



COMMUNITY BACK SOS CAMPAIGN FOR WOMEN'S REFUGES

25 November 2014

A new campaign highlighting the devastating impact on women's services across NSW is being launched this week with strong support from local councils and community groups.

SOS spokeswoman, Roxanne McMurray, said the campaign focussed on hotspots in areas where there was a high need for women's refuges and where current services were falling short or needed certainty.

"The Minister says there have been no losses but the loss of expertise built up over 40 years has decimated services and many people believe the dismantling of the women's refuge network is a major step back into the past.

"We're seeking a commitment from the Government's to continue to provide adequate services to these areas before the state election. There are now only 14 women's services operated by women across the entire state – before the reforms there were around 100.

"We've looked closely at the new services that are now operating across NSW and these hotspots have issues including no 24/7 service, staff numbers being drastically cut, or long distances to the next closest refuge.

The hotspots are:

- Bega
- Campbelltown
- Cooma
- Forster
- Lismore
- Marrickville
- Port Stephens
- Rockdale

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“There are also concerns about Dubbo, where the women’s refuge was taken over by the operator of a men’s homelessness service. The new service is allowing homeless women suffering mental illness or experiencing drug and alcohol dependency to share the refuge with women and young children escaping violence.

“We were recently contacted about a woman escaping domestic violence locking herself and her three year old daughter in their room because of the behaviour of a drug addicted resident. That’s an unacceptable situation for women and children to be placed in when they need safety.

“We’re also concerned about the Taree refuge which operated for more than 30 years and was taken over Samaritans. Greater Taree Council recently passed a motion requesting information from the new providers, but still have no details about its operations.

“Taree has a rate of domestic violence twice the state average and needs an operating refuge. It’s also a problem for Aboriginal women who have expressed reluctance to seek support from faith-based groups.

“We estimate around 75 percent of women’s services previously run by independent women’s services, have been taken over by major faith-based charities. There’s no doubt many of these groups are known for the good work they do, but it’s important to give women who may not want to access those services an additional choice.

“We’ve had the support of many councils in these hotspots passing resolutions supporting our proposals. Other services also have the support of their local police and community groups.

“We presented 15,000 signatures to Parliament from residents across NSW concerned about the loss of women’s refuges. The Minister recently ensured women’s services in the city can continue to do their valuable work, however this list shows that problems remain. The Minister says her door is open and these are serious issues that need to be acknowledged. It’s time the Government stepped in to fix them.”

For information about the hotspots go to: soswomensservices.com

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