

small

# Organisations gather, DETERMINED TO SURVIVE

*The* current economic and competitive climate has been providing a challenge for small not-for-profit organisations sometimes to the bottom line – a question of survival!. This concern resulted in 13 representatives of small organisations in and around Blacktown gathering together to discuss a way forward. The meeting was called by Blacktown Alcohol and other Drugs Family Services and Family Worker Training and Development Programme. The following service types were represented:

- youth
- child protection
- disability
- family support
- drug and alcohol
- mental health
- women
- regional resource

The increasing gap between large and small organisations is mirroring the increasing gap between rich and poor. This and a number of other issues at the local, state and national levels were identified and discussed :-

- inadequate funding increments
- how to manage potential award rises
- inability to compete with large organisations for new funding
- unrealistic expectations from funding bodies
- difficulty attracting and keeping skilled staff
- rent rises
- isolation
- little support from large non-government and government organisations with infrastructure issues in this changing climate
- lack of understanding and value of small not-for profit organisations.

There was consensus from the small organisations that we wanted to work *with* large organisations and our funders and other stakeholders to find ways forward. We are seeking innovative ways forward, not just economic rationalist solutions or take-overs.

We also discussed our need to review how we have been operating with each other. We need to collaborate more and come up with some collective responses while maintaining our separate identities. Some options include co-location, sharing of resources and joint submissions.

However, there need to be policies and strategies at state and national levels that support the survival and encourage the development of small organisations. After all, small businesses have separate lobby groups and their issues are regularly represented in the media. They are valued. We need the general public to have an increased understanding of what we do and our value, as well as an increased understanding in general of the community sector.

Small organisations are autonomous, innovative, flexible and responsive. We do not just provide a service. We also provide a voice for our clients and for issues affecting our community. In the current climate, this is particularly important and should not be lost. Our budget may be small but we represent large and diverse target groups. Many individual, local services are also unique in the State. Our community and not-for profit motives are so important in these times where for-profit motives seem to be increasingly dominating our society.

We know that there are movements happening in other areas. We know that NCOSS is working with some groups on these issues. There is also a group auspiced by VCOSS that has been formed to create dialogue and action in response to concerns over long- term viability of small organisations. They recently held a conference on these issues.

The Blacktown meeting also provided us with a sense that we are not alone, that it is not our fault that our service is struggling with this changing climate. Hence we also realised that creation of a climate where it is "safe" for small organisations to talk about our vulnerabilities (without fear of take-over or of being defunded) is critical. It has been this fear that has stopped us from coming together sooner. However for the sake of our clients, the future of small organisations, the community sector, and of our community as a whole - it is time now to speak out, be heard and work together.

We are really pleased that WSCF is committed to representing us and others on these issues. **For further information and/or to share your interest and ideas please contact Deborah Sharp.**

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