

**Laidley Community Centre Inc.**

13 Mary Street, Laidley, Qld 4341 | Ph: 07 5465 1889

info@laidleycc.org.au | www.laidleycc.org.au | www.facebook.com/laidleycc

Committee Secretary  
Community Support and Services Committee  
Parliament House  
George Street  
Brisbane Qld 4000

17 August, 2021

Dear Secretary,

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

The Laidley Community Centre 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.

By way of example of the benefits of community centres at an individual level, we offer the following as case a study:

*After migrating to Australia more than twenty years ago, this individual made connection with the community centre as a way to make friends and learn the language. During this time, she became a volunteer, then a paid staff member, then a board member and now is primarily a centre user. A few years ago, she experienced the passing of her husband and leant heavily on the community centre as an avenue to remain connected with people during her grief and to support her emotional recovery. Her routine now includes attending the centre every day to check her email on the computers and have a coffee and chat. Recently, she has been diagnosed as experiencing early symptoms of dementia. While she has begun to forget things, her attendance at the community centre has remained consistent and has meant that there are people keeping an eye on her each day (since she otherwise lives alone). Being elderly and vulnerable, during COVID restrictions, we sadly could not allow her to attend the centre for her own safety. During this time, she expressed grief and loneliness, and while we would regularly call to check on her, she found lockdown time traumatic each time, and is overwhelmed with relief when she can once again attend the community centre, which gives her day meaning. Her favourite days are when playgroup is on and she can help out and engage with the children. The children refer to her as 'Nana' and also appear to receive pleasure from the intergenerational interaction. Having no relatives to speak of, she refers to the staff at the community centre as her family and the staff have fond regard for her also. In this person's life, the community centre is now their whole world and the benefits in terms of her increased quality of life are immeasurable.*



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This is just one example of many people who first attend our service after losing life partners in search of a meaningful activity to help them ward off depression and loneliness. There are many other people who reach out to connect at the community centre and each one has a different story – from returned servicemen experiencing depression, to young single mothers lacking any other supports, to reformed drug addicts. Increasingly we are seeing presentation from young people who suffer from social anxiety who are looking to build their self-esteem and confidence. Without support, these young people are likely to experience negative employment outcomes. Through inclusion in our events and activities, and volunteering in our programs such as our social enterprise café, and becoming volunteer mentors providing computer training to seniors, young people report increased confidence, interpersonal skill development, and increased civic participation.

Our centre currently offers a variety of targeted services however these are heavily reliant on grants and our organisation's ability to piece together funding from various sources. This is time-consuming, resource-intensive and inefficient and results in inconsistency of programs across time. We also cannot deliver the range of social-connectedness activities we know are so desperately needed, including to replace several activities that were being run by other community groups pre-pandemic that have since been discontinued, and are unlikely to recommence. Adequate resourcing would mean we could consistently deliver a suite of place-based, community-informed activities and events that are specifically designed to strengthen the social fabric of our community, and provide social engagement opportunities that encourage meaningful connections between those residents otherwise at risk of isolation and loneliness. This would strengthen the resilience of our community and it's decrease its reliance on government during times of response and recovery when disasters or challenging times occur.

In considering how to reduce loneliness and social isolation in Queensland, the Queensland Government needs to adequately resource Neighbourhood Centres as critical social infrastructure that foster strong and connected communities, and link people to support services in the location that they need them and are most likely to utilise them.

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

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- **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,

Alana Wahl  
Manager,  
Laidley Community Centre



(Submitted with approval by and on behalf of the board of management of Laidley Community Centre Inc. of whom Mr Adrian Shepley is President and can be contacted on [REDACTED] or emailed at [REDACTED])

