

PEOPLE, PLACES, PARTNERSHIPS 2 CONFERENCE

(29 & 30 April)

*Workshop: Who Plans for the **Community**? Planning & Delivery Practices in Community Building (1.30 pm – 29 April 2003)*

PRESENTER DETAILS:

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Firstly I would like to acknowledge Country and the other Indigenous people who are attending this 2 day Conference. I am a Gamilaroi/Yorta Yorta woman, born in Dubbo, living in Liverpool and working in Parramatta.

My name is Hyllus Munro, and I am employed as the Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander Project Manager for the Area Assistance Scheme in Western Sydney and Macarthur. This position is funded under the Area Assistance Scheme for an initial 2 years with a review for another 2 years. I started in this position in November last year. One of my key roles is to improve the quality and quantity of AAS funding applications from Indigenous groups.

My presentation today will be presented in 3 parts.

The first part will provide a general definition and a critique of the term ‘community’.

The second part will be a brief overview of the Area Assistance Scheme and the third part will look at planning and delivery practices for the Scheme ; highlighting some benefits and issues.

PART 1- Defining and Critiquing ‘community’

a) Firstly we need to touch base by defining “what does ‘community’ mean”?

The standard Penguin dictionary defines community as :

- a group of people **living** in a particular area (ie western Sydney; Cabramatta, Redfern, the north Coast, South Coast, interstate, overseas);
- a group of individuals with some **common characteristics** based on profession, religion or status (ie nurses, doctors, Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, upper class, working class, lower class, public servants, community workers, etc)
- a body of people or nations having a **common history or common interests** (Aboriginal people, Torres Strait Islander people, refugees, youth, the aged, people with a disability, women, men, children, war veterans, etc.)
- society in **general** (all of us)

Now that a common understanding of ‘community’ has been established, I will now offer 2 critiques of this term.

b) Critiquing ‘community’

Quote 1 – ‘Community’ is imagined (Tim Rowse)

- Community is what we want it to be **or**
- What we think it is or should be.

These imaginings can have both positive and negative connotations of community – depending on your own life and social experiences. As individuals we need to reflect on our imaginings when we hear terms such as:

- : the Aboriginal community
- : the gay community
- : the Cabramatta community
- : the Arabic community
- : the Redfern community

For many of us, these imaginings are usually based on what we hear, read and see across the various media or from what other people tell us. Those who have personal experiences of these communities would no doubt have different imaginings and, sometimes these personal experiences reflect the imaginings.

The use of the singular in identifying a ‘cluster community’ does not recognise the range of diversities within these ‘communities’. For example, there is not one Aboriginal community, but a diverse range of **Aboriginal communities** across the area, the region, the State, the Nation. We are all not the same. We have different needs and wants; different points of view. The same can be applied to “the Australian community” – it does not recognise the broad range of diversity within this ‘community’.

Therefore, when **planning for the community**, the diversity of “**imagined communities**” needs to be taken into account; and that “**imagined communities**” may not necessarily reflect the day-to-day experiences, needs and wants of “**real communities**”.

Quote 2 – ‘Community’ is a promiscuous term (Benedict Anderson)

It is a loose term - it is used loosely, we bandy around the terms community consultation, community representative; community leader; community hall; community building; strengthening communities; community protests; community support; “This is what the community wants/needs”, “I am here representing the community”; etc.

It is used by those who have a vested interest in justifying their programs, their position, their role, etc in the community – politicians, bureaucrats, community workers, community leaders, etc.

Community is a word that gets used and abused, exploited and exhausted.

And based on the presentations here today, it seems that the bureaucracy is very promiscuous, and very imaginative, in its use of the term ‘community’.

Given the definition and critique, I will now give an overview of the Area Assistance Scheme.

PART 2 – Overview: The Area Assistance Scheme (AAS)

The Scheme started in 1979, initially in Western Sydney and in later years to other regions of NSW.

The Scheme's link to community is through subsidised funding of Community Project Officers located in each of the 51 Councils covered by the Scheme. Four Regional Co-ordinators are employed to oversee the scheme in the 6 areas –

- Far North Coast
- Central Coast
- Hunter
- Western Sydney
- Macarthur
- Illawarra

The Scheme is one of the NSW Government's contributions to creating sustainable **communities**, promoting a fair and inclusive society and strengthening **communities**.

This is done by providing grants to local councils and non-government organisations for projects that improve community infrastructure.

The Scheme is a *partnership* between the NSW Government, local councils and the community and actively involves the community in developing and managing community projects and making funding recommendations to the Minister. The Scheme gives priority to programs that deliver real change to **vulnerable communities**.

For the previous funding round, the Scheme focused on the following 3 funding outcomes. It is important to note that these were developed in conjunction with the community and the Minister. Community consultations were held in each region and the broad outcomes were developed from these consultations.

1. Connecting communities through partnerships

- *facilitating mutual support and **community** self-help initiatives.*
- *increase local government's role in social and **community** development.*
- *promote **community** networks, connections and collaboration to better support communities.*
- *increase corporate social commitment through the sponsorship of **community** projects*

Example: The Central Coast Neighbourhood & Communities Centre Forum employed an Aboriginal Access Worker to increase access to local community organisations by members of the Aboriginal community.

2. Building community leadership and capacity

- *provide training, mentoring and participation opportunities where **community** members can contribute to the well-being of their **communities**.*
- *support volunteer recruitment, training and co-ordination.*
- *increase the capacity of **community** groups and organisations to deliver effective accessible programs.*

Example: Camden Council provided support and training for community groups to develop and strengthen networks and mutual support for Chinese market gardens in the Camden area.

3. Promoting safe communities

- *improve safety of **community** facilities to increase access.*
- *promote safe and creative interaction in public spaces.*
- *develop skills that promote positive and safe **community** interaction and interpersonal relationships.*

Example: Byron Council employed a safe streets worker to facilitate a collaborative process bringing together young people, police, backpackers and youth organisations to develop ways of creating safe public spaces, and will promote community harmony and participation.

And of course, a community funding program needs to have identified target groups for funding purposes :

- Aboriginal people
- Young People (13-25)
- Women
- Older people
- Culturally linguistic and diverse
- Other
- Children (up to 12 years)
- Families
- Men
- People with a disability
- Generic (no specific population)

Part 3: AAS Planning and Delivery Practices

In a nutshell, the Planning and Delivery practices of the Scheme are based on a high level of community input. These include :

- their role in identifying funding outcomes
- their role in identifying local and regional priorities which assist in the ranking of projects. These are usually drawn from community consultations and/or Council social planning days.
- their membership on the Local Ranking Committees to assess projects as HIGH, MEDIUM or LOW
- their membership on the Regional Advisory Committees to further assess and evaluate HIGH ranked projects from the LRCs. When preparing their recommendations for funding to the Minister, this Committee also considers comments from other government departments on high ranked projects.
- And finally, their important role in the delivery of successfully funded projects.

All other above is done with the support and guidance from the bureaucracy.

BENEFITS

- Many of the Scheme's funded programs offer individuals free or inexpensive access to such things as child health services, parenting advise, women's clinics, tax return assistance, advice and referral of all kinds, self-help support meetings, DV prevention groups and programs, computer use, internet access, and in some cases, food and emergency relief, disability access, access to information, etc.
- Neighbourhood/Community Centres also offer individuals low cost TAFE courses, other educational courses, small business start up courses and support services, leisure and creative activities, childcare, childminding and playgroups.
- A cost benefit analysis of the Scheme states that the costs of prevention are less than the costs of repair – suggesting that there is a saving in the order of \$7.00 for every \$1.00 spent through the Scheme.

KEY ISSUE

Briefly, one of the key issues identified in the AAS process is the time from when the funding round opens and closes (August-September), to the time that announcements are made on successful projects (usually in May the following year). It has been suggested that the 2-tier recommendation process – Local Ranking Committee/Regional Advisory Committee is regarded as too slow, hence the long turn around time between the lodgement of applications and the announcement of successful projects.

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