



**Statement to the ACT Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Health,
Community and Social Services: Respite Care Services in the ACT**

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supplementary

Introduction

Our written submission to the Standing Committee Communities@Work offered comment on respite care services in the ACT based on our direct service delivery experience in implementing services such as Respite Options ACT. Today we will outline the outcomes of this service and of another program called Connections@Cooleman.

We should note that Communities@Work adopts the Home and Community Care (HACC) definition of respite as the provision of substitute care for the carer. Respite is usually provided on a planned/regular basis. These care services include a number of flexible options such as assistance with shopping, meals preparation, support to attend leisure activities, centre based activities, attendance at appointments, and companionship.

Respite Options ACT

Respite Options ACT is a flexible program, funded through a grant from the Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, as part of the Targeted Community Care (Mental Health) Program National Respite Development Fund. The level of grant for financial year 2010-11 is \$103,000.

Designed to meet the individual needs of carers and care recipients, some 1900 hours of service was provided between July 2009-August 2010.

We provide one on one respite and support services to carers of people who are experiencing severe mental illness and/or intellectual disabilities. The service enables carers time to recover from the stresses of daily living, and to balance work and caring responsibilities. Our statistics show that around half of carers have a mental illness or are at risk themselves.

The program primarily operates under a 'brokerage' model where Commonwealth Respite and Carelink Centres broker Respite Options ACT to provide services to carers. We anticipate that we will receive \$28,000 brokerage fees for the 10/11 financial year to provide the respite service.

We were also successful in receiving Government approval to quarantine a small amount of allocated management funds for direct service provision to carers to enable a "no wrong door" approach. This approach was highly successful with direct service provision reaching full capacity within six months. Services have been provided to up to 43 clients per month with this small budget. Bearing in mind this experience, Communities@Work supports a flexible model of brokerage combined with direct service provision as an effective and efficient method of delivery.

Case examples:

- Carer was provided with respite through taking their socially isolated family member (care recipient) out into the community for a walk/ice cream/coffee (social support) – the care recipient had been housebound and unable to go out on her own. The outcome for the carer has been a regular break of a few hours while the care recipient has become more confident to go out in public with the company of a support worker.
- Another carer in fulltime employment at risk of depression was able to put in place strategies for her own self care (eg a week's holiday for a break). We were part of a team of respite support during the break, providing a support worker to go to the carer's home between 5-8pm to cook the evening meal and assist with other personal care needs as agreed.

Overall benefit: Stabilises the environment/situation for carer/client/family so that there is less need to introduce higher level interventions.

Connections@Cooleman

This is a living skills and leisure program for up to 12 adults with disabilities between 25- 40 years of age living in the Tuggeranong and Weston Creek regions, funded at \$59,784 per financial year recurrently through HACC.

Activities are offered two days per week, designed in consultation with participants and their carers. Participants develop living skills such as cooking, shopping and computer skills. The program also offers a range of leisure activities including dance, music, craft, tennis, woodwork, tai chi, and art. It is designed to provide opportunities for building social networks, and a step towards independence. It provides respite to carers by giving them a break while clients participate in the program.

Key program statistics are as follows:

- Ages of clients in the program range from 22 to late 30's/early 40's
- Gender – mixed (4 male; 10 female)
- Program started in December 2009.
- 962 hours of service provided so far in 2010 (10 Feb – 10 Aug)
- We have three groups of activities on offer
 - art and crafts on Tuesday mornings
 - cooking on Tuesday afternoons
 - music and dance/exercise on Wednesday mornings.

Case examples

- One young woman had only ever had a support worker go into the home and take her out individually. Attending the group has enabled her to build a level of self confidence and independence by being dropped off at the group without a support worker.
- Another client has a purpose – somewhere to come - and is now looking at widening his horizons through volunteering.

Overall benefits:

- Increased positivity, confidence and purpose
- Role modelling socially acceptable behaviour (including boundaries) in groups and in public places.
- Practical living skills – some of our clients have not cooked before and are now cooking and also compiling a recipe book
- Improved communication skills and building of social networks.

Key outcomes

Key outcomes from our experience of delivering both the Respite Options ACT and Connections@Cooleman programs are:

- Carers/families need regular respite on an ongoing basis to assist them in sustaining their care functions in the long term
- To meet the needs of carers, respite needs to be flexible and provide people with options and choices to meet their individual needs
- Respite should be affordable and recognized by Government(s), with funding provided for service delivery; fee for service is too expensive a model for most carers.

The two programs have received highly positive responses from the families we work with and also from organisations such as Carers ACT. We believe the level of ongoing training, regular supervision and debriefing team meetings our workers receive - plus their access to Mental Health First Aid and other specific diagnosis information - is highly relevant to this kind of response.

We also note that the nature of our labour force is very suited to these programs, both in terms of their content and flexibility. The majority of our paid labour force are generally university students studying 2nd or 3rd year psychology or social work at the local universities. These students are regularly available to work for short periods on a casual basis, with particular availability afternoons/evenings and on

weekends. In total we have two part-time co-ordinators and 9 casual/part-time workers who work across the two programs. We also have four volunteers who assist with the Connections@Cooleman program activities.

Our greatest issue is having adequate recurrent funding to meet the demand for services and to provide appropriate choices. We are also concerned to maintain the flexibility in hours of casual work we can offer to our staff.

The demand for Respite Options was evidenced by 2174 hours of service provided for the year in addition to the 722 hours of brokered services.

Connections@Cooleman as a new service is still establishing its full client complement, however, we anticipate that the growth will come from clients with complex high needs which will increase the staffing to client ratio.

Research undertaken by Orima Research on behalf of Communities@Work in the Tuggeranong and Weston Creek regions indicates the following levels of demand for services in 2010

- up to 5,000 households require in-home care and maintenance services for the frail aged and people with disabilities
- up to 1,800 households require social inclusion and support services for people with disabilities
- up to 800 households require in-home support for people with dementia

It is evident that the demand is growing in our community for individuals and families to enjoy respite opportunities in order to maintain their health and well being.

Recommendations

We urge the Committee's support for any action to bring more surety to funding for respite services such as we have described and for the maintenance of flexible approaches to hours worked by staff.

We also recommend that collaborative approaches and exchange of knowledge between Governments be encouraged to ensure the best use of available funds.

Communities@Work

1 September 2010