

Submission on More Effective Social Services

LIFEWISE (www.lifewise.org.nz) is the social and community services part of the Methodist Mission in Auckland. For over 150 years our organisation in its various forms has contributed to meeting the changing needs of Aucklanders as the city has grown and developed.

Today we are still initiating new ways to solve challenging social issues and providing support to Aucklanders in need – families in need or facing violence, children in foster care, older persons, those living with disability, those who are sleeping rough in our city and in need of immediate support and accommodation, children in early childhood education, and disconnected neighbourhoods and communities.

We strive to have services that recognise and benefit the wider family/family. For children and families, our Family Services team provide a range of services and home-based programmes to encourage and support parents, including parenting courses, family counselling, social work, foster care, and respite care. Lifewise is also working to increase access to early childhood education, with a number of new initiatives underway to provide centres in low income areas.

For older people and those living with disabilities, our Homecare Services team provide services in the home to help people live independent lives, including housekeeping, personal care, carer relief and help with getting out and about.

In Rotorua, Lifewise offers a recovery focused residential programme – Te Ara Ora, the Pathway to Wellness – for people and their whanau experiencing mental illness or addictions.

For the homeless and marginalised, The Lifewise Hub offers specialist support to help people prepare for independent living. As part of the Hub approach, Lifewise works in collaboration with other organisations to provide long-term housing solutions, essential life skills and personal development, as well as the more traditional food and shelter services.

Over the last few years we have begun to change our approach to how we help people in need – from charity to social development. This change in direction is based on our own experience and expertise, along with evidence that has shown that the traditional charitable service model of simply meeting immediate need does not provide sustainable solutions to serious social issues and can perpetuate long-term dependency.

This means providing the services and support needed for individuals and families to improve their future, as well as supporting communities who are developing their own ways to meet their social needs, and advocating for just and practical social policy at both central and local Government levels. We believe that this approach is crucial to successfully working for change and creating a better future for everyone.

Lifewise appreciates the opportunity to make a submission on how the social service sector can become more efficient and effective. Our written submission below is based on our experience working in social services, and identifies the issues we believe require addressing for the social sector to be effective for New Zealanders in need.

We also support the submissions made by our colleagues at the New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services and the Methodist Social Services (Palmerston North). We would like to take part in any oral hearings or workshops.

1. Collaborative multi-agency solutions are needed to solve complex social issues

Lifewise has seen first-hand that interventions that only target one aspect of a person's life (e.g. drug addiction) have limited success. A person's homelessness may have been caused by myriad issues, such as intergenerational poverty, lack of employment opportunities, drug addiction, or isolation.

Social services are most effective when they address the complex causes that have led to issues – including breakdowns in the whanau network, a lack of neighbourliness, and the isolation of people into small family units. For example, Lifewise closed down its soup kitchens in 2008 and created a hub where Auckland's homeless people can access permanent housing with wrap-around support services, opportunities to get involved in community projects, and access to food through our low-cost café, Merge.

We need a social service that recognises the many causes of issues and takes multi-pronged approaches to finding solutions, supporting people who are already vulnerable, and giving people at risk for becoming vulnerable later in life.

There is currently no funding framework for collaborative social services approaches other than Whanau Ora – and this is only available to Maori Providers. The current competitive model of commissioning contracts fosters defensive relationships between charities. This creates a big missed opportunity for the social sector – charities need incentives to share their learnings with the wider sector. A new funding model is needed that can create win-win partnerships between providers, rather than creating siloes of competitors.

2. Leadership is need to forge partnerships between the not-for-profit and business sectors

The business community is increasingly interested in being part of the solution to widespread problems. Young entrepreneurs, socially responsible corporations, and civic-minded business leaders are looking for ways to connect with progressive social service organisations. Partnerships between the social sector and the business community would bring new frameworks and approaches to solving complex social issues.

Lifewise believes that there needs to be leadership for brokering partnerships between not-for-profits and businesses. If government is not in a position where it has the expertise to carry out this role, it should consider outsourcing this to not-for-profits who have the expertise to help forge these partnerships.

3. Government must accept more risk for innovative solutions to be implemented

Without taking risks to test out new solutions, our social service will continue to deliver the same results. Government needs to accept the risk inherent in testing new approaches, and commission innovative new approaches. Funding should be allocated to further developing social services, rather than simply funding services to continue to deliver the same results. Government could commission 'test contracts' that would enable providers to try new approaches to solving social issues.

Developing fail-fast systems where failures in the system could be quickly identified and resolved would ensure that programmes could be refined in real-time, and reduce the risk of new programmes not delivering good outcomes. This design process used often on business start ups

also useful in the social service space.

There needs to be better support for implementing new approaches. Not-for-profits can use government contracts to pilot new services, but the funding level reduces greatly when it comes to putting new services into the field. This often means that the new service is not as effective, as it does not have the resources it needs to be successfully bedded in.

There should be a culture both within government and in not-for-profits of continuous improvement. If government wants more results with less, then it needs to fund community organisations to come up with innovative ways to achieve their goals without compromising their outcomes. Government needs to partner with community providers to be 'contract makers' not 'contract takers'.

4. Find ways to identify and fund community-led work

The community is best-placed for understanding the issues facing locals, and the approaches that might be more successful to address them.

We support the words of Inspiring Communities in their recent advice to the incoming government (October 13 2014)

- *all communities have significant capacity to contribute to their positive development. This not fully appreciated by government agencies and Central Government is not well placed to lead a process to release this capacity.*
- *small change on a wide scale has significant potential. This change is frequently invisible to the main systems or old way of doing things. This change is locally driven and can significantly increase the productivity and effectiveness of existing Government investments.*
- *new diverse models of organising and leadership are required to successfully tap this potential. This is a global trend and one that NZ is well position to be a global leader in. This will require smart investment and is more about Central Government doing less as opposed to Government doing more.*

Finding ways to support community led initiatives is crucial to lasting community resilience.

The government could leverage this local activism by expanding the current Community Organisation Grants Scheme (COGS). This model would ensure that communities can access funding to expand their work, with lasting benefit to communities.

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