

**MINUTES
EMERGENCY RELIEF AGENCIES FORUM**

**EMERGENCY RELIEF FORUM
MINUTES OF MEETING held on the 2nd March 2011
(Meeting held City West Lotteries House, West Perth)**

Item 1 Attendance

Present:

Joy Smith	The Salvation Army Morley
Jenny Lydon	The Salvation Army Perth
Mira Chalklen	KEMH
Doreen Rossiter	Leeming Hampers
Loreta Williams	St Vincent de Paul
Kate White	St Vincent De Paul
Halina Szunejko	WA Association of Polish Women
Kylie Harper	Foundation Housing
Anne Maroni	Anglicare Balga
Uta Conway	FACHSIA
Cheryl Flynn	FACHSIA
Katherine Manson	St Vincent de Paul
Bridget Little	CARAD
Lucy Reynolds	LotteryWest
Pauline Edwards	LotteryWest
Bill Cosentino	UCW Creditcare
Joanna Harper	Anglicare WA
Brian Niedzwiecki	St Vincent de Paul
Kathleen Shackleton	Jacaranda Community Centre
Johanna Notley	Yanchep Two Rocks Emergency Food
Lynn Deering	WACOSS
Bernie Fisher	WACOSS
Rory Ritchie	WACOSS

Apologies: There were no apologies.

Chair: Kate White

Minutes: Liana Diacicov (WACOSS)

Item 2 Minutes of the February Forum 2011

Amendments: Not all people attending the previous meeting were on the attendance list.

Motion: The February minutes be accepted. (Minutes are sent out and also published on WACOSS website).

Moved: Bill Cosentino **Seconded:** Halina Szunejko

Minutes Accepted.

Item 3 Business Arising from the Minutes

Anne Maroni has moved from the Salvation Army to Anglicare as a Financial Counsellor.
Kate White has sent a list of suburbs not covered by SVDP services.

Item 4 Last ER Forum Address by Sue Ash as WACOSS CEO

Sue Ash, announced the appointment of Irina Cattalini as the new CEO of WACOSS who is the present Director of Policy within WACOSS. Sue said that the Board had to choose from a very strong field of candidates. The Director Social Policy position will be advertised this week. Sue said that she appreciated the valuable input from the ER Forum over the time she has been in the position of WACOSS CEO.

Sue pointed out that the State Government has announced a \$1 billion budget surplus and she is trying hard to influence the management of the announced by the Government.

She said that over past years a lot of investment has been put into physical infrastructure by the Government and it is now time for investment to be made in social infrastructure, through investment in staff of community service organisations, support of housing programs, rebates and concessions and prevention services

Sue mentioned that she will be speaking to the media on these topics and asked for forum participants to provide her with input around housing issues and social security payments (there is concern about Centrelink prosecuting people for not repaying overpayments) as well as any other emerging issues WACOSS might need to be aware of.

It was mentioned that paying traffic fines and getting cars back that have been impounded is often given priority by clients over food, which means emergency relief funding is being used to pay Government, as it is with utility payments.

Anne said that as a Financial Counselling she advises people to repay their fines, otherwise they lose their driver's license which then creates more problems.

Kate said that the people who suffer most in these situations don't have negotiating skills to deal with the authorities.

Brian said the SVDP have found that his organisation needs a substantial amount of funding to assist with rental arrears and they have established a special fund for this. However as most requests are over \$500 the funds have run out very quickly.

Sue asked if such issues arise in rural or remote areas as well and Brian said that SVDP had found it happening more over the past couple of years in the South West. Because there is no affordable housing available in and around Perth people move to rural areas, which is now causing problems around housing affordability in those areas.

Bridget from CARAD mentioned that the asylum seekers and people coming to Australia on study visas have no access to Centrelink payments and cannot afford private rentals. Houses they share subsequently become overcrowded with multiple families. Some cannot afford to send their children to school as they are charged overseas students fees (over \$1,000/term).

Jenny said that there are multiple issues arising from people who are just "above the line" in regard to accessing to Centrelink payments.

Sue said the system is geared for one level of support only and that WACOSS is pushing for the creation of differential levels of support for different groups of people.

Mira said that a big problem for KEMH is that the women refuges are full due to the shortage of affordable housing and this is causing problems for young mothers with children. Bridget also gave the example of a single father with two girls for whom there was no possibility of housing.

Sue discussed the upcoming CHOGM meeting in Perth in October and explained how WACOSS will host a 'Commonwealth Peoples Forum'. On 11th March people will have an opportunity to put forward issues at a workshop, which will then go out for regional and international discussions prior to the event in October, as a parallel event along with the CHOGM.

Sue will give a briefing to the sector after her return from a trip to London on the workshop "Women as Agents of Change" and on other events to be held at the same time.

Bernie thanked Sue for her input and interest in the ER Forum during her time as WACOSS CEO.

Item 5 Morning tea

The occasion of Doreen Rossiter's 80th birthday was celebrated with a cake and Polish donuts supplied by Halina.

Item 6 WACOSS ER Update

Bernie advised that the WACOSS ER Conference brochure and registration forms will be sent out in the next few days and will also be available on the WACOSS website.

The New WACOSS website (www.wacoss.org.au) is up and running. To access Emergency Relief on the website select Sector Development on the top of the Home Page and then go to the second link down, which is Emergency Relief. Related ER links are listed on the left, including a bulletin board.

Item 7 Utilities update

Rory Ritchie of WACOSS mentioned that a seminar will be held on March 17th on community services advocating for a streamlined concessions and rebates framework. He said that action is needed to help people using water tanks for their main water supply and who are not connected to scheme water. Rebates are aimed at people having scheme water, whereas nothing is done in terms of concessions if they are not connected.

Another issue is that many people in country areas who have to use gas bottles, are struggling to meet increasing prices through local suppliers.

Brian reported that St Vincent de Paul administration of the Power Assist Scheme is working well, with most applications submitted being successful.

Bernie asked that if agencies are able to submit applications electronically by email (with a scanned account) it would assist SVDP in their processing.

Kathleen from Jacaranda Community Centre said that they had processed 581 Alinta gas applications this year. Faxes should be sent on the allocation days only and not before. All questions on the application form must be answered.

There was a discussion on the process of gas disconnection. There is a three step process, the first step is disconnection, then the meter is padlocked and then the regulator is removed.

Item 8 Agency Information

WA Association of Polish Women

Halina mentioned that on 20th March an exhibition will be held depicting the '100 Greatest Polish Women'.

UCW Creditcare

Bill said they are doing ER and Financial Counselling and appointments are being taken on 9335 8898. Appointments for ER are on Mondays and Tuesdays at CreditCare in Fremantle.

Anglicare

Anne is now a financial counsellor at the Good Shepard Centre and also does ER. Her contact number is 9427 9705. Anglicare is trying to integrate financial counselling with ER but there are concerns regarding the funding, as the GFC additional funding will not be continued beyond July.

Salvation Army Perth

Jenny mentioned that they have a new financial counsellor who was trained by Anne before she moved to Anglicare.

Salvation Army Morley

Joy said there has been an increase in ER clients over the past month.

KEMH

Mira mentioned that there is big demand for accommodation for mothers with children. Furniture is also in demand.

Lotterywest

Lucy said that there is a new website in place and a new and improved application form and she would appreciate feedback. There is a four month turnaround time from the moment of the submission of an application until the grant is awarded. Information on ER grants funding round will be announced soon.

FAHCSIA

Uta said that the half-yearly data reports are being processed. There is still a demand for funding and agencies need to communicate this, to FaHCSIA even if the GFC funding does cease. Agencies reporting yearly will also be using the Smart form.

Services must return the Smart forms electronically. This form will stay basically the same to allow for data uniformity, but at the same time some research has been carried out which may result in a different reporting tool. The next report should be the same, but changes may occur in the future. Uta said that at this stage they don't know if funding agreements will be for two years or even three years.

Brian said that the cessation of the GFC funding was a concern.

Leeming Hampers

Doreen said that some clients have complained about SVDP workers not turning up, although an appointment has been made. Kate explained that the SVDP outreach workers are volunteers and sometimes cannot make an exact time for appointments. The appointment times are quite loose and workers often turn up and people are not home.

SVDP

Loretta said that the ER line for all requests to SVDP is 1300 794054. Kate reported that the February numbers of ER applications (2635) are up by 300, compared to last February (2350). There has been a very big increase in families seeking assistance with electricity and rental bills.

WACOSS

Lynn Deering introduced herself as the new Director Sector Services and Development and said that she will try to be present at all future ER Forums.

Bernie thanked Lotterywest and FaHCSIA for being involved in the ER Forums and said that DCP should become involved, as they are very much part of the ER scene. He said that WA is lucky to have ER funding coming through LotteryWest, as this does not happen in other States. However the State Government through DCP should also be assisting more as utility and rental price increases will continue to put a real strain on WA families.

Item 9 Chairpersons for the next Forum 2011

Bernie asked for volunteers for the chair of the next meeting – Jenny Lydon of Salvation Army and Sharon volunteered for the March Forum.

The next ER Forum will take place on 6th April 2011 at City West Lotteries House, 2 Delhi Street, West Perth.

Chair: Jenny Lydon

Enquiries: Bernie Fisher at WACOSS 9420 7222 or bernie@wacoss.org.au