

Auburn Small Community Organisation Network
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Committee Secretary
Senate Economics Committee
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia

Inquiry into the Disclosure Regimes for Charities and Not-for-Profit Organisations

Submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Economics from the Auburn Small Community Organisation Network

Dear Mr Hawkins

We would like to comment on the above inquiry, particularly regarding access to Deductible Gift Recipient status for small not-for-profit organisations.

The Auburn Small Community Organisation Network

The Auburn Small Community Organisation Network (ASCON) is a group of small not-for-profit community organisations who do not receive regular funding and who operate on a voluntary basis. The network is co-convened by Auburn Council and Somali Welfare & Cultural Association and facilitates the sharing of information and resources and collaboration between the many small community organisations based in the Auburn area.

ASCON meets bi-monthly and runs bi-monthly training sessions for community leaders in issues affecting the development of their organisations. Its member's organisations are involved in activities such as the provision of welfare services, sporting activities for young people, social and cultural activities, literacy classes, and the management of housing cooperatives.

The need to broaden the definition of a charity for tax deductibility purposes

The Auburn Small Community Organisation Network believes that the definition of a charity for Deductible Gift Recipient status should be broadened to include small voluntary not-for-profit community organisations due to the crucial role they play in highly disadvantaged communities and the barriers they face in accessing the resources they need to carry out their work.

Background

Auburn, in Central Western Sydney, is currently the Local Government Area with the highest overseas born population and the highest per capita percentage of new arrivals from refugee backgrounds. Many residents experience multiple disadvantage with Auburn ranked as the second most disadvantaged area on the SEIFA index of disadvantage in the Sydney Statistical Division.

However, the area has a vibrant NGO sector and a high rate of volunteering; there are over 130 community organisations based there, and over 75% of them are run wholly by volunteers without any regular source of funding. Many are ethno-specific organizations run by small and emerging refugee communities.

These communities often include a majority of people who have had refugee experiences and many have come from societies severely disrupted by civil war and or despotic regimes. Some of the small and emerging communities in Auburn include the Sierra Leonean, Sudanese, Liberian, Burmese and Hazara communities.

Many community members face high levels of disadvantage due to their recent arrival in Australia and their pre-arrival experiences that can include long periods spent in refugee camps, torture and trauma and lack of access to education, health or adequate food.

Once in Australia the issues being faced by these communities include family breakdown, unemployment and underemployment, families still in precarious situations in refugee camps overseas, housing stress, and difficulty learning English.

The Role of Small Community Organisations

Small not-for-profit organisations promote social capital and promote social inclusion among migrant and refugee communities. Being a newly arrived migrant or refugee can be an extremely isolating experience and voluntary organisations play a vital role in developing support networks and enhancing social well-being through bringing people together for cultural, social and religious events, literacy classes or sporting activities. At these events and through these networks new arrivals are able to access important information about Australia and how its systems work. The cultures of small and emerging communities are often very different to Australian mainstream culture and new arrivals may have little or no understanding of Australian welfare legal, civic, political or social systems or workplaces.

Welfare focussed organisations provide intensive support to individuals experiencing crises and in these situations often act as a bridge between government departments and their community members. Larger community organisations and government departments often rely on small voluntary community organisations to promote their programs and work with them to make their services accessible to small and emerging communities. The assistance that these small voluntary organisations provides often goes beyond the service that can be provided by a mainstream welfare organisation, for instance, home visits, pooling money to pay for funerals and providing family mediation.

Management committee members of small not-for-profit organisations in refugee and migrant communities are often trying to fit in their volunteer work on top of other work, family and study commitments and may also be going through an adjustment period of settling in Australia themselves. Burnout is common.

Barriers to accessing resources

Small and emerging refugee communities are currently arriving in Australia at a time when there is a shift towards a market-based approach to human services with competitive tendering by consortia led by large organisations.

Funders require increased levels of accountability and high levels of governance whilst transferring the risk associated with running services onto funded organisations. Funding is often short-term, outcomes focussed and project based, with little scope to fund core functions such as rent and administration.

Despite their high needs, the small, diverse and dispersed nature of small and emerging communities also makes it hard for them to attract funding. Religious, cultural and political diversity can lead to several different organisations in each community all competing for funding, and the fact that they are mobile, small and dispersed over wide geographical areas means that they can find it difficult to obtain place-based funding administered by local governments.

In addition to funding, small and emerging communities can find it difficult to access other resources they need to function such as office and meeting space due to the scarcity of venues and the cost of renting spaces and the prerequisite insurance.

Access to Deductible Gift Recipient Status

If small voluntary not-for-profit organisations were able to secure Deductible Gift Recipient status it would open up two additional sources of funding; philanthropic trusts and private donations from individuals. This would make their work more sustainable and bring significant benefits to the broader community through both preventing and addressing disadvantage in highly vulnerable communities.

We are happy to provide further information on request.

King regards

Saada Abdikarim
Co-convenor of ASCON
Chairperson, Somali Welfare & Cultural Association

Case Studies

Somali Welfare and Cultural Association is a voluntary organisation that works with communities from Somalia who live in NSW. Our primary goal is to promote preventive measures to combat family issues and breakdown. The Somali community relies on one another for support due to language and cultural barriers. Thus, Somali Welfare and Cultural Association has volunteers who provide support and encouragement for the community's participation and integration into the mainstream population

We currently run three major projects. **The Women Mutual Aid Group** connects socially isolated women to each other and gives them the opportunity to serve their communities. The aim is to increase peer support and access to community information and resources. Services include family conflict resolution, culturally appropriate counselling, support for new mothers, parenting and support for women in crisis. This program is currently delivered without funding.

Bridging the Gap is a program to provide information to Somali parents about the educational system and child welfare legislation in Australian society. We received a one-off grant of \$5,000 from Auburn Council to get the program running.

Somali Women's Group received a grant from the Australian Council for Arts for the **Poetry Jam Arts Project** which we have just completed with the aim of improving intergenerational communication between young people and the elders in the community through traditional poetry and hip hop subculture.

The organisation is capable of managing funds, but is finding it difficult to get ongoing funding to support our core activities and grow the organisation. Most of our activities are carried out without funding or an office and include home visits to clients, referring them to services, accompanying them to appointments, attending meetings with government departments and NGOs and providing information to the community on what services are available to them.

By Saada Abdikarim, Chairperson, Somali Welfare & Cultural Association

Sierra Leonean Women Wan Word Inc.

Wan Word means "with one voice we speak" in Krio, a Sierra Leonean language. Sierra Leone Women Wan Word is a voluntary organisation, which was set up in 2003 with the aim of empowering Sierra Leonean women, providing information, addressing settlement issues, providing moral and emotional support to each other, fostering unity as well as contributing positively towards multiculturalism in Australia.

The organisation has produced a book and CD "The Living Word" that contains the experiences and stories of the women during the war in Sierra Leone and as refugees in Guinea. The organisation is funded through members' contributions and the minimal funds received to hold community events.

My typical day as Chair Person of the organisation involves accompanying at least one member to an appointment to act as an interpreter, writing support letters for

members, drawing up resumes and helping unemployed people look for jobs and making calls on behalf of the organisation and members.

I am responsible to organise community events with the support of other executive members. I also provide information and other assistance that is required either from the organisation or by any other organisation. All this is juggled with family, study and work responsibilities.

By Beatrice Sesay, Sierra Leonean Women's Wan Word