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Dear Secretary,

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

Introduction

Sherwood Neighbourhood Community Centre Inc was founded by the community in 1979 and has been an integral part of the region ever since. Our organisation supports and offers Community based programs and events as per needs of our community as well as Emergency Relief (food only), Housing Service under the Temporary Supported Accommodation and offer support, assist, and collaborate with other independent and/or funded services and organisations. Neighbourhood Centres welcome everyone, regardless of race, gender, sexuality, religion, age, and social status. By their very nature they build connections between individuals and organisation's, particularly those who are isolated, vulnerable, and disenfranchised. Sherwood Neighbourhood Centre Inc 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.

Social Isolation and Loneliness

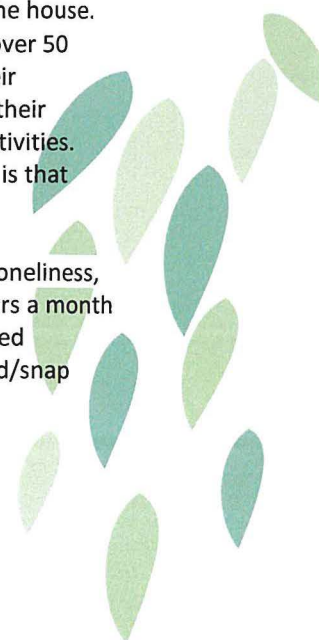
Sherwood Neighbourhood Centre is particularly well placed to assist individuals who may be experiencing loneliness and/or social isolation. Over the past year we have had an increased interest in services related to supporting mental health and reducing loneliness and social isolation. There has been significant community interest, which has resulted in the formation of a new support group at the centre and forum with the community.

The services we offer help to alleviate social isolation and loneliness. Our groups help members of the community to increase in wellbeing and self-esteem, find purpose, friendships, and connections.

The groups below are particularly suited to supporting persons experiencing social isolation and loneliness.

- Clutter Group – Monthly group based around support persons who have symptoms of hoarding. On talking with members of the group we have found they have faced unique challenges because of Covid 19 and how to cope with isolation.
- Anxiety and Depression support group who ceased meeting end of 2019.
- Our special interest groups range from pottery, crafts, exercise, self-health therapies i.e., yoga and meditation and other social activities. A number of group members have explained the value the groups give them to socialise. Recently a member explained to us they had not left the house during a Brisbane wide lockdown and attending the social group was the first time they had left the house.
- Brisbane City Council - Growing Old and Living Dangerously (GOLD) – exclusive to Seniors over 50 programs. Once again, the feedback from how these programs help these attendees in their everyday social activities incorporating crafts, exercise or mindfulness programs that help their mental health giving them a sense of belonging and also accomplishment to carry these activities. Covid 19 has impacted most of these individuals in one way or another, but the consensus is that they were happy to be able to leave their homes and socialise with others.

Sherwood Neighbourhood Centre does not usually acquire data specifically on social isolation and loneliness, nonetheless we do acquire data for annual reports. On average the centre offers 234 volunteer hours a month and sees an average of over 500 visitors a month to the centre. The snap lockdowns and covid related restrictions have made several community members hesitant to return to the centre. Each extended/snap



lockdown has created a barrier for those visitors to the centre, further exacerbating social isolation and loneliness.

NCC's and addressing social isolation and loneliness

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,



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