MONASH OAKLEIGH COMMUNITY SUPPORT AND INFORMATION SERVICE INC

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* 1. Restricting the eligibility criteria will have a negative impact on our service delivery for both volunteers, and clients.

Volunteers will be asked to make judgements on people who come including the number of visits. Many clients return a number of times, and it’s not just about money. It’s about support and being listened to.

We have a totally volunteer work force, who would find the changes you propose very stressful, impact their relationship with the clients, and potentially lead to fewer volunteers.

Currently, our volunteers do **4,900** hours per year. We have NO paid staff.

We saw **701** clients last year.

A client, who has been unemployed since a work accident, recently shared his budget information with us as follows:

***Fortnightly payment $670.00 with rent assistance.(repaying $20 per fortnight for a loan)***

***Rent $240.00, so I have under $100 to live on paying gas, electricity and food. I don’t use a lot of water, and I am still in credit after the desalination rebate. I use a pre-paid mobile, and gas for hot water, heating and cooking. I restrict myself with heating. Get up at 6 in the morning and turn it on for an hour and then turn it off during the day. I put it on in the evening if its freezing cold, but not every night. I really work out my budget and yet I still have to come and get food from here, because I run out by the end of the week. I am organised with my finances but at least two or three times a year I get behind and really regret spending $2 or $3 on that box of biscuits.***

***Rents keep going up, but income doesn’t!”.***

* 1. Our Agency provides a food voucher of $40 for a single and $50 for a family once every three months if needed. We also are able to offer food parcels through our relationships with Food Bank Victoria and Second Bite. Limited assistance can be given to people who have situations beyond their control. For example help with school camp fees, replacing locks on vehicle which was being used as a home for an 8 month pregnant woman, assistance with registration, return to school expenses including uniforms and books.

2.1,2.2 We currently attend three network meetings in our area for providers of Emergency Relief. We share information at that level in an informal way. As volunteers this is done in our own time, as well as our rostered days in the office. From observation many participants from those networks that are part of the paid workforce are apologies at these meetings.

To formalise agreements between providers would involve more paperwork, more time and more stress on Volunteers.

2.3 Currently we are providing a NILS program which is well received by the clients and well managed by two of our volunteers. Since introducing this scheme there seem to have been many changes in the micro finance area, and we have had to deal with many agencies, again in our own time. However, we deem this as an essential service as our clients have been helped significantly with, for example, a new fridge:

***“I come here most Wednesdays to get bread, and it’s nice to have a chat with the people here. I was talking about my terrible old fridge that was hard to defrost, and I was told about the No Interest Loans that you could use to buy a new fridge. So I got the loan, and I have a lovely new fridge that keeps the food cold, and I don’t have food going off. Best of all I won’t have to defrost this one!”***

***“The NILS loan has helped me with my car repairs. I think I might get another car, and maybe I will need another NILS loan when this one is finished. I have a car so I can pick up my daughters three children in the morning and take them to school, and then pick them up again three times a week.”***

2.4 There would have to be suitable accommodation, serviced by public transport. There would need to be a lot of collaboration between all levels of government and private service providers.

There would have to be adequate, trained staff. Where would volunteers fit in this model?

Our local government have been looking at a HUB model for various services in our area but consultation has ceased due to lack of suitable accommodation and funding.

3.1 Currently our role is to support people with Emergency Relief, many of whom who are unemployed. We do this by listening to their stories, treating them with dignity giving them our time and attention so as to enhance their self-esteem. We ensure that they have adequate food security, and we can assist with travel cards for interviews and appropriate clothing from our free Op Shop.

3.2 The number of occasions a person presents to our agency is not important to us. However the reasons that people are coming are important and where necessary we will refer to other agencies or our case worker. Our case worker is funded for 4 hours per week.

The main barrier to us in this instance would be that we were being asked to make judgements about our clients.

Many of our clients struggle to manage their finances due to an inadequate welfare system that keeps them below the poverty line.

*“****People should know that small resources like this are invaluable to people like me. Hopefully when we get back out there and pay tax, we can make a contribution to what you guys do. Places like this are important. My life has not been great but you guys have been hugely helpful. I like the people here because they don’t make judgements about me, how I look or what I wear. I know it is instinctive to judge but in this modern age we should keep our judgements to ourselves and not force them onto other people. When I come here I am treated like a member of this community, and that’s essentially why I come. This is probably the best resource that our town has”***

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*3.3* In many cases early intervention would have helped some of our clients to avoid the crisis situations they find themselves in. A significant injection of funds into the areas of mental health, homelessness, alcohol and drug education, education for misplaced students would all have the capacity to save the next generation from ending up needing Emergency relief.

5.1 In 2016 we conducted a survey of our clients to see whether our service was providing what they needed. The results were very positive.

Some of the evidence we have used in this submission has come directly from our clients. (***Please see dark italics print***). We recently published a book called ***Your House Your Stories***, which was a compilation of several clients’ stories. They volunteered to tell us why the come to MOCSIS in the context of their lives.

We have quoted them as direct evidence of what they need, and what we do.

Bernadette Allan President MOCSIS

Morny Cochrane Secretary MOCSIS