

People Focus



Recently, there have been two very significant occurrences that remind us of what happens when the focus is taken away from responding to people's needs in a responsible and positive manner.

The first of these is here in Western Australia where as a consequence of the recent election there has been a change of government. In my opinion, one of the main reasons for the previous government's loss, despite enjoying a substantial majority and having the major opposition party in a state of disarray was the fact that the ordinary needs of people in such areas as housing, health, mental health, and cost of living pressures were not responded to effectively.

Those of us in the social service sector were very disappointed with the last West Australian government's budget and at time expressed our disappointment at the lack of social investment. It was as if the day to day needs and frustrations of ordinary citizens were irrelevant to decision makers. The outcome of the election was a reminder to all political parties that their success is intrinsically tied to the welfare of their people and that this cannot be ignored.

The other event of course is now taking place in the United States where the whole financial system of that country is under threat. An occurrence that has resulted from irresponsible money lending by people whose only, short term goal was the amassing of profits. These people were either blind or uncaring or both to the long term, negative impact of their actions on ordinary US citizens, especially those on low incomes. Individuals who sought to borrow even when they had little chance of repaying loans have to take some responsibility for the

enormous difficulties that US and the rest of the world now face. However, there is little doubt that the greater responsibility lies with those charged with ensuring the ongoing health of the financial system and with those who sought to make substantial profits from their activities.

What is common to these two events is the lack of awareness and sensitivity to community needs. It is as if the “common good” and the national interest became subservient to short term, individual gain. The events are timely in reminding us all that our efforts must be focused on both community and individual wellbeing. These are interdependent and neither can exist without the other. Governments have no legitimacy or right to existence that is external to the community from which they arise and financial institutions are unsustainable unless they remain focused on the wellbeing of their customers as well as their shareholders.

The above occurrences also remind those of us in the community services sector just how important our work is. The focus of our organisations on the interests of individuals and their communities remains crucial to the ongoing sustainability of the world we live in. It is essential that community based organisations continue to remind themselves, policy makers and others of the centrality of people and their wellbeing in whatever they do.