Our Community Development Approach

DECEMBER 2009

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Melbourne Citymission aims to build inclusive communities by facilitating equitable access to opportunities and resources for people who are at risk of, or currently living with disadvantage. We understand that social disadvantage is multifaceted and sometimes concentrated in place. For Melbourne Citymission disadvantage derives from the following interrelated factors:

- Personal and familial life circumstances, particularly:
  - personal health, wellbeing and social connections
  - impoverished family relationships (e.g. inter-generational poverty, violence, displacement, trauma)
  
  and/or

- Living in a particular location (e.g. household, neighbourhood, suburb, region, state or country). In these contexts disadvantage may be perpetuated or caused by:
  - physical environmental factors (e.g. air and soil quality)
  - resourcing and infrastructure (e.g. inequitable access to transport, health care, recreational facilities and parkland)
  - social environmental factors, including:
    - limited access and support to engage in education, health and employment facilities
    - limited access to, and opportunity to engage in informal forms of support and connection
  
  and/or

- Structural and political factors:
  - local, state and national policy, particularly in relation to education, health, employment and environmental infrastructure and resources.

To advance this agenda, the agency has engaged as a leader or partner in social planning and programmatic initiatives which promote social inclusion for particular populations of people who experience exclusion.

This paper, ‘Our Community Development Approach’, is the first in a series of papers titled ‘Melbourne Citymission in Practice’ which describes Melbourne Citymission’s work in facilitating and promoting social inclusion.

*Melbourne Citymission in Practice:*
1. Our Community Development Approach
2. Working in Partnership
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INTRODUCTION
Melbourne Citymission aims to build inclusive communities by facilitating equitable access to opportunities and resources for people who are living with disadvantage. To advance this agenda, the agency has engaged as a leader or partner in social planning and programmatic initiatives which promote social inclusion for particular populations of people who experience exclusion. Critical to this work has been our community development approach to address social exclusion and promote social inclusion in under-resourced and/or disadvantaged places. We have also used this approach with particular populations who are at risk of, or experiencing disadvantage.

Over the past decade, these complementary ‘people’ and ‘place’-focussed approaches have also been emphasised as critical to policy and service reform to address social exclusion or promote social inclusion in the UK and the EU. More recently, the Federal Labour Government’s Social Inclusion Agenda has promoted these concepts and related approaches for understanding and addressing social in/exclusion in Australia. This work has also been led by several Australian States, particularly Victoria through the Fairer Victoria policy framework and South Australia through the Social Inclusion Initiative. Melbourne Citymission has significant experience as a partner and leader of population and place based initiatives in communities of entrenched or emerging disadvantage.

Melbourne Citymission’s Community Development work began with involvement in a number of Local Government areas, including Maribyrnong and Darebin, and has since extended to other geographic sites, designated as State Government Neighbourhood Renewal areas. More recently, we have been working in the City of Whittlesea, where we have been utilising a Community Development approach in an early intervention and prevention capacity in the newly emerging suburbs of the Northern Growth Corridor.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY ‘PLACE’?
For Melbourne Citymission ‘place’ may span suburb(s), municipalities and regions. Although our work is focussed in particular areas, at times it may be concentrated in a specific location such as a school, community hub or service precinct. Our work in these settings is not seen in isolation, it spans across the broader area. We believe this view of place is essential as we recognise that people move on a daily basis around and beyond the places where they live.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT?
Community Development is one of the key approaches that Melbourne Citymission uses to improve outcomes for people we work with, living in some of metropolitan Melbourne’s most under-resourced and/or disadvantaged areas and with particular populations who are at risk or experiencing disadvantage. Promotion and facilitation of social and urban planning is an essential element of our Community Development approach. We work to empower people, supporting them to identify issues and service gaps and facilitate ways that they can develop human and material resources and infrastructure to effect change in their local areas.

For Melbourne Citymission Community Development is a multilayered process. It encompasses strategic planning, partnership development and creation of innovative service responses to meet the identified needs in a local area. Partnerships are critical to this work. This involves building trust, skills, networks and linkages with local residents, community, Government, business and service providers in a given area to promote local leadership and a sense of community.

This work is outcome focussed. We work with partners to identify and achieve agreed social, educational, economic and environmental outcomes for the area. For example, some outcomes that have been achieved include:

Our Community Development Approach Melbourne Citymission
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• development of a range of pre-employment training opportunities for people (for example, the Office skills course developed in partnership with Darebin Council and Thornbury Women’s Neighbourhood House)
• development of a range of preschool activities and family support activities, for families with young children (for example, Lalor Park Primary School Community Hub)
• facilitation of opportunities for people to share their ideas and solutions to effect change (for example, participation in Advisory and Working Groups).

Our role in community development

Through our Community Development work, Melbourne Citymission can undertake many roles. These can include:

• leading or participating in strategic planning
• resourcing partnership development
• fostering community engagement
• fostering local leadership
• working with stakeholders to identify needs and service gaps
• development of service responses
• delivery of service responses
• resourcing local groups.

Our role can change throughout the community development process. It may also vary according to the scale and scope of the initiative and the role of other partners.

Why use a community development approach?

A Community Development approach enables us to:

• work with multiple populations, with diverse needs, living in the one area. It is not narrowly targeted so can span a range of needs.
• deliver services locally
• promote and foster local leadership
• develop services that are coordinated and responsive to the needs identified by local residents
• maximise the benefits and outcomes for people living in an area as resources can be pooled
• promote the idea of local area community by bringing people together to participate in local activities.

What are the strengths of this approach?

The strengths of this approach are that:

• services are developed and delivered locally to enhance accessibility; often this involves a single point of contact, which may be a key worker and/or a range of workers located in a community hub or centre or service precinct
• agencies work together rather than working in silos; this fosters integration of services
• by working in partnership, we can be more responsive to community need; there are opportunities to pool resources and access to a broader base of expertise, knowledge and skill
• it is strengths based; we build on the strengths of people living in local areas (capacity building) rather than deficits (therapeutic model)
• services are developed in response to local need.

Melbourne Citymission’s Community Development approach to working in under-resourced, disadvantaged areas and with particular populations, aligns with our Strategic Directions 2006–2010.

What are the challenges of using this approach?

Community Development work has promoted innovation. It has also proved challenging in terms of:

• funding
  – Establishment, security and predictability of funding (often unfunded or short term funding).
• scope of the work
  – Not a single population but multiple populations with multiple needs, within one geographic location.
• working in partnership
  – The nature of a partnership approach means that processes can move slowly, especially in the early phases.
• size and scope of area of focus
  – Where will the best results for our efforts be achieved: neighbourhood, suburb, municipality, region, etc?
• timeframe to effect change
  – Long term investment and commitment.

Despite the many challenges, we believe in the value of this approach to address needs of people living in under-resourced and/or disadvantaged places and with particular populations who are at risk or experiencing disadvantage.
### Community Development: Our Values

Our Community Development approach to supporting individuals, families, and communities to achieve identified outcomes is underpinned by the following values:

- Empowerment of people we work with
- Recognising and valuing diversity
- Building on strengths, both at an individual and local level.

### Community Development: Our 9 Key Principles

Based on our reflection, research, and practice experience, we now have 9 key Community Development principles that we use in our work.

1. Aligns with organisational values and capabilities
2. Employs a dual approach: ‘bottom up’ – ‘top down’
3. Advocates for structural and systemic change
4. Establishes strategic partnerships
5. Develops innovative service models
6. Plans for sustainability
7. Fosters critical reflection
8. Invests for the long term
9. Maintains a focus on outcomes.

### Table 1: Community Development: Our 9 Key Principles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principle</th>
<th>Some Examples (This is not an Exhaustive List)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aligns with organisational values and capabilities</td>
<td>We build on our organisational capabilities, expertise and infrastructure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employs a dual approach:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1) ‘Bottom up’</td>
<td>• We consult to identify the needs of people living in a local area to develop innovative, flexible responses that address their needs and promote a sense of a ‘local community’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) ‘Top down’</td>
<td>• We work with Government, business and local service providers to identify resources and service gaps to address structural disadvantage in particular areas or with targeted populations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocates for structural and systemic change</td>
<td>• We work to promote and develop social and economic policies that promote and ensure equitable development of, access to and use of resources across areas and populations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishes strategic partnerships</td>
<td>• We establish and maintain strong relationships with stakeholders (community members, service providers, all levels of Government, business and philanthropic organisations) to maximise opportunities and outcomes across areas and for targeted populations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develops innovative service models</td>
<td>• We lead or support the development of innovative, responsive and flexible service models based on our experience and a diverse evidence base.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Plans for sustainability                        | • We aim to develop activities, programs, processes and resources that can be maintained over time, with or without us.  
  • This must involve attention to funding, local leadership and service planning processes.  |
| Fosters critical reflection                     | • We reflect on our work on a regular basis and modify plans and actions accordingly.  
  • We recognise that the needs of local areas change and are prepared to discontinue our work if it is no longer beneficial.  
  • We evaluate our work: We identify and report on outcome measures and indicators to assess the effectiveness and impact of our work. |
| Invests for the long term                       | • We recognise that adherence to the Community Development process is critical to its success over time, in achieving key identified outcomes for the community.  
  • We recognise that a long term investment in time and resources is vital to work with and support people to effect change within their local area and promote a sense of community around people living in a local area. |
| Maintains a focus on outcomes                   | • We work with partners to identify and achieve agreed social, educational, economic and environmental outcomes for the specified area or particular populations. |
**Our Community Development Model**

The diagram above outlines our Community Development approach that we use in our work with people living in some of metropolitan Melbourne’s most under-resourced and/or disadvantaged areas.

**What do we mean by sustainability and evaluation?**

Our Community Development model recognises the importance of ongoing evaluation and planning for sustainability at each step of the process, commencing at the outset of the process.

By continuously evaluating our work, we can demonstrate evidence-based successes and use this as a basis for further development of service responses. A culture of reflection about our practice and the outcomes for the people we work with is fostered throughout the organisation to ensure quality and effective service delivery and advocacy.

We work in partnership with stakeholders to plan for sustainability of the work undertaken or facilitated in local areas or with particular populations. We aim to develop activities, programs, processes, models and approaches to community work and resources, within specific geographic locations, that can be maintained over time, with or without us.

**How are we measuring outcomes and results?**

Melbourne Citymission is implementing the ‘Measuring Outcomes and Results Framework’ (MORF), based on the Results Accountability Framework (Friedman, 2005). This promotes a disciplined way of thinking about the work that Melbourne Citymission does, focusing not only on results for the clients/communities we work with but also our own governance structures. The MORF encourages a culture of reflection about ‘What we do,’ ‘Why we do it’ and ‘What results we want for clients/communities.’

**What do we measure?**

We ask and collect data about:

- How much did we do? : How many clients did Melbourne Citymission work with?
- How well did we do it? : Are Melbourne Citymission’s practices with clients/communities we work with achieving the desired results?
- Is anyone better off? : Is Melbourne Citymission’s work making a positive difference in the lives of clients and communities?

Through implementation of this evidence-based approach Melbourne Citymission will be able to identify what is being done well, how improvements can be made and where more innovative practices can be used. It will also provide us with an evidence base to inform social policy.

**Figure 1: Our Community Development Model**

**Figure 2: Sustainability and Evaluation**
Step 1: Identifying the ‘Place’ (geographic location) where we will work

For Melbourne Citymission ‘Place’ may span suburb(s), municipalities and regions. Although our work is focussed in particular areas, at times it may be concentrated in a specific location such as a school, community hub or service precinct. Our work in these places is not confined to these settings. It spans across the broader area. We believe this view of place is essential as we recognise that people move on a daily basis around and beyond the places where they live.

Four equally important components need to come together for us to work in a particular location.

1. Data:
   - We use data and reports to identify areas or populations of significant disadvantage. This may come from Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), other data sources or evidence-based research.

2. Melbourne Citymission capacity:
   - We assess our capacity to work in a particular location, including whether we are already engaged through other activities in the location; our expertise; skills and knowledge; resources (financial and personnel) and organisational support.

3. Other key agencies:
   - We determine if there are opportunities to work in partnership with other agencies and Government to deliver service responses.

4. Community support:
   - We determine if people living in the area are interested in working in partnership with Melbourne Citymission to effect change within their local area.

Characteristics of a location where Melbourne Citymission works

Some places have limited access to:
- health care
- suitable housing
- educational/learning facilities
- transport
- recreational facilities/parklands.

Some places have minimal opportunities to participate in:
- education/training pathways
- employment
- informal forms of support and connection e.g. parenting support through a playgroup
- social networks that facilitate access to further education, employment or community participation.

Some places have high concentration of people experiencing:
- unemployment
- single parent households
- low incomes
- multiple and complex needs
- low levels of educational attainment.
EAST RESERVOIR: A PLACE WHERE WE WORK

East Reservoir is recognised as the most disadvantaged location within the City of Darebin, in northern metropolitan Melbourne.

Identified strengths of this area include:

- a commitment from service providers to work in partnership
- residents that are committed to working in partnership with service providers to improve and increase access to resources within their local area
- residents that are keen to develop new skills which may include specific employment training, taking on a leadership role, participating in an advisory group.

In this location there are:

- high rates of unemployment
- minimal opportunities to participate in educational or employment training
- inadequate health services
- large numbers of sole parent families
- a high percentage of people living in public housing or rental accommodation
- limited opportunities for preschool experiences
- a lack of childcare facilities
- poor public transport services and a lack of infrastructure.

EVALUATION WORK IN ‘PLACE’ IDENTIFICATION PHASE:

Commence reflection process:

- Identify the characteristics of the place and local population
- Consider the broad aims of our work and the desired outcomes.

SUSTAINABILITY WORK IN ‘PLACE’ IDENTIFICATION PHASE:

Exploration of the following:

- Do we have the capacity to make a long-term commitment to working in this location?
- Are there opportunities to secure funding/resources on an ongoing basis?
- Are there opportunities to work in partnership with other agencies and government?
- What resources can each partner contribute?
- Are there identified leaders that can be champions in the community?
**Step 2: Allocating ‘Start up’ resources**

Melbourne Citymission recognises that implementing a Community Development approach in our place and population based work requires an allocation of dedicated resources over an extended period of time.

**Allocation of a worker to undertake strategic planning**

This phase involves allocation of resources to employ a senior worker to undertake strategic planning. We may take a lead role in this process or work in partnership with key stakeholders to undertake strategic planning activities. Specific tasks that are undertaken in this phase are dependent on our designated role. Tasks may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- promotion and facilitation of social and urban planning
- exploring partnership opportunities
- establishing and resourcing partnership development
- working with stakeholders to identify needs and service gaps
- fostering community engagement and local leadership
- exploring and planning for sustainability.

**Employment of a community development worker**

We begin this phase by employing a Community Development worker. To enhance successful engagement with people living in an area and the establishment and ongoing support of partnerships with stakeholders, the Community Development worker requires highly developed communication skills and expertise in project management and implementation of Community Development initiatives.

During the ‘start up’ phase, the role of the Community Development worker includes engaging and consulting with the community and establishing local partnerships.

An investment in time is required as both elements require extensive work, often without achievement of visible outcomes in the local area.

**Allocation of infrastructure dollars**

Resource allocation is required to establish the infrastructure for the Community Development worker position, including staff supervision and support; office accommodation; and program running costs: travel, information technology, general office expenses.

**Allocation of discretionary dollars**

- Community engagement
  - Access to discretionary dollars can further enhance community engagement and consultation activities. For example, child care can be offered when inviting parents with young children to participate in a focus group to discuss their parent support needs or a pizza night organised as part of the strategy to engage unemployed young people.
- Implementation of program activities/service responses
  - Access to discretionary dollars is required to implement program activities as per the developed Action Plan. Funding may be made available through one agency or a number of partners may contribute, program activities/service responses.
Resources for the evaluation of our work
To support ongoing evaluation that assesses the effectiveness and impact of our work within the community, resources need to be incorporated into the initial budget. This may be in the form of support from our Research and Social Policy Unit; an allocation of dollars to employ an external consultant; or additional dollars built into the budget to support evaluation activities undertaken at the local level (this could include supporting people in the community to develop their skills in evaluating services).

EVALUATION WORK IN ‘START UP’ PHASE:
- Methods of evaluation established, e.g. external consultant, local level evaluation activities, support through our Research and Social Policy Unit
- Resources (financial and/or personnel) allocated to evaluation processes
- Mechanisms established that foster a culture of reflection, e.g. staff supervision sessions; peer support, both informal and formal.

SUSTAINABILITY WORK IN THE ‘START UP’ PHASE:
- Community Development Worker incorporates planning for sustainability into all areas of work.
**Step 3: Establishing Partnerships: Working Collaboratively to Deliver Coordinated, Integrated Services**

Melbourne Citymission's Place Based Work involves working in partnership to develop integrated, responsive service initiatives that meet the identified needs of people living in an area. By ‘Partnership’ Melbourne Citymission means a collaboration that could include business, not for profit organisations and Governments in which risks, resources and skills are shared in projects that benefit each partner as well as the community (Department Victorian Communities, 2007).

Within the context of Place Based Services, partnerships are seen as a productive mechanism for sustainable social, environmental and/or economic development within a community.

**What is a partnership?**

Partnership is a broad term used to describe working with other organisations, Government, business and the community. Partnerships can be seen on a continuum, ranging from networking through to collaboration. Where a partnership sits on the continuum is dependent on degree of commitment, trust, change required, risk involved, levels of interdependence and a willingness to share resources.

At Melbourne Citymission, we employ the full spectrum according to need and commitment. We utilise the framework developed by VicHealth to describe this continuum of commitment and employ the definitions of their key terms.

![FIGURE 5: PARTNERSHIPS CONTINUUM](image)

**Examples of partnerships in practice**

**Networking:** Involves the exchange of information for mutual benefit. It involves little time and trust between partners.

> Family services within a local government area may meet on a monthly basis to exchange ideas around issues that affect families with young children and provide an update on their work.

**Coordinating:** Involves exchanging information and altering activities for a common purpose. It involves more time and trust.

> Family services within a local government area may meet and plan a coordinated campaign to lobby Council for more family-specific services. Alternatively two Family Services organisations recognise that they are running complementary parent support groups at the same time, and that many parents would benefit from attending both groups. As a result, one of the Family Service providers changes the time that they run their group, allowing parents to participate in both activities.

**Cooperating:** Involves exchanging information, altering activities and sharing resources for mutual benefit and a common purpose. It requires significant amounts of time and high levels of trust between partners. It may require a Memorandum of Understanding.

> A Childcare Centre approaches a Family Services organisation and asks them if they would be able to run a series of parent information sessions in the early evening for parents who are unable to get to the regular information sessions conducted during the day. An agreement is drawn up between the Childcare Centre and the Family Service organisation to outline who provides which resources relating to the information session. The Family Service organisation provides the facilitator while the Childcare Centre provides the venue and childcare.

**Collaborating:** In addition to all of the above, collaboration involves a willingness to increase the capacity of another organization for mutual benefit and a common purpose.

It requires the highest levels of trust, considerable amounts of time and extensive sharing of resources. Working collaboratively can create an integrated, seamless service system.

> The parent information sessions at the Childcare Centre have been running successfully over a period of time. Parents have indicated that they would like these sessions to continue alongside another more practical series of sessions. Again, due to their work commitments parents at the Childcare Centre have been unable to attend the practical sessions held during the day. To enable the Family Services organisation to respond to this request they work with the staff from the Childcare Centre to teach them how to run the parent information sessions themselves. The Family Services organisation has some funds to skill up the staff at the Childcare Centre and absorb the cost of some ongoing parenting resources. In return the Childcare Centre also opens up these sessions to other parents in the community who have been unable to attend the parent information sessions held during the day. This frees up the Family Services staff to conduct the additional practical classes—meeting the requests of parents.
Why do we work in partnership?

We assume that Partnership approaches will bring benefits beyond the capacity of any one individual organization. Through partnerships, we are able to maximise the benefits and outcomes for the community. We work with partners to:

- bring together a diverse range of skills and resources for more effective community outcomes
  - The needs of people living in areas of disadvantage are often multifaceted and are unable to be met by one agency working alone.
- increase the capabilities available to the community
  - Harness the individual skills, practice experience and knowledge of each partner agency.
- plan and develop social and economic infrastructure in a coordinated manner
- leverage for funding from across all levels of Government
- plan for, and enhance opportunities for sustainability of ongoing planning and coordination of services, infrastructure, community initiatives and social networks
- advocate with and for the community to influence Government policy and practice to increase access to resources, services and facilities within the community of need.

Working in partnership to deliver responsive services to people living in under-resourced, disadvantaged areas can at times be difficult, requiring partnerships to respond to problems that may result from this way of working.

The challenges of working in partnership, an example from practice: Thomastown Main Street Precinct Initiative

The objective of this initiative is to establish a fully integrated Precinct, where:

- there is an integrated, holistic and responsive service system aimed at improving the educational and health and wellbeing indicators for children from early years to young adulthood
- resources are shared
- there are opportunities for strong community connections as well as effective life transitions, and
- there are opportunities for engagement of all ages in lifelong learning.

To progress this initiative a partnership has been established comprising key service providers within the Precinct—(for example, schools, community agencies, City of Whittlesea and State and Federal Government). Community engagement, including participation in the Partnership is central to the Precinct model. The work of the Partnership is guided by a Strategic Plan which has been developed by the Thomastown Precinct Planning Group.

The proposed partnership model will create a mechanism for direct community participation in future planning and project delivery and will enhance agency collaboration. This collaboration will aim to maximise resources and achieve a genuine ‘whole of government’ response to meet community needs and policy imperatives for the Thomastown community.

For many of the organisations, working in partnership has presented numerous challenges and has required much reflection. For Melbourne Citymission this included asking a number of key questions:

- Do we want to work in this area?
- Do our philosophies align with those of other potential partners?
- Do we work in a similar manner to other agencies?
- Do we have the resources (workers and time) to make a long-term commitment to the Partnership?
- What are the costs?
- What can we contribute to the Partnership (expertise, knowledge, community networks)?
- What are the benefits for Melbourne Citymission?
- Do the benefits outweigh the costs?
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**EVALUATION WORK IN THE PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PHASE:**

- Evaluation criteria developed to determine the effectiveness of the Partnership, including measures of success around:
  - i. How the Partnership is working
  - ii. Partnership activities (service responses/program activities)
- Implementation of a partnership self-assessment tool, for example, VicHealth’s ‘Partnerships Analysis Tool’ to establish a baseline regarding how the Partnership works at the outset of the project
- Reflection of our partnership work and a willingness to modify our plans and actions accordingly (questions may include: Is there a clear purpose for the partnership? Is there a shared vision? Have decision-making processes been established? Is there a communication strategy?).

**SUSTAINABILITY WORK IN THE PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PHASE:**

- Determine the resources that each partner can bring to the Partnership.
- Foster relationships with identified community leaders.
- Spend time building relationships, this can be the building block for long-term partnership work.
- Begin to explore external funding sources to continue the partnership.
**Step 4: Consulting with people living in an area to identify their needs and service gaps**

Melbourne Citymission recognises that building and strengthening communities is an ongoing process, with effective community engagement an integral component of this process. It involves a strong commitment to building trust and relationships over an extended period of time. This requires an allocation of dedicated resources. *(For additional information regarding ‘Consulting with people to identify needs and service gaps’ see Appendix 1.)*

**How we consult with people to identify their needs and service gaps**

We engage and consult with people living in an area through:

- listening to people and hearing their concerns, needs, grievances, strengths and capacities
- recognising that it takes time to develop relationships and build trust
- recognising and building on the strengths and capabilities of children, families and individuals within the local community
- recognising and valuing social (e.g. age, gender) and cultural diversity
- utilising and fostering local leadership to engage with the broader community
- providing information so that people can participate and make informed choices
- working in partnership with local communities and population groups
- advocating with and for communities to all levels of Government to increase access to resources within the area.

**Why we consult with people living in the community**

We consult with people:

- to determine:
  - Community strengths What are the existing community assets and capacities, including: talents and skills of residents; identified local leaders; existing associations/groups; physical assets—land/buildings; local stories and knowledge; institutions; businesses?
  - Community needs What do people identify as resources, services or activities within the community that are lacking? What current resources, services or activities are inaccessible? What are the specific needs of diverse groups within the community?
  - Barriers to participation What stops people from participating in local events, activities or services?
  - Service gaps What types of services would people like to see operating, that are currently unavailable within their community?
  - Aspirations for local areas What would the ideal community look like for diverse groups of people? What sorts of resources would be available? What sorts of services would be operating? What would the physical environment look like?

- to demonstrate commitment to working in the local area and with target populations
  - Some of the ways that this is shown is through attending local events/activities; arriving on time; following through on commitments; working in partnership with people in the community and developing accessible resources.
to facilitate community ownership of initiatives
- This can be fostered through: including people living in
  the community from the very beginning; working with
  and supporting people to build a vision for their
  community; listening to and responding to community
  priorities; working in partnership with the community to
devise service responses.

- to ensure that initiatives are responsive to the identified
  community needs and fill service gaps
  - We listen to and respond to community priorities, this
    guides the development of our service responses.

A breadth of information can be gained regarding commun-
ity need by creating a range of opportunities for people to discuss
and identify their issues. Flexibility regarding the time that
consultations occur further facilitates input from all members of
the community. For example, an evening consultation rather than
an early morning session for young adults is more likely to
facilitate attendance and participation as is provision of child-
care to encourage participation of parents with young children.

Development of an action plan
Based on information gained through the community consul-
tations, an Action Plan (Business Plan/Work Plan) is developed
that addresses the identified needs of the community. This
plan guides the development and delivery of responses within
the community. It outlines:

- the goals
- the tasks or actions that need to be taken to meet the
desired outcomes
- who within the partnership is responsible for each of the
actions and
- when the actions will be undertaken.

The Action Plan is a means of accountability for the
Partnership. In reviewing the Action Plan, progress to date can
be measured against the desired outcomes.

FOCUS GROUPS: AN OPPORTUNITY TO GATHER
SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Melbourne Citymission is the auspice agency for the
Employment and Learning Coordinator for the East
Reservoir Neighbourhood Renewal initiative.

Within the East Reservoir Neighbourhood
Renewal Area, between June and July 2007, a series
of employment and learning focus groups were
conducted with a wide range of residents. The groups
were held at various times of the day to cater for
different population groups, such as, during school
hours for sole parents with school aged children
and late in the afternoon/early evening for young people.

Food was provided, along with transport to and
from the focus groups—it was hoped that the ‘draw
cards’ of ‘food’; ‘making it easy to get there’ and at
an ‘accessible’ time would facilitate attendance and
participation.

Participants were asked a number of questions
including:

- what was stopping them from accessing:
  - services and resources
  - local job opportunities
  - education and training opportunities
  - participating in voluntary work.

- what sorts of jobs/training they were interested in
- what sorts of activities would help them to
  access training
- what would help them to get a job
- wish lists, hopes and dreams in relation to
  employment and training

The sessions were informal and involved a
range of activities that facilitated participation. Most
importantly, time was spent listening to people;
hearing their concerns and grievances; discussing
their wish lists and solutions—i.e. practical things that
would help them to get into the work force.

Information gained through the focus groups was
used to inform the development of the Employment and
### EVALUATION WORK IN THE CONSULTATION PHASE:
- Community Development worker participating in community activities/events to get to know target populations and demonstrate commitment to working in the area
- Leaders identified and distributing information through their networks
- A range of community consultations conducted, for example, focus groups, surveys, informal discussions, for different population groups to find out about what the community needs, service gaps and resources that are currently inaccessible
- Community outcomes identified. For example:
  - Increased opportunity for people to participate in pre-employment training
  - Improved access to preschool activities and family support for families with young children

### SUSTAINABILITY WORK IN THE CONSULTATION PHASE:
- Action Plan developed that is reflective of the identified needs of the community location. This includes who, does what, how well and when?
- Exploration of:
  - Funding opportunities for resources for service delivery
  - Which agency is the best placed to implement the service response.
- Residents living in the area taking on a leadership role (training may be required at this stage) and participating in discussions regarding service responses.
### Step 5: Developing and Implementing Service Responses

**01 Work with partners to develop service responses**
Melbourne Citymission works in partnership to develop services that are responsive to the identified needs and service gaps of the community as outlined in the Action Plan.

In developing service responses we:
- are flexible in our approach to service delivery
- draw from our previous knowledge and experience to develop service responses/program activities
- draw on evidence-based research to develop service models
- develop new models for service delivery
- tailor existing models to meet the specific needs of the community
- determine which partner/s can best deliver the required service response/program activity
- identify who will do what and when
- develop an evaluation process from the outset of service development, incorporating outcome measures and performance indicators to determine the effectiveness and impact of our work
- commence planning for sustainability from the outset of the service response development.

**02 Identify and implement service responses/program activities**
This step involves undertaking a mapping exercise to identify and find resources to implement the activities. We ensure that adequate resources for the evaluation are factored into the budget. The mapping exercise includes exploration of:
- funding opportunities through philanthropic trusts, community grants and government grants.
- resources available through each partner agency, including:
  - in kind contribution
  - workforce contributions
  - monetary contributions.
- opportunities for a partner agency to incorporate the service response or program activity into their core business.

**03 Implement service responses/program activities**
A more detailed work plan is developed for the service response or program activity, which guides the implementation of the initiative.

**04 Identify and implement service responses/program activities**
The following extract, taken from The Lalor Park Primary School (LPPS) Community Hub work plan illustrates the tasks to be undertaken and by whom, an implementation time line and key performance indicators. The last column is used to monitor progress of the service initiatives.

**LALOR PARK PRIMARY SCHOOL COMMUNITY HUB – AN EXTRACT OF THE WORK PLAN:**

**PROJECT DELIVERABLE 1: TO CONSOLIDATE AND EXPAND THE CURRENT ACTIVITIES OF THE HUB**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STRATEGIC AREA</th>
<th>ACTIVITY</th>
<th>PROCESSES (HOW) AND BY WHOM</th>
<th>IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE</th>
<th>KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS</th>
<th>PROGRESS TO DATE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Support the co-ordination of current Hub activities</td>
<td>Regular consultation with Plenty Valley Community Health/Whittlesea Community Connections/Anglicare parentzone playgroup facilitators</td>
<td>Community Development (CD) worker to arrange initial introductory meeting with each play group facilitator</td>
<td>Weeks commencing 18th February–29th February</td>
<td>Develop relationships with groups accessing services at the LPPS Community Hub</td>
<td>Key consultations were arranged by the CD worker with each of the key service provider</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular consultations with families attending playgroups</td>
<td>CD worker to arrange meeting schedule for the LPPS Community Hub playgroup facilitators meeting</td>
<td>May 2008–ongoing</td>
<td>The operation of groups participating in programs at the LPPS Community Hub to continue</td>
<td>CD worker and Early Years CD worker City of Whittlesea to develop this group in 2009. All groups that commenced programs before MCM’s involvement have continued in 2008, and plan to continue in 2009</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playgroup facilitators to complete evaluation forms/ Surveys</td>
<td>April 2008–ongoing</td>
<td>Increase the number of families/facilitators that are satisfied with the activity/program they participate in</td>
<td>Quarterly survey reports compiled for July–September and October–December indicated every family and facilitator were satisfied with the activity/program they were involved in</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CD worker to refine Hub activities through informal discussions with parents and completing evaluation surveys</td>
<td>March 2008–ongoing</td>
<td>Increase the number of families that feel the LPPS Community Hub is a child &amp; family friendly space</td>
<td>Quarterly survey reports indicated that all families involved in programs reported that the Hub was a child friendly space</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Evaluation of the service responses/program activities

Melbourne Citymission develops an evaluation process for each service response during the planning phase. There is clarity regarding why we are doing the activity and what we hope to achieve through delivering this response. We develop good outcome measures to enable us to determine the effectiveness of our work. Throughout the implementation phase, we promote a culture of reflection, and modify our plans and actions accordingly.

Other means of collecting data that can be used as part of the evaluation process may include:

- direct feedback forms (survey)
- focus groups
- data collection relating to number of participants
- collection of case studies that demonstrate effectiveness of service responses
- feedback from partner organisations
- measurement of outcomes (e.g. number of people gaining employment).

EVALUATION WORK IN THE IMPLEMENTATION PHASE:

- Working in partnership with Research and Social Policy Unit and/or external consultant
- Outcome measures identified
- Data collection processes established
- Base line information collected

SUSTAINABILITY WORK IN THE IMPLEMENTATION PHASE:

- Planning and implementing strategies at a programmatic level that foster ongoing skill development (specific skill development of leaders living in the area, e.g. Playgroup participants are supported to undertake ‘Playgroup Leader’ training with the aim that they will eventually run the playgroup)
- Service response continues if evaluation indicates that the identified needs of people living in the area are met
- Funding secured to enable the service response/s to continue on an ongoing basis (with or without us).

**Figure 7: Culture of Reflection: Implementing an Action Research Framework**
TIPS FOR CONSULTING WITH PEOPLE TO IDENTIFY THEIR NEEDS AND SERVICE GAPS

Through our Place Based work, Melbourne Citymission engages and consults with people in an area by implementing a broad range of mechanisms, including:

- **Working alongside people from the community:**
  - This can facilitate the development of relationships. It provides an opportunity for community members to get to know workers and check out what a worker is 'really' like—are they listening; do they do what they say they will do; are they reliable. Over time, this is more likely to lead to discussions regarding community needs and service gaps.

- **Utilising ‘natural’ meeting places:**
  - Initial engagement and consultation is more likely to be effective if it takes place in ‘natural’ meeting places—environments where people feel comfortable. For example, a family with school aged children is more likely to talk about what they would like for their community if this occurs informally at school ‘pick up’ time, rather than responding to a survey delivered to their home. This may be less demanding for example than completing a written survey.

- **Utilising and fostering participation of community leaders to:**
  - pass on information
  - facilitate and support engagement of others through their individual networks
  - undertake consultations within their own networks.

- **Tapping into networks that may already exist within the community to:**
  - disseminate information
  - discuss needs.

- **Holding a community activity:**
  - A social gathering where there is an opportunity to share food with others is a good ‘draw card’ for engaging with the community.

- **Surveying people by interview:**
  - This allows for two-way discussions and clarification of questions, responses may be obtained for questions, which in other circumstances may not be the case. For example, a resident who has literacy difficulties is less likely to respond to a written survey.

- **Conducting focus groups:**
  - Holding population specific focus groups enables identification of specific needs and service gaps in relation to specific life stages
  - Flexibility regarding time of groups, support with transport and provision of food may also facilitate attendance and participation.

- **Written surveys:**
  - For some people, this may be a preferred option.
Our Community Development Approach

Melbourne Citymission

utilising a local leader and a ‘natural’ meeting place to connect with families

Melbourne Citymission undertakes Place Based work within the East Reservoir area, to improve the educational and health and wellbeing of children and their families. A strong partnership has been formed with the Reservoir East Primary School.

Concerns raised by the Principal at REPS included the high number of children commencing school having had no preschool experiences; and the lack of access to recreational activities for primary school aged children, particularly during the Summer school holidays.

Although these issues had been raised by the Principal it was important to consult with families to identify their needs and service gaps.

Initial engagement with families with young children living in the East Reservoir community occurred at the Reservoir East Primary School. Within this community the Principal is well known and highly regarded by many of the families—a recognised leader. Over time, the school has built up trust with the students and their families, demonstrating an interest in supporting and working with them beyond the educational curriculum.

Upon commencement of Place Based work in the East Reservoir area, Melbourne Citymission worked in partnership with the school to engage with the community. Information regarding the initial Melbourne Citymission community consultation was distributed via the school newsletter and the school staff talked about the consultation at ‘pick up’ time.

Melbourne Citymission then spent time each day over a two week period at ‘drop off’ and ‘pick up’ time talking with families about their issues and needs. Initial introductions occurred through the principal and assistant principal.

The school was a natural meeting place—an environment where people were willing to talk.