

MEMO TO: John Forster, John Quelch, Olga Estridge, Mary Mitchell, Sue Culligan  
Tim Roberts, Maria Alibrando

FROM: Deborah Elkington, Services Liaison/SPR

RE: Establishment of Focus Groups

DATE: 19 August 1993

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1. Attached is a discussion paper on the establishment of focus groups. The paper was discussed at the Services Development Forum meeting on 26 July 1993. The proposed terms of reference for the focus groups were endorsed in principle by SDF, pending further discussion with service providers and further detailing of:
  - 1) work to be undertaken by each focus group and
  - 2) proposed timelines.
2. As discussed with you, I have organised a meeting to discuss this on Wednesday, 25th August 2 p.m. in Fitzroy.

Thanks,

*Deborah*

# DISCUSSION PAPER

## Establishment, role and membership of BSL Focus Groups

### 1. Background to the concept of focus groups

#### 1.1 Establishment of the services Development Forum

- . The Services Development Forum (SDF) was established in December 1992
- . The membership of the SDF includes the Executive Director, regional directors, director SPR, director Admin and Finance and a Senior Services manager from each region.
- . The Services Liaison Officer (SPR) is Executive Officer to the SDF.
- . The SDF was established in order to provide advice to Directors on significant new project or service proposals being developed across the BSL, through providing a central point for discussion and input on new proposals.

Over the course of SDF meetings it was agreed that the SDF should also be a forum for assisting directors to consider future service development scenarios for the purpose of:

- . broad organisational planning
- . identifying organisational priorities

and in order to

- . develop a framework which could guide and inform the future development of new program/service proposals by regions and service staff.

### 2. Concept of focus groups

#### 2.1 The concept of focus groups was suggested in response to the SDF's proposed role in identifying future service planning and development issues. It was suggested that focus groups could provide a key mechanism for assisting the SDF to undertake this task.

- . It was suggested that focus groups could comprise of key service and program managers who would be able to provide valuable input, based on their practice experience and their direct contact with service users, low-income people and/or local communities.

- . It was suggested that focus groups could be established in each broad BSL 'service area'. Namely:

- 1) Income Supplementation (incl. Material Aid, Emergency Financial relief, NILS);
- 2) Family, Youth and Community Services; and
- 3) Employment and Training.

As such, focus groups could provide for:

- . cross-regional representation,
- . enable the cross-fertilisation of information and experience across regional areas, and
- . provide a forum to draw out 'common' experience, practice wisdom and future service development issues and scenarios which could inform the strategic planning exercise.

2.2 It was decided that the service area of Aged Services would be considered separately as it is currently undergoing its own review.

### **3. Other inputs into the strategic planning process**

3.1 It was considered that the input of the focus groups to the SDF would be complemented by other sources of information to assist the SDF with its overall forward planning task.

These inputs were seen to include:

- . consultation as appropriate with service users and low-income people.
- . identification and analyses of relevant information related to broader economic and social trends impacting on low-income people and communities and service or policy trends in the broader human service sector.
- . relevant research or evaluation work relating to target groups or programme responses (within BSL or elsewhere).
- . It was suggested that inputs of focus groups and the generation of other inputs would be facilitated and supported by the SLO position, SPR.

### **4. Discussion with service managers/providers**

4.1 Discussion to this point with a number of service staff across the proposed focus group areas suggests that:

- . there is general support for the establishment of focus groups to consider future service directions based on broad service areas.

4.2 Discussion has also raised issues with respect to:

- . the need to consolidate and strengthen existing programs and practices, service policy, and service standards within the broad service areas.
- . the need to develop uniform responses to ensure that current service staff are adequately supported and resourced within broad service areas.

4.3 The degree to which strategic planning issues or consolidation and support issues are the priority for service providers varies across service areas depending on the varying internal and external contexts they are operating in and the historical development of different service areas within the BSL.

- . However it appears appropriate that any planning for future service development should incorporate an assessment of existing services, their historical development in the BSL, consolidation and support issues, and the changing social/economic contexts in which services are now operating, as an initial basis for considering our future service responses.
- . Ideally there would be some flexibility with respect to how much time is spent in individual focus groups on these issues according to each groups identified priorities and circumstances. For example, discussion suggests that:
  - . The focus group on employment and training may be under greater pressure (including external time pressures) to prioritise their work more immediately on identifying where and how the BSL as an agency wants to strategically pitch our future employment and training activity, to identify broad objectives, target groups, and to establish uniform standards and protocols and service policies for BSL labour market programmes as a basis for negotiation with external funding sources.
  - . The Income Supplementation area has expanded to include a greater range of Income Supplementation activities from an original base of Material Aid. Priorities for this group may include a review of the development of income supplementation services in BSL; differing philosophical, practice, and service models emerging across the BSL; changing client characteristics; and broader developments in the 'field' of income supplementation as a means of consolidating, refining, and rethinking the aims of our current services and practices, and as a first step to discussions on future service scenarios.
  - . Priority or starting points for discussion in the Family, Youth, and Community Services focus group, may best be first pitched at considering what the BSL's role was to have been in family, children's, and (non-employment/training based) youth services; what type of services currently exist; discussing the main aim of our activity in these areas, eg. self help, advocacy, specialist services; and identifying how people currently see the 'role' of the BSL in family, youth and community services viz a viz other players in the area; as a means of beginning to identify possible future directions.
- . The following terms of reference for Focus Groups should be considered in the context of these discussions.

# TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR FOCUS GROUPS

**DRAFT**

The broad goals of the Focus groups are to:

1. provide information and advice to the SDF which will assist the SDF to develop a framework which can provide a basis for:
  - . broad organisational planning
  - . identifying broad organisational priorities with respect to future service development
  - . guide the development of new programmes or services within broad 'service areas'.

Specifically focus groups will:

provide information and advice to the SDF on future services policy and development issues in broad 'services areas' giving consideration to the identification of:

- . emerging needs and target groups,
- . existing BSL service response and service response of other agencies or broader sector,
- . broad 'aims' and objectives of future BSL service provision in the area,
- . key principles, approaches, operational emphasis, and standards issues for the development of future services in the service area.
- . key policy issues and agendas.

2. Enhance the capacity of existing services to provide quality services for and with low-income people.

Specifically focus groups will:

- . provide a forum for sharing information and experience across regions within broad service areas.
- . provide a forum for examining current service policy and practice approaches within broad service areas.
- . provide a forum for identifying information, training and support needs of service staff within broad service areas and for facilitating or implementing strategies to address identified needs.
- . provide a forum for identifying data collection, monitoring and evaluation needs within broad service areas and for facilitating or implementing strategies to address identified needs.

It is proposed that to enable focus groups to address terms of reference, key strategies or tasks and key points of emphasis, the work of focus groups should be identified by each individual group and papers outlining these provided to SDF.

## MEMBERSHIP

Original discussions concerning membership of Focus Groups suggested membership would be drawn from senior service managers and individual program co-ordinators.

Discussions with service managers and staff have suggested that given the nature of the activity of focus groups that membership should also include a relevant director/directors.

Membership of relevant directors was seen as important, particularly in the context of future services planning, policy, and approach issues and recommendations.

Options to discuss are:

- 1) permanent membership of relevant director/s
- 2) attendance of relevant director/s at appropriate meetings of the Focus groups.

There is a general sense that membership of focus groups should be restricted to BSL staff, however it has been suggested that it would also be useful to utilise the expertise of people outside the BSL to assist focus group activity as appropriate.

## SERVICING ISSUES TO BE DISCUSSED

It was agreed at the prior SDF meetings that Focus groups be established, facilitated and serviced by the SLO position, SPR.

Additional issues to be clarified include:

- . the issue of a chair for focus groups.
- . emphasis for responsibility for the preparation of papers or other information outputs for:
  - . focus group purposes
  - . reporting to SDF.
  - . typing/admin support for work generated by the Focus groups.