

Child Family Community Australia information exchange, AIFS

Webinar

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ENGAGING COMMUNITIES: WHAT'S INVOLVED AND HOW IT'S DONE

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OUTLINE

- Background context
- What's been tried
- What is a community?
- What is community engagement?
- Rationale for community engagement
- What makes community engagement effective?
- What does community engagement look like in practice?
- Implications for practice
- An exemplary community engagement initiative: the Tasmanian Child and Family Centres

BACKGROUND CONTEXT

- There have been growing calls for governments and service systems to seek greater community engagement in the design and delivery of services
- At a societal level, it is recognised that the relationship between governments and citizens needs to change to allow more participation in decision-making by citizens, and greater inclusion of disadvantaged groups
- It also recognised that greater community engagement is necessary for effective working with disadvantaged communities
- This push for greater community engagement is a response to a number of major societal changes in recent decades

BACKGROUND CONTEXT (cont)

- Rapid social changes have occurred over the last few decades that have significantly altered the conditions under which families are raising their children.
- While most people have benefited from these changes, poorly resourced families can find the heightened demands of contemporary living and parenting overwhelming
- These changes have also altered the nature of the challenges faced by the service system, creating complex or 'wicked' social problems, and challenged the traditional service system's capacity to support them effectively
- This had created a need for service approaches more suited to the needs of contemporary families, with community engagement as a potential strategy for ensuring that services are more responsive

WHAT'S BEEN TRIED



Governments have responded to these challenges in a variety of ways:

- In Australia, one approach has been to develop *national frameworks* to guide service improvement and coordination
- Another way has been to try and build better coordinated and more effective services and service systems, with less effort focused on building more supportive communities, and improving the interface between communities and services.
- Governments have also tended to place more reliance upon 'killer' programs that address the presenting problems, rather than looking at the systemic (ecological) conditions that lead to the problems in the first place

WHAT'S BEEN TRIED (cont)

- Another response to the challenges posed by social change has been in the form of *place-based* or *collective impact* initiatives – these involve a focus on the needs of specific communities, usually the most disadvantaged, rather than a population-wide approach
- Place-based approaches have a number of common features, one of which is *community engagement*
- However, community engagement represents a challenge for traditional forms of government and service delivery, which are based on forms of service devised and delivered by professionals, usually without the meaningful involvement of consumers

WHAT IS A COMMUNITY AND WHAT IS COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT?

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY COMMUNITY?

- Communities can be thought of in two ways:
 - as geographic entities that are homogenous and distinct units with a common identity
 - as the relationships people have with others where they live, and on their sense of belonging
- These two meanings of community are complementary and inseparable
- Thus, ***a community refers to a group of people who reside in a specific location, and to the relationships between them***
- Effective community engagement depends upon the relational bonds between members of the community, and therefore strengthening these bonds may be an important focus

WHAT IS COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT?

- There is no commonly agreed definition of community engagement and the term is often used interchangeably with a number of other concepts – such as consultation, participation, collaboration, and empowerment
- All of these are related to community engagement but do not capture all aspects of the concept
- Community engagement is often depicted as a continuum, ranging from low-level engagement strategies such as consultation to high-level strategies such as empowerment

Public Participation Spectrum

(International Association for Public Participation Australasia, 2014)

	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/ or decisions	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution	To place final decision-making in the hands of the public
PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC	We will keep you informed	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced that decision. We will seek your feedback on drafts and proposals.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision	We will look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decision to the maximum extent possible	We will implement what you decide

DEFINING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

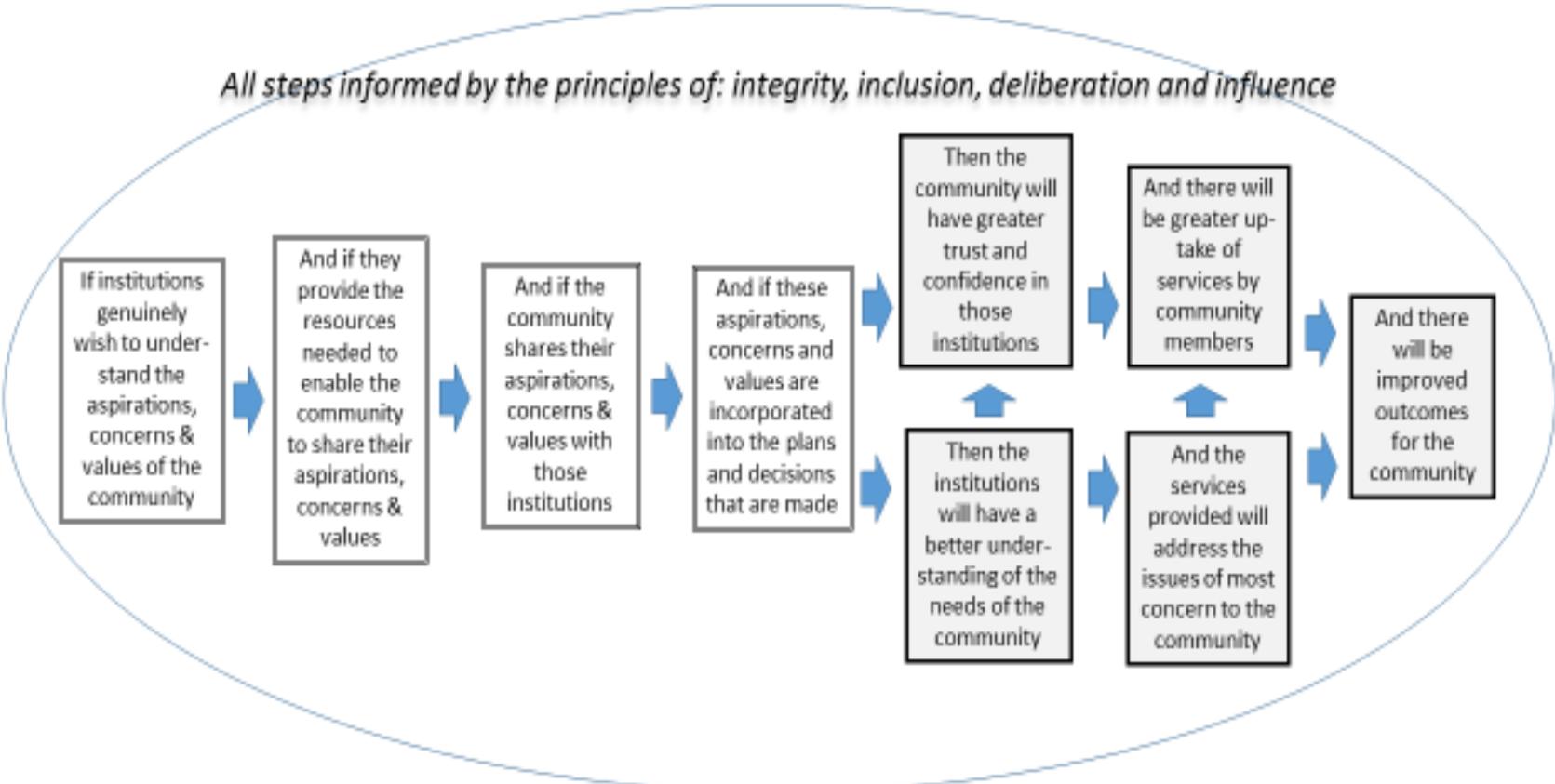


Community engagement as a process whereby a service system:

- proactively seeks out community values, concerns and aspirations
- incorporates those values, concerns and aspirations into a decision-making process or processes, and
- establishes an ongoing partnership with the community to ensure that the community's priorities and values continue to shape services and the service system

THE LOGIC OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FOR SERVICE DELIVERY

All steps informed by the principles of: integrity, inclusion, deliberation and influence



Processes	<i>integrity</i>	openness and honesty about the scope of the engagement
	<i>inclusion</i>	opportunity for a diverse range of values and perspectives to be freely and fairly expressed and heard
	<i>deliberation</i>	sufficient and credible opportunity for dialogue, choice and decisions, space to weigh options, develop common understandings and appreciate respective roles and responsibilities
Outcomes	<i>influence</i>	people have input into how they participate; policies and services reflect their involvement, and the community's impact is apparent

RATIONALE FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



There are four reasons why community engagement should be an important feature of future service development:

- ***The lack of success of traditional service approaches*** - existing forms of service are not succeeding in improving outcomes and are not fully utilised, especially by families with complex needs
- ***Community engagement can led to improved outcomes*** - establishing an effective partnership between service systems and communities results in a greater sense of ownership, greater take-up of services, and better outcomes for children and families
- ***The damaging effects of non-participation*** - non-participation in its various forms (eg. lack of access, not being able to contribute meaningfully) is damaging for health and well-being
- ***Community engagement is a human right*** - there is a rights-based argument for community engagement and participation.

WHAT MAKES COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT EFFECTIVE?

EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES



- Community participation and engagement are complex and dynamic social processes that are challenging to evaluate, particularly when assessing longer-term outcomes for children and families
- Nevertheless, there is now sufficient evidence that allow us to draw some conclusions about the efficacy of community engagement strategies
- Overall, it is clear that community engagement can have beneficial effects for those involved, with direct effects for the health, well-being and empowerment of communities and community members
- There is a considerable convergent evidence for a common set of characteristics that underpin effective community engagement strategies

EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES



Effective community engagement involves:

- starting from the communities' own needs and priorities rather than those dictated from outside
- inviting and building local autonomy, giving leadership to people in the community and acting as a resource to them
- building the capacity of families and communities to meet their own needs more effectively
- having a flexible service system that can be tailored to meet local needs
- balanced partnerships between providers and consumers based on mutual trust and respect
- working *with* communities, not doing things *for* them or *to* them
- information sharing so that communities can make informed decisions
- providing communities with choices regarding services and intervention options

WHAT DOES COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT LOOK LIKE IN PRACTICE?

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN PRACTICE



- Community engagement is essentially a ***relational process*** that occurs at a local level – it involves professionals who represent services and service systems building personal relationships with community members and groups, based on mutual trust and respect
- This provides the basis for all the other key aspects of community engagement – joint decision-making and capacity building
- Community engagement requires having professionals whose role it is to build relationships with community groups – this could be either a dedicated role or as part of their more general professional responsibilities
- The service system needs to be acting in a coordinated fashion, with effective communication and common goals – this is desirable in its own right, but also makes it easier for the system to engage the community

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN PRACTICE (cont)



- For parent groups, community engagement involves parent groups meeting regularly with the professionals who represent the service system
- This means that parents need opportunities to meet on a regular basis – there is much greater likelihood of obtaining a good understanding of the collective views of community members if they already meet regularly and have opportunities to share experiences and develop emergent opinions about what they need
- Providing parents with opportunities to meet regularly has direct benefits for parents by building social networks, but also makes it easier for the community to engage with the service system
- Efforts to engage communities are often initiated by governments and service systems, but may also be initiated by communities themselves

IMPLICATIONS

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

- To build supportive social networks and reduce social isolation, service systems should provide safe settings for families of young children to meet, ensure that streets are safe and easily navigable, and ensure that there is an efficient and affordable local transport system
- To avoid inadvertently causing undue stress and exhaustion in community members, professionals should check regularly as to whether they are asking too much of them, and coordinate with each other when multiple services are trying to engage with the same community
- To avoid disillusioning communities, services and service systems must be prepared to honour the choices made through the community engagement process

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

(cont)



- To ensure the community engagement and partnerships become standard practice and sustainable, they need to be embedded in ongoing governance arrangements
- To support community engagement at local levels, government policies and funding should be designed to support local flexibility, respect local decision-making, and provide funding support to address locally-determined objectives
- To ensure that professionals are being consistently true to community engagement principles and practices, and are responding to collective family needs, regular feedback from communities should be sought

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

(cont)

- To enable professionals to engage communities effectively, they will need training and support in a range of new skills, including relationship building, conflict resolution, negotiation, communication, and knowledge management
- To enable the service system to respond flexibly to community needs, agencies will need funding and staffing strategies that enable services to be reconfigured rapidly
- To give professionals time for community engagement activities, their roles and job descriptions may need to be reconfigured

AN EXEMPLARY COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROJECT

TASMANIAN CHILD AND FAMILY CENTRES

http://www.education.tas.gov.au/parents_carers/early_years/Programs-and-Initiatives/Pages/Child-and-Family-Centres.aspx



- The Tasmanian Child and Family Centres (CFCs) aim to improve the health and well-being, education and care of Tasmania's very young children by supporting parents and enhancing accessibility of services in the local community.
- They have been established in 12 disadvantaged communities across Tasmania through an extensive process of community engagement and empowerment.
- The process of community engagement has been guided by a Learning and Development Strategy, funded by the Tasmanian Early Years Foundation and delivered by the Centre for Community Child Health.
- The Learning and Development Strategy emphasises genuine engagement with the local community in the visioning, planning, design, implementation and functioning of the CFCs.



Using the Family Partnership Model to engage communities

Lessons from Tasmanian Child and Family Centres

Centre for Community Child Health



January 2015

Myfanwy McDonald, Martin O' Byrne & Paul Prichard (2015). **Using the Family Partnership Model to engage communities: Lessons from Tasmanian Child and Family Centres.** Parkville, Victoria: Centre for Community Child Health at the Murdoch Childrens Research Centre and the Royal Children's Hospital.

http://www.rch.org.au/uploadedFiles/Main/Content/ccch/150130_Using-the-Family-Partnership-Model-to-engage-communities_Report.pdf

TASMANIAN CFCs: KEY FEATURES

- Use of the *Family Partnership Model* (Davis & Day, 2010) as a basis for all planning and operational processes
- Development of a *Learning and Development Strategy*, funded by the Tasmanian Early Years Foundation and delivered by the Centre for Community Child Health
- Establishment of *Local Enabling Groups* to guide the planning of the building and the service
- Development of *Working Together Agreements* – these are agreements between parents and staff about how they will work with each other (including parent-parent and staff-staff relationships and well as parent-staff relationships)
- Establishment of *Local Governance Groups* once the CFCs were operational
- Use of the *Empowering Parents Empowering Communities* (EPEC) parent training program

WORKING TOGETHER AGREEMENTS



WTAs serve a number of purposes including:

- for new parents and staff, WTAs are used to outline expectations and orient them to the culture of the CFC;
- as a ‘touchstone’ that parents, service providers and CFC staff can go back to when things don’t go well, either in individual relationships or in the Centre as a whole;
- during workshops, seminars and gatherings associated with CFC, WTAs can be used to guide expectations regarding how participants will contribute and participate;
- to remind parents, staff (and external visitors) that the culture of CFCs is being developed jointly by staff and parents; and
- to engage and inform parents and community members who are not yet aware of the CFCs or what they do.



'Committed to a safe, supportive community for all children and families'

Working Together Agreement

In order for all of us involved in the Ravenswood Child and Family Centre to work together in a helpful way we have created a Working Together Agreement. This document was created in consultation with families, local community and service providers.

We agreed on the following:

How do we want the language to be?

- *Clear – no big words*
- *Fewer words as possible*
- *What we want (not what we don't want)*
- *We agree to do **this***

Why do we need a Working Together Agreement?

- *Everyone on the same page – a shared or common understanding*
- *What our purposes/needs/behaviours*
- *To all feel safe and respected*
- *All in the know/expectations*
- *Shared info*
- *Protection of privacy*
- *Children are the centre of our lives, are important to us, the reason we are here.*

How will it be used?

- *Attach it to our new information forms*
- *Discuss agreements with new families and service providers*
- *Visible copy on display in the centre*
- *Re-visit it as a group regularly or if there is an issue*
- *On our facebook page*
- *Give it to head of services – the school, St Giles, Link services etc*
- *On table at each meeting*

Ravenswood Child and Family Centre



'Committed to a safe, supportive community for all children and families'

The Agreement

1. We agree to be honest and respectful of one another. This means ... we agree to listen to one another.
2. We agree to accept that everyone has different ways of doing and seeing things. This means we include everyone.
3. We agree to be flexible. This means we make allowances if we can.
4. We agree to keep personal information private.
5. We agree to do what we say we are going to do.
6. We agree to be welcoming to everyone especially people coming to the CFC for the first time.
7. We understand that things don't always go to plan when we disagree. When this happens we agree to deal with it in a safe and respectful way.
8. We agree to always set a good example for our children.

I agree to participate and work in the Ravenswood Child and Family Centre as described above.

Name: _____ Signed: _____

From: _____

EMPOWERING PARENTS, EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES (EPEC)



The Centre for Parent and Child Support,
Maudsley Hospital, London

<http://www.cpcs.org.uk/index.php?page=empowering-parents-empowering-communities>



- EPEC is a community-based program, training local parents to run parenting groups in schools and children's centres
- By involving families at every level in the design, implementation and delivery of the programme it ensures that EPEC addresses the real and current concerns of families and delivers them in a friendly, accessible manner
- Less stigma is attached to attendance at a programme delivered by members of the local community
- Local parents - from diverse backgrounds and all active in their communities – are encouraged to train as facilitators of *Being a Parent* groups

TASMANIAN CFCs: FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO EFFECTIVENESS OF ENGAGEMENT & PARTNERING



- Amount of time allowed – 18 months for initial community engagement
- The supporting role of the Tasmanian Early Years Foundation
- Contribution of the facilitators – role and personal characteristics
- Engagement and empowerment of local parents in all aspects of the planning and running of the CFCs
- Consistency of the principles and practices underpinning all aspects of the development and operation of the CFCs

But, the initiative is vulnerable

- The Tasmanian Early Years Foundation has been defunded
- The Learning and Development Strategy finishes shortly
- Any changes in key CFC staff will place the philosophy and practice at risk unless there is strong ongoing support from the Department of Education

TASMANIAN CFCs: READINGS

McDonald, M., O' Byrne, M. & Prichard, P. (2015). **Using the Family Partnership Model to engage communities. Lessons from Tasmanian Child and Family Centres.** Parkville, Victoria: Centre for Community Child Health at the Murdoch Childrens Research Centre and the Royal Children's Hospital.

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Prichard, P., O' Byrne, M., Jenkins, S., (2015). **Supporting Tasmania's Child and Family Centres: The journey of change through a Learning & Development strategy.** Parkville, Victoria: Centre for Community Child Health, Murdoch Childrens Research Institute, The Royal Children's Hospital. <http://apo.org.au/research/supporting-tasmanias-child-and-family-centres-journey-change-through-learning-and>

Taylor, C.T., Jose, K., Christensen, D., & Van de Lageweg, W.I. (2015). **Engaging, supporting and working with children and families in Tasmania's Child and Family Centres. Report on the impact of Centres on parents' use and experiences of services and supports in the Early Years.** Perth, Western Australia: Telethon Kids Institute.

<http://telethonkids.org.au/media/1428013/tas-cfc-evaluation-report-web.pdf>

Join the Conversation

Continue the conversation started here today, and access a range of related resources, on the CFCA website:

www.aifs.gov.au/cfca/news-discussion

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