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Pomona & District Community House Inc.**1 Memorial Avenue, Pomona Qld 4568**

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17/08/2021

Dear Secretary,

Re: Neighbourhood Centres and the Parliamentary Inquiry into Loneliness and Social Isolation

The Pomona and District Community House (PCH) is one of 140 Neighbourhood and Community Centres (NCC's) around Queensland responding to loneliness and social isolation in our local communities. Neighbourhood Centres are place-based social infrastructure that foster connection, belonging, participation and inclusion.

Neighbourhood Centres welcome everyone, regardless of race, gender, sexuality, religion, age or social status and by their very nature build connections between individuals and organisations, particularly those who are isolated, vulnerable and disenfranchised.

Our centre offers many activities and services for people all ages. These include the following weekly or fortnightly activities such as:

- Boomerang Bags – sewing cloth shopping bags for a sustainable community
- Cuppa, Cake and Conversation – a fortnightly drop-in social group
- Rummikub – a social games group
- Knitting group
- French conversation classes
- Astronomy group
- Movie group
- Weekly youth groups – 10 – 18years. While this may not generally come into the radar of preventing loneliness, young people can experience difficulty in speaking honestly with parents or caregivers about problems at school or in other situations and feel isolated through not having someone they can speak freely with. Social-work trained facilitators provide an open, caring space for these young people to speak openly and assist them to find resolution.

PCH also offers a monthly information morning tea, Community Connect. Recent topics have included a My Aged Care presentation by COTA, where 26 seniors were able to ask the questions they needed to be able to find out about and navigate My Aged Care. Nearly all participants stayed after the presentation to enjoy free refreshments and to chat with other participants. Three of participants left (anonymous) feedback saying they had, at some time, felt socially isolated. Events such as these are an opportunity to let community members know about all the other activities and services we offer. While the topics vary widely in the Community Connect information mornings, morning tea is always provided creating opportunities for social interaction.

General services include computer lessons, a JP service which is much in demand, Tax Help, photocopying and any other general assistance that our community may need. The understanding for staff and volunteers is that any encounter is an opportunity to enhance someone's day.

*Community Spirit at its Best**Funded by Dept. Department of Communities, Housing & Digital Economy and Noosa Council*

We are regularly approached by people in difficult situations – needing food, petrol, or assistance with bills or large purchases, who are experiencing homelessness or leaving a situation of domestic violence. There are several people who come in regularly for a shower and who often stay for a cup of tea and a chat. In a recent conversation with a gentleman living in his car, the point was made that when you are homeless, particularly in rural areas, often the only conversations are those involving purchases and necessary services. He expressed his gratitude that a volunteer at the centre took the time to sit with him for over an hour and simply listen and engage in a conversation with him.

The low cost of activities and services is another way neighbourhood centres foster connection and social inclusion – no-one is turned away. The 'Night of Lights,' an open-air festive season event staged in partnership with the local Lions Club, is one of many free or low cost events available in the community that is supported or hosted by the Pomona Community House.

In considering how to reduce loneliness and social isolation in Queensland, the Queensland Government needs to adequately resource Neighbourhood Centres as the key pieces of social infrastructure they are.

Our centre supports the Queensland Families and Communities Association (QFCA) submission to this inquiry. QFCA is the peak body of Neighbourhood Centres in Queensland and recommend:

- **Increase Neighbourhood Centre Investment** to a minimum of 2.5 workers plus overheads per centre to ensure adequate resourcing of place-based pro-connection responses
- **Strength Based Awareness Campaign emphasising the key role of NCC's**, creating increased awareness of centres as hubs of connection for social isolated individuals
- **Enhance Neighbourhood Centre Digital and Physical Infrastructure** to connect isolated individuals in communities using hybrid online and in-person methods
- **Resource QFCA to deliver additional NCC sector support** including implementing a NCC Reporting Framework which measures social isolation and loneliness.

Additional resourcing by the Queensland Government can further enhance the Neighbourhood Centre sector's capacity to invest in community-led, place-based solutions to the problem of loneliness and social isolation in our state.

Kind regards,

Kathryn Shewring

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