Setting up a Community Managed Not-For-Profit Organisation

A guide to the steps and the benefits

The former Office for the Community Sector (OCS) was established as part of the former Department of Planning and Community Development in 2008. The primary role of the former OCS was to support and contribute to the long-term sustainability of the Victorian not-for-profit (NFP) community sector.

The former OCS worked with other government departments and authorities to reduce the impact on community organisations of government accountability and compliance requirements and supports the sector to build capacity to continue to be responsive to the needs of Victorians.

The Community Child Care Association of Victoria (CCC) <https://www.cccinc.org.au/> is an independent non-profit organisation that provides training, resources, advice and advocacy. CCC works to support the provision of quality, affordable, community-based family and children's services. CCC believes non-profit community-based services provide a benchmark for quality children's services.

This guide examines the characteristics and strengths of the community-based service model. It looks in detail at:

• How to set up locally-managed community organisations;
• How to make community organisations more socially inclusive;
• Community strengthening and social inclusion outcomes that flow from community-managed organisations.

Case studies – Six Victorian community-based children's services provided information about how they work for the purposes of this project. Participating centres were from a range of regional, metropolitan and urban fringe areas, of differing sizes and varied between small, integrated and stand- alone services.

The Centres which took part were: Clarendon Children's Centre, the Flemington Cooperative, the Kensington Community Children's Cooperative, Corio Bay Senior Secondary College Children's Centre, Remus Way Children's Centre and the Swan Hill Out of School Hours Program.

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Introduction

In 2010, the former OCS funded CCC to create a guide to setting up successful community-managed services.

Community-based services, which are managed by community groups on a not-for-profit basis, connect people to one another and play a key and unique role in providing the conditions necessary to ensure that everyone has access to services and assistance.

This report is intended to inspire those involved in creating, managing or working within community-based services to think critically about how such services can best contribute to people's social and economic participation.

This guide uses community-based children's services as an example of how community services of all types can build and strengthen communities and ensure that everyone has access to affordable, responsive, high quality community-managed services and facilities.

The evidence gathered during this project clearly shows the importance of community-managed services and the many benefits which apply from the community management of such organisations as neighbourhood houses, community education centres, refuges and information and referral centres.

Child care organisations have been using community-managed models for several decades and the sector has, as a result, gathered long-term experience and evidence about what works very well. Because of this experience and expertise, the OCS approached Community Child Care, the peak body, to prepare this publication.

This document has been developed in the context of a nationwide trend for community organisations to consolidate into larger organisations and for corporate, for-profit models to develop at the expense of models characterised by local ownership.

At the same time, the growth of new communities experiencing rapid population growth around our cities and regional centres has not been matched by a concurrent growth of new community-managed services. This absence brings a heightened risk of social isolation and exclusion at a time when communities are experiencing an influx of new people seeking to make connections and needing information and resources.

It is hoped that this document will provide a useful tool in ensuring that community-based services are included in new greenfield areas and areas experiencing rapid population growth to assist in the building and strengthening of these communities. They will also continue to be a viable and much needed resource in established communities.

This publication brings together international and national literature with evidence from case studies of various models of Victorian community-based children's services to assist local community workers and volunteers to determine the best way forward in setting up sustainable, community-managed services.

The Victorian community sector

As at 2010, there are some 120,000 NFP community organisations across Victoria which provide a wide range of support and services for the benefit of local communities or communities brought together by shared interests, such as sporting clubs.

This sector also plays a crucial role in helping to build communities by providing the means for people to get together to undertake adult learning activities, participate in sports, arts or other personal development activities or come together to protect local heritage or environmental sites.

The community sector is also a major contributor to Victoria's economy. The Australian Bureau of Statistics estimated that in 2006-07, the value of the NFP sector in Australia was one and a half times that of the agricultural sector.

Community organisations are critical to the Victorian government, delivering $2.2 billion of services on its behalf in 2005-06. Much of this delivery is essential to people's wellbeing, health and safety, and delivered by a range of organisations including community health centres, family and children's services, mental health services and emergency services, such as the State Emergency Service and Country Fire Authority.

The roles community organisations played during the 2009 bushfires and the recent floods highlight their significance. These organisations not only provided emergency relief, food, clothes, money and counselling and referral services but also drew on their established networks to facilitate the marshalling of local community responses. The former OCS publication There When Needed provides examples of the important roles played by community sector organisations during and after the 2009 bushfires.

Ensuring that Victoria has a diversity of NFP community organisations is important for the vibrancy of our communities. In addition to large, multi-site agencies, we also need local, community-based organisations. There is evidence that local participation in community organisations helps to strengthen emotional support, contacts and resources for individuals, as well as feelings of integration, belonging, harmony and safety at a community level.

Overview

This document is designed to be an easy to use guide to creating a community-managed, NFP service or organisation. It outlines key considerations, tools, resources and some good practices for initiating community-managed services. The information provided is designed to be flexible so that it can be adapted to suit different communities and in the development of different NFP services or organisations.

The guide is designed to be of use to both people employed to support communities (by such organisations as local government authorities) and people who voluntarily give their time to determining the need for community-managed organisations and then assisting in the setting up, and possibly management of, such organisations. For example, parents in a local community can become involved in the creation of a community-managed child care service if there is sufficient demand not being met by existing providers or an absence of local providers.

In developing this publication, national and international literature was assessed to gather evidence to support the need for a range of community organisations to be in place to build community capacity.

Case studies of various models of Victorian community-based children's services have been provided which outline the features of community-based services which contribute directly to the development and maintenance of viable, inclusive communities.

And while community-based children's services are used as the example of how community services of all types can build and strengthen communities, the conclusions apply equally to other sectors in which community management of services is an important theme, such as neighbourhood houses, community education centres, refuges, information and referral centres.

Some definitions to think about before getting started:

What is a community?

For the purposes of this document, communities of primary interest are geographical communities – the residents of precincts, towns, suburbs, and especially the residents of newly-established communities. The boundaries of communities may not be clear cut and this may be beneficial in ensuring that potential members are not excluded. Involvement in or use of community-managed organisations in newly established communities can, for example, also include future potential residents. This is because community engagement activities can act as a draw card for people in choosing where to live.

What is a community-managed service?

Community-managed services are generally needs-based. This means that their primary purpose is to provide services for a target group of people with identified or perceived needs. A community-managed service should be an integral part of community life, reflecting the attitudes and style of both the locality and the service users. Community life and the life of the service/organisation should overlap: ideally, service users will understand more about the community and feel part of the community through using a community-managed service.

Some examples of community-managed services are community-managed child care providers, neighbourhood houses, refuges, information and referral services and community education services.Section one: Getting started

Community-managed services are created when community members have sufficient desire and capacity to initiate and sustain them. Community-based services cannot exist unless there is a strong and viable community in which those services can indeed be 'based' (Ife 2009).

The key ingredients that communities need to start the process of creating a community-managed service, and otherwise reach their potential, include:

- Local leaders
- Access to information and other resources
- Effective and inclusive processes.

The process towards the development of a community-managed service can begin with a conversation triggered by a person or people experiencing or becoming aware of an opportunity, need, problem or an interest, who then agree to discuss this further with a view to finding a solution.

In meetings or discussions to identify common experiences and awareness, it is important that everyone involved is prepared to listen and to not try to impose preconceived ideas about what could or should be done. This includes paid community workers who may be involved from the outset.

Tip: Listening

Much is written about the 'art of listening'. Listening is the most difficult and also the most neglected element of communication. Of all the time we spend on communication activities, about 10 per cent is spent writing, 15 per cent reading, 30 per cent talking and 45 per cent listening. Listening is actively receiving all sorts of signals. It is about concentrating on what is actually being said. It is not passive hearing: it is an activity.

Apart from listening, there are other important steps that can be taken to facilitate shared awareness and support for a new community service/organisation. These are outlined below:

Think

This can be done collectively, preferably with a couple of other people in a similar situation to those who have identified a need, opportunity, problem or interest. Think through what needs you have, what your goals are, and in what sort of place you want to live, learn, work and play.

Canvass

The neighbourhood or potentially interested community members to find out who is there, what their needs are and what resources exist. For example, work out if there is anyone who can contribute time, money, energy or ideas.

This can be done by door-knocking, letter-boxing, putting advertisements in a local newspaper, using radio talk-back sessions, setting up Facebook or Twitter pages, sending out online surveys, posting notices at milk bars, schools, community supermarkets, health centres and more generally, just talking to everyone including neighbours, teachers, social workers, church leaders, young people's groups, senior citizens' groups, police, etc.

Meet

Call a meeting with people who have an interest or skills to share. Make sure this is at a time and place that suit as many people as possible.

Talk

Make sure that everyone gets their say during the meeting. Good questions to ask at a community meeting may include:

- What goals do we share?
- In what sort of community do we want to live?
- What extra support or services might we need to make this community a better place to live?

At first, these discussions may seem wide-ranging but it is essential to think clearly about these issues at the outset and to achieve common under-standings. All plans, policies, routines, practices, staffing decisions, and budgets of a community-managed service flow from the goals held in common by community members. When everyone is clear and agreed about their common goals, decisions become much easier to make.

It is also important to keep talking outside of formal meetings to keep community conversations going. Ongoing communication is required to discover the different opinions held by your community members and to learn more about what you all want

What is a good question?

Good questions are constructive; they focus attention on possible solutions, they encourage reflection and they open up discussion. Examples of good questions include:

- What do we have in common?
- How can we bring our ideas closer together?
- Can we hear from those who have not yet spoken?
- What (else) do we need to discuss to solve this issue?

Find common ground

Focus first on what is agreed, rather than on any areas of disagreement. Try to develop the areas of agreement. When people in a meeting or other discussion seem to agree, write it down, repeat it back and check if there is agreement for what has been written.

Set aside areas of disagreement for later, but make sure that these conversations are held, not postponed forever. When discussing areas of disagreement, concentrate on understanding and acknowledging each person's perspective and acknowledge when people's views begin to converge. These converging ideas can form the basis for a shared vision, aims and ideas about what to do next.

Identify local leadership

These may be people who seem to know most about what's happening and who's who in the community and related organisations. They may or may not be formal leaders in a community but they will probably be doing, or previously been involved with, volunteer work or participation in other community organisations.

Keep a constant look out for emerging potential community leaders. Support potential leaders to articulate their vision for their community and to establish and maintain robust relationships and networks to keep in touch with diverse ideas in their community.

Collect information and other resources

Small working groups of community members may be willing to work together to collect the information and other resources you will need to determine whether your service is needed and can be made viable. Here are some ideas about what information to collect:

- Find out who else is active in your community. What other organisations are based in your neighbourhood? What services are available? Who is eligible to use these services? Is there a waiting list? Who owns them? Do other services visit your neighbourhood? Make a map of who is who and what they do. This will help you to figure out what additional services are needed.
- Get information from various sources such as employers, door-to-door interviewing, mailed questionnaires and schools. Search on the internet to find local organisations: try http://www.serviceseeker.com.au/ or www.infoxchange.net.au. It is smart to use a mix of data collection methods.
- Consider asking people… if/how they access current services, why do they want more services, what kinds of services do they want, what amount of money they can – or are willing to – pay for these services, and any other special requirements they may have.
- Find out what plans your local government has for your area. Identify your local councillor. Invite her or him to join your discussions.
- Ask at your local library or your local government office about what information is available about your area. There may be published reports based on the national census that you can borrow.

Case study

When the ABC Learning Child Care Centre in her neighbourhood closed down, Nawal became worried that she would have to leave her work to care for her two children. She was anxious about how she could manage with less money. She could not afford the other for-profit child care service available locally and she had no family living nearby.

She talked to some of the other parents at the centre and asked them what they were planning. She noticed that many of the parents were in a similar situation. Nawal suggested the parents meet together to discuss what they needed. It became clear that what everyone wanted was a resource for the local

community – a place where children could feel safe and connected to the wider community and where parents could meet and support each other.

The parents were not sure what they could do, so they decided to get some help and advice. They brainstormed about who might be able to help them and they divided up some jobs between themselves. Saleema approached the local council; Zaafira called CCC; Genevieve talked to the YWCA and Maryam rang the Muslim Women's Association.

When they met again to share their information, they were able to make a list of the resources available. Of particular interest was information gleaned from the local council and CCC that another big community organisation, Power to the People, was already planning to buy the centre.

Over the next month, Nawal and the other parents met several times with Power to the People. The organisation was relieved to meet the parents as they too had a vision for community ownership of the centre. Power to the People helped Nawal and her friends to expand their group and consult others in the community. They also offered to provide ongoing support for the group to transition into a formal parent advisory committee, with a view to the committee taking over the management of the centre after two years.

Make sure your process is inclusive

Valid and effective solutions to community needs can be found only if all community members are involved to varying extents in the entire process, from defining the issue right through to solving the issue. Effective and inclusive processes encourage participation. Consider the following:

- Host and conduct conversations in places where people already gather – to ensure they are on their own turf and feel some control of the process. Good places to consider include shopping malls, sports ovals, picnic areas, libraries, and playgroups.
- Once potential community leaders emerge, support them to invite friends and neighbours over for morning tea or a 'kitchen conference' to meet the facilitator of the community engagement process and other paid and unpaid community workers and to discuss issues and ideas that are emerging from the analysis of community needs.
- Prepare easy-to-use questionnaires on issues that have already been identified as hot topics in the community.

More information on engaging your community can be found in **Section Two**.

The involvement of community workers

In some instances, community-managed services come about as a result of ideas or approaches made by people employed in such areas as community development. These people are most often employed by local government authorities.

Community workers are often motivated in their work by an awareness of a need or gap in the local community. In working with other community leaders and members to find the solution to meet this need or gap, it is important that the community engagement process start without a set destination in mind. This will ensure that people interested in being part of this process are given an opportunity to have real input, rather than just being told what the outcome is going to be.

Managing timeframes and expectations

For communities considering setting up a new service/organisation, there is a risk that change may move at a faster pace than the community can accommodate, resulting in a lack of community engagement and a loss of control. This risk increases when outside interests, such as a donor or politician, require that a community make a decision or take action within a certain timeframe. It may be

helpful if community leaders and community workers can work together to remind these outside interests that the process is important and that a good process produces better and more sustainable results in the long term.

Tips for success

When in doubt, ask questions. Good questions can be more helpful in inspiring discussion than having an answer.

- Avoid thinking that there is one right answer.
- Encourage divergent points of view.
- Encourage risk-taking. Brainstorm to encourage creativity.
- Record all ideas; ask for feedback.
- Avoid pressuring people to participate.
- Remind everyone that the process is important and that a good process produces better and more sustainable results in the long term.

Section two: Engaging the broader community

Community-managed services work best when they enjoy widespread support from community members and when community members participate fully in the planning, policy making, governance and day-to-day running of the organisation. This is why engaging the broader community at every stage of your deliberations is critically important. This section provides resources for the mobilisation of the community in the development of community-managed services.

Our Community, a valuable resource organisation for community groups, advises that one of the most powerful tools that any community group can use is its ability to inspire and engage people to support their ideas for how to benefit or develop the broader community.

By this, they do not mean just recruiting individual volunteers, although that can be important. This means rallying support within a community from institutions, other NFP groups, government agencies and media outlets.

Many community initiatives start from a little seed and just grow and grow.

Including the 'right' people

It is important to invite a wide range of community members to be involved in setting priorities and making decisions about creating a new community-managed service. Excluding important parties may delay or jeopardise the process at a later stage. Here are some suggestions for whom to include:

- People with expertise, knowledge, experience and information concerning the situation, difficulty or opportunity
- People with the right to be involved
- People who will be directly affected by the process, the decision or the implementation of the decision, including potential service users
- People who can give some 'weight' to the result by being involved in the process
- People who will gain skills, expertise and experience or will benefit from involvement in any way
- People who have available time and energy.

Determining community priorities

Setting priorities begins after a range of options and ideas have been identified. Brainstorm with the group as many ideas as you can. In reviewing the ideas of the group, consider which are most urgent and which are most important. Group similar ideas together. Test your ideas against some core principles of good community services (see boxed text.)

When setting priorities with a group, there are several techniques which can be used.

Ask group members to select their favourite idea using coloured dots, or number their first (three points), second (two points) and third (one point) priorities. Add up the votes to find the highest priority.

Alternatively, work to achieve consensus. Consensus is usually the most time-consuming approach but it may be essential if everyone is going to implement the decision. Note that consensus without alternative views and debate almost always means that other viewpoints are being ignored.

Remember also that the core values and central interests of group members must be protected: every viewpoint proposed by group members is valid and legitimate.

It is important to regularly check your priorities to ensure they remain current. Keep in touch with information about your community at all times to ensure that changes have not occurred that may affect the relevance or order of your priorities.

You will need to review your priorities regularly in light of new information that comes to hand.

Core principles for good community services

- Accessibility: Will the services that we propose be available to everyone who may need to use them?
- Relevance: Are the services we propose really going to meet the community's need/s? (Many community services do not meet the highest priority needs of community members.)
- Integration: Will the proposed services connect to and complement other existing services?
- Empowerment: Will they support and strengthen existing community networks and help create new ones?
- Inclusiveness: Will the proposed services be relevant to different ethnic and cultural groups and people of all abilities?
- Participation: Will they involve community members at every possible level in decision-making, administration and daily operations?

Making decisions

The information and other resources that you have collected so far will come in very handy to support your decision-making processes.

Be clear about what your rules and procedures are and how and by whom decisions will be made. Some core issues need to be defined clearly and consensus must be reached on these core issues. When processes are transparent, open and democratic, it is easier for others to join them.

The key decisions to be made will likely include:

- What is your overall aim?
- Who will be part of the core organising group and what roles will each group member play? Often you'll be able to form a group quite easily, other times it won't be so easy. Ultimately it will come down to networks.
- What types of services would you like to see?
- What issues will you prioritise?
- What action will you take to achieve those objectives?

- What will be your key messages?
- Who are your potential partners?
- Which potential partner will you approach first?
- What strategies will you use to engage each partner?

Case study

The Flemington Co-operative is a not-for-profit, parent-run long day care centre that caters for pre-school children from six months of age and older. Flemington Co-operative is a community-based and community-managed centre; therefore it depends on active participation from parents.

The Flemington Childcare Group was formed in February 1978 after several families found it impossible to obtain care for their children in the area. In late 1979, the group was officially recognised as a co-operative. Services to families have been offered since February 1982.

The Co-operative is firmly embedded in its community and engages a wide diversity of community members. There are good relationships, for example, with the nearest neighbours: the staff and children engage in happy banter with the neighbours in an adjoining high-density residential development. Neighbours are happy to return equipment waylaid over the fence and return sprightly chickens that have escaped from the centre.

There are also good relationships with decision-makers. The local Victorian Member of Parliament frequently visits the centre, particularly when promoting matters relevant to early years' policies and programs, as well as broader community needs and aspirations.

Reaching out to potential decision-makers and partners

Your community group should look to make connections with decision-makers and potential partners such as local councillors or members of Parliament, community agencies already providing services in your community, and other possibly influential people.

If the need for a service is urgent and there is insufficient time for community members to be able to manage it, an existing community agency can be asked to help establish the community service. Meet with the community agency and explain clearly what you want.

Consider asking the existing community agency to commit to working with emerging community leaders to support them in participating in the management processes and then ultimately taking over full management of the service. Set a realistic plan and a timeframe for how and when this can happen.

It is important that community leaders can directly engage with decision- makers in government and not rely solely on community workers to do so. Community workers can be very helpful and may have valuable experience in lobbying or advocacy that they can share with community leaders.

A community worker may also be able to facilitate dialogue with decision- makers. It is important however, that community leaders feel confident enough to speak authoritatively about what is happening in their community as the preparation done to this stage should mean they are ideally placed to do so.

Remember, when dealing with authorities, treat them politely and respectfully. This is important from the outset to build a good working relationship. Setting up community-managed organisations takes time and you may need to work effectively with such people for a long period.

Once you have the attention of a potential partner and/or another decision-maker, keep up communication with them… and with other supporters, the general public and those you want to influence. People like to feel included and to be up to date.

Strategies and approaches

Strategies for engaging people are as limitless as the imagination. Try to be as creative as you can so that your ideas will be widely recognised and understood. Consider:

- Establishing a website
- Using email addresses to send updates to your supporters, e-group or online fan page
- Planning visits to, or by, federal, state and local government representatives
- Offering to seek photo opportunities with local decision-makers in local papers
- Knocking on doors
- Dropping newsletters into letterboxes
- Organising functions or public events.

You will probably want to use different methods to engage different people at different stages of the process and these should be decided on according to current needs. It is rare that one method on its own will be effective.

Below is a list of the most common methods for community engagement used by community groups, but don't feel limited by what is here.

Public meetings

Public meetings are a good way to put an idea on the table, to encourage the discussion of ideas, and to promote exposure to a diversity of opinions. Public meetings can involve an open microphone, where anyone can come up and talk, or a panel of people (usually experts) discussing the issue. A `learn-in' could be organised to provide a discussion on the issue being discussed or advocated, or engaging a speaker might be an effective way to provide information.

Often the biggest hurdle you will face is a lack of public awareness, and public meetings can stimulate people to think about the issue. The main aim of a public meeting should be to try to work towards a solution or offer some alternatives relating to the issue/s.

Small working groups

It can be very useful to sort out what has to be done, in what area and who is going to be responsible for it. Divide up the jobs into themes and form small working groups to ensure that these jobs are completed.

One or two people can coordinate and a steering committee is often a useful tool, but steps should be taken to make sure all the work – or decision-making – is not left to a small group of people. Set up lots of working groups or project teams. Make sure that each working group has one key contact person and that meetings are always open to newcomers. Expect community members to be involved in at least one project of their choice.

Tip: A job for everyone and someone for every job.

Surveys

A common approach to engaging people is a survey. Surveys can be useful if they contain broad and open questions and are being used to ask questions of people who are already aware of the issue/s at hand.

Surveys are not a way to inform people, so asking them questions without the participants knowing what is possible will be a waste of time. It can be difficult to design a good survey. Avoid leading questions designed to get the answers that the surveyors wanted in the first place.

For advice about how to create a survey, consider approaching the social sciences department of your local tertiary institution, say a TAFE or university. There are also now several online survey companies which charge small fees and provide some advice about designing surveys. Helpful advice on how to conduct a community needs assessment is also available online from the United Kingdom's Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Centre: http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov. Decide if your survey will be best done electronically or in paper format or both to increase the scope of the audience you can reach.

Petitions/Letter-writing

Once it is clear exactly what you want, petitioning can be a great way of engaging people. The effort required is minimal – it takes only a few seconds to put your name and address on a bit of paper or on a website – which increases your chances of getting people involved.

It also engages people and gets them thinking about the issue and your proposed solution. The petition can later be used in your advocacy work. Perhaps a sympathetic local councillor can present your ideas to a council meeting. Public meetings are an ideal place to get signatures for a petition, but so is the local shopping centre or anywhere else where a large number of people congregate.

You must be able to identify the signatories to a petition – and this means having at least an email address but preferably a physical address as well. Too many petitions do not get enough details from the signatories and are rendered useless. Anyone can make up 200 names from random suburbs and write them down. You need to be able to prove that these people actually exist. You can create a petition online for free at http://www.epetitions.net/.

Letter- or email-writing requires more effort from participants than petitioning, but they tend to carry more weight than a simple petition. One personal letter is probably worth 100 names on a petition. Asking people to sign a standard letter will encourage people with less time to be involved.

However, standard letters are never as effective as a letter someone has written for themselves. A good compromise position – combining the potential for critical mass afforded by the standard letter with the impact of a personalised letter – is to provide some suggested points people can use in their letters/emails. The busy ones can cut and paste, the more creative ones can add their own personal touches.

Social media

A new generation of innumerable online tools and applications makes it possible to communicate and engage with others in creative, instantaneous ways. It makes sense to start by mining the networks that you have already established. If, for example, you already have a Facebook page, blog or a presence on LinkedIn, use these vehicles to explain your plans and invite others to contribute.

You may also consider setting up an online discussion forum or fan page. For more ideas for using social media, consider visiting Beth Kanter's blog <http://www.bethkanter.org/>.Beth is the author of The Networked Non-Profit, and she writes daily about how networked non-profits are using social media to power change.

Key questions to consider

- Are there segments of the community that are not engaged in our discussions? Who are they? How can we engage them more fully?
- How will we engage the widest possible range of people in setting priorities and making decisions?
- How can we help everyone involved in decision-making to find the right role for themselves?
- Do our decisions fit with the core principles for a good community service, that is, a service that is genuinely community-owned, accessible, relevant, connected and inclusive?

- What interests do our potential partners have? How can we align ourselves with or appeal to these interests?

Further resources

Visit the Our Community website <www.ourcommunity.com.au>to learn about successful community groups.

Section three: Developing a process

It is no easy task for a community to develop a service or organisation which is responsive to identified needs, inclusive, accessible and sustainable. However, following a rigorous, effective process which provides opportunities for people to be listened to and allows time for information to be gathered will ensure that the organisation has been established on sound foundations.

Building a sense of ownership

If people are to be engaged and continue to support the development of a community-managed organisation it is important that, at all stages, they all feel informed, listened to and their input valued. Good relationships are at the heart of a good process. Relationships are based on trust and this can take time to develop. Important relationships in such a process include those between community workers, community leaders and other community members.

It is important that no one person try to dominate these relationships or the process being undertaken. Here are some suggestions for making sure that everyone has a sense of ownership of the process:

- Don't have one person dominate meetings. Have everyone sitting down rather than one person standing while others sit. Initiate small group discussions wherever possible and give all participants the opportunity to chair discussions. Ask people for their contributions.
- Empower others. Start by asking each person to reflect and make notes or lists for themselves before they start discussing with others. This gets everyone thinking and makes them realise that they already know something about the subject. The notes and lists also give each person something to share. This leads to group discussions which are more democratic because each person has a note of things to say.
- Empower groups. Give tasks to groups. There are many sorts and sizes of groups. Much of the best analysis seems to take place in small groups of three to five members.

Case study

When attending a fundraising trivia night, Martin and Santina became excited by the work being supported by the fundraiser. A support group offering friendship to a small town in East Timor was raising money to build a school there.

Santina thought it would be great if their own municipality of Hightown could start a similar support group. She visited Freya, the Hightown community development worker, who explained that local government does not initiate such programs but can provide support to ratepayer initiatives. Freya offered Santina advice and information about how to discover if there would be support for such a group in Hightown. She also agreed to meet with Santina and a small group of neighbours and friends to discuss the issue further.

At the meeting, Freya explained that all the thinking and planning for such an initiative shouldn't only involve the people of Hightown – it was important to ensure that the people of East Timor also had a say in developing a relationship or friendship with the group.

As a starting point, Freya helped Santina design a 'learn-in' to understand more about what was happening in East Timor. Santina invited an East Timorese ambassador and a representative from the Victorian Local Governance Association's Friendship Cities Program to speak. With Freya's support, Santina and another friend, Jose, developed confidence to facilitate the learn-in.

Everyone worked in small groups to identify how they could elicit ideas for support from an East Timorese community and what they may have to offer. They learned about the differences between East Timorese culture and their own cultures and gained insight into how their actions may be perceived. The ambassador helped them to identify a community that could be a good match for the Hightown group.

The Hightown group then spent ten months building a mutually rewarding relationship with the East Timorese community and another ten months developing a reciprocal support plan.

Making a plan

Establish an action plan setting out how best to achieve your group's goals and listing what needs to be done. Put dates against each key activity showing what will be done, by whom and by when. Not everything goes to plan, but at least an action plan provides a basic roadmap when you get stuck. An example of an action plan is provided in Appendix 2.

In drawing up your plan, consider:

- What
- Why
- How
- When
- Where
- Who for/who will be responsible for it.

Make sure that the action plan covers the administrative details that you need to get the service up and running as well as the plans for the service itself. Action plan tasks will vary but may include:

- Setting up bank accounts and a legal identity
- Securing funding
- Creating a website
- Finding a venue
- Letting the wider community know about your service
- Engaging with potential partners
- Making arrangements for being contactable.

Some ideas for these are included in the next section.

Include key signposts for setting up the new service and dates of strategic significance in your action plan. Consider whether you need to create a strategic plan for your new community-managed service. Write down the shared vision that you have for your community – you will have discussed this already – and explain how the service you are proposing will contribute to achieving that vision. Write down your values or the key principles to which you are committed. Then nominate three to five goals for your service. Don't worry if the plan does not look beautiful at this stage. Strategic plans should be living guidelines, not fixed blueprints. They can be reviewed whenever required.

Implementing and adjusting the plan

Continue to review and refine your plan, as often as required. In the early stages of your work, this may be every month or so. It is important to be flexible enough to be able to adapt to change. Continue to seek community input and support for any significant changes.

Maintaining momentum

You can maintain momentum by

- Always striving to engage more people
- Reviewing your plans regularly
- Celebrating your successes
- Thanking people for their contributions, especially in public.

Key questions to consider

- Is there a wide range of community members who feel like they own the work that you are doing together?
- Is your plan for action clear and well-understood?
- Does everyone know their responsibilities and when their tasks are due to be completed?
- What processes are in place to review your plans?
- How will you celebrate your achievements?

Further resources

- Veneklasen, L & Miller, V 2002, A Weave of Power, People & Politics: The Action Guide for Advocacy and Citizens' Participation, World Neighbors, Oklahoma – this is designed to promote citizens' participation and democratise decision-making. It provides concepts, tools and step-by-step processes aimed at promoting citizens' participation.
- Chambers, R 2002, A Sourcebook of 21 Sets of Ideas and Activities, Earthscan Publications, London – this sourcebook is written for anyone working in the field of participatory learning and change. It provides 21 sets of ideas, activities and tips on a range of subjects including getting started, forming groups, dealing with dominant group members, evaluation and monitoring.
- Online participation tool kit tools <http://www.toolkitparticipation.com> for promoting citizens' participation in local governance. More than 100 case studies are provided, along with articles and links.

Section four: Funding

Groups which are entirely volunteer based and don't need to pay for services and assistance may not need to worry about funding. The advantage of this is that such groups can maintain independent control. Usually, however, community-managed services need money to support their development and operations.

Being not-for-profit does not mean that such organisations cannot earn more income than expenses. It means that when income is greater than expenses, the surplus is channelled back into the facilities, operation or services of the organisation. Surplus income cannot be allocated to the personal use of committee or association members. It is wise to try and maintain a small surplus if possible as this provides a level of security. However, it is worth noting that any surplus left from government grants and/or charitable donors will usually need to be returned to the donor.

Successful fundraising

Our Community, a resource organisation for community groups, advises NFP groups to seek funding from a range of sources wherever possible and to involve as many people as possible in trying to raise money.

They warn that many groups get into trouble because they have only one or two sources of funding, or because they have only two or three people involved in raising money. If a funding source comes to an end or people leave, the organisation can become vulnerable.

According to Our Community, a good fundraising plan rests on six pillars:

• Donations
• Grants
• Community – business partnerships
• Membership/alumni/friends
• Special events
• Earned income.

To survive and thrive in a changing world, a strong and effective organisation will draw from all six pillars. Further information is provided later in this section.

Common challenges

Some community groups rely on external funding sources which may not share the same priorities and vision as the local community. This can cause tension and can result in the organisation becoming donor-led as opposed to community-led. Having a mix of funding sources can help to avoid relying on external donors who may not be completely suitable. Seek out donors who will genuinely support what the community wants to achieve.

Your group will need to explore which fundraising avenues are feasible, achievable and profitable. The trick is to be creative and make the fundraising initiative work for you.

For each event or initiative, try to incorporate other fundraising initiatives. For example, if you have a special event, set up a stall to sell your organisation's merchandise, or conduct a raffle, and always make sure programs or invitations have a donation form attached as well as information on how people can join your group as members.

Strategies and approaches to fundraising

Your community group might be able to access funds in a variety of ways. It is very useful to start with who and what you already know. For example, some local businesses may already be aware of your work and may be willing to make a contribution of cash or in-kind resources.

If you are planning something more ambitious like a raffle or fete, it is important to check carefully with local authorities about applicable regulations.

Our Community has good advice and tips about how to raise funds. These include:

- Grants – identify relevant federal, state or local government, philanthropic and corporate grants programs.
- Sponsorship – identify potential major and minor sponsorship arrangements or community business partnerships. This could include naming rights for your service, sponsoring events, helping with a newsletter, lunches, etc.
- Membership fees – you can introduce different levels of membership fees – standard, family, a 'friends of' group or associate membership, 'Angels' or 'Gold' membership, lifetime members – and charge a fee for each.
- In-kind support – you might be able to get donations of anything, from a free venue to office supplies, printing and photocopying, transport and entertainment and/or pro bono work in such areas as legal, accounting, marketing and information technology.
- Donations – investigate whether you can arrange to receive online donations. Pursue personal donations, general appeals, direct mail and appeals to your email database of members and supporters.
- Special events, including:
  – Sales, fetes
  – Trivia nights, fashion parades, talent contests, art shows, film nights
  – Various 'athons', with community members gaining sponsorship for a walkathon, readathon, skillathon etc
  – Games nights
  – Sponsored record attempts or other similar quests
  – Raffles, competitions, auctions – with memorabilia, services, travel, gifts, tickets.
- Merchandising – sell office products, glassware etc.
- Sales – sell your goods and services.

Key questions to consider:

- How much money do you need?
- Do you have a carefully developed annual budget that gives your clear information about how much is needed?
- Which types of funding sources are the best match for which items in your budget?
- Do you meet the criteria for the grants programs relevant to your neighbourhood?
- In your community, who has fundraising skills and who has an interest and willingness to learn these skills? Can you identify at least six people who will be involved? Can more experienced people be paired with less experienced people?

Identifying funding opportunities

So how can you find out about the specific funding opportunities available to your community?

- https://www.grants.gov.au/– This is an information directory providing links and contact details for funding programs operated by federal government agencies.

- http://www.vic.gov.au/grants– This is an information directory providing links and contact details for funding programs state government agencies.

- Victorian Council of Social Service' (VCOSS) Clearinghouse http://www.vcoss.org.au

- Contact your local government <http://knowyourcouncil.vic.gov.au/councils> to ask about community grants available in your area.

- Our Community <www.ourcommunity.com.au> has a subscription grants newsletter.

- Philanthropy Australia <www.philanthropy.org.au> the national peak body for philanthropy, produces the Australian Directory of Philanthropy, which is available for purchase as on online subscription.

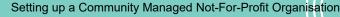## Tips for writing successful proposals

Most grants and approaches to donors will require your group to prepare a proposal. This doesn't have to be too difficult and can be achieved in four to six pages but will require careful thought and planning.

Check Our Community <www.ourcommunity.com.au> for more information, but here are some tips for creating effective proposals:

Think about who will be reading your proposal. What will they most want to know? Put yourself in their shoes. Help them to help you. Writing a proposal gives you the opportunity to tell your story. Keep asking yourselves: what do we really mean, how will this happen, when, where, who will be involved, how will we know when it's done; the story is the answer to these questions. Remember too that it is your story that counts, so even though you will want to be attentive to what the potential donor wants, you have to know your own story first. It may be the case that there are important parts of your story that the potential donor has not asked you about. It is up to you to find a way to include this information in the proposal even though it may not have been requested.

It is better if a group of people can brainstorm ideas about what should be in the proposal and in what order of priority. Think about which ideas are the most important and central and which ones are secondary and how they support the other reasons.

Finally, there are lots of good ideas out there. You need to explain how your idea is the best response to the problem and why now is the right time to be doing it. Many people make the mistake of demonstrating that implementing their idea is a better option than doing nothing. The point of comparison is not nothing. You need to prove why your idea is better than doing something else that may seem equally attractive.

Case study

Several early childhood education and care services in Victoria routinely use local traders for materials and supplies and these businesses generally reciprocate with donations or discounts for social and fundraising events (CCC 2010).

The Clarendon Children's Centre, established in 1988, is located in an inner Melbourne suburb with a mix of public, community and private high-density housing. The Centre set up a scheme whereby time-poor families could contribute cash donations towards fundraising goals, while cash-poor families could contribute time to assist the centre.

Both are valued equally by the centre's community and the scheme recognises the high level of socio-economic diversity of the area where the centre is based:

The family participation scheme is designed to give families options for contributing to the Centre's successful operation. Each family pays an initial deposit of $50. Every six months, families' participation credits are tallied and an additional payment made, if necessary, to maintain the $50 balance.

Participation credits can be earned in a variety of ways including attendance at general meetings, social events or fundraising activities or responding to a 'please help' notice. In most cases, families need only to participate twice in each six month period to maintain their $50 balance (Interview with Centre management).

Tips for success

- Involve as many people as possible in your fundraising efforts.
- Look for as many diverse funding sources as possible.
- Start locally with who and what you know.
- Be creative.
- Thank and value your donors.

Further resources

Our Community <www.ourcommunity.com.au> offers the Complete Community Fundraising Handbook: How to make the most money ever for your community organisation.

Network for Good <www1.networkforgood.org/> helps non-government organisations to raise money on their own websites and on social networks with free and low-cost fundraising tools. It is a US based online organisation.

Section five: Long-term management and stewardship

When you first establish your community group, there will probably be no paid staff and everybody will be helping to achieve shared goals. Individually or in committees and small working groups, community members will take on the governance, management and operational tasks including planning, bookkeeping, fundraising, producing newsletters, and liaising with government. Meetings may be a bit like working bees and people will become involved on the basis of their willingness to contribute and do the work.

As the group becomes more sophisticated and it becomes possible to employ some staff, there will need to be new relationships and arrangements made to ensure that community members don't continue to try to run things on a day-to-day (or micro) level, leading to conflict and confusion between paid and unpaid workers.

It is at this stage that a board or committee of management should be established.

The governance of your organisation should reflect the kind of organisation you are. Deciding what kind of community group you are comes first. Only after that do you look around for a model that suits you. Your model of governance does not necessarily have much to do with your legal status or constitution. Most constitutions look much the same because they are restrained by legislation and model rules for organisations. The actual ways of operating can be very different.

You need to have some discussions with community members and form agreement about how the organisation will be governed. Note that it usually takes several years of community work before a fully-functioning community governance group can emerge, so don't worry if it does not happen quickly.

What is community governance?

Community governance refers to the processes for making all the decisions and plans that affect life in the community. Community governance can be thought of as a process which brings together all the parties who have pieces of the jigsaw which, once made, will be the picture of that community's future (Christchurch City Council, 1999).

Forming an organisation

Discussions will need to be held and information sought about whether your group needs to be given a legal status – this will most likely mean becoming incorporated. It can be important to become incorporated if you are forming an organisation with long-term ambitions. By incorporating you shift legal responsibility from the individual to the organisation, and you will become eligible to receive grants and funding. You do not close all doors to funding by staying unincorporated, but you will limit yourself. Incorporation can also provide some protection from being sued.

In Victoria, it is usually simplest to incorporate as an association. This involves following a set of rules and regulations to comply with relevant laws. The advice given here is taken from Our Community <www.ourcommunity.com.au>. It should be viewed as a guide only and should not be used as a substitute for professional legal advice.

See the Justice Connect <https://www.justiceconnect.org.au/> for information on pro bono legal services.

Consumer Affairs Victoria <https://www.consumer.vic.gov.au/clubs-and-fundraising>

Australian Charities and Not for Profits Commission <http://www.acnc.gov.au/>

It can be difficult for small community-managed services to understand and comply with the regulations associated with incorporation. Remember that regulations – no matter how bureaucratic they may seem – were developed to protect people and organisations from bad institutions and commercial exploitation. Remember too that many people have fought hard for these standards. If you want to do something new which current regulations do not allow, clearly think through your arguments and explain to the relevant authorities why you believe this is the best solution for your group's needs and show how you are going to maintain your standards.

What is incorporation?

Incorporation is a system of state government or territory registration that gives an association or community groups certain legal advantages in return for accepting certain legal responsibilities. An incorporated association receives recognition as a legal entity separate from its members and offers some protection for office holders from any debts or liabilities incurred by the group as long as the association doesn't make a profit for its members. Incorporation is voluntary. Once incorporated, groups have to abide by relevant legislation.

Why incorporate?

NFP community groups can be unregistered and unrecognised bodies acting under their own rules, or they can be formally recognised bodies.

There are advantages and disadvantages to each approach. The advantages of being an informal group are that you do not have to pay the costs associated with incorporation and you do not have to comply with many of the requirements.

This does not mean that you can deal with the business or the property of your organisation as you like – you still have an obligation to act as a trustee for the organisation's purposes – but you can be more flexible about what you do and how you do it. If you are organising a one-off or short-term activity, this may be your best choice.

The disadvantage is that if anything goes wrong – if the office your organisation has leased in the name of the honorary treasurer burns down, or if people fall over the mat, injure themselves and sue – it is possible that the person named as lessee or committee members may be held personally liable. In that case, if the organisation does not have enough money to cover the payout you may have to pay for it yourself.

There can also be difficulties with opening bank accounts, problems with insurance, and confusion about who owns what property. If you stop being a member of the organisation, but your name is still on the contracts, there may be difficulties transferring your responsibilities to a new committee member/office holder.

Furthermore, most foundations and most government departments will only fund incorporated organisations.

Developing a management plan

If your organisation exists primarily to serve and support its members, it may be wise to use principles of representative democracy in implementing your governance model. The board or committee of management should, as far as possible, follow the views of members on any particular issue. The board will be like a representative version of the organisation. Board members will be chosen on the basis of their opinions as well as their ability. Think about the following:

• Find the right people that can meet your organisation's needs. Recruitment is an ongoing process, and not just something to think about when vacancies arise.

• Determine the types of skills and qualities you want on your board. Consider members who have skills in accounting, legal matters, property management or policy areas. Make a list of the required skills and qualities, publicise it widely and consult others about who in your community has the skills and qualities you seek.

• Develop clear roles and responsibilities for board members. Some organisations prepare job descriptions for board members, especially for officer positions such as chairperson, deputy chairperson, treasurer and secretary.

• Educate board members so they understand the organisation's mission and programs as well as their legal and fiscal responsibilities.

• Orient new members. Prepare a board manual and set up a system to mentor new board members – current board members can provide support and coaching to new members. Consider inviting new board members to tour your organisation and meet with staff as part of their orientation.

• Establish committees and working groups that will enable board members to take an active role in furthering the organisation. Some NFP organisations require board members to serve on committees prior to joining the board.

• Communicate with board members in between meetings. Use the opportunity to provide updates, encourage people to follow-through on commitments, and discuss issues in an informal setting.

• Host an annual retreat for board members. You may consider involving staff as well. Engage the services of a skilled facilitator to assist with planning and facilitating the session.

• Appreciate, recognise and celebrate the contributions of board members.

Community-managed services can rely too much on a small group of people to govern and/or deliver services. There is a risk of wearing out a small number of community leaders.

Conversely, there is a risk of relying too much on specialists such as people with financial or management skills, to the detriment of governance by local people themselves.

Sometimes community organisations can also be captured by single issue or narrow community groups, excluding genuine participation by diverse community members. It is important to plan ahead for the replacement of committee members and brainstorm with others about the skills, values and knowledge that is required and who within the community may be able to contribute these. Approach all the people on your shortlist and invite their participation.

Case study

The Clarendon Children's Centre conducts at least two general meetings of members annually, sometimes more when there are significant decisions to be made. Staff members explain the ongoing relationship between the committee of management, staff and the centre users as follows:

The committee consults in various ways and invites and expects questions and discussion and understands that their community expects clear arguments and evidence. The committee accepts that the majority of parents may not agree with the proposed ideas or actions and could reject them and /or generate alternate ideas. The history of transparency, inclusion and informed decision-making has built

the trust required for the centre community to accept any confidential discussions and decisions the committee may need to make.

The Kensington Community Children's Cooperative is a parent-managed service offering long day care and kindergarten in an inner northern Melbourne suburb. Supplementing the work of the board, users of each room appoint a parent as their designated representative. These representatives are not on the board of management, but are co-ordinated by a board member and have direct links to the board and to management.

The room representative organises information sharing and social events among families using each room, hence providing an extra link between the board members and other centre users. Board minutes are also posted on the notice board and regular information is provided to the centre community on committee decisions. This usually includes a rationale or explanation for the decisions made.

Ongoing community involvement and stewardship

The idea of stewardship refers to a responsibility to take care of something owned by others, that is, by the whole community. This means that the board do not 'own' the organisation, they look after it on behalf of the community. It is therefore critically important to find ways to continue engaging community members in all of their diversity in organisational life. This includes any community members that may not agree with you! You must stay connected to what community members want. Be conscious too of being inclusive towards community members of different ethnic backgrounds, abilities, ages, cultural groups and sexual orientations.

- Consider the following ideas:
- Set up a community suggestion box
- Develop a website
- Combine your annual general meeting with a family fun day
- Host an open day
- Take every opportunity to communicate what you are doing through newsletters, leaflets, emails and local media
- Survey community needs on a regular basis, for example, every two years
- Keep office doors open whenever possible
- Invite other local groups to use your premises on evenings or weekends or at times when you do not use it
- Look for opportunities to share resources with other local groups and networks.

It is also important to invest in keeping your board strong and fresh. Establish term limits and rotate board members so that new ideas and energy come into your organisation. Periodically self-assess your performance as a board to determine how well you are carrying out your responsibilities and identify the challenges that require action.

Key questions to consider

- What sort of organisation will you form? Do you need to register as an incorporated association?
- How will you ensure that a broad cross-section of your community is continually engaged in making decisions about your organisation?
- What sort of board will you have? What skills and qualities do you need on your board?
- What mechanisms will you adopt to make sure that the board is responsive to community need and accountable to the wider community?

Further resources

Consumer Affairs Victoria <https://www.consumer.vic.gov.au/clubs-and-fundraising>

Business Victoria <www.business.vic.gov.au> also has information about incorporated associations as well as general advice for starting and managing a new business.

Our Community <www.ourcommunity.com.au> has a policy bank

Our Consumer Place <www.ourconsumerplace.com.au> is a resource centre run by people diagnosed with mental illness. They provide information, training, support and advice to consumer-run groups and projects.

Section six: Ensuring social and economic participation

This section is designed to provide information and examples of the role that community organisations can play in ensuring people's participation in society economically, socially, culturally and politically.

Practical examples

Six Victorian community-based children's services provided information about how they work for the purposes of this project. Participating centres were from a range of regional, metropolitan and urban fringe areas, of differing sizes and varied between small, integrated and stand-alone services.

Questions for reflection

- Does your community-based organisation have policies and practices to ensure everyone has access?
- What is the best way to stimulate discussion in your community and within your community-based service about what access to community-managed services means? How will you create opportunities for community members to reach a shared view?

Social participation

Community-based services are welcoming and strive to be easy to access physically, financially, geographically and culturally. They see and make connections between people and issues. This involves linking, forming alliances, collaborating and working across individuals, groups, other agencies, government and businesses.

To increase social participation and belonging in your communities, community-based services can:

- Encourage people who use the service or who may use it in the future, those who live nearby and those with similar interests to become members of your organisation.
- Allow space and time for community members to gather, even if they are not being provided with a service.
- Provide 'soft' entry points in recognition that people may need to become familiar with a service over several visits before they feel comfortable to ask for assistance.
- Create a sense of belonging and offer spaces where people feel truly welcome. This can be achieved through things such as wheelchair accessibility, out-posted service delivery, free or subsidised fees, multilingual signage and staff.
- Support friendships that emerge among service users, members and others associated with the community organisation.
- Incorporate food into meetings and other activities.
- Recognise that, regardless of role, all staff, managers, members and service users share basic human needs and life experiences.
- Have fun.

Case study

The committee of one Children's Services Centre interviewed personally invites newcomers and introduces people at events. Parents are given name tags, which includes their children's names and dots to identify different children's age groups. This has resulted in various links between families, such as play dates and social engagements, leading to strong long-term connections. The 21st birthday of the centre attracted some 400 past and present families and staff. Families reported that the centre is part of their family history and that friendships made by parents and children at the centre continued through the school years and beyond.

Some of the centres interviewed are based in areas with a high concentration of recently arrived migrants and refugees. The committee of one such centre explicitly recognises the vital role that centre staff members play in supporting families beyond the provision of childhood education and care, but is also aware of the broader responsibilities and potential liabilities this brings. While the business and responsibilities of child care take precedence, whenever possible staff are resourced to support families. This includes taking families to the doctor, hospital and Centrelink when necessary. The centre also provides English tutoring and parenting courses and staff voluntarily provided child care on a Saturday so that parents could attend a first aid course/safety information session.

Another centre which works with refugees is actively helping the largest of its refugee communities to maintain constructive links with their country of origin by raising money to provide a roof for an orphanage.

At another participating service, strong and mutually rewarding connections have been made with local sports clubs. The service actively supports children to participate in local sports clubs including those that have recently experienced diminishing membership numbers. One recent activity for children was a tennis clinic. Local clubs acknowledge that support from the service has increased family memberships and helped to keep clubs viable.

Economic participation

Community-based services are run on a not-for-profit, break-even basis, with any operating surplus directed back to the service or the community.

Community-based services by their nature redistribute resources, especially in–kind resources. They care about equity, which means honouring, as equal, the diverse contributions that people make, no matter what their background, gender or varying abilities. Individual and local needs are acknowledged and addressed in a locally appropriate way; equal value rather than sameness is the goal. Equitable services promote a fairer distribution of economic resources and power between people.

To achieve this, organisations could consider:

• Supporting service users to develop a system of sharing transport to and from activities

• Accepting donated goods and clothing and passing on to those who need them

• Offering honorary payments to service users and members, when valued tasks are performed such as translating, participating in working bees, surveying fellow residents about community strengths and needs, being involved in evaluations or the like

• Allocating a pre-determined number of spaces in activities and events for those who would otherwise be unable to attend due to cost

• Finding the most cost effective means for services users and members to access information and other services.

Case study

Some examples of practices of redistribution adopted by the participating centres include:

- Operating the service with one fewer place than the licence provides, hence leaving one place for emergency usage
- Building the transferable skills, and thus employability, of parents and family members
- Maintaining a large store of used clothing that is available to all families
- Offering financial subsidies.

Being constantly mindful of inequities in access to resources is important to ensure that proactive and respectful action is taken to address these. One centre, aware of the poor access to technological resources of some members, prints the weekly email newsletter sent to users by the centre director for those families who do not have email access.

One centre established a system of gap fee relief when the operational subsidy for community-based centres was removed. The centre incorporated into the budget a substantial sum available to supplement Child Care Benefit (CCB) payments to support affordability for low-income earners and maintain accessibility for local families.

The system used calculations of the families' proportionate access to CCB to determine an amount of additional fee reduction. This gap fee relief system has, in recent years, been replaced by an affordability subsidy provided by the local council, which is also linked to families' access to CCB.

Political participation

Community-based services are governed by a voluntary management committee; a collective board comprising elected members who live, work or participate in the local community. The governance model is developmental, with the governing body working co-operatively and collaboratively with staff, volunteers, participants and the wider community.

Participation means those who will be affected by decisions being fully involved in all decision-making processes. For community-based services, participation means engaging community members and beneficiaries in program design, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Community-based organisations recognise that everyone has a valuable contribution to make and community members are entitled and encouraged to join in at any level.

Community-based services support community capacity for representation and participation through practices such as:

- Adopting good practices in community management which empower local people to take control of the decisions that affect their lives
- Undertaking needs analyses and user surveys, facilitating consultative meetings and running annual general meetings where community members actively participate
- Campaigning in solidarity with community members for improvements to community life
- Standing alongside community members and service users on the issues that are important to them. In meeting individual and group needs, community-based services act with, and sometimes on behalf of, community members
- Advocating for the new and emerging issues affecting community members as the service learns about them
- Declining the expert role – remembering that community members are the experts in their own lives and workers are resources for the community to draw on in pursuing their own priorities.

Case Study

One centre working with older children was especially concerned to promote values of civic participation. During its vacation care program, older children are supported to volunteer at the local tourist destination. The children are matched with and mentored by an adult volunteer. The feedback from both the organisation's management and the children is that this has been a great way to build community links. The program supports intergenerational connections, embeds the benefits of volunteerism and provides reciprocal opportunities for learning and exchange.

Generally, participating centres regarded their service as a focal point or hub for the neighbourhood. This view would seem to be shared by community members. An example given was when there was a local campaign regarding a proposal to tunnel through the park adjoining a centre. The centre was used as a conduit for information and ideas about how the community could best respond and the director was a speaker at a rally organised to protest against the tunnel. Similarly, when a walking track was opened in the nearby park, a community event was held to celebrate at the centre.

Cultural participation

Culturally inclusive services recognise and value diverse cultures. They adopt an empowering approach that respects, values and enhances people's ability to have control over their lives. This process encourages people to meet their needs and aspirations in a self-aware and informed way which takes advantage of their skills, experience and potential. Change and growth occur through informing and supporting individuals and communities to make and act out their own decisions.

Practices for community-based services to show respect and recognise the strengths of a community and its members include:

- Recruiting staff from the community being served, ensuring that workers and participants share a similar background
- Adopting a non-judgemental attitude, for example, ensuring that all activities and communications from the service are inclusive
- Actively and continually finding out about the values, beliefs and practices of different cultures represented in the local community
- Empowering others to share in decision-making
- Encouraging members and service users to make decisions for themselves by providing information and options, not direction
- Building a sense of hope by focusing on what is possible, not on what can't be achieved
- Showing compassion and caring for the human needs of all participants.

Case study

Staff at one centre include people who speak community languages, live locally and were (and sometime still are) students at the school where the centre is collocated. Having staff that correspond to the parent demographics (refugee, young staff, low income, and disadvantaged) supports communication flow between the centre and families and the community. This is instrumental in assisting staff, management and the committee to understand and utilise effective methods of engaging families and the broader community so they can influence strategic and operational decisions and directions

Another centre where five to ten per cent of children were from non- English-speaking backgrounds explained that the majority of staff speak a second language, including Arabic, Spanish, Mandarin, Vietnamese and African languages.

A centre which services a large Somali community employs Somali workers who are well-connected into the local community. These people have been valuable in building trust and understanding between the centre and the community, have significantly increased the number of Somali families using the centre's kindergarten and have eliminated some previous communication problems relating to enrolment systems and timing. Kindergarten group times have been changed and new groups added in response to the needs of Horn of Africa families.

Section seven: Assessing your organisation's effectiveness

It is important that each community-based service reflects on how they ensure that their operations are as accessible and inclusive as possible, and how they can build stronger practice, taking into account the unique context of their community and their organisational mission.

The following suite of eight indicators captures the core elements of high-quality community ownership of community-based services. These indicators can help community-based services to reflect on and evaluate current performance or can be used to set performance indicators for monitoring new plans and ideas.

The first four indicators are internally or organisationally focused, which means they focus on the organisation's management practices in such areas as governance, service delivery, inclusion/diversity and the public interest.

The second set of indicators focus on participants, members and service users in such areas as relationship, voice, inter-connectedness and capacity.

Internal indicators of community ownership

- Governance decisions about strategic questions are strongly influenced by the community (families, staff, neighbours, other community members and community service organisations).
- Decisions about curriculum, programs and/or activities are strongly influenced by the community.
- The service responds to the diverse needs of the community including complex needs and actively reaches out to those who could miss out.
- Decisions about resources are made on the basis of stewardship, informed by a sophisticated understanding of 'public good'.

External indicators of community ownership

- Being part of the service builds relationships between people and with services.
- Being part of the service gives people a voice.
- Being part of the service links individual interests with communal interests.
- Being part of the service builds personal capacity to support contributions to community capacity.

Questions for reflection

- Are these indicators a fair description of your community-based service?
- Do you have examples of how your community-based service is meeting the eight indicators?
- Is your community-based service generally better at meeting internally focused indicators or member and service- user focused indicators?
- Which are the key areas that you wish to improve?

Appendix 1: Literature review

This project was based on a review of international and national literature and consideration of a series of six case studies from Victoria.

Two broad types of literature were accessed for the purpose of this project – empirical comparisons of not-for-profit and for-profit children's services and literature about the impact of community management on community wellbeing.

Case studies are an important and valuable form of primary qualitative research. Moss (2009) argues that case studies are necessary to understand and evaluate early childhood education and care and its democratic potential. Similarly, Keevers et al (2010) make the case that qualitative and participatory research is required to understand the contribution of community-based services to producing social and economic participation.

The community-based children's services who participated in this study, and whose stories are featured throughout this document, were chosen by CCC on the basis of their representativeness of the sector and perceived good practices.

Interviews with centre managers and committee of management members were done by Rebecca Haig and Suzanne Provis of CCC. The interviewers based their questions and discussions with services on the five key themes that underpin quality community ownership:

- Community influence
- Responsiveness and accessibility
- Resources
- Respectful relationships
- Public good, mutuality.

Connecting and building local communities

Community-based organisations provide places in which it is possible for people to be connected to one another and helped to accept and embrace their responsibility for one another. Locally-based community organisations play a key and unique role in providing an infrastructure that enable reciprocal exchange and respect across the boundaries of unavoidable dependencies, inequalities and differences (Keevers et al 2010).

These are also the conditions necessary to generate social capital – the collective value of all social networks and the inclinations that arise from these networks to do things for each other (Putnam 2000). Communities with high levels of social capital tend to be more inclusive than those with low reserves of social capital. Social capital can be `bonding' when interactions between members of a group build and maintain cohesion and solidarity, as well as `bridging'. Bridging social capital involves interactions external to the group and is particularly important for social inclusion. As Balatti and Falk (2002) note: 'trust, appropriate norms and relationships are the building blocks required for social capital to grow' (Balatti and Falk 2002, p. 294).

While there is not a lot of literature about the relationship between social and economic participation and inclusion and auspice by early childhood care and education providers, there is an emerging debate about the benefits of community management of other types of services for building communities. Nationally significant research on this topic, recently completed by Lyn Keevers and colleagues in NSW, considered how community-based and community- managed organisations contribute to increased

social justice (Keevers 2009, Keevers et all 2010). According to South Australia's Social inclusion initiative, social inclusion is a method of social justice (www.socalinclusion.sa.gov.au).

Keevers (2009, Keevers et al 2010) concludes that locally-based community organisations offer valuable guidance on how social and economic participation can be achieved in practice. This conclusion affirms the value of using case studies to elucidate the practice of social and economic participation.

Keevers' research also shows how practices such as: supporting and facilitating horizontal relationships between service participants; engaging in activities and processes that 'do not provide a service'; and creating opportunities for people to participate and give back are crucial for offering service participants mutual respect, recognition, a sense of belonging and inclusion. It also articulates that knowing how to work effectively and respectfully in asymmetrical power relations and the quality of these relationships are critical to inclusive practice in locally-based community organisations.

The researchers also argue that both the `belonging role' of community organisations and their contribution of performing respect in ways that reach across the boundaries of inequality, difference and dependency have been largely overlooked both in the accountability and monitoring and evaluation systems adopted by funding bodies, and in government inquiries into the NFP sector (Keevers et al 2010 p. 4).

Community building through children's services

Contemporary interest in community building can be traced to three broad themes:

- The increasing influence of conceptual frameworks and evidence linking investment in social connectedness, social capital and civil society to improvements in economic productivity, social inclusion, public safety and public health
- Globalisation – the desire and need for local knowledge, local governance and local connectedness to help offset the vast speed and spread of global flows of information, resources and people
- Public policy experimentation with the ideas and practices of network governance and joined-up government (Wiseman 2005).

As such, community building is a way of exploring more engaged, 'joined-up' and networked approaches to governance and policy-making (Wiseman 2005). Its implementation rests on the core principles of community development: community participation, community ownership, empowerment, lifelong learning, inclusion, access and equity, social action, advocacy, networking and self-help (Humpage 2005).

Integrated children and family centres are increasingly popular in Australia, despite the thinness of evidence demonstrating improved community outcomes from integration (Centre for Community Child Health 2008). Early childhood settings have daily opportunities to connect families with each other. Families have strengths, experiences and skills that they can share with one another (Centre for Community Child Health 2007).

Several studies report that families form social networks, make cultural connections and participate in their communities – thus contributing to social capital and strengthened communities – as a result of their early childhood program participation (McCain, Mustard and Shanker 2007, Mitchell, Wylie and Carr 2008). Informal social networks among families with young children can become valuable resources that promote children's health and wellbeing.

For example, recently arrived families and those who share similar cultural traditions or who speak languages other than English benefit from meeting each other. Families also benefit when they learn about child-rearing practices from families that have different backgrounds (Moran, Ghate and van der Merwe 2004, Weiss, Caspe and Lopez 2006). Families who are involved in their children's education are

more likely to establish peer networks with other families and to have more information about their children's education (Epstein and Sanders 2002).

Families in Romerill, Matthews and Aldous' study (2007) valued partnerships and a real connection with a service that encourages different types of involvement and is focused on shared decision-making about the education and care of their children. For these families, community-based services are places where connected-ness with families and the local community and responsiveness to local and individual family needs are paramount. Many families believe that community ownership and management of children's services is relevant and important for connecting families and communities.

Governance of early childhood education and care services

In countries with well-developed early childhood service systems, the predominant governance arrangement for early childhood education and care is a public one, either through the education system or through municipal/social welfare systems (OECD 2006, Cleveland and Krashinsky 2005). Integrated systems, such as those found in the Nordic countries, offer affordable and comprehensive networks for all families needing services. Their approach to child development and learning tends to be based on a clear understanding of the citizenship rights of the child; it is respectful of the young child's age, strengths and needs. Countries such as the United Kingdom, Canada, United States, Australia and New Zealand use a combination of common curriculum, operating standards, and staffing qualifications and regulation in an effort to weave a more or less coherent approach and to foster a synergy of cultures, while maintaining mixed delivery (OECD 2006).

In OECD countries, inequitable access is far greater in jurisdictions where the private (non- profit and commercial) sector plays a larger role (Hasan 2007). Commercial lobbying efforts in Australia have ensured that regulations remain lower than those currently in place in other jurisdictions for regulated child care programs. The Australian accreditation system has modest monitoring and enforcement capacity and relies heavily on self-reporting (OECD 2006).

The idea that program delivery should be determined and managed locally is consistent with the concept of subsidiarity, that is, the principle that tasks are more appropriately handled by the lowest level competent authority. One of the benefits of local management of program delivery is that it makes it possible to involve community members, parents and children in decisions about the issues of program delivery that are most important for them staffing, facility design and programming to ensure responsive programming.

Community members and parents can be involved with setting priorities, planning and quality assurance for a locally-managed system. Bennett (2008) concludes that the type of governance structure in place has a significant impact on the coverage and quality of early childhood services within a country. Further research is required, however, to understand the impact of community governance of services on social capital and long-term community wellbeing.

Family involvement in children's services

A review of early childhood education and care (ECEC) in 20 OECD countries concludes that ten policy areas require further critical attention from governments (OECD 2006).

One of these is to encourage family and community involvement in early childhood services:

- Families play a central nurturing and educational role in their children's lives, particularly in the early childhood period. They should be assisted by early childhood centres and staff to support their children's development and learning. The continuity of children's experience across environments is greatly enhanced when parents and staff members exchange information regularly and adopt consistent approaches to socialisation, daily routines, child development and learning. Community

involvement in the pre-school is important, not only for providing expanded services and referrals where necessary, but also as a space for partnership and the participation of parents.

The evidence base in support of parent involvement in early childhood programs is strong. Some studies reveal that parent involvement contributes to higher quality early childhood education and care; others show how good ECEC services better support parent involvement. Studies examining the wider community benefits of family involvement in children's services, or indeed the outcomes that parents gain for themselves as a result of accessing and participating in ECEC are relatively uncommon, however, there are more studies about changes in parenting behaviours and other benefits for children associated with family participation in early childhood education and care.

In their extensive international review of early childhood programs, Mitchell, Wylie and Carr (2008) found five studies that highlighted the key factors associated with ECEC programs that contribute to positive outcomes for parents and their parenting: parents participating in the ECEC program and in education opportunities for themselves; good quality services offered for children and parents; services offering an empowering or partnership approach; and parents taking up positions of responsibility within the ECEC centre (Mitchell, Wylie and Carr 2008). Parent-led centres and integrated centres (centres that combine ECEC and family support) offer particularly wide opportunities for parents to enrich their lives (Mitchell, Wylie and Carr 2008). Evidence from several studies suggests that integrated early childhood programs are more likely to support family involvement by setting a broader range of specific goals and monitoring outcomes that relate to children and to their parents or other significant family members (Mitchell, Wylie and Carr 2008).

Mitchell, Wylie and Carr (2008) also identified 14 studies that included measures of parenting outcomes associated with parent involvement and engagement in early childhood programs. The review noted evidence of improved interactions with the child, including greater acceptance of the child's behaviour, positive parenting, activities to help the child learn at home, father involvement in the early childhood setting and in parenting, and parental knowledge of early child development.

Parent involvement in early childhood settings multiplies children's opportunities for learning as parents bring skills and activities back into the home environment (Weiss, Caspe and Lopez 2006). Parents' involvement in early childhood settings is also associated with being more supportive of children's learning and those children whose parents are involved are more likely to have more positive experiences in formal schooling.

However, gaining benefits from parent involvement in early childhood programs needs to go beyond whether parents are involved to focus on how they are involved and what happens as a result. To be truly inclusive, early childhood settings must encourage healthy dialogue about the principles and shared beliefs that relate to inclusion, diversity, and equity (Moss 2007) and expand communication.

Parent involvement in school settings includes parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community. The same strategies may be useful in organising family involvement in early childhood settings (Epstein and Sanders 2002).

Parent involvement benefits are greatest when there is planned programming for children and their families, when relationships between children's services and families are based on mutual trust and respect, and when children's services are sensitive to family culture, values, language and composition. Guidelines for culturally-responsive parent involvement emphasise respectful dialogue and awareness of cross-cultural communication skills.

Conclusion

In summary, the available literature makes clear how community-based services can and do contribute meaningfully to achieving social inclusion and strengthening communities. There is strong evidence as to how and why families benefit from involvement in their children's education and care. Benefits accrue to

children, to parenting practices and to parents themselves as well as to whole communities, although – understandably – the evidence becomes weaker when the benefits are more indirect.

The literature nonetheless shows how quality early childhood education and care systems can be created, and that quality is higher in not-for profit services than in for-profit services. A strong link between quality and community governance can thus be argued.

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Appendix 2: Sample action plan

This plan is based upon an imaginary organisation Improving Our Community, and the types of actions that would typically need to be taken to develop a new community organisation.

The plan incorporates six broad areas, each of which can be progressed simultaneously, so that progress in each area informs decisions and developments other areas of work.

Table 1 Appendix 2 Sample Action Plan

Task	Current Status	Responsibility	Timeline
Establish project steering group	Done		January
Appoint champions who will work with small project groups and report monthly to steering committee.	Project steering group to review		February
Document the service delivery model (identifying risks and critical issues and stages)	In train	Service delivery group (Sally)	February
Check Another Community Inc to learn about their approach	S4S identified as potential model for our service	Service delivery group to arrange visit	March
Draft position description for a project manager	Not started	Staffing group (Mahmoud)	March
Make decisions about staffing model	Joint meetings set for next month	Project steering committee (after meetings held)	April
Set an annual budget to support fund-raising efforts		Funding group (Liesl)	April
Determine governance model and preferred legal structure	Local law firm approached	Governance group (Conchetta)	March
Develop position and policies regarding land use issues, insurances and related matters	Decide who to be involved, then convene meeting	Project steering committee	March
Finish mapping partners; recruit when	Initial approaches made	Partnership and Governance groups	Mapping to be done by March

Task	Current Status	Responsibility	Timeline
sufficient info about governance and funding model.		(Saroeun)	
Develop memoranda of understanding with partners	Not commenced	Partnership group	TBC
Establish management/advisory structure, if and as required	Not commenced	Governance group	TBC
Articulate long-term vision and three year plan	Not commenced	Management advisory group	TBC
Develop communication strategy	Draft completed	Communications group (Ng)	February
Meet with Regional Manager of State Government Department	Message left; follow up	Partnership group	March
Arrange briefings with local MPs	Not commenced	Communications group	April
Plan and conduct online launch	Not commenced	External person?	June
Submit request for funds to Community Chest	Done	Funding group	Review monthly
Lodge request for assistance to Good Company	Completed; send volunteer to training	Partnership group	April

Appendix 3: Principles to consider

The principles of community work comprise the foundation for creating a community-managed service that is authentic, relevant and sustainable (Humpage 2005). These principles, outlined below, may be useful to consider when setting up a community-managed service.

Community participation

Participation is about fully involving those who will be affected by decisions in all decision-making processes. For community-managed services, participation means engaging community members and users in program design, planning, implementation and evaluation. Community-managed organisations recognise that everyone has a valuable contribution and are entitled (and encouraged) to join in.

Community ownership

This means the community accepting responsibility for the service. A voluntary management committee, collective, or board comprising elected members who live, work, or participate locally governs each community-managed service. The governance model is developmental, with the governing body working co-operatively and collaboratively with staff, volunteers, participants and the community. Community organisations are run on a not-for-profit basis, with any surplus directed back to the service.

Empowerment

This is a process that respects, values and enhances people's ability to control their lives and encourages people to meet their needs and aspirations by taking advantage of their skills, experience and potential. Change and growth occur through informing and supporting individuals or communities to make their own decisions.

Access

Community-managed services are welcoming and easy to access whether physically, financially, geographically or culturally.

Equity

Equity is about honouring, as equal, the diverse contributions that people make regardless of their background, gender or varying abilities. Individual and local needs are acknowledged and addressed in a locally appropriate way; equal value rather than sameness is the goal. Equitable services promote a fair distribution of economic resources and power between people.

Social action

Internal and external factors that impact on the local community are analysed and relationships between individuals, groups and organisations and within the community are transformed through collective action.

Advocacy

In meeting individual and group needs, community-managed services act with, or on the behalf of, community members.

Networking

Networking means making connections between people and issues. It involves linking, forming alliances, collaborating and working with individuals, groups, other agencies, government and business.

Appendix 4: Resources

Community Child Care <www.cccinc.org.au> provides information, advice and training to community-based children's services in Victoria.

Our Community <www.ourcommunity.com.au> has a wealth of information about setting up and managing successful community groups –.

Community Development in NSW <https://www.communitydevelopment.org.au//> is an interactive electronic clearing house for people involved in community renewal work.