

24 November, 1982.

PROPOSAL FOR LIMURRU NEIGHBOURHOOD PARENT & CHILDREN'S CENTRE.

(To become known as Limurru)

BACKGROUND:

The B.S.L. initiated its innovative local Family Day Care program in 1972. Limurru Cottage was established in 1973 to support and compliment Family Day Care. It provided group care for children when this was considered a more suitable alternative and cared for Family Day Care children in an emergency when care givers were unable to do so.

Limurru Cottage was able to provide full day care for 22 children and also provided some before and after school care for older siblings of Limurru or Family Day Care children and graduates of these programs.

At this time both Family Day Care and Limurru catered predominantly for local families from the flats, with both parents working in low skilled, poorly paid jobs in local industry. Limurru Cottage was open from 7.30am. until 5.30 pm. to cater for a range of working hours. Those people who were single parents were also working parents. There was a high percentage of migrant families using the services. This was a major reason for employing a high proportion of migrant women as unqualified child care workers. A balance was kept between qualified and unqualified staff.

The atmosphere was a homely one with more flexibility in service delivery than in usual day care centres. This flexibility was most important in order to meet a range of needs as they emerged (e.g. for after school care). Limurru Cottage was, however, basically operated along customary day care centre lines with the B.S.L. offering a service and staff making all decisions about that service. The staff were busy and there was little time for involving the parents.

The population in the high rise flats and nearby area changed markedly over the years. A lot of industry closed down, fewer jobs were available and many people moved out of the area to seek work. As this happened, the flats became occupied more with low income one parent families and two parent families on pensions and benefits.

The population using Limurru Cottage shifted accordingly as the local child care needs changed. The services as full time day care catering for only the over two year olds became less appropriate and inadequate for the

multitude of needs of this changed population. Currently, only five of the 27 children using the service are from migrant families, and only 5 have a working parent. The remainder are from non working families who for one reason or another need child care, time out, or assistance because of parenting, child development or behavioural difficulties. The majority of these are single parent families with poor support systems. All have low incomes.

It became time for the B.S.L. to review its child care services and adapt them to changed local needs. This review was completed in October, 1981. It was decided to pursue the transfer of Family Day Care to the local Council (this transfer has now been completed) and to change the operation of Limurru from a straight day care centre to a multi-function neighbourhood centre for parents and children, which would better meet the range of needs experienced by local families.

BROAD PRINCIPLES BEHIND THE DEVELOPMENT OF LIMURRU NEIGHBOURHOOD PARENT AND CHILDREN'S CENTRE.

From the review process, later consultative processes, and the valuable work of Community Child Care on these issues, certain principles have been formulated on which the centre's objectives will be based.

1. Children's needs must always be seen in the context of their families. One of the problems of child care centres is the failure to recognise the importance of meeting parent's needs because the needs of the parent and children are 'inextricably linked and mutually dependent'. (Community Child Cases "Ripple" No. 21)
2. Families' needs should be seen in turn in the context of their local community and their total social, political, cultural and economic environment.
3. Services to meet parent and children's needs should be available locally and should minimise undesired lengthy family separation.
4. Neighbourhood Parent and Children's Centres should seek to enable and actively encourage parent participation in the centre, enhance parent awareness and knowledge and disseminate information.
5. Neighbourhood Parent and Children's Centres should remain flexible and able to respond to changing local child care and parenting needs as these emerge and offer a wide range of activities over and above child care.

6. Neighbourhood Parent and Children's Centres should operate in a manner which fosters and enhances people's parenting self-esteem, confidence and skills with particular respect and care for the parent/child bond.

7. Such centres contribute to the building of local support networks and the strengthening of communities by creating opportunities for social interaction, friendship, a range of exchanges, and participation in the planning and development of the centre. They can provide a bridge between different groups and generations.

8. Neighbourhood Parent and Children's Centres should maximise all potential for local control and collective decision making by the parents who use the centre.

9. Child care and other centre activities should seek to respect and enhance cultural and ethnic values and practices of the families involved.

10. Neighbourhood Parent and Children's Centres should foster skills sharing and development, information exchange, mutual support arrangements, and co-operative endeavours through which people can help each other and collectively meet their child care and parenting related responsibilities and needs.

11. All Neighbourhood Parent and Children's Centres should be open to those local people who need them and wish to make use of them. Services which are exclusively for a special need category such as 'single parents' are stigmatising and therefore counter productive. This does not exclude the need for some principles of selectivity and the prioritising of needs.

DEVELOPING A MODEL FOR LIMURRU NEIGHBOURHOOD PARENT & CHILDREN'S CENTRE.

The task is to develop a model for the centre which takes heed of these principles, the particular needs of the Fitzroy community close to Limurru Cottage and the principles and special focus of the B.S.L.

Universal Access: The B.S.L. has as its focus a commitment to addressing the needs of those disadvantaged groups in our society who are most in need, particularly those who are disadvantaged primarily by a consistently low income and its consequences. Special consideration needs to be given to this commitment and its relationship to the universal principle regarding the provision of services. While recognising the value of this principle, and acknowledging that services exclusively for non-working parents or single parents would maintain the welfare mantle and would be stigmatising, some positive discrimination in favour of people with low incomes and special needs must remain for this

Neighbourhood Parent and Children's Centre.

LOCAL USER CONTROL:

The principle of local control also needs consideration in light of the B.S.L.'s commitment to this particular local community. The majority of people living closest to Limurru Cottage and in the highest need category are people living in the high rise flats who have had long term low incomes and the consequent lack of access to a range of resources, information, skill development and experience. Generally, they are not experienced at participating in services and institutions which effect their lives, and often lack self-esteem and confidence about their ability to do so. True local user management and control for this group would need to be a long term goal in a community development process. If the goal of local control was attempted too early, the more articulate, resourceful more middle class would be the ones to attain that control.* The less experienced, articulate and resourceful, those who have suffered the consequences of long term low income would again be excluded from participation. It seems important therefore to proceed with the mechanisms of community control at a pace which reflects the development of the majority of centre user's capacity to participate at this level. Particular support and encouragement will need to be given to the less experienced and confident to encourage and enable their participation when they show interest and willingness to become involved.

It is proposed therefore, that as a first stage in the local user control process, an advisory group be set up within two months of opening the centre by which time some parent representation on this panel could be assured. Other forms of community consultation will be undertaken in the meantime and in conjunction with the advisory group. This participatory mechanism would be reviewed after 12 months and more suitable mechanisms which move closer to local parent control would be sought.

LINKAGES WITH OTHER SERVICES:

There are a large number of child care services and welfare services in the Fitzroy area and it will be important for the Limurru Neighbourhood Parent and Children's Centre to remain appropriately linked into this network and to co-ordinate its activities with other local programs. This is essential to ensure that services and activities remain appropriate to overall community needs, flexible enough to meet changes in these, and to ensure the rationalization of local services in relation to community needs.

* Unless user control is a principle it may be the case that local middle class or professional people who do not use the Centre are the ones who have control.

OBJECTIVES OF LIMURRU NEIGHBOURHOOD PARENT AND CHILDREN'S CENTRE:

Within the context of the general principles which have been outlined, the Centre's current location and the needs of families within that community, the following objectives have been developed:

1. To provide a range of child care services including full and part-time day care, occasional care, emergency day care and linkages with other emergency over night or holiday care services for local families. To deliver these services in a manner which is in line with all other objectives.
2. To provide children with a variety of activities, opportunities and experiences with respect to the rights and freedoms of the individual child and which maximise the child's developmental potential and their parent's participation.
3. To foster and strengthen community networks, supports and linkages of families who use the Centre and foster co-operative endeavours among parents and others whereby they might share their parental responsibilities and care for their children collectively. A baby sitting club may be an example of such endeavour.
4. To support and enhance people's parenting self-esteem, confidence and skills with particular respect and care for the parent/child bond and other family bonds.
5. To develop the Centre as a focal point for skill and information exchange, mutual support and a venue for meetings, gatherings and activities relevant to the needs of the families using the Centre.
6. To develop, in conjunction with parents and children, a range of programs including those over and above child care, which reflect and facilitate mutual exchange and support and the strengthening of families generally.
7. To develop structures and mechanisms which enable and actively encourage the participation of parents in the Centre, enhances their role and contribution and their confidence and ability to manage the Centre collectively.
8. Generally, to create a Centre which has an open, welcoming atmosphere which breaks down the traditional barriers between parents and those providing services for them and their children. That is an atmosphere which gives people a sense of inclusion and belonging, thereby paving the way to participation and eventual collective parent management.

STAFFING:

The staff team will consist of:

- A co-ordinator/community development worker.
- A senior child care worker.
- An administrative support worker.
- A centre worker / food co-ordinator
- Three after centre workers.

Job descriptions - Appendix 1.

The approach will be a team work one using shared decision making and regular consultation with parents, children and other relevant people in the community. The management style will need to be reviewed regularly and be changed as parent participation progresses.

THE PROGRAM:

The Centre's program will need to be flexible and able to respond to changes in local need. Some needs are quite apparent now and others will not be revealed until parents become more involved. All activities will be planned and managed in conjunction with parents as far as parent involvement permits.

BASIC ACTIVITIES:

Child Care:

It seems clear that a range of needs are not currently being provided elsewhere in the locality.

This includes some full and part time day care, emergency and occasional care. Care will need to be extended to include the under two age group. Funding constraints require a component of full day care under current arrangements with the Office of Child Care.

Child Development Activities:

These will be planned and run in conjunction with parents and will include a range of educational, play and experimental activities which will aim to enhance the social, physical, and emotional potential of each child, as well as support and enhance the parent/child bond. Opportunities will be developed wherever possible for parents to share their skills and special interests with the children and for children to relate to other people in the local community.

Parenting Skill Sharing and Development Activities:

At this stage it is certain that these activities should include extended play groups (especially for parents with very young children) with opportunities for parenting information and skill exchange and low key staff input.

People have expressed interest in a community lunch and this may extend to parent cooking days for example. Specific child care, health, nutrition, or parenting topics may be discussed, or guest speakers invited.

Educational Programs:

The Centre could be used for a range of adult education activities such as sewing your children's clothes, literacy and numeracy classes, English classes, learning to tell children's stories, creative activities for your children, etc. The Centre could be used for discussion groups and as a venue for classes for local primary school children in remedial reading or other coaching.

Parent Support and Parent Chosen Activities:

The Centre will be available (space permitting) for a range of adult oriented activities, gatherings, meetings, social activities, etc. People may also want to have craft and hobby activities. It has been suggested that parents could 'hire' Limurru for their children's birthday parties as an alternative to their small flat or taking the children to McDonalds. It is most likely that a Friday and Saturday baby sitting club will also be developed.