



Chinchilla Community Centre

PO Box 406
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Chinchilla, Qld. 4413



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info@cfsc.org.au

To: CSSC@parliament.qld.gov.au

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

Introduction

Chinchilla Community Centre has been delivering community services to Chinchilla and districts for more than 40 years. Chinchilla Community Centre operates as a Centrelink Agent and delivers other programs and services including Community Connect, Youth Connect, Emergency Relief and Skilling Queenslanders for Work, Justice of the Peace, free wifi, job vacancy information, resume preparation, community garden, study group, and Kindness Corner. We support group activities, advocate for our community and its services, host community events and celebrations, support visiting services and manage our multi-tenant building. Our purpose is to support our local community through service delivery by including and welcoming all, and by providing opportunities for connection and belonging within our community, and we do this by continually responding and adapting as the needs of our community evolve.

Chinchilla is a small rural community with a population just under 6000 people. While traditionally, Chinchilla would be described as an agricultural community the past ten years have seen this community change significantly with the boom of the gas industry and more recently with the advent of the construction of many major solar and wind projects.

These changes are reflected in a changing community. Shift work, FIFO rosters, relocating for work or work opportunities have changed the makeup of the community and the connection with our community. People who have relocated do so without family support nearby. Others move away to follow new opportunities elsewhere. All of these factors have changed the connection to the community, increasing the isolation and loneliness experienced by so many.

Factors contributing to social isolation and loneliness in our area

- Changing community demographic and ways of working, with families moving away from older family members; younger families relocating away from family support; changing work patterns; FIFO/DIDO work arrangements
- isolation – our Centre regularly engages with community members who have poor or no family relationships, and little or no social connection
- access to technology – poor connectivity locally is a barrier to communication for much of the surrounding area, with hit-and-miss connections, no telephone signal, and intermittent internet connection. In addition, community members often report



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they are unable to afford credit. All of these factors combine to further isolate and frustrate community members, particularly in an environment where people are increasingly being directed online to participate in so many aspects of life.

- access to reliable and affordable transport
- complex vulnerabilities are barriers to participating in community
- ongoing drought

The benefit of addressing social isolation and loneliness

Research tells us that connection and belonging combined with a sense of purpose are most effective to assist to overcome social isolation and loneliness, and can even contribute to the prevention of developing mental health crisis. By providing a place to go, to belong and to participate, our community centre assists our community.

The Imperative to Support Neighbourhood Centres in Queensland

The Chinchilla 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.

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



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- **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,
Louise Judge
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[REDACTED]