

# A history of Neighbourhood and Community Centres in Queensland

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## Introduction

There is a saying about Neighbourhood Centres that goes along the lines of “if you have seen one Neighbourhood Centre.....you have seen one Neighbourhood Centre”. What the saying is suggesting is that each Neighbourhood Centre is vastly different from another. As each centre reflects the unique locality in which they are located, their activities and approach is different depending on the local community. Neighbourhood Centres are place-based and community-led organisations, based in a central point in their local area. Neighbourhood Centres are located across towns and cities across Queensland, from islands in the Torres Strait, to far-west mining towns, in tropical monsoon affected regions to agricultural areas and major cities on the east coast.

Because of each Neighbourhood Centre’s unique nature, they have often become an enigma for social policy makers, researchers, Government agencies and communications specialists. How do you define what Neighbourhood Centres are if each one is different? Is there a standard definition of a Neighbourhood Centre? How do we communicate what a Neighbourhood Centre is? An additional challenge is comparing Queensland’s Neighbourhood Centres to those across Australia and the world. Queensland’s unique geography and culture is interconnected with the way its centres operate. Even from a First Nations perspective, Queensland is the only state geographically located with the Torres Strait islands and its original people, culture and traditions. Queensland’s Neighbourhood Centres are difficult to define.

One way of defining what Neighbourhood Centres are is not through a formal definition, but through the telling of their story. Queensland’s Neighbourhood Centres are part of a worldwide movement of settlement houses and neighbourhood centres across the globe. They have been formed in the context of world events, social movements and the political environment of the state and nation. They have also been formed by the people that encapsulate the traditions and culture of the centres and the movement. Their methods of working with communities, advocacy for social change, strategies and beliefs embody the

principles of these community-led organisations working in local areas. In many ways, it is the history of Neighbourhood Centres that defines who and what they are.

This Queensland history of Neighbourhood Centres seeks to record the important movements, events, people, organisations and policies that have shaped the culture of the sector in the state. It is far from comprehensive and relies heavily on historical documents in archives, written histories from the sector and recollections from key people in the movement. Each record comes from a unique perspective however this history aims to bring these elements together as a narrative of how we came to be the sector we are today across the state. Additional information is invited for future revisions as we seek to tell our story to future generations of Neighbourhood Centre staff and volunteers as the journey of the movement continues.

### Settlement House Movement

While many point to the 1970's as the time when Neighbourhood Centres were birthed in Australia through the Australian Assistance Plan, community and welfare centres have existed in many forms in Australia's history over longer periods of time. Globally, Neighbourhood Centres find their origins as far back as the Settlement House movement in the 1880's and are still associated with the movement through the International Federation of Settlements and Neighborhood Centers (SIC).

As the industrial revolution rapidly progressed in the United Kingdom, poverty levels began to rise to extreme levels in East London. In 1883, *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London*<sup>1</sup> painted a picture of misery, squalor, crime and sickness in the heart of the city as the poor struggled with dangerous and unjust working conditions in factories owned by the upper classes. Published anonymously by the London Congregational Union, the publication painted a damning picture of the city's state and its neglect by not only Government officials, but the Church – the most preeminent Victorian institution. Its inward focus on building its institution and tokenistic welfare responses merely resulted in “the poor getting poorer, the wretched more miserable and the immoral more corrupt”<sup>1</sup>

In the midst of Whitechapel, stood St Jude's church, described by its Bishop as “the worst parish in my diocese, inhabited mainly by a criminal population, and one which has been, I fear, much corrupted by doles (unemployed)”<sup>2</sup> Its vicar Canon Samuel Barnett had been appointed to the church for 10 years and knew the efficacy of the parish framework, which emphasised the importance of living centrally in disadvantaged communities to fully understand their circumstances. Barnett's associations with Oxford University enabled him to rub shoulders with educated individuals with a desire for social change, including John Ruskin, Edward Tennison and Arnold Toynbee<sup>3</sup>. In these institutions, more socialist perspectives were being debated by educated clergy and others, considering the role of structural systems in society that lay beneath poverty, poor health and crime.

Along with his wife Harriett, Cannon Barnett planned to establish a facility in the middle of Whitechapel in a disadvantaged neighbourhood. There, University undergraduates and graduates would “settle” with the poor, sharing their knowledge with others while mutually

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<sup>1</sup> Mearns, A., & Preston, W. C. (1883). *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London: An Inquiry into the Condition of the Abject Poor*. W. Hall & Lovitt.

<sup>2</sup> Pimlott, J.A.R. (1935). *Toynbee Hall: fifty years of social progress 1884-1934*. J.M. Dent and sons Ltd.

<sup>3</sup> Williams, R. (1915). *The Settlement: A history of the University of Sydney Settlement and The Settlement Neighbourhood Centre 1891-1986*. The University of Sydney.

understanding the complexities of local living conditions. This approach would not only transfer skills to the local community through popular education, but enable research into the structural issues causing disadvantage to enable policy reform and social change. Barnett made his personal appeal to the Oxford Union to establish the “settlement” in 1883 and formed the University Settlement Association with the inclusion of Cambridge University soon after<sup>3</sup>. In 1884, the world’s first settlement house “Toynbee Hall” was opened in a disused refuge for boys and quickly attracted University students.

***'Nothing can be done for the people that is not done with the people'* – Canon Samuel Barnett**

Toynbee Hall became a hub of community activity. Social groups and clubs were established, classes were held in the arts, language, nature, home nursing and sociology, and locals were taught music. A library and art gallery were established, and free legal aid was offered. Toynbee Hall workers also advocated for workers’ rights in East London, including being active during the Dockers Strike in 1889<sup>3</sup>.

Discussions and debates of ideas were also encouraged, with Barnett believing Settlement Houses should be places where a broad spectrum of perspectives should be shared, analysed and welcomed. Despite being a Church of England Minister, he believed that Settlement Houses should not proselytise faith, but be a place of common humanity where people of all faiths or no faith could feel at home.

Toynbee Hall continues to operate today as a Settlement House/Neighbourhood Centre in East London offering referral, support, community activities and community-led research for social reform.<sup>4</sup>

Settlement Houses quickly spread throughout the UK and included Oxford House, Browning Hall, Mansfield House, New College Settlement, Edinburgh University Settlement and Bristol University Settlement.<sup>56</sup> As universities welcomed more women, Settlement Houses were established by them including The Women’s University Settlement founded in 1887<sup>7</sup>.

In 1888, Toynbee Hall was visited by Jane Addams who 5 years earlier had visited London to meet with Barnett’s associates at Oxford while seeking respite from a spinal condition<sup>8</sup>. The daughter of a Quaker Politician, Jane Addams received her education at Rockford Female Seminary and was instantly drawn to the writings of Leo Tolstoy and John Ruskin<sup>9</sup>. Seeking an expression of Christian humanitarianism, she investigated the Settlement House concept and sought mentoring from Samuel Barnett to establish a settlement in Chicago. Others from the United States desired the same with the first American House being established in New York in 1886 by Stanton Coit and another Women’s settlement in the same town in

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<sup>4</sup> Toynbee Hall. (n.d.). *About Us – Our History*. <https://www.toynbeehall.org.uk/>

<sup>5</sup> Ashley, P. (1911). University Settlements in Great Britain. *The Harvard Theological Review*, 4(2), 175–203. doi:10.1017/S0017816000007136

<sup>6</sup> Bruce, L. (2012). *Scottish Settlement Houses from 1886–1934* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Glasgow]. <https://theses.gla.ac.uk/3723/1/2012BrucePhD.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Black Friars Settlement. (n.d.). *About us*. <https://blackfriars-settlement.org.uk/about/>

<sup>8</sup> Addams, J. (1912). *Twenty Years at Hull House*. The Macmillan Company.

<http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/addams/hullhouse/hullhouse.html>

<sup>9</sup> Hamington, M. (2022). Jane Addams. In E. N. Zalta & U. Nodelman (Eds.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Stanford University. <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2022/entries/addams-jane/>

1889 by Vida Scudder. Addams established Hull House with Ellen Gates Starr in 1889 and her work became internationally renowned.

Recognising that Settlement Houses were place based and responded to the unique needs of their local community, Hull House was actively involved in improving the conditions of poor immigrants. Like Settlement Houses in the UK, Addams created an environment at the House that was open to all, encouraging those of all faiths, no faiths, races, backgrounds and circumstances to partake of community life together. Democracy and citizenship was encouraged. Lobbying was conducted to improve local sanitation to reduce illness, assistance offered for drug abuse, workers rights were advocated for and programs were offered to families such as playgroups and childcare. Art, music and theatre featured strongly as did community education. Low cost housing was soon purchased for disadvantaged women and Hull House's assets rapidly expanded over a number of blocks. Addams also addressed issues such as prostitution in her writings and played a key role in the women's suffrage movement. Her advocacy for World Peace led to her being the first American woman to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1931 and she was the founder of much of the modern social work movement.

News of Jane Addams spread to Queensland during her career with *The Brisbane Worker* reporting in 1928 that Jane Addams was the "Most Famous Woman in America"<sup>10</sup>. The *Courier Mail* reported her death in 1935, noting her many achievements including the establishment of Hull House with Ellen Starr Gates after visiting Toynbee Hall in the United Kingdom<sup>11</sup>.

Jane Addams was posthumously inducted into the Chicago Gay and Lesbian Hall of Fame in 2008, however her views on sexuality were never explicitly expressed but rather implied in the context of "Boston Marriages" – non-traditional, domestic relationships between two middle or upper-class women during the 1800-1900's.

By the mid 1890s there were fifty Settlement Houses in urban areas of the United States and by the turn of century there were more than a hundred recognized settlements. News stories about the Settlement House movement spread to Queensland in 1894, with articles appearing on Toynbee Hall in the *Rockhampton Bulletin*<sup>12</sup> and Hull House<sup>13</sup> in the *Brisbane Courier*. Additional Queensland stories ran in 1895 detailing the Settlement House movement in the UK starting with Toynbee Hall and Oxford House and spreading to the New York College Settlement<sup>14</sup> and Hull House in the United States<sup>15,16</sup>.

Of particular interest to Queensland's Newspapers was the role of women in the Settlement House movement, with many articles appearing under dedicated female sections of publications. The Settlements were also referred to as "Ladies Settlements", noting that settlement houses were established by women in Southwark in 1887, Mayfield in 1889<sup>17</sup> and

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<sup>10</sup> *The Worker*: monthly journal of the Associated Workers of Queensland. (1928, August 8). *The Worker*, 19.

<sup>11</sup> Jane Addams dead – Champion of World Peace. (1935, May 23). *Courier-Mail*, 13.

<sup>12</sup> Toynbee Hall. (1894, July 11). *Morning Bulletin*, 6.

<sup>13</sup> Feminine Notes. (1894, January 3). *Brisbane Courier*, 2.

<sup>14</sup> The Women's College Settlement, New York. (1895, July 6). *Queenslander*, 29.

<sup>15</sup> Ladies Settlements. (1895, March 16). *Queenslander*, 511.

<sup>16</sup> Social Settlements – American Examples. (1922, November 2). *Morning Bulletin*, 3.

<sup>17</sup> Ladies Settlements. (1895, March 16). *Queenslander*, 511.

a Female Congregationalist Settlement in Mansfield College, 1892<sup>18</sup>. In an article that featured under the women's section in the *Queenslander* in 1895, it describes the concept of Settlement Houses in the following terms:

*"While the College Settlement seeks to aid those among whom it has planted itself in purely social and educational ways, its main object is to bring young women of the educated classes into closer touch with their poorer brothers and sisters, in order that by personal experience of their ways and manners of life they may be able better to work out the great social problems of the age, and do their share towards the amelioration of existing conditions"*<sup>19</sup>.

In 1902, representatives from Settlement Houses in the UK were actively promoting the movement in Australia as a concept to be started in its capital cities. It was noted that the living conditions in sections of Sydney were not dissimilar to disadvantaged areas of East London and Chicago. The *Toowoomba Chronicle* records clergy speaking in Sydney advocating for the movement to be established on Australian shores:

*"Speaking at Pitt-st. (Sydney) Congregational Church on Sunday, the Rev. Leonard Rob Johns, M.A. (late Acting-warden of Mansfield House Settlement, London) said the University Settlements in England and all over the world were beginning to discover what the great masses of humanity really needed, and were now finding a new channel altogether for Christian enthusiasm.... The growth of the settlement work was rapidly extending, and it was to be hoped that it would soon be well ahead in Sydney. Already they had in England Toynbee-hall, Mansfield House, in the east end of London, amongst the Docks; Oxford House (of which the present Bishop of London was a warden until a few months ago), and the settlement of the Methodists in Bermondsey. Hull House, in America, was already well known, and in Paris, Berlin, and even in Japan university settlements had already commenced"*<sup>20</sup>.

Six years later in 1908, Australia's first Settlement began operating in a house outside the gates of the Women's College by the Sydney University Women's Society. Its work however can be traced back to 1891. A nephew of Samuel Barnett and Oxford graduate, Percy Rowland, had commenced tutoring in Sydney after living in Toynbee Hall. Along with others influenced by the Sydney Methodist Mission and later forming a Sydney Toynbee Guild, he resided in Surry Hills with other like minded individuals as an experiment in Toynbee-type settlement work<sup>21</sup>. The concept was adopted by the women based at Sydney University and began as a club in Woolloomooloo with a particular focus on women's education, social events, childcare, health and women's rights. After moving around various locations, a property at Edward St, Chippendale was secured and shortly after the organisation was renamed as The Sydney University Settlement. Men were not permitted to become members of the Settlement until 1931, as a response to unemployment of teenage boys during the Great Depression. Training in agriculture, handicrafts and gymnasium activities followed alongside drama, dance and first aid education. With its location based centrally in

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<sup>18</sup> Woman's World. (1895, March 22). *Brisbane Courier*, 6.

<sup>19</sup> The Women's College Settlement, New York. (1895, July 6). *Queenslander*, 29.

<sup>20</sup> Saving the masses. (1902, January 14). *Toowoomba Chronicle and Darling Downs General Advertiser*, 5.

<sup>21</sup> Williams, R. (1915). *The Settlement: A history of the University of Sydney Settlement and The Settlement Neighbourhood Centre 1891-1986*. The University of Sydney.

disadvantaged suburbs such as Redfern and Everleigh, The University Settlement began to work closely with Aboriginal families living in these areas.

News of the Sydney University Settlement travelled to Queensland in the early 1900's however a Settlement was never established in the state. Mrs Clunes Ross spoke about the "Redfern University Settlement" at the fourth biennial conference of the Australian Federation of University Women that was held at the University of Queensland in 1929<sup>22</sup> In the Brisbane Telegraph a year later, it was reported that the Sydney University Women's Social Service had started to establish itself. Lady Hampton expanded upon the work stating

*"They (the settlement house) took, the form of little social gatherings for women and children, and included were also many boys of the neighbourhood. Later, as we took more definite shape, the organisation developed into what is a social service scheme with a settlement house in Redfern. We have been able to buy a suitable, house as headquarters, and find it immensely popular"<sup>23</sup>.*

Also known as the Chippendale Neighbourhood Centre and now known as Settlement Neighbourhood Centre, it continues to operate in Darlington, Sydney and is Australia's longest running Settlement House/Neighbourhood Centre.

In 1922, The International Federation of Settlements held their first conference in London and later formed the International Federation of Settlements in 1926 with Settlement Houses across the world. Now known as the International Federation of Settlements and Neighbourhood Centres, it has over 11,000 members across the globe and its mission is to build an inclusive global community by empowering, inspiring and connecting people who are working locally for social justice. It holds general consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), the highest status with which an NGO can be accredited.

## World War 2 Community Centres Movement

During World War Two, the bombing of Toynbee Hall was noted in the Brisbane Telegraph and it was reported that Toynbee hall was imitated by 50 settlement houses in the United Kingdom and several hundred in the USA by 1941<sup>24</sup>. Two years later a community centre movement began to emerge in Brisbane as a Post War initiative.

In 1943 an advisory body was formed to inform the Brisbane City Council of the establishment of community centres in various locations including the type and nature of activities, financing, governance, locations and buildings<sup>25</sup>. The advisory body consisted of members of the already established Bardon Community Centre, Creche and Kindergarten Association, Playground Association, Free Libraries Movement and Physical Education Director. Brisbane Lord Mayor Alderman Chandler was reporting as saying "the community centre idea had a great deal of merit, and was a movement in which the council and the people could co-operate in establishing"<sup>26</sup>.

It was noted that Bardon Community Centre offered a community kitchen, community day nursery and funding for a community laundry while larger community centres at Paddington

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<sup>22</sup> University Women – Opening of Australian Conference. (1928, May 25). *Telegraph*, 10.

<sup>23</sup> Gossip from Sydney – Notes for women. (1929, May 11). *Telegraph*, 14.

<sup>24</sup> Toynbee Hall was monument to fine ideal. (1941, June 11). *Telegraph*, 8.

<sup>25</sup> New Community Centre move. (1943, September 23). *Courier-Mail*, 4.

<sup>26</sup> New Community Centre move. (1943, September 23). *Courier-Mail*, 4

and Spring Hill had playgrounds, children's libraries and community halls. Of particular note, was the intended community-led nature of community centres. Chair of the committee, Alderman T.R. Groom stated "a community centre was not in people having things done for them, but in doing things for themselves in their own districts"<sup>27</sup>. University of Queensland Education Lecturer E.C.D. Ringrose who later joined the advisory committee expanded upon this stating "a community centre is a building and grounds offering facilities for people of all organisations and views to meet and co-operate for their common ends. Such a centre, he said, would be the focal point for all community activities — recreation groups, sports associations, religious, educational, political, progressive, and war emergency groups"<sup>28</sup>.

The first centre to be established by the Brisbane City Council under its new Community Centre initiative was the Enoggera Terrace Community Centre, Red Hill in 1944. It was opened by the Lord Mayor who stated "...no council can, of itself, create a community centre...as its name implies, a centre depends on the interest of the community."<sup>29</sup> Planners for the centre were also quoted as saying "it is not a place where things are to be 'done' for the people, but a place where people may do things for themselves to develop their community life."<sup>30</sup>

As the program was being rolled out, the Mayor expressed concern that the subsidies provided by council were counterproductive to local community participation and that churches were possibly in a better position to run community centres.<sup>31</sup> It was noted that the initial ambition for community centres were in 20 locations around Brisbane City Council but the Enoggera Community Centre experiment was struggling and was not likely to receive its 500 pound subsidy. In comparison, West End Community Centre managed by the West End Methodist Church was experiencing not only community popularity but had a more permanent governance structure to sustain it. Other church-run community centres forwarded by the Methodist Church also experienced high participation rates over the following years including the Ipswich Christian Community Centre<sup>32</sup>

The first mention of a "neighbourhood centre" was in relation to a centre in Wavell Heights. The Wavell Heights Neighbourhood Centre Society was formed in 1947 by representatives of churches and public bodies who had become aware of similar schemes across Australia<sup>33</sup>. In 1948, the Brisbane City Council leased 5 acres of land to establish the Wavell Heights Neighbourhood Centre as a war memorial and community hub. The centre planned to offer a focal point of activities, including a voluntary emergency aid service, youth clubs, day nursery and kindergarten, library and reading rooms, committee rooms, facilities for educational and cultural activities, social functions, motion pictures and other entertainments<sup>34</sup>. Later becoming the Wavell Heights Neighbourhood Association, their fundraising efforts and loan led to the building of the Wavell Heights Community Hall which was opened by Governor Sir John Lavarack in 1951<sup>35</sup>.

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<sup>27</sup> Community Centre move. (1944, June 17). *Courier-Mail*, 3.

<sup>28</sup> Community Centre move. (1944, June 17). *Courier-Mail*, 3.

<sup>29</sup> Community Centre open. (1944, November 5). *Sunday Mail*, 3.

<sup>30</sup> Making good neighbours. (1944, November 7). *Courier-Mail*, 2.

<sup>31</sup> Churches best for community centres? (1949, June 28). *Brisbane Telegraph*, 10.

<sup>32</sup> "Realisation of a dream". (1952, October 24). *Queensland Times*, 2.

<sup>33</sup> Memorial at Wavell Heights. (1947, May 7). *Telegraph*, 9.

<sup>34</sup> Suburban Civic Centre. (1948, January 16). *Brisbane Telegraph*, 3.

<sup>35</sup> Hall to be opened at Wavell Heights. (1951, October 23). *Courier-Mail*, 5.



Evidence existed that the term “neighbourhood centre” was used interchangeably with “community centre” in many instances in the state in the following years. During a debate amongst councillors in Mackay City Council regarding town planning, it was reported in the Daily Mercury that a councillor asserted that “neighbourhood centres were the same as community centres”<sup>36</sup>

It is clear that the post-war community centre movement was not restricted to Queensland and was also forwarded by the Commonwealth Department of Health in 1944. Correspondence issued by the department to local governing bodies and community stakeholders highlights the community centres movement was as an important post war project in Australia, originating in Britain from the 1930’s<sup>37</sup>. It advocated for the expansion of community centres across the nation, should be place based and bring the local community together. An article in Mackay’s Daily Mercury about the correspondence from the Commonwealth Government offers the following interpretation into the principles of community centre development:

*“The true basis of the Community Centre..... is not a fine building and provision by some benign outside authority for physical well-being, but the desire within the community for cooperation, sturdy independence and self-respect, loyalty, unselfishness and tolerance. What is wanted from a community centre to-day is what is asked from democracy—a cooperative spirit working for the common good. This, it adds, probably accounts for the spotlight that is being turned on Community Centres at present.”<sup>38</sup>*

Despite their early growth in post-war Australia, neighbourhood and community centres would undergo evolution in the following decades. With the end of World War 2, Australian society began to rapidly change with the population boost of the baby boomers and traditional social norms being challenged during the late 1950’s and 1960’s. The Liberal Government that had been elected in 1949 was beginning to lose its grip on power after two decades. Institutions such as churches that played a significant role in community life were experiencing decline and their approach to social issues was undergoing additional reform.

### **Australian Assistance Plan**

The 1970s was a time of significant social change in Australia, influenced heavily by the emerging Community Development movement, and such thinkers and activists as Paulo Friere, E.F Schumacher and Saul Alinsky. The shift was not unlike the early Settlement House movement. Traditional approaches to charity and welfare delivery played a prominent role in the decades leading up to the 1970’s. The welfare approach was predominately delivered by faith-based structures under conservative governments. The need for structural change to address the underlying causes of inequality and disadvantage were back on the agenda, this time through ‘people power’. Women’s rights also played a significant role during this period and the social justice principles espoused by civil right activists such as Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King.

In Queensland, the community development movement took on a distinct non-violent flavour through the University of Queensland. Social Studies lecturer, Les Halliwell began his role in

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<sup>36</sup> Britannia Hall in filthy state. (1953, March 24). *Daily Mercury*, 2.

<sup>37</sup> Community Centres a post-war project. (1944, April 14). *Daily Mercury*, 6.

<sup>38</sup> Community Centres a post-war project. (1944, April 14). *Daily Mercury*, 6.

1958 and throughout the 1960's and 1970's forwarded a non-directive tradition of community development across the state. Les Halliwell established the Queensland Community Development Conference in 1974. His mantra for community development practice was "go to the people, listen to the people and trust the people". His work at UQ was followed by Sugata Dugupta in 1976 on the recommendation of Paulo Friere. Temporarily seeking refuge from India, Dugupta was influenced by perspectives on inequality and poverty espoused by Mahatma Gandhi and promoted a non-violent approach to social change<sup>39</sup>. After Dugupta, the Community Development tradition was continued at the University of Queensland by Anthony Kelly who forwarded Freie and Gandhian traditions incorporating dialogue and participatory approaches.

During the early community development movement in Australia, Gough Whitlam swept to power promising radical changes in 1972, shortly followed by a bold experiment – The Australian Assistance Plan<sup>40</sup>. The plan at its core recognised the importance of local voices in decision making and social welfare reform. It promoted active citizenship and the involvement of volunteering in local areas through community engagement initiatives to address local issues.<sup>41</sup> This was a "bottom up" and "grassroots" approach to community change by directly funding local communities across the nation. It perfectly aligned with the citizen-led social change approaches emerging through the community development movement.

The Australian Assistance Plan (AAP) was piloted from 1973 and was extended nationally. It eventually created thirty five Regional Councils for Social Development (RCSD) under the newly-formed Australian Social Welfare Commission<sup>42</sup>. Social planners and Community Development Officers were funded within each Regional Council to work with volunteers from local communities who wanted to have their say on what issues were important to them and what welfare initiatives were needed to address them. Regional Council Boards decided how grants and funding from the Federal Government were to be spent in each area.

Examples included:

- Assisting existing volunteer organisations to co-ordinate their services
- Talking to groups in the community and assisting them to obtain funding for projects
- Gathering information about the social welfare needs of the people in the region and looking at what can be done to meet those needs
- Providing information to groups who want to know about funds available through Government and other sources

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<sup>39</sup> Shevellar, L. (2015). *The Les Halliwell Memorial Address*.

[https://www.cdqld.org/uploads/7/0/8/6/70862165/shevellar\\_2015.pdf](https://www.cdqld.org/uploads/7/0/8/6/70862165/shevellar_2015.pdf)

<sup>40</sup> Collins, C., & Oppenheimer, M. (2019). "People Power": Social Planners and Conflicting Memories of the Australian Assistance Plan. *Labour History: a journal of labour and social history*, 116(116), 189-213.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.3828/jlh.2019.9>

<sup>41</sup> Eklund, E., Oppenheimer, M., & Scott, J. (2016). "Developing a community soul": A Comparative Assessment of the Australian Assistance Plan in Three Regions, 1973-1977. *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 62, 419-434. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajph.12271>

<sup>42</sup> Eklund, E., Oppenheimer, M., & Scott, J. (2016). "Developing a community soul": A Comparative Assessment of the Australian Assistance Plan in Three Regions, 1973-1977. *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 62, 419-434. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajph.12271>

- Talking to local, state and federal Governments about the services they provide, and assisting them to understand what local needs exist<sup>43</sup>

While sporadic Neighbourhood Houses and Centres appeared prior to the Australian Assistance Plan, the grants issued by the Regional Councils for Social Development in the 35 locations accelerated the modern Neighbourhood Houses and Centres movement across Australia.

There were 6 RCSD's established in Queensland<sup>44</sup>, however originally the Gladstone and Rockhampton Regions were combined into a "Fitzroy Region" which was split into two.

- Gladstone Area Social Development Board
- City of Brisbane Australian Assistance Plan Interim Committee
- Bundaberg Regional Council for Social Service
- Mackay Council of Social Welfare
- Rockhampton Social Welfare Development Planning Council
- Townsville Welfare Council

The Australian Assistance Plan and associated councils experienced some significant issues as the plan was implemented in the state. The Bjelke Peterson Government believed the plan was unconstitutional for bypassing State Governments and funding local communities directly for programs that were the responsibility of the state. Clashes occurred between state governments and the Federal Government but also disagreements occurred between local governments and regional development groups. Several Regional Councils barely established and functioned while others were a resounding success and funded numerous local community initiatives.

Mackay, Gladstone and Rockhampton were particularly successful in delivering grants and kickstarting numerous community initiatives.

Carmel Daveson, a student of Les Halliwell of UQ was appointed the Community Development worker for Mackay Council of Social Welfare. Numerous welfare and community associations were supported through AAP grants in this region. Carmel played an active role in establishing a Family Centre in Wellington Street, Mackay, an early Neighbourhood Centre giving support and information to families, teenagers & aged. Its first coordinator was Jill Garrett and the centre is now known as the Mackay Family Care & Community Support Association. The Whitsunday Community Centre, an umbrella organisation for various arts and education associations in Bowen was also funded under the AAP. The Sarina Council for Social Welfare was formed, offering local home care, information and referral services as well as the Kilcummin Group Settlers Association and Citizens Information Services in Moranbah and Clermont.

Citizens Information and Advisory Services, or Citizens Advice Bureaus find their origins during the 1930's in Commonwealth countries amidst struggling social welfare services

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<sup>43</sup> Commonwealth. *Australia Assistance Plan: A program to establish regional councils for social development*. House Hansard. 27 April 1976.

<https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;db=HANSARD80;id=hansard80%2Fhansardr80%2F1976-04-27%2F0107;query=Id%3A%22hansard80%2Fhansardr80%2F1976-04-27%2F0025%22>

<sup>44</sup> Commonwealth. *The Australian assistance plan : discussion paper No. 1*. Interim Committee - Social Welfare Commission. 30 August 1973. <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-1745797370/view>

during the outbreak of World War 2<sup>45</sup>. In similar fashion to Neighbourhood Centres, they were predominately run by volunteers to offer advice and referral to community members seeking support. In the early years the movement assisted with war issues such as missing relatives and war rations, however as the movement progressed after the war they supported a range of community issues such as housing, legal issues, social supports and local advocacy. The Gladstone and Rockhampton AAP regional councils used grants to establish further Citizens Advisory Services in Gladstone, Emerald, Blackwater and Biloela. A Community Advice Bureau was also supported in Innisfail during the AAP in 1975, eventually evolving into the Innisfail Community Support Centre as it attracted Neighbourhood Centre funding in the following decades.

Brisbane struggled to implement the Australian Assistance Plan. In its early stages it was identified that the Brisbane area was too big to effectively deliver grant funding on a local level. In 1973, a scoping study was conducted by QCOSS using AAP funding, with a research committee convened by Les Halliwell<sup>46</sup>. 7 subregions were proposed after extensive service mapping was conducted. The scoping study identified only 3 potential community centres in the region that could receive grant funding: Inala Community House, an initiative by Moorooka Presbyterian Church named "Moorooka Community group", and a tenuous group at Mt Gravatt called "Mount Gravatt Community Centre Association" that wished to establish a community centre in the showgrounds. One "Black" community centre in the inner city was also mentioned, the Aboriginal Community Centre based at Spring Hill.<sup>47</sup>

An interim regional council was established in 1974 by the Lady Mayoress Social Welfare Subcommittee to determine how the program could be implemented<sup>48</sup>. It was chaired by Alderman Burton and later Presbyterian Minister Rev A W Laurie, and consisted of representatives from city councils, QCOSS, universities, Red Cross and others. Five Community Development workers were employed by the council including Morrie O'Connor, Lindal Sullivan and Bob Phelps however as the interim committee progressed a year later concerns were raised about the employment of several other community development workers who were endorsed candidates of political parties. After resigning from his community development role with the interim committee in 1975, Morrie O'Connor moved to Townsville where the Townsville Welfare Council also struggled during the AAP due to local politics and it had evolved into the Northern Regional Council for Social Development. AAP Funds were distributed from the committee to the Burdekin Community Association in Ayr to establish a Neighbourhood Centre.

Malcolm Fraser came to power in late 1975 and in 1976, it was announced that the Commonwealth Government would no longer be funding the Australian Assistance Plan in

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<sup>45</sup> Citizens Advice. (n.d.). *Our History*. <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/about-us/information/our-history/#:~:text=4%20September%201939%3A%20The%20first,relatives%20and%20prisoners%20of%20war.>

<sup>46</sup> Queensland State Archives. (1975). *Administration - Welfare - Australian and Queensland Council of Social Services ACOSS QCOSS -VOL 2*. Queensland Government. <https://www.archivessearch.qld.gov.au/items/ITM644870>

<sup>47</sup> Queensland State Archives. (1975). *Administration - Welfare - Australian and Queensland Council of Social Services ACOSS QCOSS -VOL 2*. Queensland Government. <https://www.archivessearch.qld.gov.au/items/ITM644870>

<sup>48</sup> Commonwealth. *Australia Assistance Plan: A program to establish regional councils for social development*. House Hansard. 27 April 1976. <https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;db=HANSARD80;id=hansard80%2Fhansardr80%2F1976-04-27%2F0107;query=Id%3A%22hansard80%2Fhansardr80%2F1976-04-27%2F0025%22>

further budgets. It was clear that the Brisbane Interim Committee could no longer fulfil its objectives and would be unable to distribute any grants for community activities. It sparked a flurry of community development activity to fulfil at least some of the objectives of the AAP so funding would not be lost. Remaining funds were given to QCOSS<sup>49</sup> to employ a Community Development worker, Morrie O'Connor. Two weeks after commencing he was approached by a social worker from East Brisbane State School who floated the idea of a community centre that could be established in a local Catholic School hall. With remaining AAP funds through QCOSS, Morrie worked to establish the East Brisbane Community Centre starting with a vacation program and then developing an attached childcare centre. He continued to support the centre after his employment in a volunteer capacity and later played a role in establishing the Woolloowin Community Centre (The Community Place) and Nundah Neighbourhood Centre (Northside Connect).

After resigning from the Brisbane Interim Regional Council amidst committee turmoil, Lindal Sullivan gained employment as a community development worker with the Catholic Family Welfare League, where he worked with community residents in Sunnybank to establish a Family Support organisation. The Sunnybank Family Care and Support Centre was established in 1976 and is now known as Kyabra Community Association. While both East Brisbane Community Centre and Sunnybank Family Support Centre were being established a further centre was being established at Red Hill with the support of Jill Willson & UQ's social work department. The Red Hill Paddington Community Centre opened in 1978 on Caxton Street and is now known as Community. Early workers at the centre included Colin Peele and Pauline Kennedy.

This flurry of activity in establishing community centres in Brisbane after the AAP began to spread to the other suburbs in the following years in Eagleby, Bracken Ridge and Goodna. In 1978, a community group was formed called the Goodna Neighbourhood Project Committee whose goal was to "establish a neighbourhood centre in the area to provide welfare and support services" to the community<sup>50</sup>. Goodna Care and Concern Group had been formed locally which included child care, domestic violence support, housing commission activities, single family support, accommodation for country people, emergency home help, transport, home visits and handyman help. In 1982, the historical Oddfellows Hall (circa 1880) was purchased to undertake these activities and from this location the Goodna Neighbourhood Centre incorporated in 1984.

### **Church Established Neighbourhood Centres**

Despite the move away from welfare driven faith-based charity models during the 1970's, churches played a key role in starting and forming many Neighbourhood Centres throughout Queensland. Consistent with the Settlement House movement, these churches have demonstrated a concern for poverty in communities and the need to form hubs that respond on a local and structural level. Their approach to establishing these centres has not been evangelistic in nature but have a vested interest in bringing community groups together to help and support others through the basic principle of "loving one's neighbour". In most of these circumstances the idea of a Neighbourhood Centre has been "incubated" by a church, by providing an early governance structure for funding and providing buildings to operate

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<sup>49</sup> Queensland State Archives (1976), *Letter from A.Kelly, Director of QCOSS to Hon J.D.Herbert, Minister for Community & Welfare Services*. 18<sup>th</sup> October 1976

<sup>50</sup> Godwin, Ann (n.d.). The Oddfellows Hall, Goodna Neighbourhood Centre

the centre until an independent governance structure could be established. Churches have then handed the centre over to the wider community to run.

The longest running Neighbourhood Centre to operate in Queensland was established by a partnership between the Congregational, Presbyterian and Methodist churches. Modelled on the Wayside Chapel in Sydney's King Cross, Inala Community House was formed in 1966. Representatives from all 3 churches met on a weekly basis to form the basis of the agency with the support of Les Halliwell from the University of Queensland until a plan was established to erect a building to establish operations. While being built on Methodist owned land, representatives from the other churches amalgamated around a building programme for 18 months. Once built, it was decided that the community hall should not reflect a church title but rather "Inala Community House" where all community members could gather and seek support. It had a particular focus on Inala's migrant population, children and youth. On a broader scale, Congregational, Presbyterian and Methodist churches came together in 1977 to form the Uniting Church in Australia. The Wesley Mission Brisbane currently operates Eagleby Neighbourhood Centre and Elorac Place while Unitingcare holds the contract for Discovery Coast Community Service in Agnes Water. St David's Uniting Church also established a Neighbourhood Centre in 1986 after the congregants spent several years investigating what structures could best support the local community. Deaconess Jan Chalmers arrived at the congregation after spending several years establishing a Neighbourhood Centre at Balmoral Uniting Church. The Neighbourhood Centre continues to operate as St David's Neighbourhood Centre, Coopers Plains in an independent manner from the church next door. Other notable support the Uniting Church has provided to the establishment of Neighbourhood Centres include West End Community House that was auspiced by West End Uniting Church in 1983, early meetings for the establishment of Sherwood Neighbourhood Centre in 1979, auspicing of Mount Isa Neighbourhood Centre and the auspicing of Mt Gravatt Community Centre by St Bartholomew's Uniting Church in 1990. Bundaberg Neighbourhood Centre was also auspiced by Lifeline, an activity of the Uniting Church, in 1988.

The Catholic Church has also played a key role in establishing centres across the state. In 1973, the Catholic Church embarked on the Action for World Development Program, a program that sought to investigate needs and assets in local communities for social transformation. One location where this program was conducted was in Innisfail, by Brother Denis Doherty who was a Marist Brother from the Good Counsel Secondary School. His work was published in the local paper and as a result several community meetings occurred around establishing a Community Advice Bureau. After further support from the Australian Assistance Plan through the Johnstone Shire Community Development Group, the Community Advice and Information Centre opened its doors in 1975 and is now known as the Community Support Centre Innisfail. The Good Shepherd Sisters also established the Nerang Neighbourhood Centre in 1987. The local parish priest requested the Good Shepherd Sisters come to the area and work with the local community, which was experiencing large and sudden population growth. Chaplaincy services at the Numinbah Prison and Childcare services were initially established but it was clear that what the community needed was a Neighbourhood Centre. The Catholic Archdiocese of Brisbane began renting a house and auspiced the Neighbourhood Centre in 1989 until it was granted a house by the Department of Family services.

Christ the King Catholic Parish's strong social justice focus at Graceville led to various initiatives that supported local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Funding from

the Catholic Social Justice Office from 1982 supported a Community Development officer to establish an interfaith Racism Awareness Group and First Nations Solidarity Group. During the early 1990's, this community development work was renamed Benarrawa Community Development, using the traditional aboriginal word for Oxley Creek by permission from traditional custodians.<sup>51</sup>

The Catholic Church was also active in establishing Neighbourhood Centres in further regional locations. The Good Shepherd Parish in Mt Isa established Northwest Indigenous Catholic Social Services in 2001, under Catholic Social Services Limited with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Board. They operate the Neighbourhood Centre in Boulia (Boulia Community Support Service) and the Brilla Brilla Centre – a community centre in the heart of the Yallambie Indigenous Reserve. The North Country Deanery also played a key role in establishing Graham House Community Centre in Murgon<sup>52</sup>. Concerned with the lack of services and information in the South Burnett, they applied for funding through the South Burnett Community Development program and were offered an historical building to operate from in 1989. They became an incorporated association in 1992.

Other Neighbourhood Centres established by church-based organisations include Bay Islands Community Services (Southern Christian Family Church, 1995), Cannon Hill Presentation Family Support Centre (Presentation Sisters, 1990), Kingston East Neighbourhood Group (Christian Brothers & Social Work students, 1984), Kingaroy Centacare Community Services (St Mary's Catholic Church) and Fassifern Community Centre (Baptist & Salvation Army, 1985).

### **Sector Growth through Family Support Programs**

Following the Australian Assistance Plan's collapse in 1977, the Commonwealth Government offered the States an opportunity to accept Commonwealth funds under a new Family Support Services Scheme in 1978. The Queensland Government accepted the funds and distributed them through the Department of Children's Services. The program continued over several years but in 1985 expanded as a cost sharing program between the Commonwealth and the States and underwent further review in 1987. The program was designed to prevent family breakdown, providing preventative family welfare services to maintain the family unit and give support in times of crisis and need. Direct parental support could be offered in the program as well as information and referral services, volunteer services, family counselling and budgeting assistance. Neighbourhood Centres were specifically mentioned as eligible services in which the program could be delivered with up to 75% of the core operating costs of Neighbourhood and Community houses being permissible under the scheme<sup>53</sup>.

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<sup>51</sup> Benarrawa Community Development Association. (n.d.). *An Abbreviated Time-line of the Benarrawa Solidarity Group*. <https://www.benarrawa.org.au/new-page>

<sup>52</sup> Graham House Community Centre. (n.d.). *Community Centre*. <https://grahamhouse.org.au/graham-house-community-centre/>

<sup>53</sup> Queensland State Archives. (1986). *Proposed Family Support Programme - Department of Children's Services*. - Mrs Y. Chapman. [https://www.archivessearch.qld.gov.au/api/download\\_file/DR40811](https://www.archivessearch.qld.gov.au/api/download_file/DR40811)

Additionally, a Family Welfare Community Development Worker program was established in 1985 by the Bjelke Peterson Government<sup>54</sup>. It intentionally distanced itself from the Australian Assistance Plan, arguing that the AAP was too broad in its approach by giving community development workers remit to address health, education, housing, employment and other social policies overlapping with state and local government responsibilities. Under this new state program, community development workers were focused purely on family and child welfare issues. Applications were received for this scheme from 1984 and included Tara/Chinchilla Community and Family Support Committee, Capricorn Community Development Service, Lifeline Darling Downs, Boonah/Kalbar joint Baptist and Salvation Army project, The Centre Mackay and Goodna Neighbourhood Centre. This funding established Tara Neighbourhood Centre (originally the Tara Citizens Advice Bureau in 1984), Chinchilla Neighbourhood Centre (1985) and Carinity Fassifern Community Centre (1985) and supported the incorporation of (1984) Goodna Neighbourhood House and funding for Mackay Family Care & Community Support Association.

The new focus on Family Support created a duality in the sector for the next three decades. On one hand the community development traditions fostered throughout the Australian Assistance Plan in the 1970's continued to drive the development of centres across the state. On the other hand, the conservative values of the Bjelke Peterson government fostered sector growth through community-based family support initiatives that were focused on preventing family breakdown. In this context Neighbourhood Centres continued to grow in number as local communities identified welfare gaps in their communities and came together in public meetings to begin to establish neighbourhood, welfare, community and development associations.

Neighbourhood Centres like Nambour Community Centre continued to grow from radical community development foundations. Beginning in 1979 as a vision by Gail Perry to help women and children, she opened a house in the middle of Nambour in 1980 called The Meeting Place that was a grass roots, self-help centre bridging the gap between new age spirituality and mainstream society<sup>55</sup>. All types of people were welcome – regardless of wealth, religion or political view and courses were offered in yoga, meditation and massage. Environmental issues also played a prominent role and groups such as the Rainbow Alliance, Peace Movement and Civil Liberties met within their walls. Assistance was also offered to the community through The Meeting Place via visiting services such as Lifeline. The Nambour Folk Club met at the house during the mid 80's, and along with the Queensland Folk Federation began to plan a folk festival in Maleny<sup>56</sup>. Bill Hauritz and centre coordinator Des Ritchie worked with the group to launch the Maleny Folk Festival in 1987. The festival continued to grow over the following decades and is now known as the Woodford Folk Festival, the largest community-driven cultural event in Australia. The centre didn't receive State Government support until 1988 and was later renamed as Nambour Community Centre.

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<sup>54</sup> Queensland State Archives. (1985). *Department of Children's Services - Family Welfare Community Development Work Programme*. - Mr G. Muntz, 5 February 1985.

[https://www.archivessearch.qld.gov.au/api/download\\_file/DR30179](https://www.archivessearch.qld.gov.au/api/download_file/DR30179)

<sup>55</sup> Nambour Community Centre. (n.d.). *The Meeting Place - Howard Street*. <http://nambourcc.org/the-meeting-place-howard-street/>

<sup>56</sup> The Folk Rag. (2000, January 1). *Bill Hauritz*. <https://www.folkrag.org/profiles/bill-hau.html>



A number of further Neighbourhood Centres, with both Community Development and Family Support traditions appeared during this period including Mount Isa Family Support Service and Neighbourhood Centre (1980), Eagleby Community Association/Eagleby Self Help Group (1981), Maroochy Neighbourhood Centre, The Community Place/Wooloowin Community Centre (1983), West End Community House (1983), Zillmere Community Centre (1984), Kingston East Neighbourhood Group (1984), Charters Towers Neighbourhood Centre (1984), Beaudesert Community Centre (1985), Lockyer Community Centre (1985) and Charleville Neighbourhood Centre (1985)

In the 1986 state election, the long-standing Bjelke Peterson government promised a policy in which dwellings would be purchased for lease to non-government organisations on a “peppercorn” agreement for use as Neighbourhood Centres. Cabinet approved the program in March, 1987<sup>57</sup>. The program proposed that houses could be purchased in local communities where families experiencing isolation, disadvantage, stress and breakdown could access support services. The nature of these services included play groups, parent’s support groups, vacation care, children’s programs, occasional childcare, youth training, or support and information services. These Neighbourhood Centres would be sponsored by non-government organisations or local authorities and be operated by a local committee consisting of representatives from organisations and groups providing services from the facility and from the local community. With a view to becoming self-sufficient, the establishment of new Neighbourhood Centres could be supported through a range of funding streams including the Family support program, Family Welfare Community Development program, or the Youth and Community Grants program under the Queensland Government.

Negotiations occurred with the Department of works to source up to 10 centres in the first year, in areas where there was need or community interest. The Department of Families, Youth and Ethnic Affairs under Minister Yvonne Chapman identified areas of greatest need and then sought local organisations wishing to operate the facility. The Department of Works then sourced properties which were purchased and offered to organisations under a 3 year lease. The organisations were responsible for property insurance, rates, power, maintenance costs and could invest in property renovations and benefit from their investment if the property was sold. It was this initiative that led to the many peppercorn lease arrangements that many centres currently have with the Queensland Government in state owned buildings.

In 1986, a national peak body for Neighbourhood centres was also established. It was originally called National Link of Neighbourhood Houses and Learning Centres and was incorporated in Victoria. It employed one staff member and gathered together representatives from networks of Neighbourhood Centres from various states and ran national conferences. In 1991, the first Neighbourhood House Week was held in Victoria and was later adopted by the national body to be run in all states. During Neighbourhood House Week in May 1996, the Minister for Community Services, The Hon. Dennis Napthine, launched large metal public signs for the National Logo containing a blue and orange house which was adopted by many states and incorporated into their own logos. The signs were designed to be hung on the “welcome” boards to cities and towns, or for the exterior of Community and Neighbourhood Houses.

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<sup>57</sup> Queensland State Archives (1987), *Queensland Government Cabinet Decision 51099 30<sup>th</sup> March 1987*

In 2008 it continued to employ a staff member and consisted of representatives from every state and territory. Annual meetings were held in a different state each year. It had a particular focus on community development, and in 2008 proposed changing its name to “National Association of Community Development Organisations”. It became the Australia Houses and Centres Association (ANHCA) in 2012 and today represents over 1000 Neighbourhood Houses and Centres across the nation.

A member of the International Federation of Settlements and Neighbourhood Centres (IFS), the national peak is the conduit between local centres and the United Nations. In the lead up to the 2021 IFS conference in Sydney, Australia, the state peak body Local Community Services Association in New South Wales worked with ANHCA to establish an Asia Pacific region of the IFS which included Australia, Taiwan, India and Bangladesh.

### **Unfunded Neighbourhood Centres Project**

In 1992, the Community Centres and Family Support Network Association of Queensland (CCFSNAQ) produced a report detailing the struggle being experienced by a number of unfunded centres in the Neighbourhood Centre network. Following this report six centres were funded by the Department of Families, Youth and Community Care and included Hub Neighbourhood Centre Inala, St David’s Neighbourhood Centre, Hervey Bay Neighbourhood Centre, Sherwood Neighbourhood Centre, Eagleby Community Centre and Presentation Family Support (Cannon Hill). Two years later in the financial year of 1994-95 a pilot project provided new multipurpose centres to some existing centres which also provided a small operational increase followed by an increase in 1996 for several small centres to provide a full-time coordinator and .25 administrative assistant under the Community and Individual Support Program (CISP). CISP services were originally funded under one of the four categories: Neighbourhood/Community Centre, Counselling Service, Community Development Service and Other.

However a number of centres still remained unfunded after seven years of lobbying, and in 1998 a group of unfunded Neighbourhood Centres in Brisbane gathered together for mutual support and to join forces to lobby Government. As they gathered momentum, they discovered further unfunded centres across Queensland and formed the Unfunded Community Centres Network.

In December 1998, the Department of Families, Youth and Community Care conducted their own audit of unfunded Neighbourhood Centres for the purposes of identifying centres for potential funding. Unfunded centres included Annerley and District Community Centre, Logan East Community Neighbourhood Association, Zillmere Community Centre, Picabeen, Centacare South Burnett, Bay Islands Community Service and those situated in Redcliffe, Agnes Water, Childers, Malanda, Garbutt, Gin Gin, Kuranda, Bamaga, Maleny, Mt Isa, Pomona, Rosewood, Studio Village and Proserpine. This was followed by a budget bid in 1999/2000 for \$1million to fund 15 new centres, which was unsuccessful. 97 funded Neighbourhood Centres existed in the state averaging one per 35,000 of population<sup>58</sup>, lower compared to other states due to chronic underfunding of social services in Queensland.

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<sup>58</sup>Department of Families, Youth and Community Care & Unfunded Neighbourhood/Community Centers Network. (2000). *Unfunded Neighbourhood Community Centres in Queensland: bjoint report/by Unfunded Community Centres Network and the Queensland Government Families, Youth and Community Care*. Queensland Government. <https://nla.gov.au/nla.cat-vn815035>

New South Wales had 300 centres (one per 21,000) and Victoria 264 centres (one per 17,800). 49 centres operated around the state in an unfunded capacity<sup>59</sup>.

Undeterred, the Unfunded Community Centres Network were successful in obtaining a Gaming Machine Benefit Fund Grant under the auspice of QCOSS to employ a Community Project Officer for 6 months to map and research the needs of unfunded centres. The Department also agreed to engage a Project Officer for 4 months to support this work. What resulted was the Unfunded Neighbourhood/Community Centres Project, a project that mapped every Neighbourhood and Community Centre in Queensland to identify sites for potential new funding to inform a budget bid in 2000. The project committee was comprised of representatives from the Unfunded Community Centres Network, QCOSS, Brisbane City Council, CCFSNAQ and the Department.

Mapping of unfunded centres took place by issuing media releases to key workers in local councils, community organisations, rural organisations, media and universities throughout the state. QCOSS, the Department and the CCFSNAQ also provided key contacts. In order to adequately map Neighbourhood Centres, some definition needed to be provided to scope and identify relevant organisations. In order to be considered, unfunded centres needed to have the following criteria:

- Have an established management committee
- Offer a range of types of activities/services - either some or all of the following:
  - Community Development
  - Information/referral
  - Advocacy
  - Education
  - Support and outreach activities
  - Leisure
- Provide services to a range of groups
- Inclusive of local community
- Espouse Social Justice principles
- Respond to needs identified in the community

This criteria slightly differed from the Department's mapping conducted in 1998 which additionally required that the organisation be incorporated and be operating from a building. Surveys were conducted with all unfunded centres, revealing that many were operating in crisis due to lack of funding for staff, concern about the introduction of GST, lack of support from State Government, lack of opportunities for training and lack of volunteers. Most were reliant on funding from the Gambling Machine Fund. 38 centres were also identified as not connected to the internet.

The work of the project was published in a joint report between the Queensland Government and the Unfunded Community Centres Network and this was followed by advocacy for

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<sup>59</sup> Department of Families, Youth and Community Care & Unfunded Neighbourhood/Community Centers Network. (2000). *Unfunded Neighbourhood Community Centres in Queensland: bjoint report/by Unfunded Community Centres Network and the Queensland Government Families, Youth and Community Care*. Queensland Government. <https://nla.gov.au/nla.cat-vn815035>

funding in the next budget round.<sup>60</sup> The strategy was successful, with the Beattie Government announcing \$2million over 4 years to assist unfunded Neighbourhood Centres across the state.<sup>61</sup> The new annual funding would be allocated on a priority of need basis to centres in high growth and disadvantaged areas operating without any support.

Numerous unfunded Neighbourhood Centres benefited from this funding and continue to receive Neighbourhood Centre funding as the result of this initiative including the aforementioned sites identified by the Department in 1998. There are however, many centres who were identified in this project that did not receive the funding and continue to survive over 2 decades later. These include Loganlea Community Centre, Babinda Taskforce, Glasshouse Mountains Neighbourhood Centre, Morris House Neighbourhood Centre and Rainbow Beach Community Information and Resource Centre.

Other centres that did not receive funding have folded due to the pressures of trying to operate in an unfunded capacity such as South West Mackay Neighbourhood Centre that ceased operations in 2012<sup>62</sup>.

### State Peak Body Development

The Queensland Community Development conference brought together Community Development practitioners from both within and outside of centres from 1974, but as Family Support funding was rolled out in the early 1980's, Family Support organisations began to link together into regional networks. Through their combined efforts, they could advocate for more appropriate forms of funding and also support one another in the work of preserving family life in local communities<sup>63</sup> Naming themselves the Queensland Family Support Association, the network formed from 1983 to 1986, contained a number of community centres that received Family Support funding though consisted of a much broader range of family support organisations including faith-based and individual support organisations. Representatives from neighbourhood/community centres, separately formed a working group known as the Community Centres Working Party. The group advocated for better funding models for Neighbourhood Centres, arguing that they were ideal locations for Community Development, Self Help groups, Community-led initiatives, structures to promote active citizenship, reciprocity and participation. Many organisations found themselves aligning in both camps and attended both networks as family support organisations that were also Community Centres.

By 1987, the two networks formed into one network under the banner of the Community Centres and Family Support Network of Queensland (CCFN). It consisted of 52 groups that were funded under the Family Support Program, 11 that were funded under the Community Development Program and 42 organisations that received no funding or were funded for a multiplicity of other needs. Membership was open to any person or organisation that wanted

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<sup>60</sup> Department of Families, Youth and Community Care & Unfunded Neighbourhood/Community Centers Network. (2000). *Unfunded Neighbourhood Community Centres in Queensland: bjoint report/by Unfunded Community Centres Network and the Queensland Government Families, Youth and Community Care*. Queensland Government. <https://nla.gov.au/nla.cat-vn815035>

<sup>61</sup> Bredhauer Welcomes the Challenges Ahead. (2001, January 26). *Torres News*, 13.

<sup>62</sup> Selen, S. (2012, January 9). *Escalating costs close centre*. Courier Mail. <https://www.couriermail.com.au/news/queensland/mackay/escalating-costs-close-centre/news-story/f6f3856b3241793a0af11b0677648f2f>

<sup>63</sup> CCFSNAQ (2002). *CCFSNAQ Induction and Orientation Kit*

to participate. The process for working together was similar to the community development process used by the organisations themselves in local communities – gathering people together to hear common grass roots concerns and working together in a “bottom up” way to create change. Change included more support for one another, lobbying, grant applications, professional development, policy influence and communicating the value and nature of community centres. The network worked at various levels - neighbourhood, local, sub-regional, regional and state. Regional networks were regularly attended by organisations in defined geographic areas – South West, Far West, North Queensland (with Townsville and Far North sub regions), Central and South East (with Wide Bay/Burnett, Sunshine Coast, Brisbane North, Brisbane South, Gold Coast, Ipswich and Logan sub regions). Most met in person however due to geographic distribution some networks, such as the Far West met via teleconference. State meetings of the network occurred alongside the biannual Queensland Community Development Conference.

One example of the work of the network was in forming a position paper working party for community centres in 1987, consisting of Maria Tennant, Ken Butler, Maria Brennan, Heather Lord, Robyn Cross, Jenny Whithnall and Christine Shorey<sup>64</sup>. The working party conducted extensive work in defining the role and nature of Neighbourhood and Community Centres, due to their diverse nature and lack of social policy direction. It stipulated that Neighbourhood and Community Centres should have the following characteristics:

- Build supportive relationships within communities
- Facilitate the development of personal and community resources
- Are community directed and controlled
- Seek to encourage self-help rather than dependency
- Are open and inviting to all members of the community
- Are flexible in nature and allow a way for communities to respond to their own needs
- Function to reduce social isolation in a total community and promote a sense of belonging and community spirit
- Are a cost effective way of providing preventative measures within the community

The position paper outlined that the local community needed to be involved in all stages and decisions during the establishment of Neighbourhood Centres, and that building ownership should be held by community organisations or in cases where the building is owned by local Government, a leasing arrangement with a community organisation. Buildings should be accessible, the atmosphere of them open, supportive and inviting. Funding should not only be provided for capital expenses but operating costs, volunteer management, training and staffing which included administration, coordination and outreach/developmental activities. The position paper was shared widely to the sector, Local Government Association and the Queensland Government.

Discussion about the CCFN network becoming a formal organisation began as far back as 1987. In a letter to network participants, Ian Bedford wrote “*the community centres and family support network is not a formal organisation (though it will probably need to become more formal in the future). Rather it is a network of individuals and organisations who work to support and aid each other in the task of offering support to families and others through the community centres or other locally relevant structures*”. In 1996, after almost 10 years of discussion about formalising its structure it gathered a state meeting and finally agreed by

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<sup>64</sup> Community Centres & Family Support Network of Qld (1987), *Position Paper*

majority vote to become an incorporated body. Work began in forming a constitution and governance structure that suited the network. It was agreed that the management committee be comprised of two members from each geographic regional network and that membership be classed into ordinary individuals, ordinary organisations and associated individuals or organisations. Class of membership was based on whether the members were funded under government departments to work towards the concept of community centres, family and individual support, or funded/unfunded under the objects of the association. The objects of the association under the first constitution were established as:

- To foster community based service delivery for families and individuals
- To develop responses to communities and their issues regarding individuals and families
- To encourage and support the development of community based services for families and individuals
- To advocate, lobby and extend networks to develop a proactive and unified approach to government and non-government agencies on policy development, issues, awards etc
- To support staff (paid and unpaid) in community centres and family support areas

In 1997 the Network became incorporated as the Community Centres and Family Support Network Association Qld Inc<sup>65</sup> (CCFSNAQ). The state meeting in Cairns on the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> of October 1997 became the first Annual General Meeting of the newly incorporated body, and the first committee was appointed consisting of:

President: Joan Bate

Vice President: Tammy Miles

Treasurer: Debbie Irvine

Secretary: Vicki Ashford

Membership Secretary: Cathy Oats

Committee Members: John McCabe, Gay George, Anne Meehan, Julie Smart and Carmel Mills.

It was agreed that at all levels of the network be based on the principles of equality and that this was expressed through values around being open, understood, available, accessible, informative, empowering and valued.

In 1999, The CCSFNAQ received annual funding to allow member organisations to meet together regularly however did not receive any funding for peak body operations (NSW and Victoria both received staff funding to run their peak organisations). These Community Liaison Funds provided by the Department of Families were divided evenly between the five geographic regions with a percentage held by the CCFSNAQ. Each region could spend the funds on regional meetings, teleconferences, phone calls, photocopying, postage, reasonable costs of travel and accommodation, auditing, auspicing and facilitation of the annual state meeting. Due to Community Liaison Funding being restricted to regional meetings, CCFSNAQ could only employ a part time staff member from its limited membership fees and heavily relied on the inherent resources within the networks.

Nonetheless, the CCFSNAQ worked as much as it could as both a peak and a network with QCOSS and the Department of Families to forward the objectives of the sector over the next 10 years. In 2005 under president Tina Lathouras, it worked with the Department of

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<sup>65</sup> CCFSNAQ (2002) *Induction and Orientation Booklet*.

Communities on the “Strengthening Non Government Organisations” project placing Community Development workers centrally in the regions. It participated in informing early intervention programs and worked with other peaks to inform policies, solve insurance issues, further professional development, develop Community Development position papers and advocate for further funding. In 2007, CCFSNAQ conducted a census of all its organisations and networks, identifying that there were now 6 regional networks in operation with a further 8 sub-regions in South East Queensland.

However, as the CCFSNAQ was growing the nature of community services and the global economic environment was changing culminating in a “perfect storm” of events in 2012 and 2013<sup>66</sup>. Austerity measures were implemented by the Newman Government after the Global Financial Crisis. After his election, all Neighbourhood Centres had funding cut by 10% and CCFSNAQ was totally de-funded, including networks funding. On a national level the human services sector faced industrial turmoil as the result of the Equal Remuneration Order handed down by the Fair Work Commission. Constitutional corporations in Queensland, including Neighbourhood Centres were especially impacted by extra remuneration for employees and large amounts of back pay due to pay equity regulations in March and December 2012 creating a massive financial strain for organisations with reduced funding. Centres were encouraged to pursue more corporatised service delivery approaches, rather than community development to ensure financial sustainability. Neighbourhood Centres began delivering services of all kinds, more corporatised approaches were adopted and some centres amalgamated into larger nonprofit companies limited by guarantee. Additionally, the Carmody Report recommended reducing strain on the Department of Child Safety by diverting concerns to intensive family support services in the community run by professional case workers, rather than traditional family support programs that utilised volunteers and had a community-based early intervention focus.

The architecture of the Neighbourhood Centre sector and Family Support organisations across Queensland was changing, with many organisations moving away from traditions that had been at the core of the movement in order to financially survive.

With no funding, CCFSNAQ rebranded as the Queensland Families and Communities Association (QFCA) in 2013 with the official change being recorded at the Department of Fair Trading in 2014. It maintained regional networks in 8 regions – Far North, North, Far West, Central, Sunshine, Greater Brisbane, South and South West. A member from each network was appointed as both QFCA board member and network facilitator enabling the continued operation of the core structure of the organisation. Member funding enabled the employment of an Executive Officer based in Cairns, Geoff Roberson who maintained connections with the Australian Neighbourhood Houses and Centres Association, Queensland Community Services Futures Forum, QCOSS, Community Development Queensland, Peakcare and the Workforce Council. Despite continuing to recognise family support organisations in its title, these organisations became less involved in the QFCA as they either became more corporatised, amalgamated or became less community focused. The regional networks began to more exclusively focus on Neighbourhood and Community Centres.

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<sup>66</sup> Betts, H., Ingamells, A., & Odgers, N. (2021). *Enhancing Community Development In Neighbourhood Centres*. [https://ncq.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021\\_QFCA\\_EnhancingCommunityDevelopmentInNeighbourhoodCentres-2021-Full-Report.pdf](https://ncq.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021_QFCA_EnhancingCommunityDevelopmentInNeighbourhoodCentres-2021-Full-Report.pdf)

During the events of 2012/2013, QFCA identified the need to have a better reporting framework for the sector, to demonstrate its value and regain lost ground. After consulting with the peak bodies in other states, a proposal was lodged to the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services in September 2013 to conduct a trial of the Results Based Accountability (RBA) method. RBA was a model used by other states as both a reporting and evaluation tool of Neighbourhood Centre community development work. A year later the trial was approved by the Queensland Government however funding wasn't received by the organisation until early 2015 reducing the trial to 7 months. 100 representatives from 94 Neighbourhood Centres participated in the RBA workshop and a further 22 undertook testing in the RBA method. During the trial the Department service system changed and only limited elements were adopted, in particular the recording of outcomes for 4 projects, 4 resources and 4 programs.

### Recent Rebirth

Prior to funding for a Sector Development Officer for QFCA in 2017, the Department of Communities, Disability Services and Seniors were continuing to investigate funding for the Neighbourhood Centre sector. With a lack of policy direction for the funding program, an inadequate reporting framework and low Government priority, new strategies had to be explored internally and externally to give Neighbourhood Centres the recognition they deserved. Funding continued to be a major issue as Neighbourhood Centres were overlooked for the Equal Remuneration Order supplementary increases in 2016 as they were not recognised as frontline services. In 2017, the Department instigated an Investment Management Standard process for the Neighbourhood Centre program. Through a partnership between QCOSS and QFCA, the sector was surveyed extensively and a series of 5 consultation workshops were undertaken to inform a new program logic and investment framework process for Neighbourhood Centres by the Queensland Government<sup>67</sup>. The consultation was followed by a series of internal workshops at the Department to investigate possible pathways forward. Three options were considered – business as usual, expanding the Community Connect Worker program (being trialled in 12 locations), or improving the investment framework for the entire sector. The third option was recommended as the path forward after analysis, with further consideration also given to the second option. Following this in 2018, Chris Mundy was appointed to QFCA's Sector Development role.

But despite the extensive work conducted throughout the IMS process, the Department was unable to forward any progress towards sector reforms and further research was conducted. In 2018, The Policy and Innovation Hub at Griffith University was commissioned to provide research to the Queensland Government about a conceptual basis and framework for Queensland's Neighbourhood Centres, along with recommendations to enhance the sector. The report noted that a considerable challenge with their research was the lack of usable data available from the Department of Communities on the work of Neighbourhood Centres. Nonetheless, the report was extensive with both sections being over 130 pages in length and making numerous recommendations for further investment. The report was not publicly released.

Still unsatisfied with the information gathered about the sector, a further report was requested from the Department of Communities to the Policy and Innovation Hub. Delivered

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<sup>67</sup> Queensland Council of Social Service. (2017). *Queensland Neighbourhood Centres Community consultation results paper*. <https://www.qcoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Neighbourhood-Centre-IMS-Report-FINAL-for-web-1.pdf>



in 2019, the additional report focused on Neighbourhood Centre investment and provided analysis, financial modelling and advice to Government. Recommendations advised only a marginal increase to base level funding. Also not released to the public, the advice for further investment and modelling was not forwarded.

In 2019, QFCA worked to re-establish the connection between the sector and the Queensland Community Development conference, a connection that had been built since the 1970's. The conference reignited the sector's passion for Community Development and after a mandate was issued to QFCA, a Community Development sub-committee was formed under the board. As the COVID19 pandemic forced the state into lockdown in 2020, the committee forwarded research into Community Development in Neighbourhood Centres via online webinars<sup>68</sup>. The research included academics from Griffith University Helen Betts and Dr Ann Ingamells, Neighbourhood centre representatives, and practitioners that had been integral to the entire Neighbourhood Centre movement for five decades including Carmel Daveson, Maria Tennant and Bea Rogan. COVID19 created space for Neighbourhood Centres to pause and reflect on the sector's practice and purpose.

Neighbourhood Centres were re-discovering their calling as citizen led organisations being grounded in place and driven by Community Development traditions. The pandemic presented challenges for not only the sector, but local communities. As many centres stayed open for essential services, they were still active on the phones, online and in providing support in any way they could. Many centres delivered emergency relief and other assistance through their windows while wearing facemasks to maintain face to face community connection. Pandemic lockdowns moved local communities back to the neighbourhood. Community members discovered the importance of using their local park for exercise, visiting their corner store, getting in touch with their neighbours and building connections on a local level. This was also true for local social support as many larger state-wide organisations closed their doors and support was offered on a small scale through community organisations. Neighbourhood Centres were playing a vital role in the midst of the pandemic, offering communities the latest information about COVID19, the use of mobile apps to enable community members to access venues but also enabling community to help and support one another.

With new perspective and momentum, the infrastructure of QFCA was built throughout this period with disaster strategy project funding and a new strategic direction with the assistance of Belinda Drew from the Community Services Industry Alliance (CSIA). A working group was formed consisting of Tomas Passeggi (President), Chris Mundy (Sector Development Officer), Bea Rogan (Secretary), Jenny Ryan (Board Member), Dr Ann Ingamells and the support of Executive Officer Geoff Roberson. In 2020, QFCA received funding from the Department to design a new reporting and performance framework for Neighbourhood Centres and the organisation's first CEO was employed, Em James. An annual sector survey, designed on a Social Return on Investment model used by Neighbourhood Houses Victoria was also introduced to demonstrate value to stakeholders.

In November 2020 as the pandemic was still impacting Queenslanders, Minister Leeanne Enoch was appointed as Minister of Communities, Housing and the Digital Economy and immediately gave Neighbourhood Centres priority. A First Nations woman from Stradbroke

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<sup>68</sup> Betts, H., Ingamells, A., & Odgers, N. (2021). *Enhancing Community Development In Neighbourhood Centres*. [https://ncq.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021\\_QFCA\\_EnhancingCommunityDevelopmentInNeighbourhoodCentres-2021-Full-Report.pdf](https://ncq.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021_QFCA_EnhancingCommunityDevelopmentInNeighbourhoodCentres-2021-Full-Report.pdf)

Island, she called for a Parliamentary Inquiry into Loneliness and Social Isolation and formed a Strategic Repositioning Committee (SRC) for Neighbourhood Centres. The role of the SRC was to embark on a co-design process to establish an agreed purpose, program logic, investment and reporting framework for State Government investment into Neighbourhood centres. Rather than reinvent the wheel, the committee would draw on the RBA trail in 2015, IMS process in 2017, Griffith Reports in 2018 and 2019, and the QFCA Reporting Framework in 2020. The SRC consisted of Neighbourhood Centre representatives from the QFCA, Qld Community Alliance, CSIA, Volunteering Qld, Logan Together and other key organisations. Key Sector representatives included Tomas Passeggi, Louise Judge, Tanya Stevenson, Sandra Elton, Karen Dare, Em James, Geoff Leeming and Regina Turner.

A number of new Neighbourhood Centres appeared while strategic repositioning was being explored. Having introduced a procurement process for Neighbourhood Centres, the Queensland Government began putting tenders for Neighbourhood Centres out to open market for associations to operate. These were sometimes attached to the building of new facilities. Two Indigenous controlled Neighbourhood Centres were established (the first was funded to NPA Family Resource Centre in Bamaga, 2001<sup>69</sup>). After the Carpentaria Shire Council relinquished their Neighbourhood Centre contract, Indigenous controlled organisation BYNOE Community Advancement Cooperative Society won the tender for the Normanton Neighbourhood Centre in 2022 and a new Neighbourhood Centre on Thursday Island was procured to Mura Kosker in 2021, a Torres Strait Island based organisation that had been operating in the locality for over 30 years. Locally named “Buai Mudh”, it means “Family House”.

A number of contracts were also awarded to the YMCA Brisbane at Cannon Hill (2020, formerly a contract operated by Presentation Family Centre and Wesley Mission Brisbane), Wynnum Community Hub (2022, formerly a trial site operated as Wynnum Community Place by Redland Community Centre) and the new Yarrabilba “The Buzz” facility (2022). The Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) was founded in London in 1844 by a draper, George Williams. Observing the impacts of the Industrial Revolution on young men, the YMCA sought to put Christian values into practice by creating opportunities to develop a healthy body, mind and spirit. While similar in its approach to Settlement Houses in providing central community facilities, the movement had a focus on young people, athletics, leadership and evangelistic activities. It arrived in Australia in 1850 beginning in Adelaide and spreading to Brisbane in 1864. More recently the YMCA has broadened its approach, renaming itself as “The Y” to become more inclusive, leading to the organisation aligning itself with Neighbourhood Centres in the state. It still maintains its youth focus with the organisation advancing a number of vocational schools attached with community facilities, as well as housing initiatives.

In 2021 Minister Enoch announced a Parliamentary Inquiry into Loneliness and Social Isolation. After the events of COVID and numerous lockdowns, loneliness was highlighted as a significant issue in the community however the move was also a political one. If an inquiry of this nature could highlight the significant work of Neighbourhood Centres, and demonstrate it was key social infrastructure to address social isolation, their profile would be lifted within Government leading to increased investment and positioning in social policy. QFCA encouraged the sector to participate as much as possible, undertaking a submission writing campaign that articulated the work of centres and argued for an uplift in funding to address loneliness and social isolation. 53 written submissions from Neighbourhood Centres were received by the committee and during public hearings, 17 centres were asked to speak

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<sup>69</sup> Bredhauer Welcomes the Challenges Ahead. (2001, January 26). *Torres News*, 13.

and answer questions from the committee in their investigations. The committee's report was handed down, recommending various strategies to tackle loneliness and social isolation in the state and specifically mentioning the role of Neighbourhood centres.

After working with the sector and the Department of Communities and gathering yearly data about the effectiveness of Neighbourhood Centres, a focused budget bid and participatory advocacy strategy was implemented with the sector following the inquiry. QFCA knew it needed to articulate its core business more clearly so after sector consultation, changed its name to Neighbourhood Centres Queensland (NCQ). It developed a clear budget ask with the sector and using participation as its core strategy, encouraged centres to write and meet with their local MP about the work of their centre and articulate what difference a funding uplift would make. NCQ attended many meetings with Ministers and MP's along with the centres to support this work and wrote to every elected official in the state providing Neighbourhood Centre budget asks and the 2021 Sector Impact Report containing key data about the sector. Others such as the Queensland Community Alliance, QCOSS and internal department staff also undertook advocacy for centres to sway the Department of Treasury to consider the proposals being made.

The advocacy paid off, leading to the most significant funding boost for Neighbourhood Centres in Queensland's history in the 2022/2023 budget. Overall the Queensland Government committed to a \$115.8million investment into the sector including:

- Increasing the baseline funding to \$230,000 per centre
- An additional \$20,000 per year for centres operating in non-state Government buildings
- \$9million to improve existing centre buildings
- \$39million to construct 6 new centres
- \$9.3million for 20 more Community Connect workers
- \$4million innovation fund to support community-led initiatives targeting loneliness and social isolation.
- Peak body funding

The funding uplift was closely followed by a range of social policies perfectly aligned with Neighbourhood Centres. A 10 year strategic plan for the state was unveiled by the Queensland Government entitled "Communities 2032", which focused on equity, access, participation, human rights and empowerment through place-based community-led principles. Neighbourhood Centres perfectly aligned with the new vision and featured centrally in its action plan. A shared vision document about Neighbourhood Centres was released in December 2023 detailing an overarching strategic plan for centres across the state and articulating the partnership between the Queensland Government, NCQ and the Neighbourhood Centre sector.

New contracts and guidelines were released in the second half of 2023, returning to the core traditions of the Neighbourhood Centre movement for the modern context. Three activity dimensions were emphasised as the core components of all neighbourhood centres – Linking people with formal and informal support, creating social connections and inclusion, and integrating local community action. The inclusion of Community Development in the guidelines under the third dimension signalled a new era for Neighbourhood Centres and emphasised the core tradition of the movement that dates back to its beginnings in Settlement Houses – doing things with the people rather than doing things for them. Together, through advocacy, participation, determination and political strategy the sector

had driven systems change to position itself as key social and community development infrastructure across the state.

## Conclusion

Today more than ever, Queensland needs Neighbourhood Centres. Local place based, community led spaces where all people are welcomed – regardless of background, age, race, religion, ethnicity, sexuality or gender. A place where different viewpoints are discussed and democracy is encouraged. A shared space for neighbours where the needs and aspirations of local people are listened to and they are encouraged to take action to create social change themselves. Where people can learn new skills, demonstrate leadership and find connection and belonging. A place where those experiencing disadvantage and hardship can find support, a pathway forward and new opportunities. A community meeting place that expresses love, culture, and spirit and a desire to create a better world together. These are the things that have defined Neighbourhood Centres throughout their history, from the early Settlement House movement born in the UK through to the Neighbourhood Centres that are spread across Queensland today. Their principles, beliefs and tenacity for community-led approaches have shaped the sector and what it aspires to be.

Over 155 Neighbourhood Centres now operate in the state and there are plans to establish many more. From Buai Mudh on Thursday Island to Granite Belt Neighbourhood Centre in Stanthorpe, our centres cover a distance of more than 2,200km across a broad demographic of urban, regional, rural and remote locations. The diverse nature of the sector finds its unity in its evolving story of passion for local community and people.

As the sector grows and expands it will need to consider the role of traditional custodians, reflected in over 150 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language groups in Queensland. Australian First Nations people have been working in local community structures for more than 60,000 years and we have much to learn about their approaches to community on Country. As centres expand into a variety of landscapes, learning to live in harmony with Country is especially important as centres increasingly respond to environmental challenges in the form of natural disasters. Reconciliation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can bring healing in communities and on Country affected by bushfire, monsoon, cyclones, heatwaves, drought and other disasters.

The future is exciting for Neighbourhood Centres in the state and so is their potential for local change in response to the many social challenges we face. Cost of living, housing, crime, family breakdown, mental illness, social isolation, inequality and unemployment are prominent examples however these issues have always been the issues that Settlement Houses and Neighbourhood Centres have addressed throughout their history. Through their unique approach they will grow and expand to respond to new forms of these challenges in localities to bring about equality, fairness, safety, healing, peace and love between people. It is in working to make the world a better place that the spirit of Neighbourhood Centres find their strength. And in that spirit they will continue forward to a new tomorrow for Queensland's people and places.

## Appendix: Queensland Centre Establishment Dates

1966 Inala Community House

1973 Innisfail Community Advice Bureau (Innisfail Community Support Centre)

1975 Burdekin Community Association

1976 Sunnybank Family Support Centre (Kyabra)

1977 East Brisbane Community Centre

1978 Red Hill Paddington Community Centre (Communify)

1979 Upper Ross Community Centre (Community Gro)

1980 Mount Isa Family Support Service and Neighbourhood Centre

1981 Eagleby Self Help Group (Eagleby Community Association)

1983 Maroochy Neighbourhood Centre, Wooloowin Community Centre (The Community Place), West End Community House

1984 Zillmere Community Centre, Kingston East Neighbourhood Group, Charters Towers Neighbourhood Centre (Prospect Community Services)

1985 Beaudesert Community Centre, Lockyer Community Centre, Charleville Neighbourhood Centre

1986 Hub Neighbourhood Centre (Inala), St David's Neighbourhood Centre, Chinchilla Community Centre, Weipa Community Care, Leichhardt One Mile Community Centre, Whitsunday Neighbourhood Centre, New Farm Neighbourhood Centre.

1987 Co As IT, Granite Belt Neighbourhood Centre, Donald Simpson Community Centre (Unfunded), Pine Rivers Neighbourhood Centre (Encircle), CTM Links, Nerang Neighbourhood Centre, Burdekin Neighbourhood Centre

1988 Harlaxton Neighbourhood Centre, North Townsville Community Hub (NOTCH)

1989 Acacia Ridge Community Support (Belong), Caloundra Community Centre, West End Community House, Multilink, Hervey Bay Neighbourhood Centre, George Street Neighbourhood Centre (The Neighbourhood Hub, Mackay), Charleville Neighbourhood Centre, Graham House Community Centre, Dalby Family Support (Unfunded), Livingstone Community Centre, Logan Village Community Centre (Unfunded), Dysart Community Support Group

1990 Marlin Coast Neighbourhood Centre, Mareeba Community Centre, Presentation Family Support (Cannon Hill)

1991 Mt Gravatt Community Centre, Nundah Neighbourhood Centre (Northside Connect), Mossman Support Services, Nerang Neighbourhood Centre, Fassifern Community Centre, Tully Support Centre, Ravenshoe Community Centre

1992 Benarrawa Community Development Association, Picabeen Community Centre, Sandbag (Sandgate and Braken Ridge), Bundaberg Neighbourhood Centre, Deception Bay

Neighbourhood Centre, Caboolture Neighbourhood Centre, Kuranda Neighbourhood Centre,  
Murilla Community Centre (Miles),  
1993 Care Goondiwindi  
1994 Maleny Neighbourhood Centre, Care Balonne (St George)  
1995 Mooloola Community Centre (Unfunded), Bay Islands Community Service, North  
Burnett Community Services  
1996 Redland Community Centre  
1997 Studio Village Community Centre  
1998 Morris House (Unfunded)  
1999 Beenleigh Neighbourhood Centre, Hambledon House (South Cairns), Rainbow Beach  
Community Centre (Unfunded), Childers Neighbourhood Centre, Pomona, Babinda  
Taskforce (Unfunded)

Further Queensland Neighbourhood Centre history, photographs and stories can be emailed  
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