



wacoss

Western Australian
Council of Social Service Inc

*Ways to make
a difference*

Power Assist Report

1 July 2007 – 30 June 2008

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Introduction

The Western Australian Council of Social Service Inc, (WACOSS) is the peak council of community service organisations and individuals in Western Australia. WACOSS is part of a national network consisting of ACOSS and the State and Territory Councils of Social Service, who assist low income and disadvantaged people Australia wide.

As the peak body of the community services sector in WA, WACOSS is committed to working closely with emergency relief (ER) services and their stakeholders on projects aimed at building capacity across the sector. The ER sector in WA consists of approximately 250 agencies and outlets providing direct services in the form of material or financial assistance to people in crisis.

The Power Assist Scheme

WACOSS has had an ongoing sponsorship arrangement with both Synergy and Horizon Power for providing funding for the Power Assist Scheme. WACOSS has supported the Power Assist Scheme since it's inception in 1995, and continues to coordinate the funding arrangements, together with the State Emergency Relief Committee (SERC).

In June of 2007 contributions were made from both Synergy and Horizon Power for the 2007/08 round of the Power Assist scheme. Synergy contributed \$75,000 and Horizon Power \$15,000. This funding was used to assist clients experiencing financial hardship or disadvantage who are at risk of disconnection.

WACOSS and the Emergency Relief sector are grateful for the continued support for this valuable scheme which helped approximately 700 households throughout the 07/08 financial year. The scheme is administered by Anglicare with the State Emergency Relief Committee (SERC) acting as a reference committee and WACOSS taking on a co-ordination, support and communication role. WACOSS provides this service as an in-kind contribution to the scheme.

Synergy Power Assist Scheme

Currently the Synergy Power Assist Scheme operates for two days every second month, and assists on average 119 families per allocation period.

Funding is divided amongst the 6 allocation periods with a total around \$11,600 being distributed to clients in each allocation period. The Scheme is an important tool in assisting clients who seek assistance with bill payment with demand exceeding the amount of funds available. Ninety eight applications were rejection in the 07/08 due to lack of funds available in the allocation period. This figure only reflects those people who missed out on applications sent through. Agencies can only send in three applications each allocation period (a total of 16 per year).

WACOSS is aware that many more people seek assistance for utility accounts that are not coming through the power assist scheme due to the schemes limitations. The most common issue raised with WACOSS by emergency relief providers in relation to the scheme is the request to be able to widen the scheme to operate monthly and to assist more people.

Data Collection

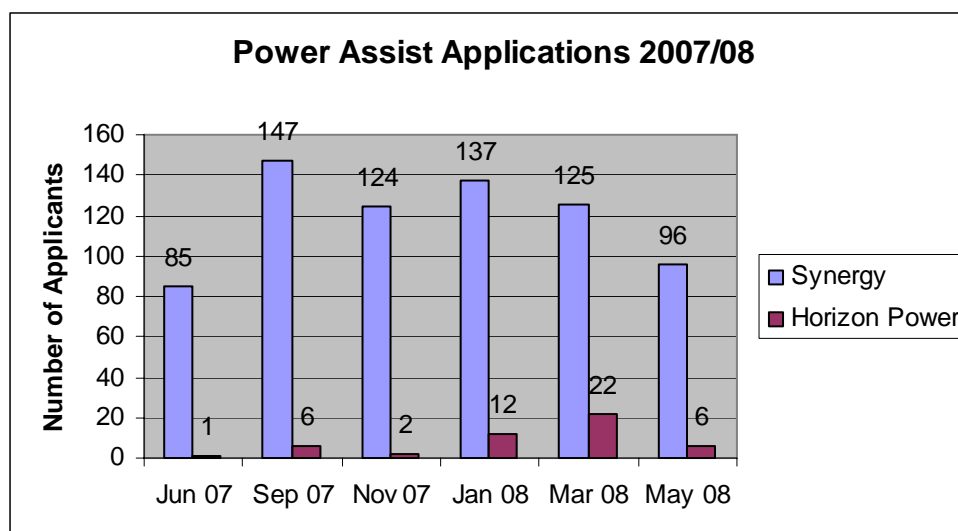
During the 2007-08 period the following data was collected:

- average size of accounts,
- agency contribution to accounts,
- number of children in the family and
- breakdown of by suburb and regions applications.

Number of agencies participating and applications received.

A total of 150 emergency relief agencies/financial counselling services participated in the scheme.

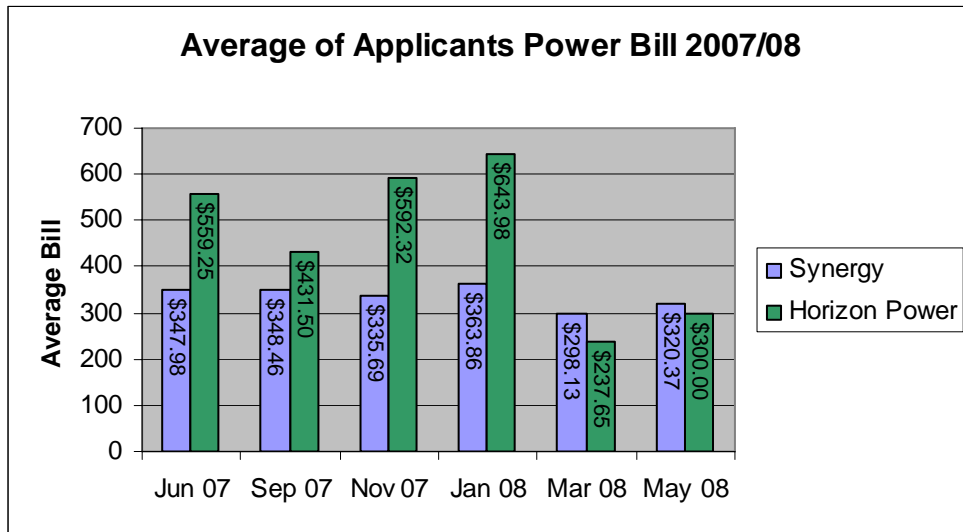
A total of 763 applications for assistance were approved. Of these 714 were for Synergy accounts.



September received the highest number of applications for Synergy accounts.

On average 16 applications are rejected during each allocation period due to the client not fulfilling the criteria or insufficient funds available to assist all applicants.

Average amount of a clients account

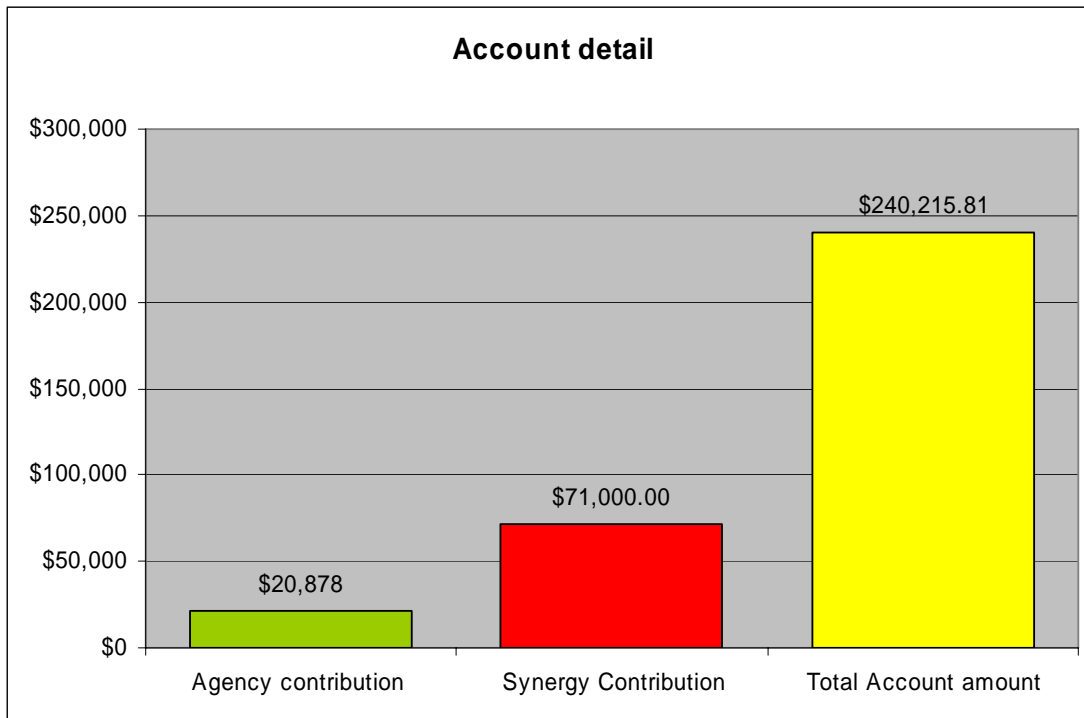


On average, the accounts from Horizon power applicants are higher then Synergy. This is likely to be due to a high cost of power associated with running air conditioners in the north-west where the majority of Horizon Power customers reside.

Synergy account averages remained relatively steady throughout the year. The average synergy account over the total year based a mean of the total account equals \$336.

Summary of Synergy Data Collected

Number of agencies participating	150
No of Applications - Synergy	714
Synergy Bill Average (mean)	336
Total number of children in applicants families	1187
% of Rural Synergy Applicants	32%
% of Metro Synergy Applicants (58)	68%
Agency contribution	\$20,878
Total outstanding amount on accounts presented	\$240216

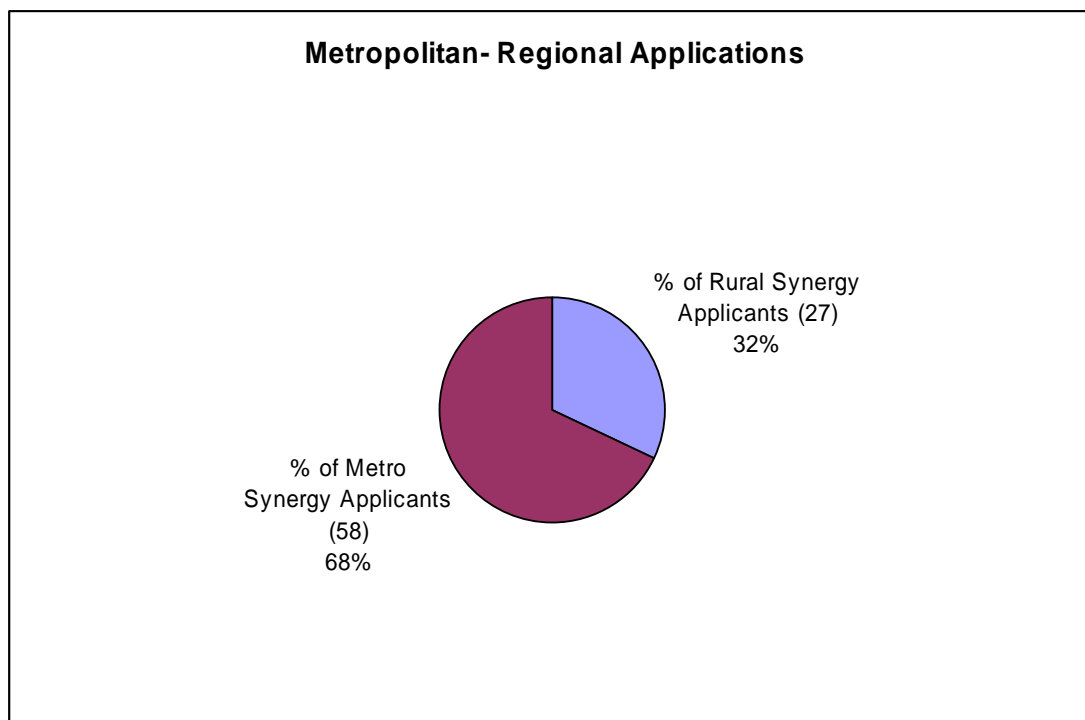


Account information

Client accounts totalled \$240,215 throughout the period the scheme operated. Of this amount emergency relief agencies contributed \$20,878 towards customer accounts. This amount does not reflect funds used to assist clients who attend and fall outside the schemes guidelines or cannot access it for other reasons.

Applications by region/suburb

Postcode data of each applicant was collected to examine areas of highest need. Postcodes which received the highest number of applications were 6210 (Mandurah and surrounding suburbs) and 6210 (Armadale/Gosnells and surrounding suburbs). WACOSS is continuing to analyse this data to gain a more comprehensive picture of need by suburb. Regional participation in the scheme was high with 32% of clients applying residing in a regional location.



Increase in funds to provide greater assistance and flexibility of the scheme

Last year WACOSS requested Synergy to increase its support for the scheme from \$75,000 to \$150,000. Should you be agreeable to this amount WACOSS will continue to consult with the emergency relief and financial counsellors to look at the best use of increased funding. However the following changes would be immediately made to the scheme:

- The scheme would run for two days each month (currently runs bi-monthly)
- The amount provided under each request would be raised to \$150 (currently set at \$100)

Recommendation

Due to the rising cost of living and the evident need shown throughout the state WACOSS would like to propose that the sponsorship is continued with the amount being increased from \$75,00 to \$150,000.

WACOSS also requests that due to the high administration work required that the fee that can be deducted for this be increased to 10% of the total sponsorship amount.