



## Queensland Council of Social Service

### *Case Study: George Street Neighbourhood Centre, Mackay*

#### **Funding withdrawals prompted a change in the way this neighbourhood centre worked and reached out to its local community.**

When recent funding withdrawals significantly reduced Mackay's George Street Neighbourhood Centre's budget, manager Teresa Raj knew it was time to talk to her team.

"We lost two major programs: Literacy and Numeracy, and Participate in Prosperity. Both were major funding projects, so that was a huge loss, 10 per cent across George Street. We were auspicing another service and due to their funding cuts they couldn't continue the contract with us. So all together we got hit quite significantly," said Teresa. "We sat down and had an open and honest discussion with the staff. We said, 'This is where we're at. We are running at a deficit. If we continue like this, we are going to crash. So let's start thinking. Each and every one of you here, what is your commitment to the organisation? What can you give?'"

#### **Rethinking resources**

The result of that conversation was a program of fundraising events – a new direction for the organisation. In 2013 the neighbourhood centre held a dinner, car wash, monster garage sale, movie night, and Christmas carols under the stars. They achieved all this without employing a new position to deliver the fundraising activities, instead restructuring two existing roles and building two hours a week into each and every staff member's role to work on new relationships and partnerships, both for service delivery and fundraising. Reporting on the number of new relationships they develop has become part of every staff member's line management.

The fundraising program had two aims. The first was to raise the profile of the organisation to reach new families moving into the area. This networking and relationship building process allowed the neighbourhood centre to collaborate with other service providers to enhance service delivery. The second aim was to put money back into the organisation after recent funding withdrawals.

While the organisation has contributed funds to develop a new website to refresh the brand's visual identity, to capture online donations and to register volunteers, it has had to be creative in finding the resources to deliver fundraising activities. The coordination and staffing of fundraising events has come down to staff and volunteers.

A vigorous campaign has seen 24 new volunteers sign up in the last two months to work on fundraising. In-kind donations from new partners in the community have provided the equipment, catering and prizes required to hold the events which included a dinner, car wash, carols by candlelight, and barbecue. "Everything for the Roast Dinner was donated by Woolworths, Coles, IGA, Bothwicks and South Leagues (Club). We didn't spend a dollar, they gave everything," said Teresa.

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## Impact

The frank and honest discussions between the staff have resulted in a profound cultural shift in the organisation. Teresa reports that all staff are now more willing to volunteer their time after hours to deliver fundraising activities. Each and every staff member's focus has shifted to be more outcomes based in service provision to Mackay families. Not only has the re-focus allowed the fundraising to be possible, it has impacted on the delivery of services as well.

So far all funds raised have been put towards emergency relief and assisting families with other costs, such as school uniforms and providing funds for the funeral of a young boy who was tragically killed. While the organisation has a federally funded Emergency Relief Program, it does not meet the presenting needs of local, vulnerable families.

Teresa is realistic that the George Street Neighbourhood Centre's fundraising will never be able to fully replace government funding for services. "Looking into Mackay as a region and trying to raise funds when the region itself is struggling in different sectors...it is really hard. But what we can do is raise our profile, get a little bit of resources in, and help in a little way."

And as for fundraising plans in 2014? Teresa simply replied, "Watch this space."

## Case study key themes

**Leadership** – Teresa's strong leadership is driving the change in her organisation. But she is also sharing her leadership by making each staff member responsible for bringing in new partners to the organisation.

**Investment** – In addition to funding the cost of a new website, George Street Neighbourhood Centre is making a significant investment in staff time to deliver the fundraising program. Their investment is being returned in the form of community resources, such as volunteers and in-kind support, while cash donations are starting to flow in.

**Culture shift** – A change in attitudes and in the way each staff member works was vital to the neighbourhood centre's fundraising strategy. The new fundraising program has necessitated a cultural shift in how George Street operates as an organisation, which has in turn positively impacted and changed the way it delivers services.

**Reactive** – George Street is reacting to its reduced funding after the fact, and so is starting from the back foot. It is only now in the process of building its organisational capacity, systems and community relationships in order to deliver fundraising activities. It will take several years for its fundraising program to mature and truly repay the organisation's investment.