Social Services Sector (SSS) Design –

Reducing the Number of People Represented in Negative Social Statistics

Partial Funding

I am concerned about a Social Services Sector (SSS) that is generally inadequately funded. There are a large number of valuable providers and programmes staffed by experienced, qualified, and highly capable practitioners who are hamstrung by the various effects of inadequate funding. If the government were to close these programmes due to a real or perceived lack of achievement against government outcomes (ie: getting people off benefits and into employment) then a large number of needy and vulnerable people in our community would be un-supported. In addition to this, many of these agencies do important work that they are not funded to do, like advocating for clients who are unable to navigate government systems on their own for example. If these agencies ceased to exist based on their partially funded performance against government stipulated outcomes, many more vulnerable people in our communities would simply fall between the cracks.

Full Funding

I am also concerned about a SSS model that fully funds agencies to deliver high value outcomes. If this were to occur without the government committing more money to the sector, the outcome would be that the government would need to extract partial funding from the many to give full funding to the few. While this may result in a few agencies delivering high value outcomes, the SSS will inevitably be supporting far fewer people in our community, and the net outcome will be a reduction in the number/percentage of needy and vulnerable people in our community being supported to make significant, or even basic, changes in their lives.

Tip of the Iceberg

We work with a large number of people who have very few options and do not fit the funding criteria of our agency or of any other agencies. Many of these people/families have no income (ie: benefit has been cut etc.), no home, no food, no medication etc. We intentionally work with new clients to engage them with the range of services they require to help them achieve positive changes in their lives, but even with this approach our success rate for engaging clients in wider service s and programmes is about 20%. For this reason we know there are many individuals and families in our community who need help but are not supported. We know therefore that the SSS is only working with the tip of the iceberg.

Big Picture Approach

New Zealand has a big problem requiring a big response, but governments appear to be unwilling or unable to respond. The average New Zealander appears to view the average beneficiary as a 'bludger' who cannot be bothered helping themselves and just takes advantage of the system. While some beneficiaries are bludgers, most are either victims trying to survive and/or genuine people who have fallen on hard times and are trying to get their lives back on track. We know this because we work with them. We need government who have the courage to commit to a long term plan that will help to address intergenerational welfare dependency/lifestyle and the many causes and effects associated with this. I believe the solution would also need to be intergenerational with a commitment by government for a 20+ year plan for change. Some ideas and principles regarding how this plan might be developed follow:

Long Term Plan

There are four key suggestions for change:
1. Improve the ability for needy and vulnerable people to **access and engage** with services regardless of their circumstances or criteria.
2. Improve and streamline client's ability to **remain engaged** in services and programmes until significant life change has been achieved.
3. Improve opportunities for vulnerable and at risk people to **learn life skills** enabling better decision making and aspirational momentum.
4. Improve the motivation and ability for people who have successfully transitioned to Self Actualisation (or something similar), with the support of the SSS, to become **part of the solution** for others.

   Further detail regarding these topics below:

1) Access and Engagement

- Many people attempt to access support from government agencies (and some NGOs) only to be turned away because they do not fit their criteria, they have problems communicating or explaining their position etc. Some of these people find their way to other agencies that are able to provide advocacy support. In the majority of these cases our staff are able to support clients to communicate with government agencies to receive the support they are entitled to. The problem here of course is that this process involves double handling for government agency staff, additional and unnecessary stress for vulnerable and needy people, and a significant investment from our agency to help clients navigate this process. There is a significant opportunity here to increase productivity for government agencies and NGOs.

- It is well documented in academic literature that many people find it difficult to engage with government agencies due to the power paradigm, lack of knowledge or confidence, mistrust – real or perceived, mental health or socialisation problems etc. If a way could be found for

NGO staff to work closely with government agencies to be the 'front people' for clients attempting to engage with government agencies, then a lot of this double handling inefficiency could be resolved. *I do have ideas regarding how this might be achieved but will not go into detail at this point as I am trying to keep this document brief.*

- There are many government and NGO access points to social service. Clients are getting bounced from agency to agency, telling their story many times, being assessed and re-assessed, judged and turned away etc. It is no wonder many people fail to access the supports they need resulting in severely entrenched intergenerational welfare dependency and lifestyles. If a way could be found to have one main access point, for people to be accepted and supported regardless of their circumstances, to only have to tell their story and be assessed once, and to be connected with the supports they require to make long lasting and significant life changes, then fewer needy and desperate people would go back into their communities to fend for themselves unsuccessfully and unsupported. *I do have ideas regarding how this might be achieved but will not go into detail at this point as I am trying to keep this document brief.*

- I will share one idea: There are several Food Banks in our city. Some give food out every day without any assessment or referrals to supports that might help resolve client's problems and need for food support. Others are open 2-3 days per week with clients being assessed and referred to other services to help achieve life changes for clients. Some enable people to continue their negative lifestyles, while others lack the ability to provide services on a daily basis. All employ and duplicate staffing, buildings, draw funding from government and/or trusts etc. Essentially there is duplication of services and a breakdown in the ability for struggling people to engage with wider supports to achieve effective life change – and, over time, a reduction in the number of people requiring social services support. What if we had one food bank in our town run by the City Council – a non-bias and respected/trusted organisation? What if the front facing staff at the food bank were Social Workers who completed an initial assessment with new clients? What if clients were given food regardless of their circumstances, and the social workers used a relational approach to build rapport with clients and to encourage/support them to engage with other services?

2) Remaining Engaged

- Too many vulnerable and needy people turn up at food banks or the like once or twice a year only to return back to their struggling lives fending for themselves without positive and productive supports. If we had a system similar to the above mentioned city food bank model (and there are other similar concepts), then clients would only need to tell their story once and would build a rapport and relationship with one key worker who could support them through their journey of transformation/actualisation. Clients would not need to be assessed time and time again, tell their story to untold agencies, being bounced from place to place without consistency.

- There is a huge opportunity for increased productivity in the reduction of clients slipping in and out of 'the system', making progress and then falling back into old habits and routines, slipping through the cracks because multiple agencies are involved without one key worker taking responsibility etc.

3) Learning Life Skills

- Welfare dependency and welfare lifestyles are often underpinned by generations of negative mind-set and destructive beliefs and values. Children being led to alcohol and drugs by their parents for example, violence being handed down or taught/desensitised from one generation to the next because they know no other way, aspiring to be on a sickness benefit and living in a State House because they would never dare to dream or believe that they could have an education or get a decent job etc.

- I believe New Zealand is suffering, among other things, from a form of moral poverty where many people, families, and sometimes communities are lacking positive and productive role models. I believe the SSS has an opportunity to help provide a far greater number and range of mentoring type programmes to help individual, families, and communities develop beliefs and values that will help them make more positive and productive decisions, that will lead over time to reduced family violence, reduced addiction, reduced mental health problems and suicide, better educational achievement, more employable and responsible citizens etc.

4) Part of the Solution

- As people succeed within this new SSS model, opportunities could be created for those who have benefited from receiving support to become part of the SSS. Some of the most valuable workers/professionals are those who have experienced hardship, and this could be encouraged and supported so that the network of people in New Zealand proving support to the vulnerable and needy can grow through informal or formal, and professional or voluntary programmes and services that help New Zealander's on the bottom rung to have productive and constructive aspirations, and to be supported or connected into services and programmes that will help them achieve self actualisation.