

SACOSS 6 AUGUST 2010 Closing Panel: Five things that would strengthen our sector?

Jos Mazel

- The Department for Families and Communities (DFC) leads the State Government's efforts in relation to housing, child protection, alternative care, ageing, disability, carers youth justice, communities and families. In the last financial year DFC directed a significant portion of its budget to non-government organisations for a broad spectrum of community service activities. This level of investment and shared focus place the community services sector and DFC as primary partners in the business of supporting vulnerable and disadvantaged people.
- The human service system is today facing significant challenges. Demand for services and the costs of delivering them are increasing. There are increased requirements in relation to quality, risk management, transparency and accountability. What might be strengthened in the sector to position it to respond to these and other challenges and the potential opportunities that they present?

History

- The first area is **history**. Service systems typically develop through incremental, sometimes adhoc growth. The potential for people to fall through the gaps and shuffle between uncoordinated services is still an issue and there remain inefficiencies in the way the system operates.
- In order to strengthen the coherency of the human service system and the alignment between the efforts of government and the non-government sector I believe we that need to return to some very core questions about what services should be provided, how they should they be provided and which sector is best placed to provide them.
- There is an increasing interest in such questions, for example the:
 - National reforms in healthcare.
 - The question of Commonwealth and state responsibilities for ageing and disability.
 - The Productivity Commission Inquiry into a National Insurance Scheme for people with disabilities.
 - DFC's Service Improvement Project in Ageing and Disability.
- All are reconsidering how people who are vulnerable and disadvantaged should be supported. There are potentially very tangible opportunities to strengthen the sector in these reforms and discussions and the sectors active participation is encouraged.

Dialogue

- In recent years there has been a strengthening of the dialogue between government and the community services sector, however there is still much to be done.
- Whilst our shared high level visions and agreements about how we engage are essential, we also need clear directions and plans of action for our key areas of shared activity. We also need to find ways of including our clients and community in the dialogue to enable them to tell us about what supports they require.
- Our Self-managed Funding Initiative is an example of this approach but we need to find ways to extend this not only within disability – but more broadly.

Relationship

- The quality of the relationship between government and the sector is vital to the ongoing provision of professional, targeted services to our common client group. There are many fine examples of partnership and collaboration between government and the sector. We need to strengthen these, to support the viability and sustainability of the community services sector and its future development while also ensuring accountability to elected governments for public funding and policy priorities.

Public Value

- We need to build public interest in the incredibly important work undertaken by the sector and build understanding of the outcomes that are achieved everyday with individuals and communities. We need to embrace opportunities to be accountable, to provide evidence of outcomes and efficiency and to demonstrate that intractable issues such as homeless can and are being solved.
- A key strength of the sector is its capacity to engage the community in its pursuits. We need to build on this and promote a valuing by the community that sees community services prioritised in public debates and recognised in the distribution of public funding.

Future focus

- Strength comes from anticipating the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.
- An ageing population and changes in family structures and carer patterns will challenge the sustainability of services. In some sectors there are significant shifts in the nature of the workforce and we are seeing staff recruitment and retention as increasing areas of concern for organisations. Technology is developing at a rapid pace. Our capacity for information and connection is

constantly being redefined and the sustainability of our environment and energy resources are in focus. All have the potential to redefine traditional modes of service delivery and administration.

- The Community Services Sector has a strong tradition of being able to respond to new challenges and develop new ways of working. We need to find ways to strengthen and support this agility and focus it on building solutions for tomorrow.