

MINUTES OF MEETING held on the 3rd August, 2011
(Meeting held City West Lotteries House, West Perth)

Item 1 Attendance

Present:

Jenny Lydon	Salvation Army Perth CSS
Philip Swan	Second Harvest
Tina Mocerino	Dept. of Human Services - Centrelink
Loreta Williams	St Vincent de Paul Society
Brian Niedzwiecki	St Vincent de Paul Society
David Marshall	FAHCSIA
Uta Conway	FAHCSIA
Yam Bahadur K C	Australian Asian Association
Jaswinder Kaur	Jacaranda Community Centre Inc
Lyndsey Fitzgerald	Jacaranda Community Centre Inc
Joy Smith	The Salvation Army Morley
Johanna Notley	Yanchep Emergency Food Relief
Tracey Glass	DCP
Sean Ralph	DCP
Katrina Vernon	DCP
Joanna Harper	Anglicare WA
Anna Notey	Gosnells Community Legal Centre
Hamish Dobie	Foodbank
Halina Szunejko	WA Association of Polish Women
Felicity Bankman	Princess Margaret Hospital
Sharon Patterson	Princess Margaret Hospital
Misty Hale	DCP

Apologies:

Doreen Rossiter	Leeming Hampers
Bill Cosentino	UCW Creditcare
Bronwyn Chapman	Southcare
Iris Bennett	JewishCare.

Chair: Brian Niedzwiecki

Minutes: Tamara Kendall (WACOSS)

Item 2 Minutes of the July Forum 2011

Amendments:

- Doreen Rossiter's apologies for the last meeting were not noted.
- Item 7 was listed twice

Motion: That the July minutes be accepted. (Minutes are sent out and also published on the WACOSS website).

Moved: Lyndsey Fitzgerald **Seconded:** Jenny Lydon Minutes Accepted

Item 3 Business Arising from the Minutes

None

Item 4 Secondary Family Support Networks – Innovation Phase

Presentation by Misty Hale, Senior Policy Officer, Department for Child Protection.
Contact details: misty.hale@dcp.wa.gov.au Tel: (08) 9222 2590
More information about the program available at: www.whereto.org.au

The Secondary Family Support State Plan (2010-2013) came out of recommendations from the review into the former Department for Community Development in 2007 (the Ford Review). It aims to coordinate the diverse range of support services currently available to ensure integrated, appropriate and effective access for children, young people and families to these services. Individual needs will be assessed and assistance provided in order to keep people out of the child protection system.

Expressions of Interest for a lead agency for the first Secondary Family Support Network went out on the website last Friday and closes in September. Originally the project was to have 10 sites, but was then reduced to just the Armadale 'Innovation Site' to run for one year, followed by an evaluation, and then further roll-outs if the project is considered successful.

The Network will not include crisis services, or accept referrals for clients in crisis. If the initial assessment indicates that immediate crisis support is required then the assessment worker will refer the person to other primary services or for emergency relief. The client can then be referred back to the Network for further support after the crisis is addressed. Referrals may come from a variety of sources including schools, other agencies, hospitals and self-referrals.

There will be a Child Protection Worker within the project. This worker may offer advice and information to the assessment workers and be able to liaise with DCP regarding any child protection issues to ensure that, if necessary, access to DCP services is available.

The Network will also help to measure demand and particular needs. It can be used as an opportunity to identify funding allocation and where increased resources are required.

Questions

What level of consultation has occurred with Aboriginal communities?

The program has been through a lengthy development and consultation process and is now in the final stages of design and development. Wide consultation has taken place including the use of task groups and the use of an external consultancy (KPMG) to collect this information. Many individual agencies have been invited to contribute to these consultations.

Will people be able to choose which agency they access, for example where they have already built up trust with a particular organisation?

A 'no wrong door' approach is being used in the program. Although there is to be a named lead agency for assessment, these assessments can be carried out by other agencies as well if a relationship already exists.

What about confidentiality?

All information sharing is consent based. The service is voluntary and not compulsory. Consent will be gained with regard to the storing of information (basic demographics collected and held in IT systems). A list of network agencies will be used to help clients identify to which agencies they are giving informed consent.

Item 5 Update on the Hardship Utility Grants Scheme (HUGS)

Katrina Vernon, Manager Non-Government Policy, Funding & Contracts in DCP introduced herself and other staff members working on HUGS. She provided an update on the scheme. In August 2008 through to the end of July this year the HUGS scheme has provided a total of 21,788 grants. Demand escalated from 2008/9 when there were 2,687 grants, to 12,400 in the 2010/11 financial year.

There is an increase in grant limits each year in line with the increase in utility costs e.g. up 5% this year. HUGS assistance is assessed on normal vs exceptional circumstances (unforeseen crisis situations that will have a severe impact on wellbeing). This involves additional grants to assist people in hardship who are making a genuine effort to pay their bills and are working with a Financial Counsellor.

A new six month trial is being implemented for clients with smaller utility bills, whereby they can apply directly through the utility (except Alinta) for a HUGS grant. This will be for clients where the total of the overdue bill is no more than \$560 (\$929 north of the 26 parallel).

They will not be mandated to attend Financial Counselling, although the utility will still recommend this and make a referral. Assistance through this additional entry point to HUGS will be one-off and only for clients who had not received a grant in that funding period.

This process may be particularly useful for seniors, who generally manage their finances well but may be having difficulty with a one-off large bill. The client, or the agency advocating on their behalf, will need to contact the utility, who will then undertake an assessment against the criteria of their own Hardship Policy. The application will then need to be approved by the 'Huggettes' at DCP, who will send an email to the utility (but not the referring agency). The client will get a letter if the application is declined (not many are at this stage).

Financial Counsellors have been notified of this new initiative and Katrina will provide information to Bernie to send out to ER services.

Item 6 Morning Tea

Item 7 Utilities update

Brian from SVDP provided an update on the Synergy Power Assist figures for the July round. There were 110 successful applications, with 22 being rejected due to lack of funding.

Brian also mentioned that if agencies do not put their contact details on the forms it is hard to provide them with feedback on their applications. It is also difficult making contact with workers where the agency phone is also the fax machine.

Lyndsey from Jacaranda Community Centre reminded the Forum that applications for AlintaCare can be sent in every month. The dates are on the Jacaranda and WACOSS websites.

Jacaranda has received \$110,000 funding from Alinta for this year. As it is a new financial year everyone is eligible to apply. Lyndsey again flagged the importance of checking the balance of a client's account with the utility before making an application, as some applications have been rejected due to a \$0 balance owing.

Bernie said that WACOSS has been collating the figures for the annual Power Assist reports for Synergy and Horizon Power. He said that the average size of the Synergy bill of those applying for Power Assist has gone up 71% in the last 12 months and 126% over the past three years. The Horizon Power bills are even larger, which probably reflects the use of more air conditioning, coupled with increased prices. Even with assistance from Power Assist, HUGS and the agencies, the average Synergy customer applying for Power Assist is still left with 68% of the bill unpaid.

Item 8 WACOSS Update

Lynn Deering, the WACOSS Director of Sector Services & Development, introduced herself to the Forum and advised about a scoping project for the Office of Energy that is under development. The aim of the project is to review the current HEP model and potentially remodel the delivery of the scheme after consultation with the sector. Further information about this will be sent out through the WACOSS E-News and on the website.

Michelle Burgermeister, WACOSS Training Coordinator, provided copies of the new WACOSS training calendar. She also mentioned that customised training can be organised for agency staff at their workplaces. Please contact Michelle on 9420 7222 if you want more information.

Chris Twomey, WACOSS Director of Social Policy, gave an update about the annual WACOSS Pre-Budget Submission. This will include consultations and regional forums with the sector and peak bodies. The aim of this process is to help identify emerging issues and current funding & policy priorities. This will result in a WACOSS submission to the State Government on behalf of the sector in the form of key priority areas.

Chris invited the ER Forum members to be involved in the process. A response form was provided to attendees and will also be sent out with the minutes. Responses are requested by Wednesday, 31st August 2011.

For further information about the Pre-Budget Submission, please contact Amelia Brancato, Social Policy Coordinator, on 9420 7222 or email amelia@wacoss.org.au

Item 9 Information Sharing

There was no time for information sharing, so the chair called for any important announcements. Uta from FaHCSIA advised that the smart-forms had all been sent out. If your funding agreement has been signed and returned then you should have received your first payment.

Item 10 Next ER Forum

The next ER Forum will take place on 7th September, 2011 at City West Lotteries House, 2 Delhi Street, West Perth.

Chair: TBA

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