



Submission to Parliamentary Inquiry into Loneliness and Social Isolation

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Introduction

Kingston East Neighbourhood Group (KENG) has been operating for over 35 years and has grown to become a centre based on community, strength-based work, inclusiveness, cultural safety, trust, and collaboration for the many families and individuals that KENG engages with. Logan has since become the fastest growing city in Australia and consequently, it suffers from growing pain that such rapid development brings. Many families are migrants, both from overseas and interstate, with no extended family support, and therefore has led to increased demands for community services. This is where KENG has stepped forward, to support and assist families particularly those in Central Logan (that is Woodridge, Slacks Creek, Kingston, Marsden, and Loganlea). KENG offers a range of services that are paramount to address the importance of local community needs including, occasional child-care, play groups, men's group, older persons action program, and many other programs that encompass interconnection, community togetherness and community empowerment. Neighbourhood Centres in Queensland play an important role to reduce social isolation through volunteer work, social activity, self-help groups, using local knowledge to connect community members with partner organisations and offering support to vulnerable groups during crises and natural disasters.

Social Isolation in Logan Community

Social Isolation has had a significant impact in the Logan Community, this has been evident when speaking with many of our participants who engage with our programs, and being

Discussions pertaining to COVID-19 and loneliness/social isolation were also implemented, this was especially important as participants shared that when the lockdown occurred in the Logan Area, people were concerned when the programs that KENG runs would re-open. This uncertainty did create a lot of anxiety for the participants attending KENG and loneliness/isolation was experienced by the participants interviewed. The importance of implementing programs that help to create social connection and meaningful positive relationships have been an important goal that KENG continues to implement and is an identified need that our participants have shared.

Additionally, KENG also runs a men's group every Friday called 'Great Mates Meet' and has created a great network of men from all over Logan. The Great Mates Meet program has been supporting men around Logan for several years, and particularly when COVID-19 lockdown and restrictions had recently impacted upon the Logan community and surrounding areas. The men's group hold a BBQ and chat about different programs and activities that are upcoming. It is relaxed and strongly based on mateship. Speaking with one participant, he had stated "being able to attend the men's group has been good, I like that its relaxed, it helps a lot of with my mental health". Another participant spoke about how beneficial groups and programs like this are rare for men around the area and added that more programs for blokes to go to are important, he stated "men's shed isn't my thing, I like these types of programs because it's not about building things it's just about chatting with mates". Another participant mentioned that there needs to be more groups for men around this area, as it really helps with his mental health, he went on to state that he would look forward to meeting with workers at different workplaces to talk about the importance of men's mental health. Additionally, when asked about isolation and loneliness, one participant mentioned that it does help a lot to get out of the house and have something to look forward to throughout the week.

These two programs that KENG are currently running are an important part of integrating and improving social connection and addressing isolation in the Logan Community. There are many other programs that KENG are currently running and with social isolation and loneliness increasing in our community, it is important that programs that foster social connection are continued, implemented, and improved upon.

Kingston East Neighbourhood Group

Kingston East Neighbourhood Group run many social activities that reduce loneliness and social isolation in our community, including, Great Mates Meet, Circle of Security (parenting program) etc. KENG also has many other government and non-government agencies that we connect with to implement information sessions, community meetings, training sessions etc.

Volunteering is integral to KENG, and we have many volunteers from all walks of life who work in different programs that KENG run. Emergency Relief is one program that individuals from our community volunteer to support people who may need extra financial support (bills, petrol cards, shopping vouchers) or a food parcel. When COVID-19 lockdowns occurred, Emergency

create more programs with our participants for the benefit of our community members to address the continuing issue of Loneliness and Isolation.

Conclusion

National Neighbourhood Centre Week's motto in 2021 was "Loneliness- The solution is Community". It is important to recognise the integral role that Neighbourhood Centres play in our local community. Neighbourhood Centres engage with families and individuals from all walks of life, Neighbourhood Centres work on the ground level and walk alongside our community members to create, improve, and grow the many activities and programs that they engage with. This fosters community empowerment, belonging and purpose, which is one of the integral tools to work against social isolation. The Kingston East Neighbourhood Centre supports the QFCA recommendations to this Inquiry to position Neighbourhood Centres as a key community-based vehicle for addressing social isolation and loneliness.


Kim Wright
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