



Neighbourhood Houses
Tasmania

Submission to the Joint Select Committee on Child and Family Centres by Neighbourhood Houses Tasmania

Neighbourhood Houses Tasmania and the network of Neighbourhood Houses is committed to Early Years Intervention and education, and congratulates current and past governments on the focus on early years intervention and support for families. We are particularly pleased that the community development model which Neighbourhood Houses have operated under for so many years has been acknowledged as critical in supporting families. The Child and Family Centres, in their conception, seek to be community development centres focussing on families of children 0-5 years old.

Neighbourhood Houses Tasmania Inc. lodges this submission after consulting with our Members who are directly located in 10 of the 11 communities CFC's operate in, as well as being informed by discussions with our Members throughout the 8 years since the announcement of the CFC initiative. Our Members were part of the State Government and community working parties, were on the initial steering committees for local CFCs prior to the build, and have continued to engage with them over the last five years of delivery.

Neighbourhood Houses in their communities have and continue to work in partnerships with CFCs and a number have good working relationships with workers within the CFCs. These partnerships and relationships have produced a number of projects of benefit to the local community. Where there is a good understanding of community development practice within the CFC, respect for the role of the Neighbourhood House and vice versa, the results have been what you'd hope from two organisations working together. Conceptually and in the ideal, Child and Family Centres could be a great resource introduced and managed in the right way.

However the now consistent pattern of concerns our Members have raised over 5 years of discussions at regional meetings and in their direct feedback to us for this submission, mean we need to raise with the Select Committee the significant and consistent challenges our Members are seeing at a local level. As a result we recommend current or future governments not commit further roll out of the CFC model without understanding and responding to the issues that Neighbourhood Houses, communities and other organisations have experienced at the local level.

Background

There are 33 Neighbourhood Houses funded by the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Disability & Community Services Division under the Neighbourhood House Program, and supported through Neighbourhood Houses Tasmania as their peak body. (Two member Houses are not DHHS-funded.) All Houses primarily engage in community development work in disadvantaged or socially isolated communities. Neighbourhood Houses are all separately incorporated community organisations governed by a volunteer local management committee. The Houses work with people of all ages and always from the core fundamental of community development as our process – and have done for over 30 years in many communities.

CFCs have been introduced into our communities seeking to act from a community development model with a target group of 0-5 year old children and their families.

What do Houses do?

Neighbourhood Houses are places where people come together to support their local community and make a significant difference in people's lives. They are run by the community, for the community, and offer a wide range of programs and activities for local people.

As a network the Houses form the largest community development infrastructure in Tasmania, with the most regionally diverse footprint of any non-government community service organisation in the state. Each individual House is an independent entity, run under a community governance model. In essence we are "run by the community, for the community"

Highlights from our [2015-16 Annual report](#) show:

- 445,336 contacts were made by community members with all Houses
- This is 13 495 on average in each House for the year
- Which is equivalent to 281 contacts per week in each House
- Volunteers contributed 189 608 hours across the State over the year
- It means there are 120 hours of volunteering per week in each House
- Each House worked with an average of 27 partner organisations during 2015-16

Further information about our network can be found at: <http://nht.org.au/home/neighbourhood-houses-in-tasmania/>

Neighbourhood Houses concerns regarding the Child and Family Centres

The key challenges as experienced by our member Neighbourhood Houses are summarised below.

Direct comments and quote from our Members are provided in italics (but de-identified). Some comments are direct and challenging but we don't believe these messages have been heard in the past, without being dismissed as our sector being envious. Having struggled to raise these issues and have them heard within government, the Select Committee inquiry is an opportunity to place these issues on the record.

We acknowledge that the funding and infrastructure disparity is fairly hard to digest, however the key driver of our message is our communities and what they need. Our Members work day to day in very challenging communities and have for years. Please hear the critique in the spirit and good faith in which it is intended. We all want better early years outcomes in our communities and the good use of government resources to support that outcome.

1. Neighbourhood Houses participated in good faith in initial consultations about CFC's and saw them as being a new partner in local communities. Our understanding was that CFC's were to integrate into the existing work within communities, and would not duplicate existing work. The scope of CFC's was to support families of children 0-5, and integrate their work with local organisations. The CFCs in actuality have often duplicated or taken over programs that were being run by Neighbourhood Houses. Programs such as play groups and Adult Education courses have been shifted to the CFC, which was fine when Houses opted to integrate those programs. Unfortunately this has sometimes occurred without consultation. Some programs have been outside the intended scope of CFC's. Our Members across the state have raised frequent instances where programs run by House staff or volunteers, though run in CFC facilities, have been unfairly included in outcomes and outputs reporting by CFC's. Houses have reported that CFC staff have actively "poached" confirmed courses and programs of the House, costing the House revenue and the loss of connection with organisations and partners.

Houses also report a lack of support for people on pathways to future opportunities. For example a community member may have taken up training, but there has been no consideration given to the longer term pathway to further training or employment beyond that particular course, for that person.

🏠 *We have been very vocal around the CFC establishment in our community. The local working group, which was ultimately ignored, determined that funding should be used to resource existing services, not create a new service.*

🏠 *"Packing" parents with certificates has become an 'attendance outcome', not a pathway to employment.*

2. CFCs have broadened their scope. To ensure Neighbourhood Houses were not duplicating services they were forced to stop working with the 0-5s and transfer programs to the CFC's. Even child care workers from Neighbourhood Houses opted to move to the CFCs in the spirit of cooperation. NH staff thought over time families of 0-5 would then transition back to working with the House as the children got older. However the CFCs have now actively advertised and pursued a broader scope of 0-8 and even 0-12 in some communities. This has meant that Houses have lost contact with those families and a cohort of children have potentially lost their connection to the Neighbourhood House. The transition back into relationship with the local Neighbourhood House has not been supported actively in many CFCs. This undermines the trust relationships between the organisations, but worse leads to families falling through the gaps. It also directly contradicts the government undertakings given to communities about the scope and role of the CFCs. Unfortunately our fears around scope creep have been realised.

🏠 *When the CFC opened in XX we had to reinvent ourselves... all the visiting service providers, child health nurse, etc etc moved with them.*

🏠 *CFC projects in many cases target groups outside of the CFC scope;*

🏠 *Since the opening of the CFC they have had major problems moving parents on when their children turn 5 years old and go to school.*

🏠 *The CFC provides free food to single disadvantaged males with no children to increase the numbers of 'men' using the Centre, which is obviously outside their scope.*

🏠 *CFC scope has included projects catering to 12-15 year olds*

🏠 *The families taken from our House to establish the CFC have not transitioned back and no attempt has been made to re-engage them(at the NH) after 3 ½ years of trying with CFC management*

3. CFC's as government agencies are directly competing with Neighbourhood Houses and other community groups for the same government and philanthropic funding sources such as Tasmanian Community Fund, Skills Tasmania funding etc. With the decreasing funding available to community and the health sector in general a more competitive environment has developed which decreases collaboration and works against community development principles.
4. Houses and CFCs have sometimes co-facilitated-programs. The accommodating and collaborative approach of Neighbourhood House staff and volunteers, along with the allure of brand new purpose built facilities has meant many programs have been physically hosted by the CFCs. The results of this

have sometimes been that these statistics are included in the outcomes for CFCs when the development and recruitment of people for the programs has been made by the Neighbourhood Houses, and often without acknowledgement of the work of House staff and volunteers. Hosues are very aware that the CFC staff have spoken of the pressure they are under to demonstrate efficacy of the model, and this has lead to a culture of over claiming statistics.

- 🏠 *The partnerships are really one sided in that we seem to give a lot more than we get back...*
- 🏠 *it is always us who does the work !!*
- 🏠 *we very much do it all with them only contributing at meetings*

5. There is a significant funding and infrastructure imbalance. It is our understanding that each CFC cost between \$3 and \$4 million. It is difficult for the Neighbourhood House sector not to see and compare this infrastructure roll out. Our sector has been lucky to have had desperately needed upgrades to our buildings and we are grateful for the government investments that we have received. The network of Neighbourhood Houses has received welcome investment of \$6 million across 26 buildings over three years, and \$1.6 million committed to build a new Neighbourhood House at Rocherlea. This obviously does not compare with the investment estimated below or any planned for the future.

- 🏠 *Our local CFC has a purpose built 3.5 million dollar building and our House is a 40yr old domestic house worth \$375K.*

The following table while simplistic, provides an overview of the funding disparity

	Neighbourhood House	Child and Family Centre
Infrastructure	Retro fitted public housing buildings or small scale purpose builds between 40 -10 years old	Brand new buildings \$3-4 million
Recent Infrastructure investment	\$7.6 million over 27 properties, including \$1.7 million on new Rocherlea site	\$44 million investment in 11 buildings in 2011

6. A Neighbourhood House receives total core funding of approximately \$150 000 a year to employ 1.5 staff, pay for the running costs of thei building, support volunteer management committee, consult with their community and deliver programs and activities. This is equivalent to the wages (including on-costs) of the lead CFC manager. On top of this each CFC has social inclusion workers, other project workers and the running costs all paid by government separately. The CFCs scope is to work with families 0-5, while Neighbourhood Houses are working with all age groups and families, indeed the whole community.
- 🏠 *the CFC position was advertised and salary for leader was \$111K - \$123K. There are also 3 social inclusion officers employed at the centre.*
 - 🏠 *and here we are scrimping and saving to hold a free BBQ.*

The following table provides an overview of overall funding disparity

	Neighbourhood House	Child and Family Centre
Funding (approx.)	\$150 000	Estimated total= \$353 000 ie Centre leader salary and on costs = \$144000 2 Staff on salaries of \$80 000 plus on costs = \$180 000 Building running costs \$25 000
Staffing average	1.5 FTE on community sector salaries	3 FTE government salaries (min)
Scope	0 - Death	Families 0-5
Scope as % of Community (ideal)	100% of community	25% of community

7. The scope of the CFC's was also supposed to be focused on people from low socio-economic backgrounds. Such work is very challenging, and requires trust and relationships built over a long time. Many Houses have expressed concerns about the CFCs in some communities being utilised mostly by the eaiser to reach middle class parents and not the low SES families they were envisioned to target.

📌 *We also see a culture developing within the CFC in XX, that it is only for well-to-do families.*

📌 *Over half the mothers are affluent and not from the target area of which the Centre is designed to service.*

📌 *There is very marginal 'parent-children contact and engagement'; which is what the CFC is designed to increase – parents are consistently only using the CFC for 'child-care', not any broder support. This is the antithesis of what CFC's are supposed to be about.*

8. Houses have also expressed concern about a high turnover of staff in CFC's, and difficult staff culture in a number of CFCs. NHT is aware that other organisations are identifying this pattern as well. This again reduces the potential impact of the Centres ,as relationships fail to be built, or are broken again as staff move on from local communities.

📌 *Also staffing changes are an issue for XX CFC with 5 managers in 4 years... ...each new manager comes with their own agenda and this really causes chaos and confusion for the community*

📌 *(Our local CFC was) employing teachers and childcare administrators as managers to do community development and people management; (these are) inadequate people skills for complex disadvantaged communities*

📌 *Rural/remote CFC's have a high staff turnover which is detrimental for building the community.*

9. The state wide coordination of Child and Family Centre's has been problematic both at a local level, and from the NHT state-wide perspective. In the initial years there was significant investment in state wide coordination and training, then from our perspective, this has diluted over the last few years. This may be a function of confusion of responsibility from Department of Education to Dept of Health and Human Services over the journey, but it is a notable issue. NHT, when we raised the challenges in the early implementation and pre-

implementation years were at least able to engage in dialogue centrally about how these issues could potentially be resolved, however after the initial implementation this engagement from CFC state management outward has ceased.

Summary

Unfortunately it appears the CFC implementation has duplicated our community development model with a much smaller target group and we believe that there should be much more time given to examining the effectiveness and cost effectiveness of the model before it is introduced in more communities and further duplication occurs.

The role of the Neighbourhood House is very challenging when compared to the Child and Family Centre as for a House to be effective that role and connection with parents of young children is an essential of our core business to create thriving communities. By introducing the CFCs into our communities, that role of the Neighbourhood House has been hollowed out essentially. We have reinvented ourselves accordingly, in the hope that this would collectively lead to greater impact overall with communities by both organisations. However if the CFC scope creep continues and the lack of active work to transition families back to the Neighbourhood House continues, then these issues will get worse between the organisations, and families will be worse off.

There is the possibility that the above points and quotes can appear to be “one off” instances. We would reiterate that the included quotes are offered as examples of the much more substantive feedback received, and again they are exemplars of the pattern or challenges our Members reported over the last five years.

This submission we will choose to be public. There are risks with raising these concerns as we know that many will see the opportunity and ideal of the CFC, but haven’t witnessed the challenges at the very local level as our Houses have done. It is important that truly independent analysis is undertaken prior to determining or committing future investment.

We do encourage the government or possible future governments to look at the funding disparity between Neighbourhood Houses and Child and Family Centres, and address this as a priority before future new CFCs as this undermines the relationship and outcomes significantly. NHT has lodged a budget submission seeking an extra \$40 000 per annum recurrently for each DHHS funded Neighbourhood House. To ensure that all Neighbourhood Houses, including each of the 10 overlapping local Houses with CFCs are well funded, would mean great things for communities of course. However, in the context of this submission, by investing well in existing CFCs AND Houses means that true analysis of outcomes for community can be done, without the funding and resource disparity disabling the community outcomes and the analysis of the efficacy of CFCs.

John Hooper

NHT Executive Officer