RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

1. receive the report by the Manager, Community Services on the Community Services Quarterly Update - January to March 2020;

2. note the recent services provided and activities coordinated by Council’s Community Services Department.

Executive summary

This report aims to familiarise Council with services and activities provided by its Community Services Department and to inform it of issues and events of note that arose during the period January to March 2020 (inclusive). It also provides a summary of Community Services’ responses to the global coronavirus pandemic.

Disclosure of Interest

Nil.

Detailed report

Details of Community Services’ quarterly activities, events, milestones and points of note are contained in the attachment to this report. Of particular interest:

- Community Transport services have been limited to essential journeys only;
- Family Day Care Educators’ incomes have been affected by the Federal Government’s Early Childhood Education and Care Relief Package;
- Meals on Wheels numbers are anticipated to increase in response to the global pandemic;
- Council has established a low cost welfare check system to some of our more vulnerable clients living within our community whilst continuing to engage with service volunteers;
- Youth Services have migrated to online platforms for engaging with local youth whilst social distancing measures remain in place.

Community Plan implications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Looking After Our Community</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Goal</td>
<td>A safe and healthy community</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strategy</td>
<td>Maintain the provision of high quality, accessible community services that meet the needs of our community</td>
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</table>
Strategic implications

Council Strategies
Not Applicable.

Council Policies
Not Applicable.

Legislation
Not Applicable.

Financial implications
Not Applicable.

Associated Risks
Not Applicable.

FIONA TURNER
MANAGER, COMMUNITY SERVICES

SIMON JONES
DIRECTOR COMMUNITY

6 May 2020


APPROVED FOR SUBMISSION:

BRAD CAM
GENERAL MANAGER
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Interagency

Interagency meetings resumed for 2020 in February with reduced attendance numbers. The March meeting was also attended by small number of local and outreach agencies. Local issues discussed included the new Mudgee Hospital, changes to NGO/Government funding focus, homelessness, disability access and advocacy, TAFE courses, and NDIS, as well as opportunities to work together and support mutual client groups. The group raised the issue of a lack of a suitable venue, such as a neighbourhood hub or community centre, where people can go to participate in groups such as arts, craft or seek referrals to specific services. Discussions were also commencing about the emerging Australian coronavirus outbreak, and reactions to public health protocols.

Targeted Early Intervention

Council’s Community Development Officers are continuing to develop relationships within Targeted Early Intervention service providers and client groups to plan activities and programs that build resilience and assist to improve outcomes in people’s lives. One such project is centred around Aboriginal families and initiated through meetings at the Kandos Aboriginal Cultural Centre.

In discussions with this community, plans have been made to include building up a propagation and seed collecting operation based at a former plant nursery in Wollar. Skillset has provided workers to do some repairs there and now are engaged in assisting trainees. The long term plan is to do workshops with plant specialists to list what plants (in particular, indigenous plants) grow locally and what plants have an immediate market. Further workshops in product making are also planned.

Further to Targeted Early Intervention goals, plans are progressing to run ‘Affordable Living’ workshops for program target groups. Topics to be covered will include:

- household budgeting, how to develop a budget;
- cooking on a budget, easy healthful recipes;
- how to reduce costs by growing your own vegetables (and get outside as well);
- understanding nutrition;
- who is out there to help (domestic and family violence and addiction cessation); and
- connecting with community and the many activities families can do on limited budgets.

Given social distancing, this project is now intended to run as a series of short discussions in community radio (at least for the short term).
COMMUNITY TRANSPORT

Outputs

Commonwealth Home Support Program trips  1066
Community Transport Program trips  292
NDIS trips  113
Department of Veterans Affairs trips  54
Health Related Transport trips  99
Full Cost Recovery trips  25
Total  1649

Unmet requests for transport

Unmet requests were the highest they have been on a record at 227 trips. This was largely due to restrictions stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, there were four unmet requests for transportation during January due to limited driver availability. As a result of the COVID-19 Public Health Order, funding targets were not met (having only reached slightly over 50% for each program target). Extreme summer heat and bushfires, as well as medical specialists shutting down during January, also had a negative effect on outputs.

Vehicles

All three new vehicles are performing well and very suitable to service. The new wheelchair accessible vehicle is not easily accessible by some elderly (non-wheelchair) clients but additional assists have been purchased to alleviate this issue. Wheelchair clients report that the vehicle is comfortable to ride in.

All vehicle first aid kits have been audited and restocked.

Volunteers

The service has 24 volunteers, however, due to the pandemic the majority of them were identified as vulnerable to coronavirus and have been stood down temporarily. The service hopes to continue to engage with these valuable volunteers once restrictions ease. Calls have gone out to recruit more volunteers in the meantime. Five volunteers continue to drive for the service for essential client trips (medical and grocery) only.

COVID-19

From March, the service took proactive steps to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 through increased vehicle and office cleaning, as well as the provision of PPE for clients and volunteers (where appropriate). Staff and volunteers have also been educated on effective infection control measures. Social distancing was implemented within vehicles through limiting the number of passengers travelling and clients also began to voluntarily cancel all non-essential travel, prior to this becoming mandatory. The service continues to monitor advice from the State and Federal Departments of Health and Transport for NSW.
FAMILY DAY CARE

Mid-Western Regional Family Day Care Scheme has continually provided high quality education and care to the families of our local community for the past 28 years.

Over the past six months our Educators numbers have remained solid at seventeen. During February we underwent a recruitment push which resulted in three enquiries, with one pursuing it to the next stage.

January to March saw the usual increase in vacancies that as children progress to formal schooling, such as kindergarten.

COVID-19

On 2 April 2020, the Prime Minister declared free children care for Australian families. The Scheme, as an approved Early Childhood Service, became responsible for distributing the Australian Government’s Early Childhood Education and Care Relief Package. A static package figure, calculated on a two week reference period in February 2020, will be distributed amongst Educators on a weekly basis based on the calculation of what would have been Educators’ fees generated the week prior. This package is intended to continue until the last week of June 2020. Whilst this results in a decreased income for Educators, they have been encouraged to apply for the Federal Government’s JobKeeper payments to subsidise that income loss. As at the date of writing this report, it is not yet known whether Educators have been successful in their applications for JobKeeper payments. Council is further supporting Educators by waiving their levies until October 2020.

The overall effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Educators, children, families and the Scheme is yet to be fully understood.
MEALS ON WHEELS

Outputs

Main meals, including hot meals, chilled desserts, sandwiches and soups:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Meals</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>672</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>586</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>756</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>2014</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Frozen meals:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Meals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>191</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Active clients

34 meal deliveries | 7 receiving frozen meals only

COVID-19

Volunteer numbers remained steady with 160 individuals coming from 13 different organisations until March, at which time the majority began to stand down voluntarily due to the identification of vulnerabilities to the virus. The service has responded by preparing Council staff to assist with deliveries as required, and also undertaking a recruitment drive for new volunteers that are not, on the face of it, particularly vulnerable to the virus. The response to the latter has been particularly pleasing.

The service identified an increase in orders for frozen meals from end of March as ‘panic buying’ in supermarkets commenced as a result of the pandemic.

It is anticipated that client numbers will continue to grow as the pandemic continues, and further funding has been secured to address the increased requests for service.

All volunteers and staff rostered to assist with Meals on Wheels deliveries have been educated on social distancing and good hygiene principles and have been issued with PPE (where appropriate).
SOCIAL CONTACT WELFARE CHECKS
Council has established a low cost welfare check for clients of Meals on Wheels and Community Transport that have indicated the current global crisis has left them feeling isolated and anxious for their own wellbeing. The service coordinates a small number of existing volunteers (temporarily stood down from duties within Meals on Wheels and Community Transport due to identified vulnerabilities) and matches them with a short list of clients already known to them. Phone calls are undertaken on a regularity requested by the client and general conversations are undertaken to improve their mental wellbeing. The service also acts to ensure that the clients are physically well and have adequate household supplies. Where clients do not respond to calls or indicate serious risk of harm, the matter is escalated by staff to relevant contacts (usually family members listed as emergency contacts).
YOUTH SERVICES

Youth school holiday activities

Attendance at the summer/January school holiday activities overall was good, and feedback from the exit surveys indicates events were well received by attendees. Planning for Youth Week, autumn as well as winter school holiday activities were well underway and then reviewed due to COVID-19 restrictions.

One YA Book One Community

150 copies of ‘A song only I can hear’ by Barry Jonsberg were delivered to various locations across the region in December and it is estimated around 275 people read the book (readers reportedly ranged in age from 9 to 86 years). Unfortunately, the sessions to discuss the book in January were not well attended, for various reasons. It has been determined that continuing the project annually would be worthwhile, but to change the time of year to an August launch date to take advantage of Mudgee Readers’ Festival promotions.

Funding and grant applications

KEPCO Bylong funding for Youth Services concluded on 7 February. An announcement as to the outcome of the successful submission to Round 3 of the Stronger Country Communities Fund Project was made in April. Ongoing funding will ensure the continuation of current and intended youth focused projects and programmes for an additional two years.

Youth Services outreach

A Youth Services Officer attended the Mudgee TAFE NSW Health & Wellness Day in February. It provided an opportunity to interact with local apprentices and promote resources available to them across the region. Additionally a meeting was held with Skillset Workforce staff, to discuss potential future collaboration opportunities.

Regular after school programming

The response to monthly after school programmes Level Up and Manga And Anime Squad has shown there is demand for free after school youth activities. The Youth Services team are investigating opportunities for running impromptu drop-in activities at the Mudgee Library. A regular monthly activity is also being planned for both Kandos and Gulgong, and will tie-in to the day a Youth Services Officer is available at these locations. It is hoped that provision of a regular activity at these locations will increase youth attendance at the libraries. Should this occur the feasibility of a Youth Services Officer attending these locations more frequently will be explored.

COVID-19

Self-isolation and social distancing requirements surrounding COVID-19 have had a significant impact on the planning and delivery of all Youth Services programming. From 30 March, Youth Services Officers began working from home and all formal and non-formal meetings with youth have been temporarily suspended. Staff are now working through viable alternative options for youth activities that can be conducted online or through contactless delivery, which will still allow for local youth community engagement.