

Dear Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this critical inquiry on loneliness and social isolation.

Fams is the NSW peak body that represents the child protection NGO early intervention and prevention sector. We advocate for improved policies for children, families, communities and services. The organisations Fams represents work to support children, young people and families to be safe, together and thrive and reduce the likelihood of children entering the Out of Home Care system.

Human beings are relational creatures, and social connection and community belonging are critical to all aspects of health. While loneliness and social isolation are distinct—one a subjective feeling, the other an objective lack of social contact—both negatively impact individual and community health.

Many families that our sector support face complex, systemic disadvantages and are likely to experience heightened loneliness and social isolation, making it challenging for them to access supportive relationships and networks.

Without essential wraparound services to reduce loneliness and strengthen social connections, children face a heightened risk of entering the child protection system, as families struggle with unaddressed risk factors.

A significant and sustained investment in relational opportunities—spaces where meaningful connections can form and thrive—is essential to address loneliness in these communities. Research consistently demonstrates that community-based social networks foster resilience, enhance mental well-being, and provide a foundation for families to flourish. When families have access to safe, supportive environments, they experience stronger mental health outcomes, which in turn benefits children, young people and the broader community.

Community centres offer an ideal platform for these initiatives. They are trusted spaces that serve as central points for gathering, learning, and support. They have the unique ability to create inclusive spaces where children, young people and families can build supportive networks and a sense of belonging. Leveraging the power of these community spaces can play a pivotal role in reducing loneliness.

However, the reality of community centres across NSW is that under the current funding models they are stretched to breaking point. To harness the full potential of community centres as connection hubs, they must receive stable core funding. This funding would enable centres to focus on service delivery and operations, hire skilled staff, and expand programs through inclusive design that meet the diverse needs of families in their areas. Core funding would also allow for greater stability in service delivery, fostering long-term relational growth within communities.

A critical consideration in our response to families is to understand their needs beyond traditional support services. We need intentional strategies to build relational opportunities for all families within their communities. In turn, the more we build the natural social connectedness of our communities, the less there will be a reliance on the various service systems to reduce the impacts of loneliness.

Fams fully supports our fellow peak, LCSA's, comprehensive assessment of the benefits and contributions to reducing loneliness that community centres can provide, as a clear pathway forward to build essential social infrastructure.

Fams urges the Committee to prioritise strategies for relational community-building and create spaces that transform isolation into connection to help families provide nurturing care for their children in supportive, community-focused environments.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Jensen'.

Chief Executive Officer

Fams