
SOUTHLAND INTERAGENCY FORUM INC.
Affiliated To Community Networks Aotearoa

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On behalf of the Southland Interagency Forum Inc.
Co-chairs
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Human Rights Commission
195 Lambton Quay,
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Wellington, 6160

e-mailed in first instance to enquiries@mfat.govt.nz

SUBMISSION: UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW 2019

Southland Interagency Forum Incorporated (S.I.F.), (formerly Southland Regional Support Group) has a membership of over fifty Southland social service and community agencies. The forum meets monthly in Invercargill. Member organisations represent a wide cross section of the Southland NGO sector, with the majority providing social service and health support services. We are an affiliated member organisation of the Community Networks Aotearoa (CNA), formerly the New Zealand Council of Social Services (NZCOSS).

The Southland Interagency Forum wishes to submit to the Universal Periodic Review on human rights challenges which manifest themselves to our members through their contact within their communities.

General Statement

On 12 April 2018, the Human Rights Commission held a round table discussion in Invercargill with representatives from groups that are part of the Southland Inter-Agency Forum and members of the public. The purpose of the meeting was to provide information on how individuals and groups can participate in the UPR and to hear about human rights challenges in Southland. The following is the response from those attending. (List attached in Appendix I. A further list, Appendix II, is of member organisations who were unable to be present but who through their experiences, concur with the statements herein)

All member organisations report regularly to our forum on the activities within their communities that are undertaken expressly to enhance the lives of their residents. They do this by acting as a conduit to services that are seen to be difficult to access, particularly but not exclusively, in our country towns.

Southland District Council has the longest roading network of any region in New Zealand therefore centralisation of social services in a region as large as Southland has caused the disenfranchisement of many country folk, particularly in areas of health, education and housing.

Specific Challenges

1. Health

- a) People in outlying townships experience difficulties in attending appointments at the Southland Hospital or other specialist services in Invercargill if they do not have their own transport. Public transport does not exist. The Community Workers often act as drivers or arrange other means to ensure such appointments are kept. Difficulties have sometimes occurred when appointments are rescheduled to another day without warning. This travel has a cost impact on the client who is usually on a limited income.
- b) The proposed closure of Lumsden Maternity Centre will have a big impact on those who live in rural Southland, adding at least an hour's travel for a pregnant and possibly in-labour woman in her attempt to get to an approved birthing unit. More road-side deliveries are predicted.
- c) A Roxburgh-based (Otago) residential village for vulnerable children is one of two around the country to close. This is another blow to Southland families. The Omaui Health Camp, near Bluff closed many years ago, forcing children in need to be sent to Roxburgh. Many Southland families have benefited from the interventions put in place to assist with trauma focused treatment. The cause of closure is stated as continued under funding by successive governments.
- d) The proposed cut to rescue helicopters in Southland is a concern. Many tourists come to the region yet there is no recognition that more resources are needed to fund health services, particularly in ski season where rescue helicopters are coming to the Southland hospital in Invercargill every day. Trampers often get themselves into precarious situations while enjoying our wonderful wilderness in Fiordland, including our walks on the Milford and Hump Ridge Tracks. Shifting the helicopter base from Te Anau to Queenstown will add extra time before any rescue can be effected and as we know in such situations time can make the difference between a rescue and a recovery.

e. Mental health

- i. Increased awareness and identification of persons suffering from mental illness, while being a positive action for society, has at the same time shown the limited ability of civil society to deal with this growing challenge. It is becoming increasingly concerning that farmers, isolated as many are, are specifically prone to suffer. This dilemma has drawn attention to how stretched our primary health services are. Community groups are trying to deal with the issues but underfunding precludes much mitigation.
- ii. Southern communities have limited ability to respond to adverse childhood events. There is no capacity for ongoing support; Families have to travel to Dunedin, further disrupting family life.

- iii. Sadly statistics reveal Southland as having high suicide rates, not just amongst farmers but particularly young men. Support groups do exist but with limited effect: funding is an issue.
- iv. There are community groups trying to deal with mental illness through appropriate programmes which try to re-socialise people back into their community. These can be effective however underfunding and limited community response is impeding their work.
- v. When dealing with young people there are structural gaps in the mental health system. There is a call for more preventative services starting in schools. Currently Able-Southern Family Support is the only provider, in Southland Mental Health Services, of support for families/whanau including children/tamariki of Mental health, Alcohol and addictions and suicide. They are very stretched to meet growing needs
- vi. Currently when a mental illness trauma occurs in the rural sector, emergency teams do not attend. Police officers will often arrive and while they do offer some assistance they have limited training for such events.
- vii. Patients with mental illness are often discharged early before consulting their families. They are also released to those families because there is no specific housing facility available. This adds further stress within the family dynamics.

2. Benefits

- a) There is a concern that the benefit payments are not enough to keep up with the cost of living. It is hoped that new Government announcement will remediate this issue however living in Southland brings extra costs of heating and essential items when transport costs add extra cents to most items available in the supermarket.
- b) Members are noticing that even so-called middle income families are struggling to keep ahead of costs.
- c) It was noted that the abatement threshold has not changed for years and asks that this be considered in any future strategy
- d) National Council of Women asked that a Universal Basic Income be considered as a tool for eliminating poverty. This is NCW policy.

3. Housing

- a. Members expressed desperation in terms of accessing housing
 - i. People are turning up with nowhere to go and there is a lack of resources to help them
 - ii. WINZ often cannot help these people and often they are sent to Balclutha and Dunedin for emergency accommodation
 - iii. Families are split up between homes
- b. Landlords are evicting tenants using 90-day notice period leaving families in desperate situations
- c. Little new housing is being built despite:
 - 90 refugees who will be arriving in Invercargill each year;
 - 10,000 people expected to move to the region by 2025;
 - student population increasing by 1,000 year on year.

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- d. Social housing that needs repairing is sitting vacant
 - e. There has been a dramatic drop in availability of social housing, in part because of privatisation. State housing stock was over 800 units and now down to 354
 - f. Housing NZ office closed in Invercargill and moved to Dunedin – a move to put everything online
 - g. Colder weather conditions are not taken into account in services
 - i. Electricity allowance is the same in Invercargill as Northland
 - ii. Think about double glazing social housing
 - h. Rural towns have no accommodation for new arrivals and much of the existing housing stock is below acceptable standards, but residents, particularly the elderly cannot move to Invercargill due to low availability and higher housing costs there
 - i. A new Regional Development Strategy makes no mention of housing issues despite it being a major Southland wide issue
 - j. Members commented on the lack of investment into infrastructure to keep up with the current growing population, let alone the Regional Development Strategy goal of 10,000 new arrivals by 2025.

4. Learning Differences

Member organisation '*Learning Differences Aotearoa*' asked that:

- a) Dyslexia be seen as a learning difference rather than a learning difficulty
- b) more resources be provided to support learning differences in schools
- c) it be noted that extra support is only provided to children whose families can afford it
- d) groups providing learning support services be themselves supported with funding
- e) children with learning differences be identified early on

5. Access to Technology/Internet

Members noted that WINZ (Work and Income NZ) communicates with its clients through phone and internet. This disadvantages many clients who do not have a landline due to high costs. For the same reason if they have a mobile phone there is often no money on it so they can receive texts but cannot respond. Similarly internet access is not available. Hopefully the Government's new policies for lifting families out of poverty will ameliorate this situation in the long term but actually remedies are needed now.

Summary.

1. The key human rights challenges noted above were:
 - Social services have been centralised to the larger regions and as a result Southlanders have suffered particularly in terms of health, education, and housing
 - Lack of financial investment and engagement in Southland

2. Some of the recommendations that were made to address these issues were for the New Zealand Government to:
 - Provide adequate funding to non-governmental social service providers
 - Ensure a cohesive approach across government agencies providing services in the region
 - Develop a new approach to social housing in order to keep up with demand as the current system is failing
 - Assess the range of risks in terms of mental health and then allocate services to meet that risk rather than fitting people within the service structure already in place
 - Consider introducing a Universal Basic Income to help alleviate poverty.

While the Bill of Rights Act and Human Rights Act gives everyone the right to not be discriminated against because of our age, race or gender, the above scenarios could be construed as institutionalised discrimination due to our living in Southland. It is understood that we live in a vast geographical area with relatively small and scattered population but contributing well above our weight towards the prosperity of New Zealand. All Southlanders ever ask is that there be a fairer distribution of the wealth produced so all may benefit from improved access to health, education and adequate housing.

Yours faithfully,
The Southland Interagency Forum Inc.

Contact and administration

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APPENDIX I

Representatives of these organisations attended

- Welcoming Newcomers
- Able – Southern Family Support
- Methodist Mission
- Learning Differences Aotearoa
- Habitat for Humanity Invercargill
- Salvation Army
- Family Violence Network
- Programme for Assertive Community Treatment (PACT)
- National Council of Women Southland Branch
- Number 10 Youth One Stop Shop

APPENDIX II

The following member organisations who were not able to attend but who have read the submission and concur with its content

- Access Ability Charitable Trust
- Age Concern
- Arts Murihiku
- Autism NZ Inc. Southland Branch
- Balance Wellness Centre - Seventh Day Adventist
- Barnardos
- Cancer Society
- Citizens Advice Bureau - Invercargill and District
- Community Trust of Southland
- Community Worker – Otautau
- Community Worker – Northern Southland
- Community House - Riverton
- Community Worker - Takitimu
- Community Worker – Tuatapere
- Community Worker- Winton
- CCS Disability Action
- Department of Internal Affairs
- Disabilities Resource Centre
- English Language Partners
- Family Works Southland – Presbyterian Support Southland
- Fiordland Community House
- Community Networking Trust (Eastern Southland)
- Jubilee Budget Advisory Service
- McGlynn Homes
- New Zealand Red Cross – Southland Branch
- Nga Kete Matauranga Pounumau TRUST
- Parent to Parent Southland
- Pregnancy Help
- Public Health South
- Rape & Abuse Support Centre
- South Alive
- South Centre Family Support
- Southern Adult Literacy
- Southern REAP
- Southland Community House

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- Southland Community Law Centre
 - Southland Rural Women NZ
 - Sport Southland
 - Stand for Children
 - Strengthening Families
 - Stopping Violence Southland
 - Venture Southland
 - YMCA
 - Youthline Southland