



Neighbourhood Houses
Tasmania

Submission to the Tasmanian Government Budget 2016-17

Our Enterprising Communities



***Budget Submission to the Tasmanian Government for the
2016 - 2017 State Budget***

***From
Neighbourhood Houses Tasmania***

***“Supporting our Members to Strengthen
their Communities”***



**Neighbourhood Houses
Tasmania**

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This Budget Submission is separated into three sections.

1.	Our Organisation's Role and Functions	Page 4
2.	The Needs of the Neighbourhood House Network <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Beyond Survival Funding• Capital & Infrastructure Program Investment	Page 6 Page 6 Page 11
3.	Responding to the Big Issues facing Tasmania <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Education• Employment, Unemployment and Underemployment• Health and Wellbeing	Page 13 Page 15 Page 22 Page 26

Section 1 - Our Organisation's Role and Functions

Neighbourhood Houses Tasmania Inc. is the peak body for all 35 Community and Neighbourhood Houses operating in Tasmania.

Of our member Neighbourhood Houses whom we represent and support, 33 are funded by the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Disability & Community Services Division under the Neighbourhood House Program. They are funded primarily to engage in community development work in disadvantaged or socially isolated communities. Neighbourhood Houses are all separately incorporated community organisations governed by a volunteer local management committee.

Neighbourhood Houses Tasmania Members:

North-West Region	Northern Region	Southern Region
Burnie Devonport Eastern Shore (East Devonport) Phoenix (King Island) Rosebery Ulverstone Zeehan	Beaconsfield Deloraine Dorset Fingal Valley George Town NSCC -Rocherlea NSCC – Mowbray Ravenswood St Helens Tresca (Exeter)	JRS - Bridgewater Bucaan (Chigwell) Clarendon Vale Derwent Valley Dowsing Point Dunalley JRS - Gagebrook Ge-Co (Geeveston) Goodwood Karadi Maranoa Heights (Kingston) Okines Pittwater (Midway Point) Risdon Vale Rokeby Warrane/Mornington West Moonah West Winds

Taken together, the Neighbourhood House network is the largest community development infrastructure in the state.

What Houses deliver

- 498, 000 participants a year in programs and activities
- 118, 000 volunteer hours
- 131, 000 hours of employment

Neighbourhood Houses are funded to engage in community development.

At its most basic, and most powerful, community development is the act of people coming together united around a concern or an opportunity in their local community, and working together to act.

Community development is fundamentally about enabling, facilitating and building capacity for a community to address its own needs. (Community Development Foundation/NEF consulting 3:2010)

In short it is local people working together to solve their own problems.

This is what differentiates us from traditional service delivery which responds to problems by bringing in “workers” to support the individual. Traditional service delivery is vital to support people, but will be ultimately unaffordable as a State unless we work at broadening the model. We need to create communities where people are supported by the community they live in, not just as individuals supported by an external support agency. Community development workers act as catalysts: they stimulate the investment of time and talent from the volunteering potential inherent in local communities.

Neighbourhood Houses are therefore an essential community resource, contributing towards social cohesion in disadvantaged and isolated communities through community development activities that provide opportunities for community members to build their confidence, reduce social isolation and learn new skills, and as such, have become a more vital part of community infrastructure over the last five years.

In some ways Houses are victims of their own success, as organisations both government and non-government, approach Neighbourhood Houses wanting to consult with them, using the Houses as a means to engage with community and seeking to partner with them to deliver programs into communities. Particularly with so many government departments wanting to create “place based approaches”, the demands on coordinator and volunteer time has increased and local expertise is asked for more and more.

Section 2 - The Needs of the Neighbourhood House Network

To support and enable our enterprising communities we need to recurrently provide more than “Survival Funding” to existing Neighbourhood Houses.

Introduction

NHT and the network of Neighbourhood Houses are very grateful for the Government’s commitment to their communities. We certainly acknowledge the great investments over the last two years of:

- An additional \$1.7 million into Neighbourhood Houses over the 2014-15 and 2015-16 financial years. The Government delivered on its promise to provide each House with an additional one-off funding injection of \$50,000 over two years. This is additional funding was on top of the \$4.6 million already committed recurrently for Neighbourhood Houses.
- Capital investment funding of \$4 million for 2014-15 which has and is being spent on upgrading and refurbishment of the ageing buildings Neighbourhood Houses operate from. This is confirmation of a commitment made by the previous Government, and is in addition to around \$2 million provided for infrastructure upgrades in 2013-14.
- \$100,000 allocated to enable eight start-up Food Cooperatives to help families and individuals access low cost, healthy, fresh and nutritious food by establishing partnerships between community, local food producers, Neighbourhood Houses and food relief organisations.
- \$300 000 over four years to resource MI Fellowship to work with, resource and support Neighbourhood Houses to better support community members and volunteers living with mental health issues.
- \$1.7 million to build a brand new Neighbourhood House in Rocherlea to replace the ageing and unhealthy demountable buildings the House currently operates from. This investment is rolling out between 2015 and 2018.

All of these have been great investments in enabling and supporting Houses to strengthen their communities and which they have and will continue to put to great use.

Beyond Survival Funding

NHT and the Management Committees of the 33 DHHS-funded Neighbourhood Houses call on the Government to finish the work it started by:

1. Investing recurrently to finally sustainably fund the 33 Neighbourhood Houses and;
2. Analysing the existing infrastructure gaps identified by the current Capital Infrastructure Program and commit enough funds over 4 years to ensure the physical infrastructure of each Neighbourhood Houses is fit for purpose.

Recommendation 1. Make a recurrent investment beyond the current two year \$25 000 per annum commitment. We urge the government to increase the recurrent budget of Neighbourhood Houses by a minimum of \$35 000.

Responsible Department: Department of Health and Human Services

In its 2014-15 Budget Submission NHT called for an increase to Houses' Funding to enable Houses to be adequately staffed and resourced to respond to the community's needs, and to enable them to keep up with cost of living increases and move beyond survival level funding. In it we quantified this as an investment of \$35 000 per annum.

Our hope then and now is to create a funding paradigm that actually finally establishes a sustainably funded and staffed Neighbourhood House. It potentially enables the equivalent employment of two full time staff and a Neighbourhood House that has the flexibility to invest in community projects, their infrastructure and equipment when needed.

In 2009-10 NHT asked for increased funding for Neighbourhood Houses due to rising costs. At that time Houses' recurrent budgets were approximately \$100 000 with approximately \$25 000 of their budget (25 percent) spent on fixed costs which continued to rise. These fixed costs include electricity, insurance, Internet and phone costs, postage, security etc.

At that time this meant Houses were investing on average maximum of \$75 000 on staff. This just enabled Houses to afford approximately 1.5 FTE of worker time.

In NHT's 2012-13 Budget submission we sought a minimum of \$50 000 per annum extra per House to adequately fund a thriving Neighbourhood House. However we did make the point that at the very least \$25 000 was urgently needed as Survival Funding to maintain the current levels of service and staffing at Neighbourhood Houses.

The previous Government was able to meet the survival funding increase of \$25 000 per House for which we are very grateful. We now know that even with that funding and wage increases under the Equal Remuneration Order, the recurrent funding of Neighbourhood Houses still can only operate at the 2009-10 level of 1.5 FTE in staff (just) and the fixed costs of running the building!

This means that in five years due to rising staffing and fixed costs, the network of Houses has not advanced in real terms at all with its recurrent funding.

The evidence is clear. NHT has recently conducted analysis on the income and expenditure costs of 9 of our member Houses, from both rural and urban locations. This has shown that fixed costs of electricity, insurance, phone etc on average consume approximately \$35 000 of a total grant of \$148 000 for Category A Neighbourhood Houses. This means that fixed costs consume around 23.6 percent of House recurrent funding virtually the same as in 2009-10.

Analysis of current Award wages means that in 2014-15 to employ a full time coordinator at SCHADS level 6 and a part *time* worker (for admin/finance/project roles) on Level 4 costs \$107 000 per annum. This means that 72.3 percent of Houses' core recurrent funding is still being spent achieving a minimum of staffing equivalent of 1.5 FTE.

New Government responds and provides \$50 000 over 2 years per Neighbourhood House

That urgent need to move beyond survival funding for the Neighbourhood House network in our 2014-15 submission was acknowledged by the current Government when it came to office. The Government delivered on its election promise to provide an extra \$25 000 per annum for two years in all DHHS-funded Neighbourhood Houses.

This was not the recurrent \$35 000 the Network was seeking, however NHT and the network of Houses are grateful for this investment and the vote of confidence in their work at such a difficult budget time for the Government.

At the media launch of this initiative attended by Premier Will Hodgman, it was publicly acknowledged that due to a difficult budget circumstance this amount could not, in the short term, be offered recurrently. The suggestion was that it was up to NHT and the network of Houses to show what could be achieved through this investment. Government was looking for the network to “prove” this was money well spent, and when the Tasmanian economy rebounded, that the funding should be made recurrent and increased to the original \$35 000 per annum per House that was originally requested.

We are confident that even after just one year of the funding our network has created real community impact with these funds. In calling on further Government investment we have analysed the reports on the spending by Neighbourhood Houses and their planned programs to create a state wide analysis of how the funds have and will be used.

What has been achieved with the \$50 000 one-off funding - is it a worthwhile investment?

The initial \$25 000 for 2014-15 has enabled Neighbourhood Houses to make improvements in practical ways and also has created real community outcomes. Eighty two percent of Houses have or plan to use the funding to increase staffing hours. What this has meant in reality has been **time**.

Houses have built on established programs, but now with the **time** to implement well, evaluate, listen to feedback and change approaches to suit the community. Basically the more **time** the staff have, the greater they are able to support and encourage the community to own and run programs.

The \$25 000 has meant **time** for the staff of Houses to focus on their volunteers, supporting them, training them and tailoring roles better for them. This in turn has led to more volunteers and more importantly a greater sense of ownership of the programs they're involved in by the volunteers.

*“We have been able to recruit new volunteers, provide them with customer service training, safe food handling and other opportunities to increase their skills. Having **time** means we've been able to support the volunteers in a way that has unleashed their creative and ownership, leading to increased usage and awareness of the Playhouse facility”. (Devonport Community House)*

*“We decided that employing a volunteer manager to support the 51 volunteers at the House would be a wise investment. This has allowed all volunteers to have clear positions descriptions, better support and induction, and an increased chance to shine which means a more purposeful time here”.
– (Ravenswood)*

It has given staff more **time** to reach out and build partnerships with other organisations and service providers. This has directly led to many new programs and initiatives being established such as, for example:

- School Holiday programs in Georgetown;
- “Five for \$5” a cooking program for disadvantaged men in East Devonport;
- A health program in Chigwell called “Eat Well, Move More, Stress Less” and
- A “Sids and Kids” partnership in Devonport.

*“Devonport through the Play House is now hosting the Sids and Kids organisation, with the first North West monthly bereaved parents support group. We’ve been able to create better partnerships through having more **time!**”*

The greater **time** to work with partners has led to greater funding overall through collective groups in community submitting for philanthropic funds together through the House leadership. This means more collective action by organisations in community not silo driven responses which are often of frustration to government and philanthropic funding bodies alike.

*“We’ve been able to establish more and better partnerships with other service providers and community groups, instead of drowning trying to do it ourselves we’ve had the **time** to outreach and meet, and this has led to more programs happening through the House with these partners through their involvement and support. **Time** for us, has led to greater investment in our community by other organisations through the House.”*

Time for staff to actually focus on the community issues that the House had identified but not had the **time** or resources to tackle. Ulverstone Neighbourhood House was able to create a specific youth project for two years, because their community had continually identified youth as an area of concern. Dunally-Tasman was able to increase staff hours to continue to provide an extended response to the needs of their community two years after the terrible bushfires.

“Without these extra funds we have no idea how we could have managed the extra workload within our budget constraints. These funds enabled us to be responsive to the community’s changing needs in a way that we could never have managed without the extra funds”. (DTNH)

It’s enabled **time** so that staff can be more available to welcome and interact with those coming to the House for the first time, which is so critical.

The funds have enabled an investment in our valued volunteers – creating outcomes for individuals and outcomes for communities.

Forty percent of Houses have utilised some of the funds to train their volunteers and staff which leads to increased skill levels and confidence of staff and volunteers. This includes administrative volunteers and staff being better trained in use of software or mental health awareness training for all volunteers at the House. These investments by Houses with these funds make for a more effective House, a better workplace for all, and at the same time raises the confidence and skill levels of those involved, which for volunteers, we have seen directly lead to employment outcomes.

In 2015 Neighbourhood Houses Tasmania launched our new book [“Starting Point: The Real Difference People and Neighbourhood Houses Can Make”](#). This was important, as it is through the stories of participants and volunteers that the interplay of people receiving and gaining so much as individuals while volunteering for their community at the House is truly understood.

We can see that there are themes that run strongly and constantly through the stories, including that:

- Connection within a community is a critical factor in people’s lives and Neighbourhood Houses enable connections in so many ways.

- Connection and confidence are two related strengths – one builds on the other and brings people to a place where they can be happier and healthier – and often leads to contributions back to their communities. It benefits the person but just as importantly it builds stronger communities.

Or as Christine from Gagebrook Community Centre stated in her interview about this “two way benefit” for the individual and the community: *“It’s a double whammy of awesomeness!”*

It was great to have Peter Richards, the Ravenswood Neighbourhood House Vice President, launch the book at our 2015 Conference. He is one of the people telling their story in the book, and at the launch he bravely and honestly shared his story of the role the House has played in his journey out of depression and isolation to engagement and contribution to his community again. We encourage anyone considering this submission and the work of Neighborhood Houses to take the time to read the stories within to inform their decision making.

Investing in equipment

Seventy five percent of Houses have used some proportion of the funding to upgrade equipment and infrastructure at the House. Assumptions could be made that Houses already have the basic equipment and amenity that supports a welcoming and efficient environment, but this is not always the case. Pragmatic, important items have been purchased such as:

- Tables and chairs to replace old donated items, which mean that community lunches have been expanded and people now have comfortable seats;
- Commercial fridges have been bought to enable food relief and catering to be stored in the volumes required;
- Decent ovens have been bought, with one House commenting “the volunteers can finally cook a roast for the community lunch as we’ve got two good ovens now. We’ve wanted that for years but never had the resources to quite prioritise as a purchase. The volunteers are really excited and pleased”;
- Houses have bought computers that work and are fast, rather than old donated computers “that are freezing and have been very slow and difficult to work with – we finally don’t have substandard technology”;
- Houses have upgraded websites to enable better community connection, and focussed on marketing to the broader community; and
- One House has been able to install wall tracking that enables their main room to also be a place local artists can hang their work, and even provide a venue for art launches and exhibitions. “This may seem like a small thing but being a small regional community there just isn’t anywhere for these artists to come together and celebrate what they do. It also makes the House a more vibrant and attractive community space!”

These sorts of investments in equipment by Houses on top of the government’s \$6 million infrastructure funding across the network mean so many Neighbourhood Houses can finally “physically” be places that are what their communities deserve. Houses have always been welcoming and warm places.....now if this investment can be made recurrent the buildings and the equipment, the physical capital of the House, can start to live up to their social capital.

This temporary investment of \$25 000 trusted the community to decide how the money was spent and this was one of the greatest strengths of this funding. The local Neighbourhood House had the freedom to choose where to invest those funds.

As you can see from above, Houses have stretched these dollars across a great variety of areas, and have squeezed blood from a stone to maximise the benefit to their community.

The State Government gave the Houses the opportunity of where to direct those funds and we hope that any future investment would be similarly flexible. Allowing local communities the opportunity to decide where best to target the funds to achieve the aims of the Neighbourhood House program is being true to the place-based community development approach of the Houses.

Increase the investment, make it recurrent and Houses will continue to deliver.

Recommendation 2: That the government invest an extra \$35 000 per annum in 33 of the most disadvantaged and /or socially isolated communities in Tasmania, meaning that each DHHS funded Neighbourhood House receive an extra \$35 000 per annum recurrently to finally enable all Houses to have the resources they need to be thriving places.

Annual cost \$1 155 000 per annum or \$4 620 000 over four years.

Responsible Department: Department of Health and Human Services

Capital and Infrastructure Program Investment

NHT calls on government to further stimulate local economies through investment in local builders to finish the capital improvement work already commenced to create Houses worthy of the communities that use them.

Over the last three years the current and previous government have invested \$6 million across the DHHS-funded Neighbourhood House network. This has focussed on raising the Houses to a fit-for-purpose state after years of underinvestment.

Prior to this the State Government spent \$3-4 million each on 9 Child and Family Centres across the state, for we assume a total infrastructure cost of around \$27 million.

Excluding the \$1.7 million investment in NSCC Rocherlea which was granted in the last budget, for which the network is incredibly grateful, \$6 million will have been spent across the 33 sites Neighbourhood Houses operate from. Given that planning and consultancy/architects fees have consumed around \$500 000 of the allocations it has resulted in \$166 000 being spent on average per House.

Impacting on the use of these funds is that any changes to footprints has triggered requirements under the recently revised Building Code of Australia around disability access. This has meant that many of the renovations have required between \$80 000 and \$100 000 on new disabled and ambulant access toilet blocks. The disability access created is a great outcome but these required investments have left precious little left over to create as many new kitchens, new multi -purpose rooms and offices that all had hoped for.

The project team have done a great job seeking to maximise the spending on Houses, but it did require prioritising the greater needs of some Houses over others, and committing to major renovations of around a dozen Houses as opposed to major re builds across the network.

There is an opportunity while the knowledge is fresh within the DHHS project team and the House network to estimate the cost in 2016-17 of the actual needs remaining for all Houses to be fit-for-purpose. It would also benefit all for that analysis to be resourced and conducted externally rather than the internal team having to do further work off the side of their desks.

Given the investment by the past Government into the 9 Child and Family Centres which cost between \$3 and \$4 million each, it would seem a further investment in the Neighbourhood House network to take the total investment from \$7.7 million including Rocherlea to \$9.7 million across 34 sites is not unreasonable.

Already a raft of regional builders have benefited through government investment in House infrastructure as these have been relatively small contracts located in some of our most disadvantaged and socially isolated rural communities.

Further investment will provide greater local economic stimulus into the regions which is a good thing in itself, in addition to the community benefit via better fit-for-purpose Neighbourhood Houses.

Recommendation 3: That the government invest in thorough analysis of the outcomes of the CIP project to determine which Neighbourhood Houses have unmet infrastructure needs to bring each House up to an equivalent standard to be fit-for-purpose. This analysis to determine the total infrastructure investment is needed, however NHT anticipates an investment of \$2 million at minimum will be required.

Given the pressures on DHHS with their programs we recommend that an external consultant appointed by NHT in partnership with DHHS be engaged to allow thorough and independent consultation with Houses and DHHS to fully scope the need in 2016-17.

Consultant cost of \$50 000 with at least a \$2 million investment over 2017-18 and 2018-19.

Total Cost over three years \$2.05 million

Responsible Department: Department of Health and Human Services

Section 3 – Responding to the Big Issues facing Tasmania

Introduction

At the Neighbourhood Houses Tasmania State Conference in 2014, 30 communities were represented by a broad mix of volunteers, committee members and paid staff from Neighbourhood Houses – over 120 people from all over Tasmania. The two days were spent identifying the key issues of concern common across the 30 communities represented, and prioritising them. The four issues that all agreed needed the attention of government, community and business were:

- Education;
- Employment;
- Health & Wellbeing; and
- Cost of Living.

These four issues have been areas of concern for communities and Governments for a long time, but unfortunately there seems to have been little structural progress made on any of them.

We have chosen to focus this Submission on the three issues of: Education, Employment, and Health and Wellbeing.

The network has explored these issues, focusing on and sharing the things we do well at the local level, and identifying new ideas and innovations for wider consideration. Instead of focusing on the problems, the network has focused on solutions. Based on these local innovations and successes we seek to build what should be a set of “Big Ideas” so that the broader Tasmanian community and Governments understand and address the ongoing issues that affect individuals, communities and Tasmania so deeply.

While the underlying issues and problems are briefly summarised below, Neighbourhood Houses believe that the issues are generally known. Our network wants to move beyond talk and into action with regard to these problems, as they see the impacts of these issues on community members every day. The network is united in the view that the time for constantly and repeatedly naming the problems is over and we need to start identifying and implementing solutions. As a result, in 2015 the NHT Board and Member Houses committed to using our regional meetings to drill down into local solutions that Houses find are working and address these problems at community level. Houses can then build on local solutions and contribute to the bigger community/policy/government responses that are needed. Houses have had conversations within their communities about each issue with the key points brought to successive regional meetings during 2015. NHT has facilitated the discussions and collated the common themes which now inform this Budget Submission.

We provide this background to emphasise that what we are proposing has been developed collectively and collaboratively across the 35 communities represented by Neighbourhood Houses. Therefore we hope that these recommendations are given appropriate consideration. Houses may not be experts in any of these areas, but our members are supporting the families and individuals living with the impacts of these issues every day. Community organisations and local people have been compelled to creatively respond in efforts to change the situation at the local level. These recommendations are built from the experience, drive and passion of local communities working at the coal face and thus should and must be considered.

NHT and our member Houses welcome discussions with the relevant Departments about our recommendations to clarify or discuss them in greater depth. We'd particularly welcome the opportunity for discussions in communities like Clarendon Vale, Rosebery or Rocherlea where the impacts of these issues are being seen so clearly.

Education

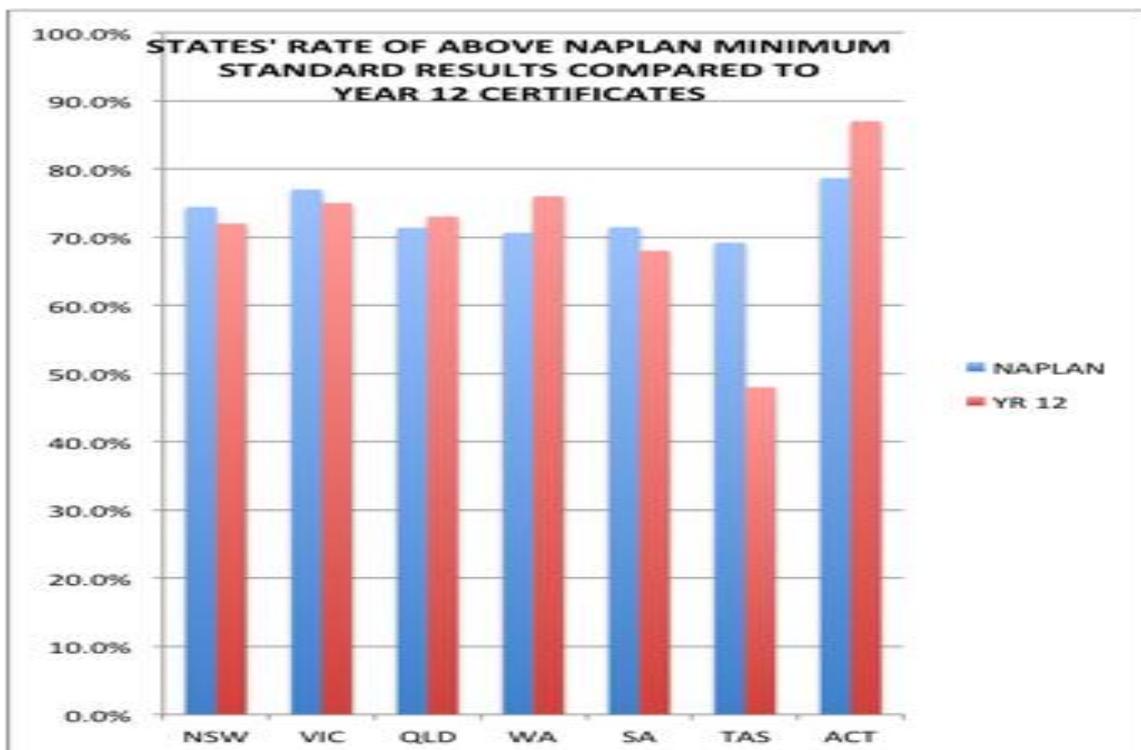
Education is the number one issue of concern to Neighbourhood Houses and local communities.

The Neighbourhood House sector has for a long time seen education as the key to the self-confidence and self-esteem that we need in order to engage or re-engage with our communities, our families, and our work. However we know that nearly one in two Tasmanians lack the literacy skills they need to engage fully with family, community, and work. This means that for nearly half of us life can be harder than it needs to be.

In Tasmania today not quite half our young people are gaining their TCE, and only about one third of them are from our state high schools. Some of these successful students would have contributed to the total of 63 students completing a Certificate III in the senior secondary colleges in 2013.

Our low rate of year 12 completion cannot be explained by lack of ability. Look at Tasmania's 2014 year 9 NAPLAN results. Except for spelling, the percentage of Tasmanian students who achieved at or above the national minimum standard equalled or exceeded that for Australia as a whole. In the key areas of reading and writing, only Victoria and WA were ahead of Tasmania. In numeracy no state was.

In the other states, the percentage of young people who gain their year 12 certificates and the percentage who were above the national minimum standard in their year 9 NAPLAN, are about the same. In some states, a greater percentage achieve their year 12. In Tasmania there is a gap of more than 20%. The bar graph below shows these comparisons.



Or numerically....

	NAPLAN	YR 12
NSW	74.4%	72.0%
VIC	77.0%	75.0%
QLD	71.4%	73.0%
WA	70.6%	76.0%
SA	71.4%	68.0%
TAS	69.2%	48.0%
ACT	78.7%	87.0%

In many of our state schools, less than half the young people who did well in their NAPLAN at year 9 went on to complete their year 12. This just does not happen anywhere else in Australia, and we cannot afford to let this continue.

It is our Member Neighbourhood Houses that are dealing with students who are disengaged or excluded from their local school. It is our Members who sit down with despairing parents to try to support them to re-engage their child with school. It is our Members who are unfortunately seeking to support locally those students whose parents are not in a place to support them or encourage them to go to school. When we asked the 35 Neighbourhood Houses, their volunteers and staff, what the number one issue of concern and the number one opportunity to change outcomes in their community the resounding, even overwhelming response was education.

We of all organisations have no desire to stigmatise our communities or be seen as attacking what our High Schools and Colleges are aiming to achieve but we have to highlight these outcomes as the current system is not working!

We believe that the cause of this problem is that no one has responsibility for the failure of our schools and colleges to support our capable students through to successful completion.

Instead we have defensiveness, blame shifting between the colleges and the high schools, and claims that the kids or the community are the problem.

The Tasmanian Government must urgently address this problem. We need an honest report to the community on the performance of our schooling system. We need an explanation of why we are so far behind the other states. We need action to fix the problem.

Above all, we need schools to support our young people **all the way** through high school to the end of year 12 , with school principals who are accountable for their students' successful completion of year 12, with their schools well-resourced to meet this.

It is engaging in education that provides role models for the next generation.

It is only education that can provide our communities with the knowledge and skills we need to build a future of productive and satisfying work, creativity and care.

It is only education that can open our young people's eyes to a wide world of possibilities for their futures, that can encourage them to have big dreams for what they might become.

Houses want our communities to have high expectations of the educational capacities of our young people and hopes for their educational attainment levels – no 'tyranny of low expectations' for our communities.

Houses want to see young people and adults all reach their full potential, and not to be thwarted by challenges they may face.

Houses want to see high levels of community involvement and engagement with local education provision. When issues arise, such as young people disengaging from the education system, there should not be a one-size-fits-all solution but rather options that can vary by location according to what will work best in each community.

Education must be quarantined from further funding cuts and investment increased. This has to be the priority for the current and any future governments for all our sake.

Addressing issues for secondary education

We commend the State Government for enabling more communities to move to provide education through to year 12. However we and our member Houses are concerned that this is currently being done within a resource constrained environment. Some of the very schools expanding to Year 12 have received extra funding while at the same time facing cuts that have been applied across all schools.

However the extension to year 12 should not be for the sake of it, or just be doing more of the same which maintains a high level of disenfranchised students. We need to get away from the one-size-fits-all approach to schooling, and it needs to be purposeful, relevant and flexible in the delivery of subjects and options, engaging with community and industry.

We are not advocating that all High Schools in Tasmania should go to year 12. However a strategic analysis must seek to create or recreate schools going through to year 12 as the default rather than the exception. Schools should not operate in a closed, insular manner but be open to, and part of, the wider community. Creating a silo approach must be avoided but rather, with collaboration between all involved, creating an integrated service approach that goes right the way through to year 12. Emphasis should be on real, contextual learning for students, involving the local business community to give young people workplace experiences and opportunity.

Thanks to Hon Professor Michael Rowan and Hon Professor Eleanor Ramsay for their voluntary work to assist us to develop this section of our Budget Submission, assisting particularly on making public the figures relating to educational attainment and NAPLAN. Their full analysis can be seen on the Education Ambassadors website <http://educationambassadors.org.au/>

Recommendation 4: Increase current funding and investment to enable significantly more High Schools go through to year 12, with this transition fully funded.

Responsible Department: Department of Education.

All our communities, and Neighbourhood Houses, are prepared to lead and take a role in these community discussions must encourage and find alternative ways to celebrate the completion of Year 10. The Leavers Dinner culture and the way the media, family and communities continue to emphasise this is a cultural issue that we all must challenge as it continues to contribute to the lack of retention beyond year 12.

Recommendation 5. The year 10 school leaver celebration culture in our schools and media must stop. It creates the impression that year 10 is the end of school when it is not.

Responsibility: Department of Education

Leadership teams within schools need to prioritise forming intentional partnerships with community groups and organisations. Partnerships should not be reliant on the personality or philosophy of the individual principal, but rather they become a requirement and expectation of the role to engage the school within the wider community. School principals need to be leaders rather than managers. There needs to be a review of their role within the community setting, making the forming of community partnerships a part of the role, and not leaving it randomly up to individual choice or interest.

There needs to be the intentional development of relationships between schools and Houses which will help provide a safety net for children having difficulty engaging with the school system. A coordinated community approach will help prevent children falling through the cracks. Schools need to partner better with their local communities, and work in a coordinated effort.

There needs to be a state wide approach to connect Houses and schools by developing a formal partnership with the Education Department regarding working together around the issue of disengaged, suspended and truant students.

There also needs to be a school level budget to enable this or it will remain difficult for Principals to prioritise these external partnerships.

Recommendation 6. The Department of Education fosters a community focused culture with their Principals and senior staff, with expectations to develop outreach programs, build community partnerships and develop solutions that work in their local areas. To enable this there needs to be floating, unallocated resources of both finances and staff for school communities, which will allow for adaptive, targeted responses, solutions and partnerships to meet the particular local needs and issues of students as they present themselves within a school and community.

Responsible Department: Department of Education

The approach advocated in Recommendation 3 is to enable schools and community groups to partner at the local level to re-engage and support students currently or at risk of disengagement.

Outside of this the Education Department must be mandated to develop a larger and well resourced evidence based Alternative Education program at a sub-regional level. The current Government has stated that its approach to alternative education will be evidence based and targeted where needed and our network applauds this. However our anecdotal experience is that the approach currently is not structured and strategic or invested in to the extent that it needs to. Any programs that do develop are forced to cobble together resources from multiple non-recurrent sources and that should not be the case.

Recommendation 7. The Education Department provide funding for larger structured alternative education programs with a long term commitment to those that are proven to work.

Responsible Department: Department of Education

Addressing issues for adult education and training

Education and training needs to be accessible, relevant and supported for adults as well as school aged students, therefore foundation skills must be an incorporated, supported part of training, and not sectioned off or included as an extra after thought.

National literacy and numeracy levels are low and support for many people is needed in mainstream training, not as an adjunct, so as not to stigmatise those who need it and potentially block them from participation.

For many adults re-engaging with training or engaging for the first time, their previous experiences with formal education were not positive ones. Training cannot just be provided in the traditional classroom format as this presents a barrier to many. Houses meet people where they are at, creating possibilities and options for people who are re-engaging with the education system for perhaps the first time in years.

Houses provide a soft entry point for people to engage in a supportive, non-threatening learning environment, which can often lead to individuals engaging in more formal training experiences within the House environment. People engage in House activities, become volunteers, build their confidence and broaden their engagement, which is increasingly becoming pathways into education, including formal training. This connection and development within the House context should not be underestimated as a powerful support and tool to engage people in training.

Funding bodies and training organisations should not lose sight of creating pathways from Foundation Skills and Certificate 2 level. Entry level into training and industry should not just focus on Certificate 3 and above. Houses are facilitating successful training for their communities at the Certificate 2 level. This is engaging many people in learning fundamental job ready skills and increasing their confidence to have a can-do approach to further training and seeking work.

The Neighbourhood House sector provides a complex and unique environment for workforce development as it is not solely about their paid staff but encompasses volunteers and community participants in the House, as well as community members that come to the House to engage in programs and want to progress on pathways to become work ready and to look for employment.

Due to this complexity there needs to be a flexible, creative, informed approach to delivering training and workforce development within the Neighbourhood House sector as no single approach can address all its issues and training needs.

Houses are not just a venue. Nowhere else provides the relationship focus that Houses do, providing support to people in fundamental ways, providing the building blocks including confidence, motivation, trust, and giving purpose in a real way to get engaged. Pathways that Houses provide are not just from a Certificate 2 to a Certificate 3, but are fundamental pathways from people's houses into the community and then into

expanding their potential as citizens. Pathways into education and training start at people's doorways and Houses are the conduit for that engagement.

In essence the current Department of State Growth method of funding for training places through competitive tendering processes does not work for the Neighbourhood House sector or allow for the unique opportunity that we offer to re-engage citizens on pathways to meaningful work.

However it takes time to build the trust and relationships between Houses and a training provider, not to mention the understanding of the network that an RTO requires to provide appropriate training. However under the current system the sector is asked to start again and again, depending on which training organisation is successful with their tenders. This undermines relationships rather than builds them, constantly pushing our members back to square one and sees them having to start over.

The sector needs certainty of funded places to support people from vulnerable communities into training. People need to be able to trust the system to support them if they are going to take that initial risk to engage. This trust is built on consistency of approach and outcomes, as well as relationships. The sector needs to be able to rely on the availability of places on a regular basis so as to meet the needs as and when they arise, or at least within a reasonable timeframe so as not to lose the people who have indicated they want to engage.

Therefore we call on the government to rethink the mechanism of competitive tendering for funding training for vulnerable people and to significantly increase overall investment.

There does appear to be an assumption that people can train at TasTAFE and then move into the workforce but often for the House sector, pathways start further back, as outlined earlier. By creating the environment for people to re-engage with education and training, Houses are supporting the setting up of pathways into the workforce.

Constructive relationships with local employers, training organisations and individual students are what Houses can deliver at a local level. However these relationships need resources. Over the last two years the foundation work put in by Houses to establish networks with industry in their communities have been frustrated and even damaged when the funding has not been able to be sourced through the current competitive tendering process.

Houses are in a unique position to engage with disengaged individuals and communities. If the government wants to truly invest in people's futures then they need to join with people where they are at, and support a sector that is responsive and creative in their efforts to increase workforce participation and support people to gain real skills for real jobs.

Recommendation 8. Provide \$250,000 in addition to the current competitive tendering system and funding quantum for training funds specifically quarantined for the Neighbourhood House sector. This will address foundation and work ready skills through partnering with RTOs that have proven to our network that they can deliver at a local level. Our network can upskill people in place-based training that builds relationships and confidence, leading people to engage in further training and employment opportunities and increasing workforce participation.

Per annum \$250 000 Total Cost \$750 000 over three years

Responsible Department: Department of State Growth

Online Access needs of Tasmanian Communities

Many of the Neighbourhood Houses are located in rural and regional areas that do not have access to free Wi-Fi, digital hubs, large LINC services, Service Tasmania offices and Commonwealth Centrelink offices, severely restricting residents' ability to use the on-line services which are the increasing norm for day to day life and for accessing a variety of social services such as Centrelink payments. Many of these digitally isolated communities in rural and regional areas are also bearing the impact of economic down turn from the loss of generation-long regional employment with no alternative work, resulting in increasing unemployment rates and poverty.

For these people, who cannot afford to own computers, pay internet fees, and who often have few skills in using the technology, on-line access centres have played an important role. While much of the need for Online Access Centres original aims around computer literacy have been met, the change in technology and the reliance on online portals for so many services that were previously provided face to face mean that many Tasmanians are requiring much support to adapt to these changes, particularly older Tasmanians.

The Education Departments continual freeze of online access centre funding, and withdrawal of services, has resulted in Neighbourhood Houses in many communities having to replace their role without any formal acknowledgement or transfer of resources from the Education Department.

One of our Houses (located in Exeter) has been hosting a regional on-line service which, despite rises in operational and wages costs and increased usage, has received no increase in funding over the ten years of their operation.

The Education Department may make significant cost savings by what is obviously a withdrawal of online access centres, but it is cost shifting this work to Neighbourhood Houses.

Recommendation 22: That the Department of Education as a matter of priority consult with Neighbourhood Houses Tasmania and its Members about the real impact of the reduction in Online Access Centres on communities, and the resulting support burden being borne financially by Neighbourhood Houses.

Responsible Department: Department of Education

Employment, unemployment and underemployment.

Why is the issue of unemployment important to Houses and their local communities?

Unemployment and underemployment remain significant issues in many parts of Tasmania. While the unemployment rate is reportedly showing some signs of improvement in Tasmania as a whole, many regional and local communities continue to experience a lack of employment opportunities and high youth unemployment. There have been many changes to the nature of the workplace which can disproportionately impact on rural and regional communities. For example: the loss of significant manual labour jobs in agriculture or manufacturing due to technology advances and mechanisation, and increases in labour markets occurring in the services sector which typically translate to jobs that are located in metropolitan areas.

The overall employment rate of 6.5% for Tasmania in October 2015 does not paint a sufficiently detailed picture. Some analysis of cohorts and demographics is needed to drill down to the areas of greatest impact in relation to employment rates. The State-wide rate for young people between 15 and 24 is 16 percent. Rates vary according to where you live, with the rate being lower in Hobart but increasing for regional communities with the North West experiencing an unemployment rate of 7.8 percent.¹

The ABS definition of employment means being in paid work for more than 1 hour a week. Underemployment is a significant issue that is rarely included in reporting on employment. The under-utilisation rate (those under-employed as well as unemployed) for Tasmania overall is the highest in the country at 18 percent².

These statistical rates represent the life circumstances of real people - families and individuals who battle to find work, keep work and survive without work. Our Members are seeing the resulting rise in emergency relief and are seeking to give hope and support to families and individuals struggling with unemployment or underemployment.

The Employment Services System is broken

While the provision of employment services agencies (ESA's) (Job Active) is a Federal responsibility, the problems with this system significantly affect people in Tasmania. Action must be taken by State and Federal Governments to address what communities, employers and individuals tell us over and over again – the employment services system is not working. We are not suggesting tweaking the system of employment support but to be blunt – we suggest that abandoning it and starting again is the preferred option.

The Neighbourhood House network is keen to work with the State Government, employer groups and other Community Sector Peak bodies to advocate for a better system. The issues our Members identified included:

¹ <http://lmip.gov.au/default.aspx?LMIP/EmploymentData/Tasmania/WestAndNorthWest>

² http://tasmaniantimes.com/images/uploads/employment_report.pdf

- The continual change of the names, structure, funding and model of the employment services agencies does little to improve employment outcomes, and confuses people in situations of long term unemployment;
- People in rural and regional areas experience reduced access to ESA's due to the lack of local offices or outreach services;
- In some areas, local businesses have trouble engaging people who are unemployed, due to the lack of a central 'jobs board', and/or due to low job-readiness by many individuals. Low job-readiness is in part a result of intergenerational long term unemployment, and a lack of understanding about healthy workplace practices and culture;
- There is no or little incentive for ESA's to support people with a low skills base. The financial incentives provided create incentive to "cherry pick" through focussing on people with higher skills and higher chances of recruitment, while others are ignored or receive unsatisfactory services;
- There is no accountability to local community, and the real need is not being met; and
- The employment services sector is profit focused rather than solution focused. Competition between different agencies in an area means they do not share job opportunities – creating another barrier for job seekers.

NHT and its Members through discussion with employers and employer peak body groups are all developing their own "workarounds" of the ESA system to try and provide what employers and potential employees truly need.

It is time to stop fiddling with the margins and start again.

Tasmania has a unique opportunity because of the direct relationships and stronger connections between sectors, businesses and government that could enable a joint submission to the Federal Government for change.

Recommendation 9: That the Employment Services sector be rebuilt from the ground up, based on consultation with employers, local community organisations and people with experience of being unemployed, and that local solutions to local issues be funded and enabled. The Tasmanian State Government should develop a taskforce/think-tank combining key representatives from all sectors to develop a united submission to the Federal Government for wholesale reform of the Employment Services System.

Responsible Department: Department of State Growth

Due to our communities being so disillusioned with the Employment Services System, Houses have engaged with employers and local partners to seek to create responses that at many levels work outside this system.

Example One: Huon Valley Works – The State Government has recently provided \$250 000 to the Geeveston Community Centre to pilot their local employment solution. Huon Valley Works has been developed by the Huon Valley community through the leadership of Geeveston Community Centre. The community recognised the many issues associated with unemployment identified above, and choose to take control and find local solutions. The Hub will use a labour hire model and work with local employers to link various local part time job opportunities from different employers together to create more sustainable employment opportunities for individuals. This solution can assist to meet the need of employers with short term and/or part time employment opportunities.

In many ways Huon Valley works is a simple concept - it brings together the old CES jobs board concept, with all the jobs in a regional community listed in one place that's accessible to job seekers. Access to information about available jobs is not fragmented across different job service agencies. There is one place for the employer and potential employee to go to. It also adds an ethical labour hire component, by bringing together the various part time jobs and linking them together into a more sustainable job for someone. The value-add is that the Hub is connected to the Neighbourhood House which will mean people will have the supportive environment of the House if life issues come up that might be a risk to their new job. It also means that those people that may not be quite job ready can get involved in the House and build their skills and confidence before moving onto Huon Valley Works.

NHT congratulates the Minister and Skills Tasmania for seeing the potential in this idea and the role Neighbourhood Houses can play in developing innovative local solutions.

Other Houses have developed different innovative local partnerships, through various short term funding mechanisms, but particularly over the last two years through the Primary Health Network of Tasmania. Neighbourhood Houses have worked to establish social enterprises that trade to serve a community need, such as providing access to affordable healthy food, and creating employment and training pathways for local people.

Innovative thinking and actions have enabled social enterprises to be generated by Neighbourhood Houses, including: Hill-Top Seeds by Burnie Community House; Bridgewater Community Garden and Northern Suburbs Community Centre's Peace of the Garden.

Example Two: Hilltop Fresh Produce Project is a collective approach by a coalition of community organisations lead by Burnie Community House. The primary focus is to address food insecurity in Shorewell Park an area identified as one of the most disadvantaged communities in Australia. Its purpose is to

- Develop a community food hub that creates a sustainable model that improves the health and well-being of the local residents and others by increasing access to affordable, good-quality, fresh produce;
- Create opportunities and pathways to training and employment; and
- Increase skills and knowledge around healthy lifestyle choices.

Community-based food hubs have a successful history of improving food access to communities in areas of disadvantage. They also act as a space for the community to come together and make positive connections to the wider world.

Volunteer participants have received accredited training and skills development at the Burnie Community House and TasTAFE Burnie. The participants actively work in the market garden and produce store. Informal learning also takes place at Burnie Community House by offering programs, workshops and activities centered on healthy lifestyle and food choices.

The above examples demonstrate how Neighborhood Houses through their community development focus and local partnerships can deliver local innovations that address employment issues. We ask the State Government to take the opportunity and seek to develop and resource more community employment responses through the Neighborhood House network.

Recommendation 10: Provide \$600 000 in total funding grants for two NHT local communities to develop and trial local employment service solutions, such as that being piloted by Geeveston

Initially provide four grants of \$25 000 for four regional communities to conduct a consultation and investigation into developing a local employment services solution, leading to an expression of interest process for further grants of \$250 000 for two communities to implement their model in their local community with an external panel determining which EOI to fund.

Responsible Department: Department of State Growth

Health and Wellbeing

Introduction

Australians living in socio-economically disadvantaged areas experience poorer outcomes across a range of health status indicators³. Families with young children, living in disadvantaged areas, are more likely to experience social exclusion, family relationship and parenting challenges, and overall poorer health and wellbeing than more advantaged families. Their challenges are complex and multi-faceted. Children are not getting the best start, sometimes because of the postcode where they are born. This inequity needs a focussed, long term and proactive response. Without intervention, it will not get better over time, nor can we count on improvement in these areas just because the overall economy experiences an up-turn.

The place-based approach inherent in the work of Neighbourhood Houses aligns with the direction of many other jurisdictions. The establishment of the Child and Family Centres in Tasmania and much work occurring in the United Kingdom, aims to empower individuals in targeted locations towards self-reliance, different life-choices and improved health outcomes. This is a space in which Neighbourhood Houses in Tasmania and across Australia have been operating, mostly without acknowledgement or awareness of the broader Health and academic sector.

The emerging international evidence suggests that well designed place based programs like Neighbourhood Houses not only contribute to more inclusive communities and improved health and wellbeing outcomes, but over the longer term lead to significant cost savings.

Place-based approaches:

1. are designed to meet the unique needs of locations
2. engage stakeholders across all sectors in collaborative decision-making
3. seize opportunities, particularly local skills and resources
4. evolve and adapt to new learning and stakeholder interests
5. encourage collaborative action by crossing organisational borders and interests
6. pull together assets and knowledge through shared ownership
7. attempt to change behaviour and norms in a location.⁴

Our Member Houses through their core work of engaging the local community see the reality of the gains individuals make through their place based approach.

When discussing local solutions to Health and Well Being our members continuously identified that it was the engagement of the individual which was of primary importance. Houses have created great initiatives that engage local people and provide for local needs such as: Community Sheds, Community Gardens, volunteer gardening groups, play groups, social enterprises, food cooperatives, op shops etc. However all of these are mechanisms that connect people with others in their community, provide purpose and meaning and enable people to re/discover their confidence. These lead to so many further outcomes for individuals.

³ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2012) 'Australian Health Survey: First Results, 2011-12', ABS Catalogue no 4364.0.55.001

⁴ Department of Health and Human Services, 2012, *Place-based approaches to health and wellbeing, Issues Paper*, Tasmanian Government, 12 December 2012, Version 1.0, pp. 13.

The potential to build on the work of neighbourhood Houses to outreach to at-risk young families to improve health outcomes was acknowledged and invested in by the previous Government through trialling the Thriving Communities Healthy Families Project through Neighbourhood Houses.

Supporting Families through place based preventative approaches

THRIVING COMMUNITIES HEALTHY FAMILIES

In 2013, \$580 000 was provided to Neighbourhood Houses Tasmania to implement Thriving Communities, Healthy Families (TCHF), a place-based health promotion project. An expression of interest process saw 14 Neighbourhood Houses seek this kind of support for their communities. The funding allowed for five Neighbourhood Houses in socioeconomically disadvantaged areas of Tasmania to be allocated funds to support early engagement and intervention with vulnerable families.

The University of Tasmania Institute for the Study of Social Change has worked with the Houses to evaluate the outcomes of TCHF, providing a robust and impartial evaluation that is focussed on outcomes for families, and longer term community change.

The mid-project evaluation (August 2015) is showing that:

- Disenfranchised families have been engaged and supported (575 episodes of families engaging with activities and services through the Houses);
- Local service systems are more integrated and easier to navigate. A constant challenge for the services that make up a service system is that vulnerable people cannot navigate it, feel ashamed to front up with a problem, and/or fall through the cracks of multiple eligibility criteria and wait lists;
- Houses are working alongside 49 partner organisations and have referred families to 32 support providers. Partner organisations include schools, local councils and Child and Family Centres – effectively joining up a range of human services from the ground up;
- Partner organisations report that their knowledge of the local service system has improved due to direct involvement with TCHF. That is an indication that a local service system is now more joined-up because of TCHF. This means that families less frequently fall through the cracks, and those services will wrap around the family with minimal duplication and greatest efficiency and effectiveness;
- All the Houses have responded to local needs and delivered TCHF in unique ways. This is true place-based community development; and
- The evaluation also finds that Neighbourhood Houses have significant expertise in engaging with and building relationships with people and organisations to achieve outcomes, are well positioned to reach disenfranchised families and that many families became aware of services that can help them for the first time through TCHF.

These projects take a relatively long set-up time, and it takes time for investments in building stronger communities to deliver improved health and education outcomes and therefore the longer term approach as laid out in the Healthy Tasmania Strategic Plan is strongly supported.

To identify the target client groups, potential partners, and then to form and strengthen those trusting relationships are crucial success factors. With the cessation of pilot funding, TCHF will wind up, just as client

outcomes are being seen, just as relationships have developed and just as the service systems are developing stronger local integration. There is a real fear that without further funding all gains made will not be sustained and that the cynicism that exists in communities about short term services and pilot programs will grow. The TCHF approach is significantly different from case-management activities, providing greater reach into communities, significant improvements in personal capabilities and many clients who then become volunteers; giving back to their communities.

The Thriving Communities program is informed by international best practice and if scaled up has the potential to improve long term health and wellbeing, stronger communities and reduce cost pressures on health systems. This is why the Cameron Government in the UK is so committed to similar approaches.

Recommendation 11: Build on the community capacity and health promotion successes of the Thriving Communities Healthy Families pilot by continuing the Project in the five pilot locations, and expand to five other target communities in future. The pilot has provided evidence of significant engagement by at-risk families, the development of more integrated local service systems and peer support networks. These outcomes are the basis of longer term community change.

Continue to fund five existing locations at approx. \$309 000 per annum (\$927 000 over 3 years). Expand the Project into five additional communities requiring an additional \$290 000 per annum (there are economies of scale in evaluation and project coordination costs).

Responsible Department: Department of Health and Human Services.

Whole of Government role in providing communities the information they need to properly inform decision making.

Neighbourhood Houses Tasmania (NHT) is very concerned that data relevant to community health and wellbeing are obtained and managed by many Government agencies including Police, Education, DHHS and DPAC, through a range of activities, such as the reporting required from community sector organisations, program evaluations and community consultations.

Our concerns are not that these initiatives are occurring, but that information is often not available, or not available in a timely or accessible manner. We are calling for Government to ensure that communities are able to access data and information held by Government to support decision making processes and facilitate true community driven responses where appropriate. Governments should require that its policy experts and information management systems provide plain language, accessible outputs to communities.

Social policy staff can assume that everyone is able to access ABS and other data with ease, as they do, but this is just not the case at a community level. In fact, we believe providing this data in a format that is accessible to the community should be a priority for any government policy unit. If governments are collating this information to inform their decision making, it must and should be made accessible and understandable to local communities and organisations. This could be in the form of summaries and collations of the results of evaluations, consultations, statistics and reporting that would contribute to maximising the community benefit and outcomes being sought. The “Kids Come First” data was a great initiative that attempted to do this.

We would also extend this request of Government Departments to any discussion or consultation papers produced and sent to community and community organisations. If real informed consultation is required, then concise, understandable summaries must be produced for communities as part of any process.

Recommendation 12: *NHT calls on the State Government to ensure that information, data and policy consultations are accessible and available to community sector organisations and communities. It should be presented in a timely and plain language way to support planning, continuous improvement and optimal targeting of effort, as well as enabling real informed community consultation and informed community input into decisions.*

Responsible Departments: DPAC

In conclusion Neighbourhood Houses Tasmania appreciates the opportunity to provide this Budget Submission on behalf of its Member organisations and looks forward to discussions with the responsible Departments about the recommendations we have raised.

NHT and our Members are committed to a better and fairer Tasmania for all and look forward to working with the Tasmanian Government into the future to achieve these aims.

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has. Margaret Mead