

Kyabra Community Association Inc. Submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Loneliness and Social Isolation.

About Kyabra

Kyabra is a community-based organisation committed to strengthening individual, family and community life. Established in 1976 as Sunnybank Family Support, Kyabra provides support and training to individuals, families and community groups in the south side of Brisbane. In the last year, over 2000 clients were supported by Kyabra.

Individuals and families accessing services at Kyabra are often on very low incomes and experience social inequality for reasons such as disability, ethnicity, mental health issues and homelessness. Our activities and services include:

- Supports for NDIS participants
- Community Finance
- Neighbourhood Centre Activities
- Mental Health Supports
- Foster and Kinship Care
- Support for women and children who have experienced domestic and family violence
- Housing and Homelessness Support
- Early Years and Parenting Support
- Lighthouse Resources - Training and Bookshop
- Community Computer Services

Kyabra Case Workers' Observations on Social Isolation and Loneliness

Fifty percent of my clients would be adversely affected by social isolation and loneliness.

Covid-19 has impacted on households, either directly by requiring families to lockdown, or indirectly by families becoming anxious about the virus and choosing to self-isolate out of fear. Families have not been able to attend usual social activities, visit friends etc, which has had an impact on their loneliness – impacting on mental health and functionality. This impacted people living on their own, but also entire households dealing with isolation.

Four out of my 24 clients have been impacted by loneliness and social isolation to my knowledge due to limited/nil informal supports and ongoing lockdowns/restrictions as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. I'd say all have the potential to be adversely affected by loneliness and social isolation, but the remainder have stronger informal supports (family/friends/neighbours/work colleagues) and are better connected into mainstream supports as well.

One of my clients continuously disengages from formal services due to her ill mental health which we know can be exacerbated by social isolation. She is an NDIS participant, so this has

Kyabra Community Association Inc. Submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Loneliness and Social Isolation.

also impacted her capacity to work towards her NDIS goals as it takes time to rebuild supports each time she disengages. I also have an NDIS participant living in an Aged Care Facility who has been restricted from seeing family members during periods where restrictions are in place and this has led to a feeling of neglect and abandonment.

Due to Covid-19 lockdowns and the isolation that comes with it, the limiting factors of the various disabilities in their families, as well as feelings of medical vulnerability to the virus among my older clients approx. 60% have indicated a degree of loneliness

In one case a particular client has been feeling isolated due to fear of Covid-19 and its possible impact within her family. She has limited her trips to only very essential requirements such as medical appointments. She used to look forward to outings including grocery shopping and coffee at the local shops as well as lunch at her local cafe. She has expressed her loneliness to me over the phone and has increased her phone calls to me to several times a week rather than the previous once a fortnight. Previously her calls dealt with definite concerns or needs while now they are more general and “chatty”. While this client is a particular case I have noticed the same among other clients increasing my time on service calls by at least 50 %.

Social Isolation and Loneliness – A Kyabra Response

What’s Getting in the Way?

Kyabra’s integrated model allows case workers the opportunity to work with clients on multiple issues. The caveat is that the issues worked on with a client are generally limited via the funding model. For example, clients seeking housing support, who are case-managed within a funded Housing Support program, are generally focused on the immediate issue of securing housing.

This would also apply to case workers working with community members in other areas, whether it is within a Foster and Kinship Care, Parenting, Disability or Financial Support area. The presenting issue is usually given priority, and secondary or contributing issues would be explored after the presenting issue has been addressed, and sometimes only if they are making an obvious and significant contribution to the presenting issue.

Kyabra Community Association Inc. Submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Loneliness and Social Isolation.

While loneliness and social isolation could be present for a client, they would often be considered secondary to the presenting issues. Unless prompted, these issues are often hidden, and as such, it is difficult to ascertain the true extent of loneliness and isolation in the community.

A Case Management Outcomes Approach

There is certainly scope within Kyabra's service delivery model to give greater attention to loneliness and social isolation through our integrated case-management approach.

Kyabra has adopted a case management tool called Outcomes Star which provides a fuller case management engagement with a client and can be effective in revealing other contributing issues affecting and impacting on their lives.

"Outcomes Stars are holistic and empowering tools that are designed to meet the need for outcomes measurement whilst also improving keywork for service users, services and commissioners.

Each version consists of a set of scales presented in a friendly and accessible Star shape, covering the key outcome areas that are relevant in the sector. Underpinning these scales is a five stage Journey of Change - an explicit model of the steps people go through when making sustainable change in their lives"

Briefing-what-is-the-Outcomes-Star-june2017-web.pdf

Kyabra currently uses 3 Outcome Stars for case managed clients:

1. Homelessness Star
2. Tenancy Star
3. Empowerment Star

These Stars, contain domains relevant to loneliness and social isolation, eg:

Homelessness Star

- Social Networks and Relationships
- Meaningful use of Time

Tenancy Star

- Positive Use of Time
- Community and Contribution

Kyabra Community Association Inc. Submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Loneliness and Social Isolation.

Empowerment Star

- Support Networks

The ability of a case manager to fully explore all of the domains within an Outcome Star are constrained by the competing demands on the worker and the prescribed service agreement outcomes. Case Managers would have greater capacity to explore and address social isolation and loneliness issues for clients, if these issues were also prioritised in service agreements.

Conclusion

1. Kyabra's service model can assist a client to identify and address issues related to loneliness and social isolation.
2. The Outcomes Star provides a structured case management approach which includes domains which can assist clients to identify and address issues related to loneliness and social isolation.
3. The Outcomes Star provides a tool which allows funding bodies to see if their interventions are making a difference. Pre- and post-intervention measurements allow us to see if clients are making progress along the "journey of change" from being "stuck" at one end of the continuum to being self-reliant, on the other.
4. For Kyabra to make a positive impact in supporting clients to address their loneliness and isolation, the following changes need to occur:
 - The inclusion of loneliness and social isolation targets within funding service agreements across all levels of government, and
 - Either a reduction in client number targets, or increased funding, to allow greater capacity to address issues relating to loneliness and social isolation.
5. Kyabra proposes a research project/Pilot which could examine these issues further. Kyabra will provide further details of such a project, on request.

Written by Chris Wilson and endorsed by David O'Toole, Kyabra CEO on 17 August 2021
Mailing Address: PO Box 1103, Sunnybank Hills Q 4109
Telephone Contact: [REDACTED]

X Chris Wilson