

Review of Existing Child and Family Support Services on Norfolk Island

Prepared for the Department of Regional Australia,
Regional Development and Local Government

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Table of contents

Supporting Norfolk Island children, young people and families.....3

The Children and Families: Strengthening the safety net.....6

The Professionals: Strengthening services for children and families.....11

The Community: Mobilising for change.....16

Conclusion.....20

Recommendations.....21

Supporting Norfolk Island Children, Young People and Families

Background and Context

Within the contemporary child protection and family welfare environment most jurisdictions are striving to move beyond reactive investigative responses toward more needs-based interventions and services that will support the interests of vulnerable children and their families. This is so internationally and across Australian state jurisdictions:

As the close relationship between problems such as poverty, mental illness, homelessness, substance misuse, unemployment, crime, antisocial behaviour, poor health, low literacy and child abuse and neglect is increasingly understood, new ways of thinking and responding to this challenge are emerging (Scott 2010)¹

The links between family hardship and other dimensions of child wellbeing – physical health, housing, safety and psychological wellbeing – are well established². Within a family support policy and practice context, notions of more joined up community-based responses that take into account broader family circumstances, built on strengths and tailored to need, are seen as critical to the prevention efforts of both government and non-government services.

Increasingly, therefore, it is recognised that creating a responsive child, young person and family support system requires the development of a continuum of services that support diverse family need. Within an integrated multi-level service system, families a range of services that stretch across the preventative/specialist service spectrum (figure 1³) and include income support, health, education and social support services. The service continuum seeks to support those families identify and reduce situations of current harm and support strong, capable families. Service systems across Australia strive to develop a strong continuum of services, consistent with the expectations of the *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children*.⁴

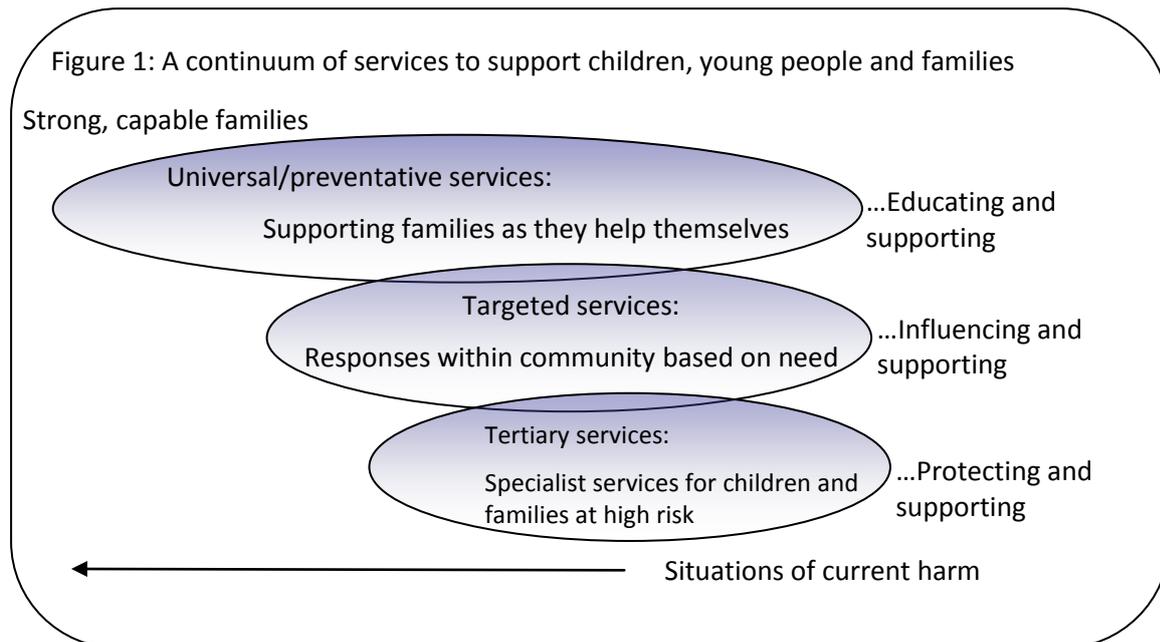
Within this review we have examined Norfolk Island service framework across this continuum, considering both the broad and specific needs of children, young people and their families.

¹ Scott, D. (2010). Working within and between organisations. *Working with vulnerable families: A partnership approach* (edited by F. Arney & D. Scott), Cambridge University Press.

² Scutellaq, R. & Smyth, P. (2005) *The Brotherhood's Social Barometer: Monitoring children's chances*. Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne.

³ Adapted from Connolly & Smith (2010). Reforming Child Welfare: An integrated approach. *Child Welfare*, 89 (3) 9-31.

⁴ *Protecting Children is Everyone's Business: National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020*. An initiative of the Council of Australian Governments



Our experience of meeting with Norfolk Island children, young people and their families highlighted for us the considerable strength and resilience demonstrated by Norfolk Island families and communities. We observed and heard about the valuing of family (including extended family) and community life; the strong work ethic; the child-friendly physical environment; the high level of self-reliance and resilience in the face of adversity; and the valuing of history, culture and environment. These strengths are important. They create a unique set of community expectations that reinforce a proud culture that has withstood many challenges over the decades.

In the many meetings we had we also heard that Norfolk Island life is inevitably changing. Whilst children and families have been supported by a strong extended kin network, this is now not the case for everyone. Vulnerable people who lack a supportive extended family find themselves without a safety net to support them in times of trouble. There are also times when self-reliance creates a reluctance to seek help, resulting in vulnerable people falling through the net of family and community concern.

The privileging of history, culture and environment is another important aspect of Norfolk Island identity. In the past, that sense of independence and history of self-governance contributed to the prosperity of Norfolk Island. Nevertheless, when we talked with people we found that many are concerned about the way in which Norfolk Island self-governance has impacted upon their rights as Australian residents. It is clear that many of the services and provisions available to people on mainland Australia are not accessible to people on Norfolk Island. It is also clear that financial constraints and economic limitations prevent the Norfolk Island Government from providing the universal safety net that is taken for granted on mainland Australia.

Many people expressed the view that the value and benefits of fully entering Australian Government systems outweigh the perceived lessening of aspects of the island's autonomy and management of its own affairs. Disagreement over this within the Island community and between the Norfolk Island Government and successive Australian Governments has restricted the development of a strong

service sector supporting Norfolk Island children, young people and families, despite successive reviews and recommendations for change.

The findings of earlier reviews⁵ and the extent of the distress and concern expressed by people within the Norfolk Island community suggests that the Norfolk Island Government alone is not able to close the gaps of disadvantage and promote lifelong wellbeing for children, young people and families living in Norfolk Island. Solutions depend upon the combined support of the Australian Government and Norfolk Island Government.

Terms of Reference

1. Examine the current framework for family support and child protection services on Norfolk Island
2. Identify barriers and issues associated with the provision of effective children and family support services
3. Consider practices, procedures and resources within the Norfolk Island Government with direct responsibilities in this area, and also consider how the government and non-government organisation agencies might contribute to a more effective protection and support network
4. Consider how the Norfolk Island Government can help to support children and young people to reach their potential and assist individuals and families who are at risk or in crisis.

The Review Approach

In considering the service needs of children and families living on Norfolk Island we undertook:

- A desk review of available documents relating to the demographics of the Norfolk Island community, service statistics, earlier reviews and reports relating to the provision of Norfolk Island services⁶;

⁵ These reviews include but are not limited to *Wellbeing Report – Norfolk Island*, Deloitte Access Economics, April 2011, *Norfolk Island Economic Development Report*, ACIL Tasman, March 2012 & *Norfolk Island Public Service Review*, Australian Continuous Improvement Group, January 2012.

⁶ These reviews include but are not limited to the monthly reports from the Child Welfare Officer to Norfolk Island Government; *Wellbeing Report – Norfolk Island*, Deloitte Access Economics, April 2011; *Norfolk Island Economic Development Report*, ACIL Tasman, March 2012; *Norfolk Island Public Service Review*, Australian Continuous Improvement Group, January 2012; *2011 Community Survey Norfolk Island*, Department of Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government, Australian Government, 2011; *In the Pink or in the Red? Inquiry into the provision of health services on Norfolk Island*, Joint Standing Committee on the

- A series of community meetings that included a public meeting and meetings with specific interest groups;
- Meetings with Ministers in the Norfolk Island Government and the staff of the Norfolk Island Administration;
- Meetings with service providers across the sector; and
- Individual meetings with young people and families⁷.

To maximise the participation of young people and their families we arranged for an item to be placed in *The Norfolk ISLANDER* explaining the purpose of the review and the importance of wide consultation. We were also interviewed on Norfolk Island radio, and received a volume of emails from community stakeholders expressing their views and perspectives relating to the availability and quality of services on the island. Hence the review has taken into consideration empirical data, professional reports, and the reported experiences of families, professionals, decision-makers and community leaders.

The lack of reliable data has frustrated our efforts to assess in depth the wellbeing of Norfolk Island children, young people and families, both now and across time. Consequently self report and report by professional's form a bigger role in this report than might otherwise be the case. It also makes planning more difficult as trends cannot be identified and tracked, nor can the impacts of interventions be assessed.

The findings and recommendations of the review are organised within a systemic framework addressing levels across the continuum of services. This is consistent with the direction for service delivery that has been set by the National Framework⁸:

Australia needs to move from seeing 'protecting children' merely as a response to abuse and neglect to one of promoting the safety and wellbeing of children. ...priority is placed on having universal supports available for all families (for example, health and education). More intensive (secondary) prevention interventions are provided to those families that need additional assistance with a focus on early intervention. Tertiary child protection services are a last resort, and the least desirable option for families and governments.

The challenges facing Norfolk Island in providing a continuum of services have implications for children, young people and families, for professionals, and for the community more broadly. As such we have framed the sections of the report to address these three domains.

National Capital and External Territories, July, 2001; *Commonwealth Grants Commission Report, 1997*, Commonwealth Government, Canberra.

⁷ These meetings and consultations are outlined in the Stakeholder Consultations section of this report.

⁸ *Protecting Children is Everyone's Business: National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020*. An initiative of the Council of Australian Governments p 7

Children, Young People and Families: Strengthening the safety net

Economic hardship ran through almost all our conversations with families on Norfolk Island. Families reported their experiences of “doing it tough” in a harsh economic environment. These personal experiences were validated by community members who provided help through their church or their club and by professionals across the service sector. In their survey of community wellbeing, Deloitte Access Economics, found that 51% of Norfolk Islanders reported they were “just getting by” compared with 28% of mainland Australians⁹. If things were tough for families, however, then there were even more difficult for families with additional needs; families that had a child with a disability or mental illness, families where one of the children had been ill and required time off island, or sole parents with no financial support from the other parent.

It would seem this personal experience is borne out by the sharp increase in more objective measures such as the recovery of unpaid debts to the Norfolk Island Government as Table 1 demonstrates. While there has been more effort to recover debts it is unlikely such dramatic increases would result solely from a more vigorous approach to recovering bad debts.

Table 1: Recovery of Unpaid Debts

	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	% increase
Health defaults	139	353	287	542	290%
Default summons	208	360	406	596	187%

Registrar for the Administration of Norfolk Island

It was not unusual for people to talk about needing to work at three or four jobs in order to make ends meet.¹⁰ Deloitte's Access Economics used the frequency of a shortage of money as one of their objective measures of financial stress. They found that over 25% of the population indicated they had missed an electricity, gas or telephone bill in the past 12 months due to a shortage of money compared to 12% in mainland Australia. They conclude that “the levels of financial stress on Norfolk Island are higher than elsewhere in Australia”¹¹.

Family economic stability is exacerbated by Norfolk Island's concentrated wage structure¹², and high cost of living for essentials such as food, utilities and transport¹³. When combined with increasing

⁹ *Wellbeing Report – Norfolk Island*, Deloitte Access Economics, April 2011, p18

¹⁰ Thirty seven percent of Norfolk Islanders hold multiple jobs. *Wellbeing Report – Norfolk Island*, Deloitte Access Economics, April 2011, p 14

¹¹ *Wellbeing Report – Norfolk Island*, Deloitte Access Economics, April 2011, p 19

¹² *Wellbeing Report – Norfolk Island*, Deloitte Access Economics, April 2011, p 14

¹³ Since December 2005, using the price data collected as part of the Norfolk Island Retail Price Index, the cost of living on Norfolk Island has increased by 26 percent. For this same period the average increases in prices across Australia was only 19 percent. *Norfolk Island Economic Development Report*, ACIL Tasman, March 2012, p 15

job insecurity from the downturn in tourism¹⁴, this is creating significant financial and emotional stressors. ACIL Tasman in its review of economic development on Norfolk Island concluded that

*The economic downturn on Norfolk Island has been relatively severe, and can be described as an economic depression. There is relatively strong evidence that the economic downturn is impacting the quality of life on Norfolk Island and resulting in the depreciation of social capital. Many costs on Norfolk Island are greater than on the mainland, and the cost of living on Norfolk Island has been increasing faster than on the mainland. Even allowing for the absence of income tax, incomes on Norfolk Island are relatively low. As such, increases in the cost of living have a relatively strong impact on welfare.*¹⁵

Having a parent work is positive for children because it provides family economic stability, one of the preconditions for wellbeing.¹⁶ It ceases to be positive, however, when that work interferes significantly with family time or is insufficient to provide family economic security and diminishes the parent's psychological resources – another precondition for wellbeing. Many adults spoke about feeling tired and stressed, and how they struggled to fulfil their parenting role. Stress and exhaustion not only impacts on the health of the parent, it also impacts on the quality of the child's experience of being parented. Families where someone had a disability or a mental illness, or where they were parenting alone, faced an even greater challenge. It is interesting to note that unpublished data from the health survey undertaken by Professor Lyn Griffiths from Griffith University, shows an increase in self reported mental health concerns by Norfolk Island residents from 8.33% (n=50) in 2000 to 10% (n=64) in 2010¹⁷.

Women spoke to us of returning to work within 3-4 weeks of their baby's birth, some returned to work as soon as one week after giving birth. Women reported that this return to work was usually by economic necessity. This return to work pattern results in children entering child care very early, something that is particularly worrying as it impacts on the immediate and longer term wellbeing of infants. Any measure of women's health and child development policy would suggest this to be unacceptable. It allows no time for the woman to recover after the physical tasks of pregnancy and birthing, it complicates breastfeeding, and has the potential to interfere with critical processes of bonding and attachment between the baby and the important adults in their lives.¹⁸ All the women we spoke with described their deep distress at having to return to work so early in their baby's lives.

¹⁴ Using the estimate of per day tourism spending and actual tourism visitor stay data the fall in the nominal value of tourism spending on Norfolk Island between 2007/08 and 2008/09 was \$8.4M. Tourism spending then fell by a further \$5.6M in 2009/10, and a further \$2.6M in 2010/11 so that the total fall in tourism spending over this period was \$16.6M. *Norfolk Island Economic Development Report*, ACIL Tasman, March 2012, p 6

¹⁵ *Norfolk Island Economic Development Report*, ACIL Tasman, March 2012, p 25

¹⁶ Centre on the Developing Child at Harvard University (2010), *The Foundations of Lifelong Health are Built in Early Childhood*, www.developingchild.harvard.edu p 7

¹⁷ Personal Communication, Professor Lyn Griffiths, February 2012

¹⁸ *Paid Parental Leave: Support for Parents with Newborn Children*, Productivity Commission, May 2009, Chapter 4

All said they would have wanted to stay with their babies. The research supports their concern. It also underpins mainland Australia's recent introduction of a Paid Parental Leave Scheme¹⁹.

A child's early environment plays a large role in shaping their later outcomes. Thus policies such as paid parental leave and programs that impact on the quality of early childhood education and care services and maternal health services have significant impacts on human resource development and future Island prosperity. Nobel Laureate economist James Heckman has powerfully demonstrated this and argues that directing additional funds toward the early years, before the start of traditional schooling, is a sound investment in the productivity and safety of our society.²⁰

Programs impacting on the quality of early childhood education and care are especially significant for Norfolk Island as it has a 25% higher participation in preschool than mainland Australia²¹. Yet despite this higher participation rate, Norfolk Island has no standards covering these services. In contrast the development and implementation of a quality framework in early childhood has been an important focus for mainland Australian policy and investment.²²

We also were concerned about the perverse effects of the health insurance scheme operating on Norfolk Island. It has been shown across time and across countries that health is directly related to income; people on low incomes have poorer health whereas those on high incomes have much better health.²³ This relationship will exist for Norfolk Island and is likely to be reinforced by the Island's choice of health insurance scheme. For example a family of 2 adults and 2 children is required to outlay almost \$4000 annually before the health insurance scheme activates²⁴. This cost increases when the caps on some items such as the \$200 cap on medical flights compared to the actual cost of \$500 for a return fare and the exclusions such as for pre existing illnesses, are included. The Commonwealth Grants Commission concludes it is possible for a resident to spend \$6000 before all costs were covered.²⁵

Families with high incomes can carry this cost whereas poorer families are unable to and as a consequence will avoid seeking health care, a response that is deleterious to their health. For example, they may neglect the management of chronic illnesses, or they may fail to take preventative measures to avoid hospitalisation and so on. As such the health insurance scheme creates perverse incentives – those who are better off generally enjoy better health and are able to access health care, whilst those with poorer health are discouraged from seeking health care because of cost. This inverse incentive that discourages and disadvantages poorer people informs

¹⁹ IBID

²⁰ Heckman J, (2010) *The Productivity Argument for Investing in Young Children*, Working Paper 5, Invest in Kids Working Group, Committee for Economic Development http://jenni.uchicago.edu/Invest/FILES/dugger_2004-12-02_dvm.pdf

²¹ *Wellbeing Report – Norfolk Island*, Deloitte Access Economics, April 2011, p 11

²² *National Quality Framework for Early Education and Care*, Australian Government, 2012

²³ Wilkinson R & Marmot M (2003) *The Solid Facts*, World Health Organisation, Denmark

²⁴ This figure includes the \$1,510 health insurance Levy and the co contribution of \$2,500 before a family can claim.

²⁵ *Commonwealth Grants Commission Report (1997)* Commonwealth Government, Canberra p 89

mainland Australia's commitment to Medicare as it enables those most in need (i.e. those on low incomes and thus poorer health) to have more equal access to health care.

Secure housing is another essential in meeting children's basic needs.²⁶ Deloitte Access Economics estimate that approximately 57% of mortgaged households on Norfolk Island are potentially experiencing mortgage stress.²⁷ Thus the absence of any social housing on Norfolk Island is another gap in the safety net.

On mainland Australia, family stress is significantly relieved by the combination of and interaction between; an income support system (e.g. carers benefit); taxation (e.g. family tax rebates); employment schemes (e.g. 18 weeks Paid Parental Leave); social housing schemes (eg supported housing through rent subsidy); and health schemes (e.g. sole parents have a health care card entitling them to health care including significantly reduced pharmaceutical costs). Further, it is a progressive system which means that those with more wealth contribute more to the taxation base than those with less capacity to do so. It is transparent and not arbitrary. To a large extent the mainland population sees these costs and benefits as part of the mutual obligation between a government and its citizens.

We have found the breadth, design and operation of the safety net and mutual obligation expressed through Norfolk Island's income support, taxation, health, and employment legislation and systems to be extremely limited by comparison to mainland Australia. It is in our view, inadequate to support the very real disadvantage facing some individuals and families in Norfolk Island. This inadequate safety net is critically significant when seen in combination with the island's concentrated wage structure, high cost of living, increasing job insecurity, the absence of any social housing and the notably older age profile of Norfolk Island than that of the rest of Australia. Indeed the median age on Norfolk Island is 46, as compared to 37 in the rest of Australia.²⁸ Whilst a few people on the island expressed their doubts to us that families were in fact confronting real hardship, our considered opinion is that many families do indeed experience a precarious existence. It is also clear that economic hardship is forcing individuals and families to leave the island, or consider separation as the breadwinner seeks employment in mainland Australia or elsewhere internationally.

We are aware from our discussions with people on Norfolk Island that there is a real concern, expressed by a few, that introducing a stronger safety net for families could undermine the strengths of self-reliance and the strong work ethic that underpins many of the values of Norfolk Island life. We appreciate these concerns. At the same time, the majority of people expressed to us the need to protect more vulnerable members of the Norfolk Island community in ways that are respectful of diverse need, for example, ensuring humane responses when people lose their jobs, when they are affected by mental illness, or when they require specialist care. Many suggested that building the preconditions for wellbeing and strengthening the safety net for its vulnerable members is a measure of a fair and supportive society.

²⁶ Robinson E & Adams R (2008) *Housing Stress and the mental health and wellbeing of families*, Briefing Paper No 12, Australian Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne

²⁷ *Wellbeing Report – Norfolk Island*, Deloitte Access Economics, April 2011, p 30

²⁸ *Wellbeing Report – Norfolk Island*, Deloitte Access Economics, April 2011, p 5

As highlighted earlier, the lack of reliable data has frustrated our efforts to assess in depth the wellbeing of Norfolk Island children and families, both now and across time. It also compromises planning efforts when there is limited data upon which to measure progress or the impact of interventions. Mainland Australia has a number of useful data collections that contribute importantly to planning for children, young people and families. The Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) for example, is a national collection of information on young children's development. Based on teacher's assessment of every child in kindergarten, data are collected every three years and the results provide a snapshot of how children in mainland Australia are developing. The information is then made available on a website at the local government district level and has assisted communities, service providers and governments plan and improve supports and services for the early years (http://www.rch.org.au/aedi/index.cfm?doc_id=13051). It is important that consideration is given to the gathering of similar data for Norfolk Island children.

Recommendation 1

- To assist in overcoming barriers and issues associated with the provision of effective children and family support services, Norfolk Island residents should within three years, become part of the same income security, employment, taxation, child support scheme and benefit systems as other Australian residents including eligibility requirements, processes and support and participation requirements. Entering the same system as other Australian resident will better support the financial, legal, health, social care and educational needs of children and families. Australian Government standards must be adopted by Norfolk Island as part of this. We recognise a staged implementation may be needed in some areas, for example, early childhood education and care.

Recommendation 2

- Whilst the above recommendation is being implemented, the Norfolk Island Government and the Australian Government should immediately provide relief for vulnerable children, young people and families living on Norfolk Island by:
 - Norfolk Island Government broadening the eligibility for existing social service benefits such as the hardship and aged benefit and applying processes so they are consistent with the relevant Australian Government equivalent benefits.
 - Norfolk Island Government reviewing the rate for the social service benefits to bring them into line with cost of living on Norfolk Island taking into account both the relatively low wages and that additional benefits available to mainland Australians such as the Health Care card may not be available to Australians living on Norfolk Island.
 - Norfolk Island Government introducing a Paid Parental Leave Scheme of a minimum of 18 weeks consistent with mainland Australia, at a rate in line with the cost of living on Norfolk Island
 - Norfolk Island Government funding those pharmaceutical costs that are greater than the PBS cut-off

- The Australian Government should second an officer knowledgeable about the Australian pension and benefits scheme, to assist Norfolk Island Government review their processes, eligibility and rates.
- The Norfolk Island Government and the Australian Government should jointly review the funding base available for this enhanced Norfolk Island safety net without increasing costs to families and low income earners through the raising levies, fees and charges. If Norfolk Island Government is unable to meet this basic obligation to Australians living on Norfolk Island then they should approach the Australian Government seeking emergency funding for the remaining time of the three-year period referred to above.

Recommendation 3

- To assist with planning for how the Norfolk Island may best help to support children and young people to reach their potential and assist individuals and families who are risk or in crisis, the Norfolk Island Government and the Australian Government should seek opportunities to include Norfolk Island in key national information collection activities, or to at least align with them so Norfolk Island can be compared to mainland Australia. This should include but not be limited to the ABS data collection activities, the AIHW data collection activities and the AEDI data collection activities. To facilitate this, Norfolk Island Government should liaise with the Australian Government and relevant mainland states, e.g. NSW Department of Education and Communities, to seek their assistance with developing and aligning their information systems so they can participate in key national information collections.

The Professionals: Strengthening services for children and families

In the first section of the report we considered the needs of children, young people and families and the ways in which economic hardship increases vulnerability and negatively impacts upon the capacity of individuals and the family to withstand disadvantage. As we reviewed the service framework for children, young people and families within Norfolk Island it was also clear that as a priority some local service systems need to be strengthened. It is also clear that the professionals within these systems need greater support to provide improved service delivery.

The offshore model of service delivery and accountability has worked well for policing and schooling. Teachers at the school, provided by from the NSW Department of Education and Training, provide a strong and lively learning community for students, the majority of whom go on to achieve well academically. Island police provided by from the Australian Federal Police (AFP) with support from other AFP areas in law enforcement, corporate services and management provide community policing approaches on the Island. It is notable that both the school and the police service are institutions with offshore support and accountability. The recent *Norfolk Island Public Service Review*, nevertheless, outlines many service system challenges within Norfolk Island.²⁹ It highlights

²⁹ *Norfolk Island Public Service Review*, Australian Continuous Improvement Group, January 2012

significant problems within the administration and management of a number of Norfolk Island Government services and pinpoints key areas for change. Our review of the services for children, young people and families has identified many of the same issues impacting on the delivery of services on the ground.

The Norfolk Island Hospital Services

Health services play a key role in building and maintaining the wellbeing of children, young people and families. Generally these cover a range of health services including healthy living programs, early intervention through screening programs and medical care for those who are seriously ill. Further they are generally delivered from a range of sites including community centres, in home visits, schools, General Practice surgeries and hospitals. Health services on Norfolk Island were essentially hospital based and clustered at the tertiary end which in turn impacts on the planning, delivery and range of child, youth and family support services available on Norfolk Island.

Missing from Norfolk Island for example, are some primary health services such as population health education and awareness programs. Primary health services form part of the suite of services generally used to improve outcomes for children and youth wellbeing. Preparation for birth, breastfeeding education and support, childhood nutrition and activity campaigns for example, all contribute to positive outcomes for children. These services improve children's quality of life and reduce future health care costs to Norfolk Island families by avoiding hospital admissions, visits to the doctor and pharmaceutical costs.

As the sole provider of health care, the Hospital occupies a critical place in Island life. When trust in health service provision is diminished it generates considerable stress and anxiety for parents requiring health care for their children and family. It can also generate stress and anxiety in health providers resulting in high turnover. This in turn can result in service gaps, reduced service effectiveness and a lack of a service improvement approach.

We heard from a number of people regarding their concerns about health care on Norfolk Island. For example despite a long-acknowledged lack of facilities for seriously unwell mental health patients, psychotic people continue to be restrained in police cells rather than in a suitable and appropriately staffed area within the hospital.

The recent *Norfolk Island Public Service Review* found that as services become more complex the small workforce with its current levels of capability cannot deliver the range of services to standards commensurate with the mainland and that Norfolk Island will struggle to deliver even state type services.³⁰ This is already the case with health care provision on Norfolk Island. The breadth of skills and knowledge required to support the full range of health care needs is too broad to be met solely within and by Norfolk Island.

Based on the experience of the offshore model of service delivery and accountability, which has worked well for policing and schooling, outsourcing and contracting out services would provide an

³⁰ *Norfolk Island Public Service Review*, Australian Continuous Improvement Group, January 2012

effective and efficient option for meeting the health care needs of the Island. Outsourcing to a larger health provider enables Norfolk Island to take advantage of well established mainland systems that could provide greater support in terms of professional development, service standards, quality assurance, accountability, financial and other administrative activities. Importantly it provides access to a wider range of health services that the larger mainland provider has the economies of scale to develop and implement. It is also, however, important to retain and employ local staff where possible as these are important sources of employment for the Island population.

In addition to other benefits, outsourcing would ensure external processes of accountability with respect to the health service delivery. If it is not outsourced then an independent and external review of the Norfolk Island Hospital should be urgently undertaken and the hospital's performance measured against Australian standards. We remain extremely concerned about current service standards and scope. Given the degree of community interest, the findings from any review undertaken should be made publically available.

Recommendation 4:

- That the Norfolk Island Government contracts with an off shore health provider with capability to provide all health services including hospital services for Norfolk Island until the new arrangements with the Australian Government are in place. (See Recommendation 1 and 3).

Norfolk Island Support Services

Currently the limited support services that are available to individuals and families on Norfolk Island are poorly coordinated, lacking in support and not reflecting mainland Australian standards. We heard from both service users and the professionals themselves that suggested the service system is understaffed, pressured by complex health and child welfare issues, and not coordinated. The hospital, employing the one and only counsellor on the island, has been unable to retain qualified professional staff. There has been a series of short-term counsellors, the most recent resigning after a short time in post with subsequent difficulties in recruiting a permanent replacement. A range of concerns contributed to her decision to leave the position, but significant factors included: the lack of support and professionalism within the service; and the dearth of service options for people seeking help.

A second position completes the core of service support for Norfolk Island children and families. A part-time Child Welfare Officer, supported by the Norfolk Island Government, is dedicated to child and family welfare support. This position was established relatively recently and is essentially an itinerant position reporting directly to the Norfolk Island Government. The current incumbent is not qualified, but has taken the initiative to strengthen her knowledge and expertise through online educational support. The Child Welfare Officer's reports indicate a small but complex cohort of children requiring support, care and/or protection, and a paucity of support options and solutions.

The counsellor position and the Child Welfare Officer provide a degree of support for each other, and other key people, for example, the police and the Administrator, provide support as best they can. The services nevertheless lack depth and support, and are generally uncoordinated and unaccountable as a service system. A weak, uncoordinated and unaccountable service system increases vulnerability for children, young people and families.

Coordinating and supporting services: Establishing a 'Hub'

Most people who use welfare services benefit from a more 'joined-up' approach, and as noted earlier, most jurisdictions are looking at ways in which systems can be coordinated and integrated to provide enhanced services for complex situations. Good management of welfare services within a coordinated service system requires: attention to the primary service delivery tasks; monitoring standards and consistency of practice; supporting staff who are confronted by increasingly complex practice environments; providing staff development opportunities; and strategically developing the service delivery system based on a good understanding of community need. Whilst Norfolk Island services currently struggle to meet these expectations of a well-managed coordinated system, it is possible to increase the depth and experience of the core services provision by increasing staffing and locating professional services together enabling them to function as a team working together toward common service delivery goals.

The Victorian inquiry into the protection of vulnerable children and their families reinforces the importance of co-locating services that can work together in unison. The Inquiry argues the need for³¹:

"...(a) single entry point for a broad range of services ...connecting members of the surrounding community to government or community services that respond to the prevalence of vulnerability ...the area-based entry would involve ...staff working jointly.

By establishing a community services hub, the currently dispersed professionals could be relocated together and provided with the kind of leadership that would strengthen the overall service response. The Hub would then function as a community centre to plan, deliver and coordinate social care services and activities and meet good management expectations of an integrated service system identified above. As a community centre the Hub would provide an array of services across a spectrum of need: primary prevention (e.g. enabling, educational); targeted services (responding to more complex needs); and specialist services (for people at high risk). Providing across-the-board services that would attract a more diverse service-user population would also reduce the stigmatising effects of single service provision. Critically it creates a safe place for vulnerable children, young people and individuals to form relationships of trust with professionals and thus raise sensitive issues, something that is particularly important in a small community such as Norfolk Island.

³¹ *Report of the Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry*, State Government Victoria, Department of Premier and Cabinet, January 2012, p220.

Whilst supporting the delivery of onshore services the Hub would also actively mobilise and liaise with offshore services. Offshore support is necessary to the maintenance and ongoing development of Norfolk Island services. Two-way involvement of external systems creates greater opportunity for professional supervision, staff rotation, and the exchange of ideas that will encourage innovation and development.

An example of mobilising with offshore services is the telephone and on line dispute resolution services for separating couples. Given that over half the couple families with children on Norfolk Island are blended or step families (55%) and there are no family law specialists on Island, this is likely to be a much needed service.³² It was specifically developed for remote communities to assist separating parents and to help them make good decisions regarding the care of their children, actions that support good outcomes for children. Norfolk Islanders can access this free service but few Islanders were aware of its existence or their eligibility. The Hub could promote and educate Islanders about this and other services.

Recommendation 5:

- That a community services centre be established as the “Hub” from which to provide a coordinated service system for Norfolk Island’s children and families

To facilitate the establishment of the Hub, the Norfolk Island Government should:

- Provide a rent free centrally located community house that would provide the physical needs of the ‘Hub’, supporting its upkeep and maintenance, and funding its utilities and on-costs.
- Arrange for the hospital funded Counsellor to be relocated to and managed from the Hub and develop a position description supporting appropriate qualification and professional membership.
- Increase the funding of the Child Welfare Officer to 24hours per week³³, relocate and manage them from the Hub and develop a position description supporting appropriate qualification and professional membership (or evidence of engagement in a qualification pathway, supported by the Government).
- Relocate the Claims Officer³⁴ to the Hub.

³² *2011 Community Survey Norfolk Island*, Department of Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government, Australian Government, 2011

³³ Increasing the hours of both the CWO and the Youth Development Officer to 24 per week enables the Hub to have full coverage of a “child and family” professional and a half a day cross over for professional development, staff meetings, planning and so on.

³⁴ This is the public service officer who answers inquiries relating to benefits and pensions and assist people in completing the application and process.

- Fund a new position of Youth Development Officer for 24 hours per week, located and managed from the Hub and develop a position description supporting appropriate qualification and professional membership.

Currently the service system within Norfolk Island lacks the depth of expertise and experience necessary to the provision of child and family welfare services, particularly services at the tertiary end of the spectrum. A senior social work position is required to establish the hub and to oversee the development of service provision, including services to the most vulnerable children on Norfolk Island. To facilitate the establishment of the Hub, the Australian Government should:

- Fund a full-time social worker, experienced in child and family welfare practice, as a team leader for 3 years to establish, manage and lead the Hub, and develop a position description supporting appropriate qualification and professional membership. The team leader would be responsible for: overseeing and supporting the primary service delivery tasks; monitoring standards and consistency of practice; reporting; supporting and supervising professional staff; coordinating staff development opportunities; developing information systems that enable participation in national information collection activities. Importantly, the position would also be responsible for strategically developing the service delivery system including offshore support services (such as out-of-home care, respite services, mental health support services and other services based on community need). This would include the mobilization of specialist child protection expertise when necessary, and establishing access to 1800 help numbers etc).
- Assist the Team Leader in the development of the Hub's reporting framework.
- Relocate the Community Liaison Officer to the Hub to provide planning expertise, program support and communication/information dissemination.
- Provide a program fund of \$20,000.00 per annum to support Hub initiatives arising from community consultation and need (see Recommendation 7), administered and controlled by the Hub Team Leader.
- Support the cost of 1800 number access.
- Undertake a 3 year evaluation of the Hub, including at least twice yearly management meetings between the Hub, the Norfolk Island Government and the Australian Government as part of the evaluative design.

The Community: Mobilising for change

Within a systemic framework, children and young people are supported within families, and families are supported by communities. Over time, communities are in a position to reinforce important key messages thus contributing to critical shifts and changes in community attitudes. So the final area in

this report looks at mobilising community support for two particular challenges facing the Norfolk Island community: the need to provide positive pathways for young people as they move toward adulthood; and the need to work together to create a Norfolk Island community safety plan.

Like all Australian communities, Norfolk Island faces challenges. In many ways the extent or scope of issues faced by communities is not as important as the ways in which communities respond to the challenges they face. Many of the people we spoke to were passionate about their support of Norfolk Island as a community. Community forums were well attended during our visit, and many people shared important personal experiences in the hope that it would better contribute to our understanding of the difficulties the island faces as a community.

We also saw and heard about community initiatives that have been developed – people coming together to work on solutions. For example, the Women’s Forum has been actively seeking to address issues of concern to women. The youth centre is run entirely by volunteers so the younger teens of Norfolk Island may have a positive experience on Friday and Saturday nights. During our visit we were invited to a two day Youth Forum. The first day involved young people outlining the issues they considered important to them. On the second day service providers came together to explore how they might work with the young people to respond to the concerns. It was clear to us that Norfolk Island has a strong community spirit, and that people can and do come together as a force for positive change.

Maintaining Positive Pathways for Norfolk Island Young People

Mainland Australia recently raised the school leaving age to 17. This change was made partially in recognition of the need to better prepare young people for the skills- and/or knowledge-based economy that they will be entering as adult workers. The change was also influenced by a perceived need to provide extended structure and connection for young people as family ties loosen at this particular time in the family life cycle. Concurrently, mainland Australia has created easier pathways into vocational education – critical for those not interested in university. These policy responses are especially important during periods of high youth unemployment as they enable young people to move from one institution that provides structure and a sense of connectedness (school) to another (work). When this move is interrupted or compromised in some way, for example, in the absence of appropriate vocational pathways, then a young person’s positive trajectory toward adulthood can be at risk. Keeping young people engaged with school can assist with these transitions. For this reason we support the approach outlined in ACIL Tasman’s review into economic development in Norfolk Island to improve vocational education.³⁵

Recommendation 6:

- Norfolk Island Government should raise the school leaving age to 17 years.

Developing a community safety and support plan

³⁵ *Norfolk Island Economic Development Report*, ACIL Tasman, March 2012, p 68.

We heard many expressions of concern about the unhealthy levels of alcohol consumption on the island and its impacts on children, family and community life. Concern was expressed in relation to all ages: the age at which young people start drinking; the ways in which some parents modelled high alcohol consumption and also provided alcohol for young people; the fighting between adults that is fuelled by alcohol; people driving whilst intoxicated. This, of course, is not unique to Norfolk Island. Indeed a recent Victorian Inquiry³⁶ into child protection noted alcohol misuse as an important risk factor in child abuse and neglect, recommending that consideration be given to its impact on the safety and wellbeing of children. Similar concerns were expressed regarding cannabis use.³⁷

Whilst alcohol misuse is a concern across many communities, Norfolk Island's duty free pricing environment is an exacerbating factor as it reduces the potential for alcohol price control, a mechanism used in mainland Australia to effectively reduce alcohol consumption, especially in young people.³⁸ Price control is one mechanism that mainland Australia included when it developed its strategic plan to reduce risky drinking patterns. This national plan is based on supply, demand and measures of harm and widely supported across the governments. Mainland Australia has adopted a similar three pronged approach based on supply, demand and measures in relation to cannabis. Engaging this expertise from mainland Australia within a planned Norfolk Island community initiative would seem a useful way of using onshore and offshore expertise.³⁹

Sexual activity was also identified as a related area of concern in the context of young people, alcohol, drugs and risky behaviour more generally. It was frequently raised in relation to young men up to 24 and girls under 16. The school indicated it was reinstating its girls program⁴⁰, an action we strongly support. It is important nevertheless that this kind of initiative be developed as part of a broader family and community plan to model positive and appropriate behaviours. Messages, whether explicit or tacit, that support or condone inappropriate sexual or anti-social behaviour are likely to negatively influence the behaviour of young people. This is particularly so when they are still learning to exercise judgement and their actions are being fuelled by alcohol or drugs.

Domestic violence was also identified as a related area of concern, particularly in the context of alcohol. It was raised in a number of submissions to us. Securing a person's safety in a small remote community is challenging and requires community responses at a number of levels. In recent years a child's exposure to domestic violence in the home has increasingly been identified as potentially

³⁶ *Report of the Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry*, State Government Victoria, Department of Premier and Cabinet, January 2012.

³⁷ We understand there is administrative data on alcohol, cannabis and domestic violence eg Police charge. However it is difficult to extract meaningful policy information from this data without a comparison eg incidents identified through health screening which was not available.

³⁸ Comparing the same brand of bourbon, one litre costs \$35 on Norfolk Island and \$50 in Sydney. Comparing the same brand of gin, one litre costs \$31 on Norfolk Island and \$46 in Sydney.

³⁹ The Australian National Council on Drugs is one such group who could assist.

⁴⁰ This is a program run by the school which provides a safe space in which girls can discuss relationship, identity and personal issues under the tutelage of an adult woman as mentor, guide and advocate.

harmful for children, particularly so when the child is younger.⁴¹ It also has a detrimental impact on parenting capacity.⁴² Reducing both the experience and impact of domestic violence for children is an important imperative for all communities.

Targeting change at the family and community level is more likely to provide effective responses to domestic violence, and to other forms of violence within a community. People talked to us about a Norfolk Island tolerance of intimidation, bullying and violence as ways of resolving issues. Because these behaviours tend to be covert and are actively hidden within communities, the extent of the problem is often underestimated. During our time in Norfolk Island we heard of many instances of people feeling unsafe when they openly challenged issues. As a consequence we believe that informal hierarchies of power exist on the island that support cultures of intimidation and violence and that there is an atmosphere of fear that disables criticism and also minimises the extent of the risk taking and family related violence. Whilst there may be some members of the community who believe risk taking and family related violence occurs only rarely on Norfolk Island, the majority of people providing feedback were very concerned that these issues impacted on the safety and wellbeing of children and families.

Gauging the extent of family related violence is always challenging. It is challenging in the context of mainland Australian, and within Norfolk Island. An additional complication on the island, however, is the lack of routine data collection that is collected by mainland Australian information systems (see Recommendation 3). Current gaps in information prevent any comparative analysis. It is nevertheless clear that risk taking and family related violence does occur on Norfolk Island – just as it does in mainland Australia – and alcohol can exacerbate these problems. All communities need to develop responses that will both provide support for victims and those witnessing assaults, and reduce the prevalence of offending and risk taking behaviour.

Finding ways of influencing attitudes toward violence is a key task for communities as they confront contemporary challenges. A planned strategy which includes community messaging, along with the modelling of non-violent, respectful relationships is important to individual, family, and community wellbeing. Norfolk Island has demonstrated the ways in which a community can model pro-social values of non-violent through the work of groups such as *Men Against Sexual Abuse*. We noted, however, that such pro-social action was not always appreciated by sections of the community and that advocates for change often found themselves at the centre of community criticism. In our view, a community safety plan that both validates and supports this work would demonstrate the kind of leadership that is required to mobilise change within the Norfolk Island community. Working to provide positive portrayals of masculinity, demonstrating respectful relationships, and reducing community tolerance of intimidation and violence would, over time, influence attitudes in ways that support strong role modelling for children and young people.

⁴¹ *Report of the Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry*, State Government Victoria, Department of Premier and Cabinet, January 2012.

⁴² Bromfield et al (2010) *Issues for the safety and wellbeing of children in families with multiple and complex problems: the co-occurrence of domestic violence, parental substance misuse, and mental health problems*, issue no 33, National Child Protection Clearinghouse, Australian Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne.

At the family level, work needs to be done to provide responses to victims of domestic violence. Clearly this is challenging in small communities and we noted that the community's attempts to develop safe houses for vulnerable women and children have been frustrated by issues of anonymity. This suggests to us the need to support grass-root responses that work with the unique Norfolk Island environment and context. Solutions to the challenges will be found within the community itself. Australia does, nevertheless, have internationally recognised experts within the field of domestic violence. Again, engaging this expertise within a planned community initiative would seem a useful way of using onshore and offshore expertise.

It has been shown across many communities and time that local place-based responses can establish partnerships within communities that will help to build positive alternatives. It is this linking of community with its institutions that will be especially effective in building Norfolk Island as a safe community.

Recommendation 7:

- That the Norfolk Island Government demonstrate leadership in supporting the development of a community safety and support plan that focuses on community-based responses to reducing community tolerance of intimidation and violence, reducing alcohol and drug use, domestic violence and age inappropriate sex.
- That community safety and support plan be initiated through the Hub and include broader services such as police, school and health services, and community groups such as the service clubs and the Women's Forum.
- An independent facilitator, with expertise in local place-based planning and community building, be contracted to support the Hub in the development and implementation of the plan, and to assist in the facilitating of workshops and public meetings that fully involve and consult the community.

Conclusion

Within this review we have looked at levels of intervention based on systems that can influence services for children, young people and families living on Norfolk Island. It is clear that the families themselves require support to withstand the effects of hardship, and enable them to attend to the tasks of parenting. The professional systems also require support to build and maintain essential services for children, young people and families. More generally, family systems are nested in communities that have the potential to influence and shape expectations that provide a supportive culture for children, young people and families over time. In our view, with the right support and effort Norfolk Island has the potential and strength to influence the challenges they face in providing community-based systems of support. It is nevertheless clear to us that Norfolk Island is not able to successfully overcome the challenges without the active support of the Australian Government.

Norfolk Island is a small community. The actual number of children, young people and families needing support is also small. This means that the financial impact of recommendations is, overall,

minimal. The scale of the challenges now is also amenable to resolution. Delaying corrective action is likely to cause an exacerbation of the problems making them more difficult, and more expensive to solve in the future.

In closing, we are acutely aware that there have been many reviews of Norfolk Island and know that recommendations from past reviews have not resulted in anticipated change. The recently released *Norfolk Island Public Service Review* attributes this largely to the Government's fundamental resistance to change and determination to maintain the status quo.⁴³ We would suggest a further dimension that influences what appears to have become an intractable impasse – that the Norfolk Island Government and the Australian Government have yet to settle on an agreed way forward that each are prepared to fully commit to. In the absence of this, the recommendations within this review (and indeed any reviews to come) will be equally unsuccessful.

⁴³ *Norfolk Island Public Service Review*, Australian Continuous Improvement Group, January 2012.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

- To assist in overcoming barriers and issues associated with the provision of effective children and family support services, Norfolk Island residents should within three years, become part of the same income security, employment, taxation, child support scheme and benefit systems as other Australian residents including eligibility requirements, processes and support and participation requirements. Entering the same system as other Australian resident will better support the financial, legal, health, social care and educational needs of children and families. Australian Government standards must be adopted by Norfolk Island as part of this. We recognise a staged implementation may be needed in some areas, for example, early childhood education and care.

Recommendation 2

- Whilst the above recommendation is being implemented, the Norfolk Island Government and the Australian Government should immediately provide relief for vulnerable children, young people and families living on Norfolk Island by:
 - Norfolk Island Government broadening the eligibility for existing social service benefits such as the hardship and aged benefit and applying processes so they are consistent with the relevant Australian Government equivalent benefits.
 - Norfolk Island Government reviewing the rate for the social service benefits to bring them into line with cost of living on Norfolk Island taking into account both the relatively low wages and that additional benefits available to mainland Australians such as the Health Care card may not be available to Australians living on Norfolk Island.
 - Norfolk Island Government introducing a Paid Parental Leave Scheme of a minimum of 18 weeks consistent with mainland Australia, at a rate in line with the cost of living on Norfolk Island
 - Norfolk Island Government funding those pharmaceutical costs that are greater than the PBS cut-off
- The Australian Government should second an officer knowledgeable about the Australian pension and benefits scheme, to assist Norfolk Island Government review their processes, eligibility and rates.
- The Norfolk Island Government and the Australian Government should jointly review the funding base available for this enhanced Norfolk Island safety net without increasing costs to families and low income earners through the raising levies, fees and charges. If Norfolk Island Government is unable to meet this basic obligation to Australians living on Norfolk Island then they should approach the Australian Government seeking emergency funding for the remaining time of the three-year period referred to above.

Recommendation 3

- To assist with planning for how the Norfolk Island may best help to support children and young people to reach their potential and assist individuals and families who are risk or in crisis, the Norfolk Island Government and the Australian Government should seek opportunities to include Norfolk Island in key national information collection activities, or to at least align with them so Norfolk Island can be compared to mainland Australia. This should include but not be limited to the ABS data collection activities, the AIHW data collection activities and the AEDI data collection activities. To facilitate this, Norfolk Island Government should liaise with the Australian Government and relevant mainland states, e.g. NSW Department of Education and Communities, to seek their assistance with developing and aligning their information systems so they can participate in key national information collections.

Recommendation 4:

- That the Norfolk Island Government contracts South East Sydney Local Health District to provide all health services including hospital services, for Norfolk Island for three years until the new arrangements with the Australian Government (see Recommendation 1).

Recommendation 5:

- That a community services centre be established as the “Hub” from which to provide a coordinated service system for Norfolk Island’s children and families

To facilitate the establishment of the Hub, the Norfolk Island Government should:

- Provide a rent free centrally located community house that would provide the physical needs of the ‘Hub’, supporting its upkeep and maintenance, and funding its utilities and on-costs.
- Arrange for the hospital funded Counsellor to be relocated to and managed from the Hub and develop a position description supporting appropriate qualification and professional membership.
- Increase the funding of the Child Welfare Officer to 24hours per week⁴⁴, relocate and manage them from the Hub and develop a position description supporting appropriate qualification and professional membership (or evidence of engagement in a qualification pathway, supported by the Government).

⁴⁴ Increasing the hours of both the CWO and the Youth Development Officer to 24 per week enables the Hub to have full coverage of a “child and family” professional and a half a day cross over for professional development, staff meetings, planning and so on.

- Relocate the Claims Officer⁴⁵ to the Hub.
- Fund a new position of Youth Development Officer for 24 hours per week, located and managed from the Hub and develop a position description supporting appropriate qualification and professional membership

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⁴⁵ This is the public service officer who answers inquiries relating to benefits and pensions and assist people in completing the application and process.

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- That community safety and support plan be initiated through the Hub and include broader services such as police, school and health services, and community groups such as the service clubs and the Women's Forum.
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