



69 Stuart Russell Street, Mundubbera Qld 4626

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68 483 025 508

Dear Secretary,

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

The North Burnett Community Service 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 regional Queensland centre offers a range of community services and events including Diabetes support group, garden club, Lily's Bingo (run by a young woman with a disability each month), Patient Transport, monthly community outings

As a regional Queensland community we face a range of issues that increase social isolation and loneliness from remoteness to Covid-19 and drought to poor internet services. These compounding issues only increase the demand placed on regional neighbourhood centres and stretch our current resources to their limits.

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.

In the short time that I have been the manager here at NBCS I have seen for myself the significant savings our front-line, grassroots services generate for government. For example, a woman came to us last year in significant distress. We spent time talking with her and identified one of her key needs was increased inclusion and participation so we referred her to our range of groups and activities. For a period of 6 months she attended everything from Bingo to Diabetes group – and she loved feeling included, valued and part of the community. Shortly after this her participation declined and she would come in at odd times to the centre just for a chat. During these she disclosed to a staff member that she was contemplating suicide. This disclosure was followed by another at which point it was identified that she was at serious risk. We then used our networks and connections to liaise with local services and the local doctor to provide safe, soft-entry mental health services to address her need. As a result, she successfully managed this period and moved forward.

If this very isolated person had not been supported initially to develop relationships in community and the neighbourhood centre the outcome may have been very different – and from a financial perspective much more cost to government than adequately supporting neighbourhood centres.



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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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Yasmin Barber", written over a horizontal line.

Yasmin Barber
Service Manager
North Burnett Community Service
[Redacted]