

Voice for SONG

The way forward:

Tackling the issues confronting
small community organisations.

Tirrania Suhood Chris Marks, Mary Waterford,
and Voice for SONG members

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This paper was originally co-written by Tirrania Suhood, Blacktown Alcohol & Drugs Family Services, Chris Marks, Consultant and Mary Waterford, Mountains Community Resource Network for a SONG community sector roundtable in July 2005,

in collaboration with other Voice for SONG members and Associates

Maree McDermott, South Penrith Youth and Neighbourhood Services

Lauren Harris, Lower Mountains Neighbourhood Centre

Carmen Boserio, Werrington Neighbourhood Centre

Leah Godfrey, Western Sydney Community Forum

Peter Rogers, WESTIR

Nigel Spence, Association of Child Welfare Agencies

Liz Priestly, NSW Council of Social Services

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Formatted by Christine Eastman

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Voice for SONG’s Way Forward: tackling the issues confronting small community organisations

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Introduction

This paper has been produced by Voice for SONG (for small organisations non-government), a network of individuals and organisations, particularly small community organisations. This paper is a revised and updated version of the original SONG Issues Paper that was prepared for a community sector roundtable in July 2005. This roundtable led to the formation of Voice for SONG NSW, with NCOSS (Council of Social Services of NSW) agreeing to provide the secretariat for the group.

This paper:

- illustrates why small community organisations are valuable
- describes some of the impacts on their wellbeing and some recommendations to address these impacts
- introduces Voice for SONG and its ideas for moving forward to increase awareness of the value of small community organisations and increase cooperation between small community organisations, large non-government organisations (NGOs), government, business and the general community
- describes the collaborative and complementary role of Voice for SONG in relation to peak bodies (bodies that represent community sector organisations).

The paper has a NSW perspective but the issues we highlight are global issues, identified in other states and countries. For instance, the Canadian paper Voluntary Sector Initiative Report “Caught in the Middle: What small, non-profit organizations need to survive and flourish” (Voluntary Sector Secretariat, December 2001) is an example of this.

Small community organisations

Small community organisations are essential for the maintenance of healthy local communities. They promote social justice, the building of social capital, cooperation between people in different communities and sectors, democracy and other values related to not-for-profit activities. Small community organisations are well placed to know their local communities, networks and culture, and have working relationships across a range of local services and agencies. Small community organisations ensure the valuing of all community members, with a particular focus on disadvantaged communities and individuals. They provide infrastructure and innovation that allows people to contribute their time and skills to participate in their community and develop community identity, creativity and connectedness. They often provide a vehicle for leadership locally and in the broader sector.

The ongoing survival and vibrancy of small organisations is paramount to the general health of communities and democratic processes.

Background to Voice for SONG

Voice for SONG (for small organisations non-government) is a collaboration of small community organisations and others concerned with promoting the value of small organisations to a healthy, democratic, vibrant, inclusive society.

Voice for SONG is about more than promoting the survival and development of small NGOs. It also promotes social justice, environmental sustainability, social capital, shared power and leadership, and not-for-profit activities. Voice for SONG formed to develop and maintain structures and activities that support and promote these values and influence healthy, connected communities.

Voice for SONG began in 2000 when several organisations from the western suburbs of Sydney came together because their futures were uncertain. Their funding in real terms was gradually being whittled away and they were missing out on new funding sources. They perceived a culture of a lack of understanding of the value of small community organisations and a lack of commitment to sustain them in a competitive climate that was valuing large organisations over small organisations. The efficiencies

and effectiveness of small organisations were not recognised and accountability requirements were becoming unrealistically onerous.

Voice for SONG has engaged many other small organisations (and peak bodies and larger organisations). As well as supporting each other, the groups, through their collective voice, began to promote the value of small community organisations through public forums and the media. Voice for SONG has also acted as a catalyst for initiatives such as LCSA's publication *Odd Socks: Why the Future of Small Community Organisations is Critical*, and the *Small Organisations Working Together (SNOW) Project*. Voice for SONG has also been invited to, and spoken at, many conferences.

Voice for Song has gone from a Blacktown initiative to a statewide initiative demonstrating that even though small community organisations generally have the least status and power of all organisations, they can have significant influence.

In challenging narrow notions of "efficiency" and promoting the value of small community organisations, Voice for SONG has been bringing about attitudinal and cultural change.

Who we are talking about and why we are valuable

“Small organisations have an important role in mobilising existing social capital and creating more. Social capital is generated through the networks, local values and trust that exist in community. (Onyx & Williams 2002)”

Who we are

The types of organisations covered in this discussion are funded human and community services organisations. They are mostly small and localised and include:

- neighbourhood centres;
- youth centres;
- refuges (youth, women’s, family);
- family support services;
- information and resource services;
- home based/community services to frail aged and people with different abilities;
- migrant resource and direct ethnic and refugee support services;
- indigenous locally based services;
- community arts organisations;
- community children’s services;
- community legal services;
- employment and training support services;
- community based women’s health centres;
- domestic violence and child protection services;
- drug & alcohol services;
- housing support services;
- community mental health services
- or a combination of many of the above. Larger neighbourhood centres, larger community legal centres and community housing associations are also part of this discussion paper.

All of these organisations are funded from one or many different government funding programmes at local, state and federal level.

What is valuable about small community based human service organisations?

- Small community based organisations are generally guided by social justice, environmental sustainability, peace, not-for-profit and democratic values and promote the need for independent voices that represent the diversity of groups in our society.
- We work with innovation, flexibility and responsiveness to addressing social capital and social justice issues, often with limited resources.
- We promote not-for-profit values at a time when our society is increasingly dominated by the profit motive.
- We have limited bureaucracy and more responsive decision making processes.
- We further grassroots democracy and independent bodies at the local level.
- We encourage cooperation above competition and build social capital, trust, cooperation and mutually supportive activities in and between our organisations and communities.
- We employ many skilled, innovative and highly motivated paid workers with commitment and experience. We often have staff that choose to remain in the sector, despite poor conditions, as they see social change is best implemented at the grass roots level. Their social entrepreneur skills can be used to advantage in small structures.
- Small organisations often provide the entry point for new workers to the sector. They gain experience that can inform their practice throughout their career.
- We support many skilled and innovative volunteers who make major contributions to our society through their work in small NGOs.

- We empower communities by facilitating flexible, responsive, independent projects and have the flexibility to nurture small ideas that may grow into large projects.
- We develop and support local networks and link people.
- Diverse and marginalised communities are usually represented.
- We value “small” in our society at a time when structures and organisations are becoming larger.

Characteristics of the small community based, human service organisations

1. Geographically we are diverse: from suburban, rural, local, to regional and some statewide areas.
2. We range in size: some have incomes as small as under \$50,000pa to some receiving up to one million dollars. Some have a sole worker, while others have between twenty and thirty workers. There are a sizeable number of middle sized organisations in our sector.
3. We are community managed by democratically elected management committees. Most are incorporated associations.
4. We have membership and volunteers and participation is encouraged through committee & volunteer work.
5. We have multiple partnerships & funding accountabilities: most income comes from government funding and most small organisations manage a range of projects over several funding bodies.
6. We have legislative accountability and corporate accountability in multiple forms and employ staff and meet all legislative requirements.
7. We cover a diversity of client groups, often the most disadvantaged and marginalised in the community.

8. Service development, community development and social justice emphasis: the commitment to social justice, responding to existing and emerging needs and the framework of participation and empowerment are part of the essential ways of working of this sector.

See Appendix for more details.

NCOSS research *Alive and Well (2003)* includes a summary of the fifth “Australians Living on the Edge” survey of organisations in the community services sector in NSW and compares the findings with National organisational respondents. In that survey, organisations in NSW representing incomes under \$1 million were 87% of the total, while nationally respondents from small organisations were 83% of total. The patterns are similar. Their reliance on government funding represented 76.6% of their total incomes in NSW and 74.2% nationally.

What we do

As small community based human service organisations, we are mostly engaged in a combination of efforts toward:

- Being concerned primarily with the needs of people in their communities of locality and/or interest who do not readily access services or participate in their communities as active members. These individuals, families and sometimes groups are often in crisis, with fewer financial and emotional resources, genuinely marginalised and disadvantaged;
- Service development, management, direction setting, local needs based assessment direct delivery of a range of services to particular client groups;
- Responsiveness to emerging needs of their clients and local communities of interest;
- Developing and using capacity to be creative and innovative;
- Minimal layers of decision making;
- Cooperative networking with each other -including inter-agency cooperation;
- Enhancing our communities of locality and/or interest(s);

- With local people, building social capacity through community development to address and work towards redressing the problems and disadvantage experienced by marginalised individuals, families and groups of people in the Australian community;
- Influencing policy and communication of local needs and issues through regional structures. These needs and issues can be of national concern.

As small locality focused human service organisations, we have an intimate knowledge of our communities; we are flexible and able to be innovative in response to emerging needs. We also have a commitment to community involvement in decision making through management committees and other participatory processes. Finally our commitment to an ethos of social justice and community development practice often sets us apart from other types of local community organisations.

It is often small organisations who summon the courage and determination to raise issues, and to organise meetings with politicians, peak bodies and regional bodies to have their concerns listened to and to develop cooperative strategies. This requires time and energy with little or no financial assistance to support these strategies. These organisations can often work with great flexibility as they don't have multiple layers of decision making prohibiting them from being spokespeople for marginalised communities (Suhood 2000b).

At the Communities in Control Conference in Melbourne in 1994, Professor Berkman of Harvard University told the conference:

Community organisations have the power to tangibly improve population health. In this case, what's good for individuals and what's good for the community is the same thing. Those with the most social 'connectedness', i.e. who have a high level of participation in social and community organisation and networks, have lower mortality rates...Community groups are the engines that drive our ability to change behaviour, reduce morbidity, expand life-expectancy and innovate change (Our Community 2004).

It is through our service provision, research, outreach, advocacy and the community development efforts of our small community based, human service organisations, that many individuals in need are able to experience their first opportunity for

'connectedness'. They are treated in an inclusive manner, with a non-discriminatory attitude and with respect and dignity for their human rights and their right to participate actively in meeting their own needs by people employed to support their needs, and concerns.

Professor Jenny Onyx (2002) highlights why the survival of small community organisations is critical:

There are some distinctive characteristics about these small organisations that enable them to act in ways that larger, more bureaucratic organisations can't match. They are likely to have their ears to the ground in ways few organisations do. They hear the distress and name it before others are even aware there is a problem. They can, and often do, mobilise an instant response to that issue by way of emergency support, advocacy, information, preparing a submission to government, or establishing a service on a volunteer basis. The form of the response is as varied as the need. There is no need to fit the response into a pre-existing program category. Indeed...they have the flexibility to respond as required. As human beings our needs are complex and part of a whole. Very often attempts to make these conform to the requirements of silo bureaucracies serves only to distort and fracture our experience.

Despite the important value and activity of small community organisations in NSW, many such organisations report major challenges and difficulties in continuing their work.

Major Issues

1. Invisibility of small organisations and lack of understanding of their value and potential;
2. Recruitment and retention of skilled workers;
3. Inadequacy of funding and multiple accountabilities across programs;
4. Short term project funding and expectation to be sustainable through private sector funding;
5. Government trend to fund one large regional project rather than several small organisations;
6. Stresses on Community Management.

Issue 1

Invisibility of small organisations and lack of understanding of their value and potential.

This is the key challenge of the Voice for SONG strategy. Small community organisations have a low profile and status with government decision-makers and even within the community.

Background Reasons/Concerns:

- In each local government area there may be over 100 small community organisations in urban areas and 5-20 in smaller rural communities. Given there are over 150 local government areas in New South Wales alone the figures are significant. However, these small organisations have not been promoted with a common voice, and our media profile is disparate.
- There is very little research on small locally managed human service organisations or on the impact of small organisations on their client groups and communities. Many small community organisations are developing innovative and successful approaches that are used as models in other areas. There is little recognition of the role small organisations play in developing new ways of working with disadvantaged communities.
- There is no representative voice for small organisations. They are subsumed in a range of different peak and/or regional organisations, or may not belong to any because of cost of membership fees. Peaks represent both large and small organisations and often the level of support required for many struggling organisations is problematic. A sense of vulnerability constrains many community organisations from speaking out. Fears of government

funding cuts prevent agencies from being good advocates for themselves and the sector.

Resulting Impacts on small community organisations

Small community organisations can be undervalued and their potential underestimated by themselves, government and decision-makers. Small community organisations experience uncertainty in regard to their future owing to inadequate funding and policies and limited support and attention. Recruitment and retention of staff is affected by lack of value of the impact of the work of small community organisations as well as the insecurity of funding.

Small community organisations often allocate significant resources to developing funding applications only to have their auspice overlooked in favour of larger organisations. Government decision-makers often hold inaccurate, poorly informed images of management practises of small community organisations.

Possible Responses:

1. Resources allocated for a dedicated Voice for SONG position to coordinate future work;
2. Stakeholders to further develop strategies, including media strategies to increase profile and promote the value of small community organisations;
3. Organise forums and conferences or conference sessions on the value and potential of small community organisations. Ensure adequate representation from small community organisations as speakers and facilitators;
4. Academics to set up research strategies to document the value and scope of the work of small organisations;

5. Stakeholders to engage with government departments around the broader value and potential of allocating resources to small community organisations and to build trust;
6. Dialogue to be developed between small and large NGOs with the express purpose of looking at ways to work together;
7. Promotion of innovative and successful models from small community organisations;
8. Encouragement of a stronger role for local government in promoting their local community organisations;
9. Resources to assist representation from small community organisations for particular working parties or conferences.

Issue 2

Recruitment and retention of skilled workers.

Recruitment and retention of skilled workers - managers, project/program coordinators, direct delivery workers, administrators and management committees is critical to the success of small community based NGOs.

Background Reasons/Concerns:

- The NGO sector is often the entry point and training ground for human services workers. Losing experienced workers is problematic to this sector;
- The public sector is more highly paid and better resourced than the non-government community sector. Many workers are lost to the government sector as rates of pay and career pathways are not equitable across sectors;
- Staff from NGOs are often seconded to short term government positions, which can provide experience for the worker but create great difficulty for the organisation and the sector;
- Provision of training and professional development is not adequately funded.

Resulting impacts on small NGOs

Staff change impacts significantly on the sector. A manager position may hold core leadership in the organisation and community workers often have strong links into the community. Recruitment is not just replacement of staff but the building of trust and connection. Longevity of staff is important to the strength of local organisations.

Lack of career pathways and poor wages and conditions discourage skilled workers from staying in small NGOs.

Transportability of skills is an issue where there is little money available for professional development.

Possible responses:

1. The Australian Services Union and government funding providers must address the disparity in pay and conditions between community agencies and the public sector.
2. Innovative ways to second workers between community organisations and government departments should be developed. For instance the creation of a list of skilled, experienced people willing to work as locums backed by earmarked funds for higher wages could assist to alleviate the negative impact of secondment.
3. Funding providers need to invest in learning and development towards positive governance and effective human and financial resource management.

Issue 3

Inadequate funding and multiple accountabilities

Major funding programs such as Department of Community Services (DoCS) Community Services Grants Program (CSGP) have not had an increase in core funding since 1989. Different and multiple accountability processes from different government funding programs is also a major issue.

Background Reasons/Concerns:

- There are historical anomalies of service funding that date back to the early 1980's. Funding programs of human services departments such as DoCS, Health, DADHC each have different formulas to allocate funding. Federal government departments fund inconsistently across areas.
- There is a lack of recognition of the cost of management. CSGP has not had an increase in core funding in 15 years, yet it provides the core management role of many small organisations and supports a range of other programs. Management accountability responsibilities have increased greatly in this time.
- Most small organisations receive funding from a range of programs. One SONG member organisation has ten staff and nine funding sources - this is not unique. Most organisations have at least three funding sources. Each program has its own accountability requirements necessitating management time and responsibility.
- There is little research on differential funding levels both geographically, or within similar service areas, or in terms of reasonable levels of funding required to maintain current service levels. There are no comparisons between the value of "big" versus "small".

- NCOSS has worked with the NSW Government to reduce compliance costs across funding programs. Whilst results are still scant on the ground, it is important to note that concerted effort is being made with the centre of Government and that there is some support within Government for reducing the scandalous level of inappropriate compliance requirements.

Resulting Impact on small NGOs

Small community organisations are struggling to provide viable management and administrative support to existing core services and have increasing difficulty in supporting the management of additional project funding, or new service program needs. The trend towards fixed term funding impacts negatively on management and planning for small NGOs.

Funding disparity mean that for instance some programs / organisations are funded for administration and rent and others are not.

Possible Responses:

1. Increase in CSGP and other core funding across the state to provide accurate funding for management and administration.
2. Development of formula approaches for appropriate core funding for different types of services in different localities sources and outcome requirements of Government departments.
3. Research into the funding inequities that exist.

Issue 4

Government trend to fund one large regional project rather than several small projects across localities.

The trend of government funding towards larger organisations puts pressure on small community based NGOs to build consortiums, amalgamate or miss out. The current political and economic environment values “large” over “small. This trend can result in a loss of diversity in services, loss of grassroots participation in decision making and loss of commitment to working towards common community goals. It appears to be in contradiction to the express commitment of government to strengthening communities and building capacity.

Background Reasons/Concerns:

- Government departments and decision makers often favour funding large organisations over small. The Industry Assistance Commission (1994) estimated that very small agencies comprised around 30% of the sector but received less than 2% of all government funding. By contrast very large organisations comprised less than 0.5% of the sector but received 28% of available funding. The sheer size of the sector is one reason that Government Departments want to deal with fewer individual organisations in terms of accountability and similarity of standards of service delivery.
- There is a lack of understanding and appreciation by decision-makers of the breadth of benefits that productive small organisations bring to local communities, economies and infrastructure. And there is a lack understanding and trust of the particular strengths of small NGOs by many government bureaucrats.

- There is a lack of understanding by current government departments of the history, credibility and spirit of diversity of the many smaller organisations that arose from local community pressure of needs.
- Government departments are increasing their demands for services to look the same - professional standards, evaluation processes, strategic plans, performance indicators, and other measures in order to prove their worthiness for ongoing assistance.
- Often decisions are made by senior levels of government to only fund a project across a region, restricting the possibility of community input into service delivery in their local area (for instance the Western Sydney Aboriginal Child Youth and Family Strategy).

Resulting impact on small NGOs:

Small NGOs are being pressured to form consortiums or compete with each other regarding expressions of interest and competitive tendering.

Small NGOs can be by-passed for funding, even when they are already doing fine work in the area nominated by the funding program.

Possible Responses:

1. Meetings need to take place with larger organisations through peaks or FONGA to facilitate understanding and develop cooperation between small organisations and government departments. Strategies need to be developed to facilitate better understanding and trust that permeates all levels of bureaucracy
2. The market needs to be managed in such a way that Government gives some structural guarantees that small NGOs will get a fair share of tenders etc. (NCOSS believes that this is essential if we are to arrest the policy directions that Government funders are continuing to take)

3. There needs to be more comparative research assessing the different impact and costing structures on the community of small compared to large organisations
4. The value of small NGOs must be documented for their broader contribution to social justice and capacity building in communities

Issue 5

Expectation to manage short term projects and be sustainable through private sector funding

More and more funding programs are one to three years' duration with an expectation that outcomes will be sustainable.

Background Reasons/Concerns:

- Government bodies are moving more towards fixed term funding that is outcome prescriptive. Program funding has increasingly become one to three years. Government priorities and plans will often change within the period so that projects may not be able to re-new their funding at the end of the period, regardless of the quality of outcomes.
- Funding for innovation or new projects is almost non-existent. There is increased reliance on funding from schemes such as CDSE (Community Development Expenditure Scheme), although this scheme does not have equitable resources across NSW. The 'mutilation by 1,000 cuts' of the Area Assistance Scheme has had major impact on the sector's ability to develop sustainable projects, which in turn has impacted on marginalised communities.
- There is a significant trend in the social policy arena today for greater corporate responsibility, mutual obligation, and partnerships. Private sector fundraising and partnerships with business are perceived as desirable for small NGOs to provide sustainability for their future. Some issues have 'more appeal' to private sector for funding. Local needs may not be addressed as private sector often wants their 'pet project' undertaken.

- Tax deductibility status (DGR) is inequitably and illogically spread across the sector (three of six neighbourhood centres in one area have it, the others determined ineligible).

Resulting impacts on small NGOs

Short term funding has major impact on small organisation's ability to plan and maintain quality staff. Financial viability can be threatened as projects come and go.

There is a tension for small NGOs between demonstrating capacity in applying for new grants and the time and work involved in each EOI.

Outcome focussed funding does not allow organisations to work within their own frame of reference and their reason for being. Government driven agendas are not necessarily the agendas of the service organisations that already exist.

Ownership of projects may be taken away from the organisation and promoted more formally by government and private sector who want the kudos and 'brands' applied to any advertising or products of the service (Families First for instance).

Larger corporations want bigger, newer partnerships. What is of benefit locally is often not a 'big enough profile' at the corporate level. The efforts required to compete for corporate money detracts/constrains service delivery to existing clients/communities, and often goes not gain local results.

Possible Responses:

1. Research needs to be undertaken to evaluate the value and impact of short term funding.
2. More funding programs to be open to broader outcomes.
3. All organisations in the human service arena need tax deductibility status to attract donations and to be able to apply for money from philanthropic trusts.

4. Studies need to be undertaken to explore models of ‘whole of community’ approach not just ‘whole of government’. This could mean that public and private sector work together to develop a compact and establish structures that would foster a more diverse range of funding sources administered in a variety of ways so that small human service organisations can be considered according to their needs.
5. Studies need to be undertaken to establish models of corporate partnerships that take account of smaller organisations and locally identified priorities.

Issue 6

Stresses on Community Management

Community management as a model of governance is both a strength and a weakness of the sector but there is little recognition and valuing of the many benefits to local communities and a significant tool of capacity building and community strengthening.

Background Reasons/Concerns:

- Community management is the means by which local people can directly participate in the direction of their community service organisation and needs to be valued more by government.
- The number and complexity of management tasks and accountability requirements have increased dramatically in the past decade. The level of knowledge and skill required of committees and paid managers is significantly greater.
- There are inherent dilemmas in clients/volunteers participating in management, however the “greater good” is to support and empower their participation for the skills that can develop from this experience.
- Marginalised groups, especially indigenous groups, can have the greatest difficulties in managing an organisation due to varying levels of skills, access to information and pressures in the individuals in their daily lives. Yet it is these communities where it is most important to have community based self-determining services and projects.

Resulting impact on small NGOs:

There are increased responsibilities on managers and service coordinators, as well as committee members, given the increased legislative and funding accountability requirements.

The demands to run “like a business is killing many small organisations who cannot or will not comply ... as complying may mean losing the soul of a caring community (Onyx & Williams 2002)”.

Possible Responses:

1. Research into and promotion of models working in local areas to support marginalised communities in managing their projects eg ATSI organisations.
2. Government to resource regional and local structures with management training and resourcing as an ongoing need and not a one off funding option.
3. TAFES and universities and peak bodies need to develop sustainable resourcing links with local organisations re community management.
4. Recognition of the financial costs of accountability requirements means more funding is required for administration both financial and general in formulas for funding small NGOs.
5. Conglomerate models of management at the local level need to be further researched for their value eg NSW Women’s Refuge Network is now sponsoring a number of refuges through critical phases. There needs to be an evaluation of this strategy including the loss of community members participating in the direction and management of these organisations.

Voice for SONG and Peak Bodies

As stated previously Voice for SONG's role is complementary to the role of the NCOSS and other peak bodies.

Voice for SONG recognises that NCOSS and other peaks have always, and will continue to, advocate for small community organisations.

Voice for SONG emerged from the realisation that despite the advocacy of peak bodies the direct voice of small community organisations was often missing from key policy meetings, papers and conferences that were influencing the future of small community organisations. The reasons for this included:

- a) small community organisations having perceived lower status than other organisational types
- b) small community organisations having minimal resources to participate
- c) most small community organisations not seeing their role as involving advocacy and liaison at the state sector level and the forming of relationships with high level decision-makers, as such activities compete for time and energy with local service delivery goals
- d) the value, efficiencies and effectiveness of small community organisations were not adequately appreciated.

Because of the lack of understanding of small community organisations and their value, Voice for SONG was formed to support a more comprehensive understanding and to promote inclusion in discussions about their future.

Voice for SONG Strategy has been as follows:

- a) Voice for SONG took on as its main focus raising the profile of small community organisations and promoting the recognition of their value,

efficiencies and effectiveness. It did not take up lobbying as its primary focus.

- b) Voice for SONG took into account the climate where councils, government departments and businesses were merging. Voice for Song decided it would not be realistic to use as its main strategy the lobbying for the survival of small community organisations. Clearly small community organisations and “small” in general were not understood or valued adequately for government decision-makers to determine that the way forward was to separately better resource individual organisations.
- c) Voice for SONG viewed its role of promoting the value, efficiencies and effectiveness of small community organisations as complementing activities carried out by peaks.
- d) Voice for SONG also built cooperative relationships with other small community organisations, peaks, large NGOs, government and business. Voice for SONG has raised conflictual issues but has not been antagonistic and has sought to engage large NGOs, government and business. Rather than criticise large NGOs, Voice for SONG has promoted small NGOs.
- e) Voice for SONG’s resources were limited and the strategy described above was seen as the best way to use the resources.

The success of the Voice for SONG strategy

- f) Voice for SONG has influenced widespread discussion on the value and issues of small community organisations.
- g) Voice for SONG has been a catalyst for the SNOW Project, the LCSA-Odd Socks and has created a safer environment for small community organisations to raise their issues. Voice for SONG has also been invited to and spoken at many conferences.
- h) While Voice for SONG has not stopped the government's move towards favouring large NGOs, it has contributed to more discussion and opportunity to challenge the process.
- i) Voice for SONG has been supported by a range of groups. Without the support of Western Sydney Community Forum,(WSCF), NCOSS and the Local Community Services Association (LCSA) (all from the early stages) and a range of other peaks, as well as large NGOs, government departments including Premiers and DoCS, and also TAFE, Voice for SONG would not still be in existence, and would certainly not now be a statewide initiative.
- j) Peak organisations have been increasingly proactive in working as a part of Voice for SONG to achieve its goals.
- k) The success also needs to be viewed with recognition that Voice for SONG had no resources for coordination and much of the work from Voice for SONG participants has been achieved through unpaid hours.

Opportunities

- a) If resources had been available in the past 6 years, much more would also have been achieved. There have been many groups and individuals who have wanted to support Voice for SONG but without funded coordination, participation from these groups has not been possible. With the increased recognition of Voice for SONG, the movement to a statewide initiative and increased support from NCOSS, it will now be possible to realise much more.
- b) Much can be achieved through working with NCOSS in a complementary role in the future. Voice for SONG believes that promotion of the value of small community organisations needs to be a key strategy. NCOSS advocates for small organisations but it does not necessarily see the promotion of the value of small community organisations as a key strategy.

NCOSS views its role as:

- advocating for managed markets so small community organisations have a future in government funding. This involves government practises that are inclusive of small community organisations
- working with clusters of small community organisations for greater capacity
- facilitating consensus within the community sector around a common vision in 20 years time, including the role and relationship of and between small, medium and large NGOs.

Voice for SONG will continue to work with NCOSS and other peaks to advocate for more resources for small community organisations so that they can continue to have their independence.

Moving Forward/Conclusion

Many of the issues raised in this paper have been acknowledged in a number of arenas over many years. Attempts at tackling the issues have been made in various ways through the efforts of many individuals, groups and organisations across community, government and business sectors.

Addressing the issues effectively will involve further cooperation from all sectors - community, government and business. The issues will not be successfully addressed without the inclusion of all community organisations in the cooperative efforts and substantially increased recognition of the value of small community organisations.

Voice for SONG emerged because of the lack of recognition of the value, efficiencies and effectiveness of small community organisations (in an environment where the general trend is to value large organisations over small organisations across all sectors). It promotes and advocates for the inclusion of small community organisations in decision-making processes regarding their future. These issues are part of Issue No. 1: Visibility - described in this report. Therefore in the initial stages Voice for SONG's strongest emphasis will be on the tackling of these issues.

Voice for SONG will therefore seek to ensure healthy democratic, vibrant, inclusive communities through the sustainability of small community organisations by:

promoting the recognition of the value, efficiencies and effectiveness of small community organisations (in a climate that values large organisations over small organisations across all sectors)

being a vehicle for information exchange, discussion, consultation and advocacy on key policy, program and service delivery issues affecting small community human service organisations.

encouraging small community organisations to take leadership roles

connecting and developing cooperative and collaborative relationships between small community organisations, medium and large NGOs, peaks, government, business and the general community to progress issues for small community organisations.

working with key peak groups such as NCOSS to ensure that all levels of government are aware of key policy and sector development issues for small community organisations. While Voice for SONG acknowledges that NCOSS and other peaks have always and will continue to represent and advocate for their member organisations, including small community organisations, Voice for SONG aims to have a complementary and non-competitive role with NCOSS and other peaks. Voice for SONG will lobby NCOSS and other peaks to advocate for the benefit of small community organisations.

being a catalyst that influences others - and/or supporting the efforts of others to take leadership in progressing issues for small community organisations.

There are criticisms of small community organisations. As we progress it is important to have responses to these criticisms.

In the past six years there have certainly been many groups who have indicated a desire to support the cause. However, it has been hard to take up offers as there has been no funding to coordinate action across the sector around representation, recognition, promotion of value, potential and sustainability of small community organisations. Coordination that has taken place has not been part of core funded activities and has added additional stress to individuals and organisations involved. While NCOSS is now providing the secretariat for the group, additional funds and resources are required to support the coordination activities.

The more the value, potential and way forward for small community organisations is clear, the more resources will come to address coordination - and the more small community organisations and the communities they represent will be strengthened.

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Appendices to the Original SONG Issues Paper (July 2005)

Attachment 1

Characteristics of the small community based, human service organisations

Geographically:

They are local (suburban, urban, rural, remote) local government wide, sub regional (two or more local government areas, or regionally based (6 or more local government areas), or some statewide organisations;

Financially:

They are primarily dependent on a range of government revenue/funding from either one source or multiple sources. They have a range of funding from below \$100,000 to below \$1 million. They have a small percentage component of fundraising and donations but their capacity is very limited by the nature of their client/service focus.

Size:

They are considered small in three categories of finances and employment of paid workers: under \$100,000 total income, employing at least one worker (either full time or part time may increase up to 2 -3 employees); under \$500000, employing up to 4-5 workers (either full time or part time may increase numbers up to 8-10); and under \$1 million, employing 8-10 workers (either full time or part time may increase numbers from 15 - 20 employees)

Community Management/Governance:

They are mostly managed through incorporated associations (under Dept of Fair Trading), while some are non profit companies limited by guarantee (under ASIC), and a few a Cooperatives (under Cooperative Societies Act). This means that all have annual general meetings, are independently audited, create annual reports to various levels of detail, and have elected members of the community of locality or interest as their boards of management. There are no formal training requirements or skill levels required. Membership of management is voluntary and interest focussed.

However community management is a cornerstone of small NGOs and as such can reflect the diversity within particular communities. This model has been criticised but with no real options 'out there' to do it differently. If locality and interest issues is a form of knowledge then community management can be seen as the best way to access this knowledge through community participation of individuals in those areas of knowledge.

Membership/Volunteers:

Most of these organisations encourage participation by their client/target group in a volunteering capacity in both the management and delivery of some aspect of their different project areas. There are often steering groups, working parties, sub-committees to promote, support and advise on service delivery. However they are not organisations of people established for the specific purpose of mutual benefits of its members as other third Sector categories.

Partnerships/Funded Agreements for Service Delivery:

All receive local and/or state and/or federal government funding in cash and/or kind. Many have multiple sources of government funding and therefore have different funding accountability mechanisms. Most receive inadequate core levels of funding to resource their management component and many receive project funding, and small grants with very little, if no, emphasis on corporate related costs of managing. The emphasis on possible business partnerships is problematic for these small organisations as there is not the infrastructure of resources, expertise, or personnel to assist this process. More importantly in many localities there is not the business size - larger corporations who can donate or be partners.

Legislative Accountability

There is a plethora of corporate responsibility as legal entities, there are child protection and disclosure issues for volunteers and workers, there are occupational health and safety requirements, there are anti-discrimination legislation, and duty of care requirements that also effects the Sector.

Employment Accountability

There is EEO legislation, industrial relations concerns, awards across a number of different areas of work, enterprise agreements, issues of supervision, appraisal, discipline and grievance, as well as professional development training and support..

Diversity of Client/Service Group

As pointed out in the paper the client groups of these organisations are often people who are from the most disadvantaged and marginalised in our society. Their resources are limited, their choices are few and the poverty of their existence pervasive. Sometimes they are not so poor but certainly not part of the mainstream in either its values and/or ability to normalise or pathologise human behaviours and lifestyles.

Service Development, Community Development & Social Justice

The community services sector, particularly small localised organisations that have grown out of the needs of their communities, have been developed by residents, council workers and community workers, from submissions to government for funding. There are creative tensions between service delivery, research and advocacy. In the current climate advocacy is seen as unacceptable - somehow biting the hand that feeds you rather than an open dialogue about needs and issues that are emerging. How best to address such concerns in a collaborative rather than contesting way is a vexed issue for the small NGO sector.

Social justice is an important platform of the work in this sector in order to work towards redressing disadvantage and empowering people without a voice to be heard and for their needs to be recognised. This is often devalued and dismissed as “radical fringe elements” rather than looking beyond fears and to recognise needs and issues of marginalised groups in our society.

Who we aren't - the parameters of this discussion paper

In terms of locality based, community managed human services, the organisations such as sporting clubs, activity/interest groups, service clubs, educational associations, and churches are not seen to be part of the focus of this paper. Lyons' research that incorporates all of the above categories as part of the same Third Sector creates some false parameters that confuse the issues, concerns and difficulties, in addressing what is needed for the sustainability of small, localised, community based, human services organisations. We are a part of this sector that relies heavily on government funding and government policy directions for our financial and organisational sustainability. "Lumping us in" with trade unions, political organisations, sporting bodies, friendly societies, building societies, credit unions and religious organisations is deceptive.

The existence of locally managed human service organisations arises from: our historical beginnings; the nature of our client groups; the nature of our roles; our work in our communities of locality and/or interest. Our organisational development, maintenance and viability, are fundamentally different from the rest of the Third Sector. Our primary focus is towards social justice for those people in the community who are marginalised and experience exclusion/invisibility at times in their lives, and sometimes for all of their lives. We are primarily dependent on cooperation, partnership and funding from government. Our roles are often not seen as valid by sections of the community with views that would judge and push certain people to the edges of our society, and our organisations are often labelled "rat bags" or "softies" and so on.

Attachment 2

The Third Sector Comparisons

According to a Mark Lyons' (2001) widely accepted frame of the Third Sector there are:

- An estimated 700,000 Australian community organisations with the majority having budgets under \$1 million and operating at the local level.
- 65% of all Australians over the age of 14 belong to one or more community groups (ABS 2000).
- Community organisations contribute 3.3% to Australia's gross domestic product (GDP) (IAC 1994).
- Community organisations provide employment for over 600,000 Australians.
- Australia's not for profit sector represents 6.8% of the labour force and almost 12% of private employers.
- Community volunteering contributes an estimated \$42billion a year to the Australian economy (ABS 2004).

Not for profit organisations have approximately 30 million memberships because many Australians belong to several organisations.

Lyons' Third Sector in total is worth \$51,582 million in operating expenditure of which 16% is government funded; 72% is fees and sales and .05% is fundraising; and has 633,758 employees. (p.31 Lyons 2001) All of these figures are based on 1995/96 financial year. However the small community based, human service organisations within this sector are a combination of a few of these areas, possibly all of community services, all of other human services, some arts and culture, some recreation. Combined this represents of the 1995/96 figures 8.7% (\$4497 Million of the total \$51582 million) of total operational income with overall government contribution from funding to these sections representing 55% (\$4769million) of the total government grants received of \$8671 million to the whole of this Third Sector. Total number of employees represent 23.8% (151329) of total 633,758 employed persons in this part of the Third

Sector. However the actual percentage of these sub sectors that are small compared to large is not really known.

There are as many similarities as differences in small not for profit community based, human service organisations reliant on government funding that are considered part of a much broader not for profit "Third Sector". Mark Lyons' in his "Third Sector" analysis of 1995/96 information, sees the total national expenditure worth \$51,582million and employs 633,758 people (p31 Lyons 2001). Attachment 2 to this paper compares the different expenditure and employment size of each part of the third sector by the categorising in Lyons analysis of: Community Services, Health, Education, Education related activities, Other Human Services, Religious Organisations, Arts & Culture, Sport & Recreation, Interest organisations, Economic Cooperation Agencies and Philanthropic intermediaries.

This information is based on national figures, not broken down by State, or size of organisation. These figures obviously do not reflect the current context of increased government funding to larger charities and church based organisations who in Lyons' analysis in 1995/95 received very little government funding except for nursing homes and child care services. The religious organisations' foray into direct delivery of locality based community services is a phenomenon of the last decade, in particular with federal funding, but increasingly state funding. In Lyons' analysis in 1994/5 Religious Organisations were not in receipt of government funding and represented only 1.7% (\$892 million) of the total expended income in the Third Sector.

What these figures in attachment 2 do highlight is that the bulk of the funds in the Third Sector are in the sub categories of Sport, Interest Organisations and Economic Cooperation agencies totalling \$34,417million which is 67% of total income of this sector.

The employee base here is 199,713 which is 32% of Third Sector employees and in receipt of only 7.3% of government funding that is \$601million dollars of \$8189million in total. Lyons' research creates some false parameters that confuse the issues and concerns and difficulties in addressing what is needed for the sustainability of this part of the Third Sector.

To continue to create this broad classification for comparison across other industries according to the industrial classification system of ANZSIC (Australian & New Zealand Standard Industry Classifications) without better refinement of sub categories or adding new categories to ANZSIC, does not do justice to the needs of the small, localised community based human services organisations. This sub sector relies heavily on government funding and government policy directions for their financial sustainability. “Lumping them in” with trade unions, political organisations, sporting bodies, friendly societies, building societies, credit unions and religious organisations is deceptive.

Community Services: (are small, locally based, and have diverse client groups, as well as community development organisations and overseas aid agencies) This sector is worth \$3700 million (0.07% of the Third Sector) of operating expenditure of which 52% (\$1919million) is government funded; 21% is fees and sales; and 28% is fundraising; and has 132,247 employees which represents 21% of total employees in the Third Sector. (There is a .95% operational deficit. (Table 4.1 p 40 op cit).

Health: (non profit hospitals, nursing homes and emergency services) is worth \$4201 million (1.1% of Third Sector) of operating expenditure of which 47% (\$1964million) is government funded; 50% is fees and sales and .03% is fundraising; and has 111484 employees which represents 18% of total employees in the Third Sector. There is a 1.01% operational surplus. (Table 5.1 p 45 op cit).

Education: (mostly universities) are worth \$6138 million (0.12% of Third Sector) of operating expenditure of which 52% is government funded; 37% is fees and sales and .06% is fundraising; and has 134569 employees which represents 21% of total employees in the Third Sector. There is also 1% operational deficit. (Table 6.1 p 49 op cit).

Education related activities: (parent associations, university unions, research organisations) are worth \$870million (0.01 % of Third Sector) of operating expenditure of which 21% is government funded; 60% is fees and sales and .06% is fundraising; and has 9265 employees which represents 1.5% of total employees in the Third Sector. There is also 9.2% operational deficit. (Table 6.2 p 49 op cit) There is also a 9% operational deficit. (Table 6.2 p 49 op cit).

Other Human Services: (housing, employment & training, legal services and community transport) are worth \$363 million (0.007% of Third Sector) of operating expenditure of

which 45% is government funded; 53% is fees and sales and .02% is fundraising; and has 12405 employees which represents 1.9% of total employees in the Third Sector. There is also an operating surplus of 3.5%. (Table 7.1 p 52 op cit).

Religious Organisations: is worth \$892 million (0.017% of Third Sector) of operating expenditure of which there are no government funds; fees and sales that are mixed with 101% from fundraising; and has 17000 employees which represents 2.6% of total employees in the Third Sector. There is an operational surplus of 12.2%. (Table 8.1 p 58 op cit).

Arts & Culture: is worth \$434 million (0.008% of Third Sector) of operating expenditure of which 40% is government funded; 49% is fees and sales and .08% is fundraising; and has 6677 employees which represents 1% of total employees in the Third Sector. There is an operating surplus of 7.4%. (Table 9.1 p 62 op cit).

Sport & Recreation: (sporting and social and recreation clubs and associations) is worth \$5942 million (0.11% of Third Sector) of operating expenditure of which 0.016% is government funded; 101% is fees and sales and .045% is fundraising; and has 98341 employees which represents 15.5% of total employees in the Third Sector. There is an operational surplus of 9%. (Table 10.1 p 70 op cit).

Interest organisations: (professional associations, trade unions, trade and business associations, public interest associations, political parties and other interest organisations) is worth \$3002 million (0.058% of Third Sector) of operating expenditure of which 0.16% is government funded; 72% is fees, membership and sales and 2.8% is fundraising; and has 46982 employees which represents 7.4% of total employees in the Third Sector. There is an operational surplus of 8.2%. (Table 11.1 p 81 op cit).

Economic Cooperation Agencies (includes friendly societies, building societies, cooperatives, credit unions mutual insurance companies, bodies corporate): are worth \$25473 million (49% of Third Sector) of operating expenditure of which 0.13% is government funded; 87% is fees and sales, and has 54390 employees which represents 8.5% of total employees in the Third Sector. There is an operational surplus of 23%.

Philanthropic intermediaries: is worth \$82 million (.15% of Third Sector) with operating expenditure of which 3.6% is government funded; 1.2% is fees and sales and 76% is

fundraising; and has 434 employees which represents 0.068% of total employees in the Third Sector. There is an operational deficit of 2.5%. (Table 13.1 p 94 op cit)(These figures are based on the tables in Mark Lyons Third Sector 2001).

Attachment 3

Historical Context of Small NGOs & Government Policies

The development of locality based human service organisations over the last thirty years, has most often arisen from locally expressed needs, direct advocacy and submissions from residents, representative client groups and existing organisations. At different times in different political climates governments have taken the initiative to name social policy areas and invite organisations to develop local auspice eg Australian Assistance Plan, Children's Services - both federal initiatives, while in NSW it was the Area Assistance Schemes, Community Transport initiatives, Place Management, Families First etc...

Mostly small locally based organisations more readily respond to government initiatives and continue to take the lead in developing appropriate projects, usually in consultation with community members in response to expressed needs.

Since the mid 80's larger organisations (church and charity based) initially responding to Federal/State shared Government funding programs under HACC and SAAP as well as emergency assistance relief, and drug & alcohol treatment and rehabilitation, started to receive substantial funding. As these larger organisations grew in size their capacity to seek other smaller funding sources from State governments started to create a squeeze on the ability of smaller organisations to compete for any new dollars from government. These larger organisations also have a capacity to fundraise and increase their management core with monies raised elsewhere and we, as smaller organisations, are finding it harder to compete.

In the last 15 years the greater funding accountability within government has possibly been the most significant downward pressure from government. There have been a number of inquiries and investigations of local councils and various government departments, with both State and Federal Auditor Generals wanting increased accountability, increased transparency, as well as improvement in productivity and

efficiency savings from government departments themselves. These inquiries questioned politicians having a say or making recommendations about funding, even though it has been a long held tradition of the political process.

Accountability criteria that had been traditionally used for physical infrastructure such as roads and buildings, is now being applied to human service infrastructure resulting in competitive tendering, and expressions of interest replacing submission/needs based funding frameworks. The time and resources needed to manage and compete in the new policy frameworks have left us smaller organisations struggling to be part of the play. “Big is better” is creeping into the political decision-making without consideration for the value of small community based organisations. The “louder voices” are being heard.

The development of human services over the last thirty years, particularly in the 70’s and 80’s has most often arisen from locally expressed needs, direct advocacy and submissions from residents, representative client groups, and existing organisations. There is evidence for this in the development of migrant resource centres, regional peaks, family support services, out of school hour services for children, youth refuges, women’s services, occasional child care, neighbourhood centres and youth centres.

At different times in different political climates governments have taken the initiatives to name social policy areas and invite organisations to develop local auspice eg Australian Assistance Plan, Children’s Services - both federal initiatives, while in NSW it was the Area Assistance Schemes, Community Transport initiatives, Place Management, Families First etc... However the reality is that mostly small locally based organisations could more readily respond to government initiatives and continued to take the lead in developing appropriate projects, usually in consultation with community members.

Health funding to non- government sector, to both large and small organisations, has impacted on what government expects of NGOs. Health funding was centralised for many years and this provided more direct access to decision making and to developing a shared understanding between government and service providers of the major issues. However regionalisation of health funding in the late 80’s, saw Area Boards and executives struggling to understand the nature and history of NGOs. Consequently the “looking glass” became focussed around efficiencies and standards more familiar to

their own type of environments, and before too long these NGOs were expected to be mere extensions of government rather than independent community controlled services. This tension continues to exist and NGOs demonstrate their independent worth. This has spread to other government funding providers and the pressures on small NGOs has increased. Without additional financial resources and training to both professionalise and address standards and quality provision, this pressure has often clouded the localised flexibility of organisations to respond to the specific needs of their own localities.

Since the mid 80's larger organisations initially responding to Federal/State shared Government funding programs under HACC and SAAP as well as emergency assistance relief, and drug & alcohol treatment and rehabilitation, started to receive substantial funding. As they grew in size their capacity to seek other smaller funding sources from State governments started to create a squeeze on the ability of smaller organisations to compete for the new dollars from government. These organisations also had a capacity to fundraise and increase their management core with monies raised elsewhere and smaller organisations were finding it harder to compete.

“Needs based planning” was the catchcry of the 80's both from regional bodies, local areas as well as from governments, to address inequities that were arising from the submission based mode of funding organisations - ie loudest voice received the most in the political process. Western Sydney particularly had missed out comparatively to other parts of Sydney and rural and remote communities were hardly in the figuring.

Greater funding accountability has possibly been the most significant downward pressure from government in the last decade. After decades of inquiries and investigations of local councils and various government departments, both State and Federal Auditor Generals wanted increased accountability, increased transparency as well as improvement in productivity and efficiency savings from government departments themselves. They no longer tolerated politicians having a say or making recommendations about funding even though it has been a long held tradition of the political process. Accountability criteria that has been traditionally used for physical infrastructure such as roads and buildings is now impacting on human service infrastructure and competitive tendering expressions of interests has replaced submission based funding.

It is also important to recognise how young the small NGO sector is and the recognition of the skills and value of the workers in this sector did not really occur until 1991 with the Social and Community Services Award was brought down.

Attachment 4

The History of Voice for SONG) (Small organisations non government)

Voice for SONG began as a coalition of workers in Western Sydney representing a wide variety of small non-government organisations based in and around the Blacktown LGA. Prior to the formation of this group, the coordinator of Blacktown Alcohol and Drug Family Service (BADFS) began to publicly raise the issue of small organisational survival as her own agency was under threat of closure. Other organisations then also began to raise these issues publicly, including Family Worker Training and Development, who was also had a key role in the development of Voice for SONG.

At the 1999 BADFS Annual General meeting a forum was held which promoted developing stronger relationships within the community sector. At this forum the coordinator shared her organisations sense of isolation and sense of lack of trust and sharing of vulnerabilities in the service network. She shared her experiences around the difficulties of retaining suitable staff when their hours were under constant threat of reduction and conditions were so poor. The agency had been unsuccessful in securing additional funding and there was no likelihood of core funding increases in the future.

Concerns began to emerge from some other organisations, who felt that they needed to compete with each other and larger welfare agencies. Similar themes were apparent that small organisations were not being valued and funded appropriately in a climate of economic rationalism. It was felt that a collective approach was needed and a smaller meeting was held with some of the participants from the AGM.

They decided to target other small agencies in the area to see if there would be enough interest in establishing a working group to define the issues at a local level and how they would work together to address them. Their mission became “to ensure the survival and development of small non-government, not for profit organisations,

through developing and implementing local strategies and promoting the development of a national body to represent them.”

Through the process of becoming a collective voice this group of workers were able to support each other, raise their individual issues at the monthly meetings and promote the value of small organisations through public forums and the media. To raise awareness of the potential and viability of small organizations in the interest of diverse community participation in decision making and the enhancement of community well being.

They began to challenge the culture of competition between agencies and they have been proactive in developing trusting cooperative relationships with other organisations, both small and large whilst advocating and lobbying for the sustainability of small non-government agencies as a national issue.

Without funding or a worker to coordinate Voice for SONG activities the group has been successful in raising the profile of small non-government agencies through conducting forums, holding combined AGMs, conference presentations and participating in research that has led to various publications being developed. They have built strong relationships with peak bodies such as Local Community Services Association (LCSA), Western Sydney Community Forum (WSCF), NSW Council of Community Services (NCOSS) and others, and as a group have had input into the COMPACT (NSW initiative to enhance relationships between Government and non-government organizations). They influenced many other organisations and activities, including LCSA’s publication “Odd Socks: Why the survival of small community organisations is critical”. They influenced the development and funding for the SNOW (Small Non-Government Organisations Working Together) Project (designed to explore strengths, issues and challenges faced by small NGOs in the Mt Druitt/Blacktown area and work with them to develop workable strategies that would support and assist them in enhancing their potential). They also were approached by Westpac who went on to provide pro bono human resource management training for workers in small NGOs in Western Sydney.

Voice for SONG has now become a regional movement and its membership now has representation from Blacktown, Penrith, the Blue Mountains and beyond. The aim is to become a stronger lobbying voice to further progress its agenda i.e. to support the survival of small NGOs in meeting local community needs.

Attachment 5

Opportunities: Social capital and Partnerships

1. Social Capital is a current government and public discourse that provides an opportunity for researching and promoting the value and potential of small community organisations

Research is being undertaken by ABS¹, the Productivity Commission, The Australian Institute of Family Studies and others to explore the policy implications of understanding social capital and the investment required by the whole community, but in particular the private and public sectors.

“Social capital combines a broader range of elements that hold a society together, and is associated with potential positive outcomes for both individuals and societies. At a time when the interdependence of many social problems has been recognised, social capital appears to offer different insights to assist with solutions (p1 ABS 2004).”

The ABS paper on Social Capital also identifies:

“finding a balance between governmental, business, communal and personal responsibility in different social and economic areas is a current major policy direction of governments in Australia.”

Since social capital is seen to be about resources available within local communities in networks of mutual support, reciprocity and trust and contributes to community strength (ABS 2004) it is important to recognise the importance of small locality based human service organisations. This ABS paper also acknowledges that there are other

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2004) Information Paper 1378.0 (www.abs.gov.au) *Measuring Social Capital an Australian Framework & Indicators.*

concepts that describe the way people and groups function that impact on society as a whole and the consequence is that in local communities these needs/effects are more evident. Such terms are: “social participation, attachment, inclusion, social exclusion, deprivation, and social cohesion (which) are so often used in research and the setting of social policy goals designed to mitigate social disadvantage and encourage economic and social development.” (p6 ABS 2004) yet there is no attempt to assess, let alone value the role of small NGO’s.

This discourse is extremely relevant to the survival of effective networks of small locality based human service organisations who can support and resource many of the individuals, families and groups who are the most marginalised, in need, and socially excluded in our society:

- These people need support to realise their potential for inclusion in diverse and creative communities concerned with addressing their needs;
- In reality it is not the mutual benefit interest groups and associations that make an effort to include those who are socially deprived.

It is the direct brief of government funded community based NGO’s to actively support services to meet the needs where:

“social exclusion exists, where people are not able to participate adequately. This may be due to denial or non realisation of access to social rights of citizenship, which results in a rupture of social bonds between the individual and society (p7 ABS 2004).”

2. Building and Strengthening Partnerships between small and large community organizations, government and business organisations

Such partnerships can be used to promote the value, potential, issues and ways forward for small community organizations. As well as promotion they can include activities that address research, policy development, improved practice that is inclusive of small community organizations. Some examples of possible activities are listed below:

- Organisation of forums promote and facilitate discussion and action on issues and ways forward for small community organizations. These activities can also support relationship building and understanding between

small and large organizations and between the different sectors. Strategies can also include activities that promote Small Community Organisations to the general public and development of mechanisms to raise their collective profile to also assist with fund-raising.

- Strengthening relationships between peak organisations and small organisations. Voice for SONG developed in part because its members did not feel adequately represented by peak bodies. They felt their voice was not being heard or adequately represented on issues even involving the future of small community organisations. A lack of voice or a specific body to represent small organisations is in itself a problem. Generally small organisations do not have the resources to organise themselves collectively. It takes time and resources to organise meetings, maintain contact, identify and engage supportive stakeholders, develop collective fundraising strategies, identify buildings, and activities to support any particular project or campaign. It is sustainable for short bursts but problematic for ongoing cooperation. Funding bodies do not see this work. It is often invisible and even open to challenge as to whether a particular government funding body may or may not see worth in this cooperation, and may even threaten withdrawal of funds if such effort is seen to take away from program funded objectives. So it is possible for regional organisations such as WSCF (which has taken this role for Voice for SONG since it began) to support some of the endeavours and even for Peak Organisations to consider ways of doing some of this collective cooperating to bring about a fairer deal for their members. However what is more likely required is a large investment of resources by all the players to establish better structures to represent this large and diverse sector.
- Development of understanding and agreements across sectors. For instance Government, NCOSS and other peaks can be in dialogue about a Compact with the private sector. This dialogue would consider ways of improving the whole of community approach to funding - its distribution and its capacity to meet the needs of a diverse community. Models of possible structures to collect, monitor, allocate and evaluate impact of funding, both public and private, along with a freeing up of the taxation rules, could see a very different future for human service provision.
- Stronger partnerships with universities across all areas to support promotional activities as well as research.

It also needs to be recognised that there are already extensive networks between organisations in the Sector that support the strategies named in this paper such as Western Sydney Community Forum, Illawarra Forum, NCOSS, Local Community Services Association, and other regional and local government wide organisations. However these organisations are also limited in their financial capacity to fund the kind of initiatives that are required to support the viability of the small community based human services sector.

Moving Forward

This paper has outlined the value, key issues and opportunities for the survival and realisation of potential for small community organisations. The committee welcomes any contribution that addresses any of the issues identified in this paper, or additional issues that can progress the goals. At the same time we also invite stakeholders to consider the following recommended priorities identified by members of Voice for SONG:

- **Continue promoting the value and potential of small community organisations.** In the last five years members of Voice for SONG have prioritised such activities. These strategies to date have been successful and need to remain a priority. The promotion is critical even within the community sector, where even many small community organisations may not fully understand their own value or have fully analysed and articulated the issues they face. The more the value and potential of small community organisations is highlighted, demonstrated and recognised, the more resources will be found to address their needs.
- **Provide opportunities for discussion, analysis and development of strategies that address criticisms of small community organisations.**
- **Research is needed to support understanding the value, potential, issues, needs and ways forward.**
- **Include social capital and related concepts in research activities and discourses on value and potential of small community organisations.**
- **Build and strengthen partnerships and relationships between small and large community organisations, government and business to progress issues for small community organisations.**
- **Access resources and develop strategies that support the linking and coordination of activities that promote their value and understanding of the issues they face.** In the last five years there have certainly been many groups who have indicated their desire to support the cause. However, it has been hard to take up these offers as there has been no funding to coordinate action across the sector. It has often been the small, struggling organisations themselves who have coordinated activities. Coordination that has taken place has not been part of core funded activities and has added additional stress to individuals and organisations

involved. The action plan therefore needs to consider how to address this issue of coordination.

- **Support activities that move towards an equivalent of a national body that represents small community organisations.** This may be included in the role of existing peak bodies or a separate body altogether. As previously stated, in the private sector small business has a voice at local, regional, state and national levels, and even have a State Minister for Small Business. There is recognition of their worth, there are awards for their efforts, there is acknowledgement in the media of their concerns.

Small Community Organisations are critical for our community and our society. They are critical not just for the services they provide but for the progression of healthy societies and for democracy itself. Stakeholders coming together to around this issue is an exercise in social capital itself. It involves the sharing of skills, resources and general capacities as well as the further development of mutual trusting, relationships to both strengthen small community organizations and our society as a whole.