parks to foster relationships and socially connect with young people, families and older generation living at the park. The residents enjoy the social connection not only with the service agencies that attend but also with other residents at the park.

Neighbourhood Centres, Loneliness and Social Isolation

Neighbourhood Centres offer a place based and person-centred solution to addressing loneliness and social isolation in our communities. There are over 138 Neighbourhood Centres throughout Queensland, but no two Centres are the same. Guided by a community development approach, they engage and respond to the needs and priorities of the communities they serve.

According to QFCA, on average over 1.83 million people per year are visitors to Neighbourhood Centres and a 'no wrong door' approach means everyone is welcome. Over 2255 active community volunteers give 544,440 hours of their time per year. The average social return on investment is \$4.08 for every \$1 invested by the Qld Government.

In considering strategies for reducing loneliness and social isolation in Queensland, the Queensland Government needs to adequately resource Neighbourhood Centres as the key pieces of social infrastructure they are and can be to reduce loneliness and social isolation. Token solutions to loneliness and social isolation by 'cookie cutting' more social groups across the State will not address this epidemic.



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Conclusion

In 2021, National Neighbourhood Centre Week's motto was 'Loneliness-The solution is Community'. Neighbourhood Centres are the heart of our communities. They bring people together to connect and contribute to their local community through social, educational and support activities. They welcome people of all ages, abilities and walks of life, and create opportunities for people to enrich their lives through connections they might not otherwise make.

DBNC supports the QFCA's recommendations to this inquiry to position Neighbourhood Centres as a key community-based vehicle for addressing social isolation and loneliness.