

**Submission to the Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry from:
The Management Committee of Logan East Community Neighbourhood
Association Inc. (LECNA)**

September, 2012

Commissioner Carmody, Fellow Commissioners,

On behalf of the management committee of Logan East Community Neighbourhood Association Inc. (LECNA) I would like to address the issue of “whether the current use of available resources across the child protection system is adequate and whether resources could be used more efficiently” from your terms of reference. We do not wish to enter into the debate on the current use of resources but rather to make observations, based on our experiences in the Logan East community, on the way resources can be used very effectively to address issues of child protection and safety. Subsequently we will make recommendations on taking steps to ensure similar approaches can be used in the future throughout Queensland.

We at LECNA believe that we provide highly effective responses to child safety issues that are frequently not recognized or acknowledged in public debate on these matters. These responses are grounded in our commitment to community development, bringing people together to address issues of common concern to them (Taylor, 1992). The overarching issue that brings us together and which is the focus of our organisation is building the capacity for resilience in families. Evaluation of our work indicates to us that we are effective in directly assisting families in which the Department of Child Safety has already had to intervene and in assisting families to prevent themselves from getting into that situation.

The approach we use to achieve these results is to bring together people in the community, (we regularly have over 40 active volunteers involved in our work), under the leadership of a small team of full and part time community development professional workers to provide first of all “wrap around support” for people in the community who seek our assistance and then to provide them with information that will assist them in problem solving their way to better lives. (LECNA’s vision statement is: “Building Better Lives”). Referrals from agencies such as the Department of Child Safety, the Support Link programme of the Qld Police Service and other community organisations and our “word of mouth” reputation in the community ensure that we have no shortage of people seeking our help. We currently receive in the region of 60 referrals each month from the Support Link programme of people troubled by their relationships with their children, mainly their young adolescent children.

Our approach is grounded in Maslow’s theory of a hierarchy of human needs (Maslow, 1943, 1954); the idea that in order to function effectively and display

qualities like morality, creativity, spontaneity, problem solving, lack of prejudice and acceptance of facts, people must have their physiological, safety, love/belonging and esteem needs met. If their basic needs are being met then people are in a position to take on board and make use of information from educational, counselling and other support services which assist them in pursuing the goals of self-actualization that are consistent with healthy and productive family lives.

In collaboration with the Commonwealth Government, the Good Shepherd Foundation of Australia and the National Australia Bank, LECNA provides services such as Emergency Relief and No Interest and Low Interest Loan programmes which assist people in meeting the physiological and material needs of their families. (It is possible that demand for our emergency relief programme, which is already stretched at times, will increase following the Qld. Government's decision to cease funding of similar programmes by other providers in Logan.)

We strive to meet the psychological needs for safety, belonging, love and esteem of people who look to us for help by the way we seek to involve them in our sense of community and the respectful ways in which we behave towards them. Feedback we commonly and consistently get is that people who come to us feel much more comfortable in working with us than they do when they seek assistance from government agencies and larger organisation. We see this as being a direct function of our deliberate policy of placing "respect" at the centre of our organisation's values and of the way we do all our work.

In practical terms we pursue respectful relationships with our community through a Life-skills Education programme (Rolls, 2006, 2012) developed and presented by David Rolls, B.Soc.Wk. The programme is run in a series of 10 weekly 2 hour sessions. They are repeated four times each year and people are invited to, and frequently do return to participate in the series more than once. The content of the course includes:

- Understanding and managing our emotions and behaviours
- Anger management
- Understanding our relationships (Ways of Loving)
- Understanding and managing inter-personal communication
- Managing conflict
- Assertiveness and empathy
- Parenting and the impact of our being parented
- Understanding and managing grief and separation

The focus of the course is upon giving people information that they can use to better understand and manage themselves and build their capacity for building and maintaining respectful relationships with others. David has been running this programme at LECNA for some sixteen years now. All of the permanent staff at LECNA and a majority of our volunteers have participated in it. We believe that we

have ample evidence that it has had a significant impact upon the culture of our organisation and subsequently upon the outcomes we are able to achieve.

This same course provides the final and vital element in our “wrap around” approach to assisting people. Having put in place supports that go some way to helping people to meet their physiological, material and psychological needs we use David Rolls’ Life-skills programme to provide them with information that will assist them in the self-actualization processes needed to form healthy family relationships. Clients participating in this programme also have the individual support of one of a team of trained volunteer mentors under the leadership of one of our community development officers and access to counselling and other support services.

Together, all of this operates under the name of our K.N.I.T. (Knowledge, Networking Information and Training) programme which has operated at LECNA for nearly seven years now with funding from FaHCSIA (the Commonwealth’s Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs).

A wide range of people participate, the great majority of whom report finding it extremely useful in helping them to improve the quality of the relationships they have with their families. The average number of participants at any one time in 2012 has been approximately 32 people. Allowing for people who return to take part in the 10 week blocks a number of times; we conservatively estimate that in the past six years over 500 families have accessed the programme. They include parents in families where the Department of Child Safety have intervened and taken children into care. Over the years many of these people have managed to re-establish functional relationships in their homes. They also include many people who are seeking to prevent problems they face in their family lives reaching such extreme levels. The number of people accessing this programme is significant.

Some measure of the success that the KNIT programme has had over the years can be found in the fact that evaluations carried out, both by LECNA and outside agencies, have satisfied FaHCSIA that they should re-fund the programme four times. Current arrangements are in place until mid-2014. By then the total amount expended on the programme over eight years will be in the region of \$1m. The evidence that the decisions to expend public money in this way are based upon includes the sort of feedback from participants which is attached as an appendix to this submission. It is interesting to note that many people who make the kinds of comments made in this sample include those who have attended other, well regarded parenting programmes. They consistently tell us that they find KNIT much more useful than anything they have found previously.

As a result of this kind of work LECNA has established an excellent reputation in the Logan community and in informed community work circles throughout both Queensland and the rest of the nation. We consider our work to be an outstanding example of what can be achieved by a small, locally based community neighbourhood organisation adopting a community development approach focused

on building the capacity of families for resilience. We would point out this this is achieved for the expenditure of a relatively small financial investment (LECNA's total annual budget is less than \$½ million of which the Qld Government's current contribution is less than \$135 000).

Based on the evidence of these experiences we, the management committee of LECNA, recommend the following to you:

1. That overt steps be taken to devote significant resources to policies and programmes that are focused upon the capacity for resilience of families with the aim of both preventing the need for intervention by government and restoring functionality to families where intervention has been necessary.
2. That strong consideration be given to acting and building upon the findings and recommendations of the research report commissioned by Peakcare in 2009 entitled: "The Case for Sustainability of Small NGOs within the Child Protection Sector in Queensland." (Wiseman, 2009)
3. That appropriate departments in the Government of Queensland be encouraged to seek out, verify, document, support (logistically and financially), publicise and seek to replicate as part of government policy and programmes in other places, exemplar models of community development work like that being carried out at LECNA as noted in the submission above.

Thank you for reading and considering our ideas, we trust that you find them to be of value. Please to not hesitate to contact us should you have any questions or if you require our assistance in any way. We wish you well in your work.

Roger Marshall
LECNA Management Committee Member

References:

- Maslow, A. H. (1943). A theory of human motivation. *Psychological Review*, 50(4), 370-396.
- Maslow, A. H. (1954). *Motivation and personality*. New York: Harper.
- Rolls, D. J. (2006). *Life-skills education programme or educating the heart*. Brisbane: Author.
- Rolls, D. J. (2012). Counselling/Therapy, Mediation and Training Services, from <http://www.davidrolls.com.au/>
- Taylor, M. (1992). *Signposts to community development*. London: Community Development Foundation.
- Wiseman, R. (2009). The case for sustaining samll NGOs in the child protection sector. Brisbane, Qld: Peakcare, Queensland from: <http://www.peakcare.com.au/>

Appendix: Typical Participant Feedback to KNIT Programme

Before I would get cranky at the kids and now I am aware of my tone of voice. I am still a work in progress but I have learnt to think all the time before I react.

I did this to improve my relationship with my son. Respect chair comes into my lounge room. I have more self-awareness. I have learnt how to process my reaction to certain problems and triggers. The course has also helped me see what has worked and what hasn't. I intend to do KNIT again.

"That's just the way (I am /think)" concept has been very powerful in changing the way I think. It has made me aware that nobody can change me, I am the only one who chooses to do that; and now, thanks to KNIT, I have the steps to do this effectively.

Four kids oldest 5yrs. Wanted to learn how to be a better parent, and I think I know how to do that now. I felt that I have made a change in my house especially with my husband.

Thanks to David and Colleen who have supported me through homelessness and now I have a job. I have learnt in my relationship I can't force someone to love me. Everything is coming together now and I'm at peace with my new knowledge provided from the program.

It is a great program which includes interesting topics of self-awareness and self-management. I also learnt that we can't dwell on negatives. We all have the capacity for joy and happiness, it's hard to change but worth the journey.

The information has been very valuable. I am thinking differently about things and learning to build a friendship with my son who is 23.

The course has enabled me to understand other people's reactions and more importantly how I react to them.

Enjoyed all modules of the course but especially learning about redundancy and building friendships with my children

Enhanced my self-awareness, how I come across to other people and the importance of tone of voice

The program has provided me with the insight to make my life better for me with change.

Coming from a different culture it is wonderful how inclusive the course is.

The program has helped renew my relationship with my Mum. We include each other in each of our lives more and talk more.

In 10 weeks we moved from power to respect. It's amazing how lots of changes have happened. I've learnt not to be confronted and react. My relationship with my daughter is a lot more joyful and it has changed the dynamic of our family for the better. I am building to friend capacity with my daughter who will be 14 next month.

With the help of the course I have come from a very different unpleasant place to a much joyful one. I am loving this course. I have friends who ring me and I ask the questions in the model of communication we learn and I am able to help them with certain issues.

I have learnt the importance of logical thinking to face challenges. I feel I can cope regardless of the situation. Grandchildren are learning to be more respectful

For me it has been a tough year with many ups and downs. The course has allowed me to get through it and feel much better as a result of it.