



MEDIA RELEASE

**Minister for Community Services
The Hon. Linda Burney MP**

Wednesday, 5 August 2009

NEW PROGRAM WILL BUILD STRONGER COMMUNITIES

The State Government's Area Assistance Scheme (AAS) has been improved in a move that will directly benefit communities at a local level, Minister for Community Services Linda Burney revealed today.

Ms Burney made the announcement with Swansea Member Robert Coombs while visiting the Belmont Neighborhood Centre in the Hunter region, one of 115 community groups to receive 2009/10 funding under the AAS grants program.

Ms Burney said the Area Assistance Program, which has played an important role in supporting local communities for the past 30 years, has undergone reform to enable even more opportunities to build the strengths and capacities of local communities.

"When the new funding round opens in November 2009, the AAS will have become the Community Builders program," Ms Burney said.

Community Builders will provide opportunities for disadvantaged groups, such as new migrants, to participate in, and benefit from, community projects. The program focuses on communities within a number of regions across NSW: the Hunter and Central Coast, Illawarra, North Coast and Sydney West and South West.

The application process has been streamlined to make it faster and easier for community groups to access valuable funding for development projects that respond to emerging issues.

Ms Burney said the change had been prompted by community feedback about the current functioning of the AAS.

"After listening to the community's comments and concerns, we saw the opportunity to make improvements to the program so it is robust and sustainable.

"Over the past few months we have consulted more than 100 community organisations and local councils. I am confident Community Builders will be successful in carrying on the work of the AAS and achieving positive results for communities.

"It is important that we continually seek ways to improve service delivery. I am committed to building strong, viable communities in NSW and these reforms will ensure this valuable community program remains relevant and valuable."

This year, the Rees Government will provide almost \$4.8 million in funding to 115 projects across the state.

Mr Coombs said the Belmont Neighbourhood Centre was one of 24 successful grant recipients in the Hunter region.

“The Neighbourhood Centre is an outreach service that serves as a central point of help, information and referral for the local community,” Mr Coombs said.

“It will receive \$90,000 to upgrade its kitchen facilities to meet OH&S and food handling standards, allowing more community groups to use the centre for valuable services such as playgroups and youth outreach.”

Information sessions on the Community Builders program will be held from September.

Funding applications for the 2009/10 round open in November. Non-government organisations and local councils can apply for funding of \$10,000 to \$100,000 per annum, for between one and three years.

For further information about the program and other government funding opportunities, visit www.communitybuilders.nsw.gov.au, or contact the Community Services Manager Regional Strategy at the following locations: Hunter/Central Coast (4985 1424), Illawarra (4222 8442), Metro South West (9781 5565), Metro West (9354 1651) or North Coast (6683 5696).

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