Valuing local NGO knowledge in planning community services

The University of Sydney · Illawarra Forum Inc · University of Western Sydney

Submission to the Productivity Commission

Study into the Contribution of the Not For Profit Sector

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary

The submission is based on a 3 year research project called '*Valuing local NGO knowledge in planning community services* funded by an Australian Research Council Industry Linkage Grant. The Illawarra Forum Inc. conducted this research project in partnership with the University of Sydney and the University of Western Sydney. The project aims to improve ways to harness the knowledge of community organisations and increase genuine participation in newer accountability planning models, such the Results-Based Accountability (RBA) framework (Friedman, 2005).

The focus of this submission is locally based community organisations which are a sub-set of organisations within the Third Sector.

Locally based community organisations are described, in this submission, as having the following characteristics:

- they do not distribute profits to members;
- have autonomy in local decision-making;
- have voluntary participation by members;
- are self-governing organisations usually through a local management committee or board elected by the members of the organisation;
- are community-serving and pursue some 'public good' within a particular geographic area (Productivity Commission, 2009; Salamon & Anheier, 1996).

The unique contributions of these organisations are discussed in detail in the section "Valuing Contributions of locally-based organisations". It is crucial in discussions around measurement and performance accountability of community based organisations to consider the evidence of the distinctiveness of their practice. It is not possible to measure contribution without an understanding of the nature of the contribution and how it is achieved. The experience of the community organisations in our study is that

conventional accountability and performance measurement systems overlook critical information such as the importance of building relationships, a sense of belonging, community development and social justice. Instead, such reporting systems usually favour simple counts of 'client throughput' and occasions of service' that are easily quantifiable and comparable but do not really measure impact or outcomes.

Our research demonstrates how community organisations facilitate service participants' experiences of and struggles over social justice. Service participants repeatedly talked about how their relationships with community organisations, community workers and other service participants are critical in supporting their everyday struggles over humiliation, hardship, belonging, voice, respect and personal and social change.

This submission provides evidence that these outcomes are not a once-off end state, but are a series of relational experiences based on: practices of inclusion and belonging; respect and recognition; representation and participation; and redistribution. Good practice in community organisations is more than just providing a 'service' and it is not possible to reduce the contribution of community organisations to that of merely sub-contractors to government. The crucial contributions of community organisations are not adequately captured by the accountability and performance measurement frameworks currently used by funding organisations in NSW.

We argue that it would be preferable if government set clear **broad results** for their programs. The Conceptual Framework in the Productivity Commission's Issues Paper recognises some broad result areas (outcomes and impacts). However, we discuss the limitations of a linear model of attribution

and how the often life changing element of '*relationships*' that is built into practice is not captured in this conceptual framework.

We provide evidence for the case that government funders should accept a range of methods for evaluating contribution rather than endorsing one standardised, centrally mandated performance measure evaluation model.

We agree with the position expressed in the Issues Paper that impacts are the result of complex interactions and entanglements, involving community organisations, government, economic and social conditions (not to mention communities, individuals, local environments etc). Consequently attribution for impacts is difficult to isolate, and contributions are always partial. The current emphasis on partnership renders accountability and the attribution for outcomes more complex. We suggest the Productivity Commission framework should focus on analysis of contributions and outcomes rather than just focusing on measuring outcomes and impacts. This requires a move away from linear models of accountability and measuring contribution to networks of accountability and contribution.

Current performance measures privilege quantitative data over qualitative. Research from the World Health Organisation (CSDH,2008) demonstrates how this reliance on quantitative data alone can itself be exclusionary. Service participants themselves are often left out in the development of indicators and measures, yet the people most closely experiencing the impact of community organisation have a significant contribution to make in the development of evaluative tools. Indicators and quantitative data currently relied on in accountability processes hamper the inclusion of the local experience and knowledge of both workers and service participants, and fail to capture the real impacts and results to which organisations contribute. Our research suggests that qualitative and interpretive data is more likely to

render visible those aspects of the contributions of locally based organisations to our communities that quantitative data is unable to count. Suggestions are made concerning the development of relevant proxy measures in the section "Measuring the contribution of community organisations" in this submission.

The impacts of network models of service delivery and lead agency approaches require a more transparent monitoring and evaluation to ensure that the intentions of a networked service system are adhered to and the potential for monopoly provision is reduced.

This submission provides a number of case studies and evidence from our research that provides insights into the mechanisms for enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of the not-for-profit sector. The negative impacts of short-term funding arrangements and competitive tendering are discussed in the light of research evidence and recommendations are made for improvements to the contracting systems.

The case study on the implementation of Results Based Accountability Framework with Department of Community Services funded services in NSW highlights a process with the potential to link program level and population level outcomes. Difficulties arise however, through the processes of abstraction including procedures of simplification and standardisation. Through RBA, practices and activities become decontextualised for the purposes of quantification. Whether deliberately or not, the measures, which are usually imposed on organisations as part of their contracts, can dictate the processes that are used and distort the character of what they claim to measure. The limitations of short-term reporting frameworks, the absence of accessible and relevant population data and the difficulties of direct attribution of population results are discussed.

In conclusion a number of recommendations are made to the Inquiry based on the evidence provided. These are grouped under the themes:

- contributions of locally based community organisations

- measuring the contributions of community organisations

- enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of the not-for-profit sector

- service delivery issues.

and are presented on page 49 of this submission.

Introducing the submission

The Illawarra Forum Inc is the regional peak and resourcing organisation for non-government community service sector organisations in the Illawarra region comprising of the local government areas of Shoalhaven, Kiama, Shellharbour and Wollongong. The Illawarra Forum undertakes a number of roles including: governance training and support, skills development, sector representation and advocacy, resourcing social housing tenant groups, provision of information, regional social planning and organisational support such as facilitation of strategic planning.

The organisations we represent predominantly

- are companies limited by guarantee, incorporated associations, co-operatives, and Aboriginal corporations,

- provide services to members and the wider community in the area of Health, Social Services, Development and Housing, and Civic and Advocacy.

- receive the bulk of their funding from government

The majority of the organisations we work with are small receiving funding up to $1m. In addition some of our members have turnovers of several million dollars and some organisations receive no government funding.

Evidence-base of this submission

The submission is based on a 3 year research project called '*Valuing local NGO knowledge in planning community services* funded by an Australian Research Council (ARC) Industry Linkage Grant. The Illawarra Forum Inc. conducted this research project in partnership with the University of Sydney and the University of Western Sydney. The project aims to improve ways to harness

the knowledge of community organisations and increase genuine participation in newer accountability planning models, such the Results-Based Accountability (RBA) framework (Friedman, 2005).

The motivation for this project came from members of the Illawarra Forum expressing frustration about the volume and form of government-initiated consultations relating to the development and restructuring of community services programs and planning. Whilst many community organisations felt that they were providing the same information in different consultation processes, the emerging policies and processes rarely seem to adequately reflect the contributions and ideals of residents, service participants or community sector practitioners (Illawarra Forum Inc. documentation, 2006:1). Community organisations know their knowledge of local communities, practice models and what works and doesn't work on the ground is relevant for policy development and implementation. However there seems to be a lack of attention to or a devaluing of this local knowledge and the contributions locally-based community organisations make to the health and well-being of local people and their communities (Yanow, 2004).

Their funding in real terms is gradually diminishing and in the competitive tendering environment, large nationally-based non-government organisations are attracting the new funding sources (Keevers, Treleaven, & Sykes, 2008; Phillips, 2007; Productivity Commission, 2009; Suhood, Marks, & Waterford, 2006). The experience of the community organisations is that conventional accountability and performance measurement systems overlook critical information such as the importance of building relationships, a sense of belonging, community development and social justice. Instead, such reporting systems usually favour simple counts of 'client throughput' and 'occasions of service' that are easily quantifiable and comparable (Cortis, 2006).

The ARC linkage research project involved observations of the everyday practices of community organisations and discussions with more than 300 service participants, management committee members and workers.[1]

 Grounded in the evidence of this research our submission is organised in the following way:.First, we discuss definitional issues and explain that the focus of our submission are locally-based community organisations. Second, we outline the contributions made by locally-based community organisations to the well-being of local people and their communities. Third, we discuss some of the issues in measuring the contribution of locally-based community organisations and their impact and significance for both individuals and the community. Fourth, we discuss some of the factors that restrain the effectiveness of community organisations especially in relation to accountability and funding policies. Finally, we make some recommendations based on our research and the experience of the member organisations of the Illawarra Forum Inc.

Locally-based community organisations and the Australian not-for-profit sector

Locally-based community organisations, the focus of our submission, are a sub-set of organisations within the third sector. The Australian Third Sector is large, complex, heterogenous and difficult to define (Productivity Commission, 2009; Staples, 2006). As the issues paper explains there is little

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[1] The participatory action research project involved five members of the ARC research team and an industry reference group made up of fourteen community sector practitioners from the Illawarra. During the research we observed practices in five locally-based community organisations and held discussions and interviews with 70 service participants, management committee members and workers. We also observed two results-based accountability (RBA) processes, which involved around one hundred and eighty people. A further three hundred people took part in two related research projects that investigated the contributions of locally-based community organisations make to the health and well being of local people and their communities. Six methods were used within the participatory action research cycles: following observation of situated practices, written ethnographic accounts of observations, reflective group discussions, semi-structured interviewing, accessing, collecting and copying artefacts and reflexive writing.

reliable data on the numbers of organisations in the community sector in Australia (Productivity Commission, 2009). The first substantial mapping of the sector using data from 1995-96 estimated it comprised about 700,000 organisations (Lyons, 2001; Lyons & Hocking, 2000). The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) estimates that in 2007 there were almost 41,000 not-for-profit organisations employing 884, 476 people and harnessing the efforts of 2.4 million volunteers (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008). However, this figure excludes many locally-based community organisations as it only counts those whose annual turnover is more than $150000 per year (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008). Comparing the figures above, it is clear that the vast majority of community organisations in the sector are small in terms of income. Most community organisations, which are funded, employ only a few staff and are managed by locally-based, voluntary management committees. Despite constituting the vast majority of organisations in the not-for-profit sector in Australia there is little research and information available on this group of organisations..Most of the published literature concentrates on the few, large national and state-wide community services organisations (Roberts, 2001; Suhood et al, 2006).

Locally-based community organisations

Locally-based community organisations are described, in this submission, as having the following characteristics:

- they do not distribute profits to members;
- have autonomy in local decision-making;
- have voluntary participation by members;
- are self-governing organisations usually through a local management committee or board elected by the members of the organisation;
- are community-serving and pursue some 'public good' within a particular geographic area (Productivity Commission, 2009; Salamon & Anheier, 1996).

They provide support, services and/or advocacy to specific groups such as children, women, elderly people, refugees, young people, local residents, people with a disability, indigenous people or people from culturally and linguistically-diverse backgrounds in their area. They offer programs responding to community issues such as poverty, homelessness, domestic violence, environmental degradation, preservation of cultural heritage, child abuse, sexual assault, unemployment, mental health or substance abuse. There is also diversity in the ways locally-based community organisations intervene that include practices of: community development, community education, community arts and social action; residential and community care and support; counselling, case management and groupwork; information, advice, referral and individual and systemic advocacy.

Perhaps the critical distinguishing feature is their local governance. It is this feature that generates the possibility that decisions can take place in the presence of those who will bear their consequences. Accordingly, locally-based community organisations have different ways of practising, organising and managing from the other organisations involved in the community services domain such as large non-government organisations, for-profit organisations and government bureaucracies. Their unique governance, organisation and practices make crucial contributions to the quality of community life but remain largely unacknowledged by those outside the community sector (Harris, 2001; Lyons, 2001; Lyons & Passey, 2006).

Valuing the contributions of locally-based community organisations

Locally-based community organisations make distinctive contributions in relation to what Sennett (2003) and Lovell (2007) argue is an urgent need in our society, practices that express respect across the boundaries of inequality, difference and dependency. Our research demonstrates how community organisations facilitate service participants' experiences of and struggles over social justice. Service participants repeatedly talked about how their relationships with community organisations, community workers and other service participants are critical in supporting their everyday struggles over humiliation, hardship, belonging, voice, respect and personal and social change. This evidence from service participants shows that a major contribution of locally-based community based organisations is the daily work of 'practising social justice'. It is clear from participants' experiences that for them social justice is not an end state, not a once off outcome but is relational and experienced in their daily lives through participating in these organisations. Locally-based organisations play an important role in encouraging belonging and participation and create a sense of hope and opportunities for the future. They build community infrastructure (both in terms of the material environment and relationships).

It is beyond the scope this submission to provide a detailed account of all the practices of community organisations ,identified in our research, that contribute to the well-being of local people, their communities and their struggles over social justice. The diagram below illustrates some of practices we observed and that were dominant themes in the accounts of service participants, workers and management committee members.
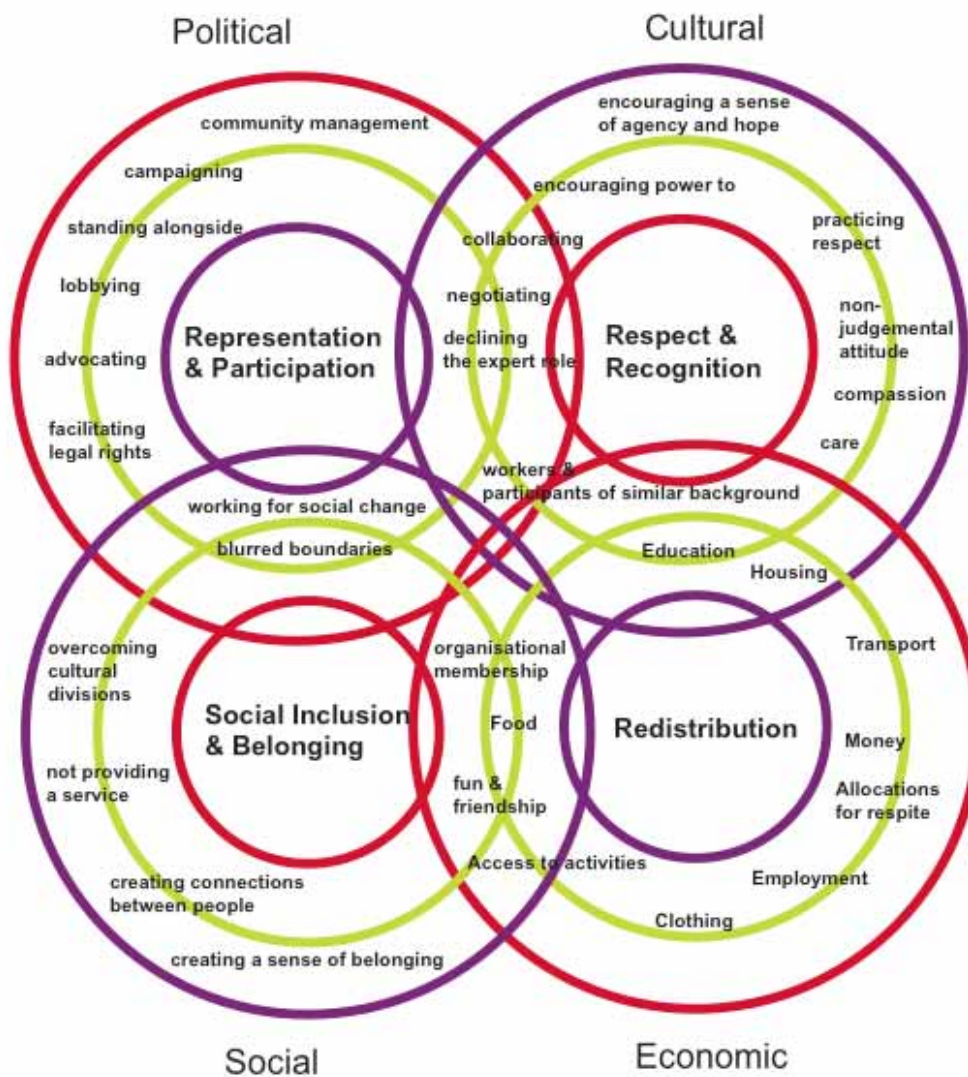
Figure 1: Interpretive topology of social justice practices (Keevers, 2009)

The diagram attempts to depict the co-emerging political, cultural, social and economic dimensions of social justice. In each inner circle the intra-acting

forms of social justice are named. Some of the practices that contribute to these forms of social justice, identified in the fieldwork, are named in the entangled rings. The use of red, purple, green and white references the historical, political and cultural connections that community organisations in the Illawarra have with the social movements involved in struggles over social justice such as the labour movement (red) the women's movement (purple and green) the environmental movement (green) and the peace movement (white). The pattern of these colours (for example, the inner ring of 'redistribution' corresponds with the colour of outer ring of inclusion and belonging) illustrates how practices intra-act, collaborate, depend on each other, include one another and co-emerge in struggles over social justice.

In the following section we provide a few examples of the contribution of locally-based community organisations in relation to their practices of: inclusion and belonging; respect and recognition; representation and participation; and redistribution. We use fieldwork data and case studies from the research to illustrate the practices and contributions of locally-based community organisations.

Practices of belonging and inclusion

Experiencing a sense of belonging and inclusion was a theme strongly expressed by service participants and workers involved our research project. Perhaps this is not surprising, given the now overwhelming evidence demonstrating the centrality of social connectedness and social support for health and well-being (Berkman, 1995; Wilkinson, 2005). [2]

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[2] In a recent report, the World Health Organization asserts: "Being included in the society in which one lives is vital to the material, psychosocial, and political aspects of empowerment that underpin social well-being and equitable health"(CSDH, 2008: 18). The international research on the social determinants of health demonstrates that significant risk/protective factors for a whole range of diseases including heart disease, arthritis and depression include a sense of control over your life (Marmot, 2004), a sense of belonging (Wilkinson, 2005) and a sense of agency and hope (Berkman, 1995; CSDH, 2008). Wilkinson's research in the United Kingdom demonstrates that belonging infrastructure at the neighbourhood level is a significant factor in the physical and mental health and well-being of individuals living in the community. This belonging infrastructure is often weakest in poor disadvantaged

Valuing the intra-actions between people and supporting and facilitating
horizontal relationships between peers rather than focusing only on the
worker-client relationship and individualised outcomes is a distinctive
feature of practices in locally-based community organisations. Such practices
contribute to building social connectedness and strengthening local
communities.

A sense of belonging is essential to feeling safe, to health and to well-being.
Helena, a service participant with the Multicultural Women's Network
beautifully conveys the profound and uplifting effects of an easy sense of
belonging and inclusion across the boundaries of cultural difference:

Helena: And the most important thing with our group, with Multicultural Women's
          Group, is we don't know each other. First time I came in nobody know me.
          Soon as I was on this door, it was ladies there, and they all come smiling
          and said, "Welcome, how are you and what your name?" And I said to
          myself they… I know them. But I didn't. Then we start talking like we
          know each other. So this for me it was the beginning and this changed my
          life completely. I lost myself since I came to Australia and I was here so
          many years. It's since the year 2000 I joined this. I came to Australia 1956
          and I thought I was dead, you know, because I didn't know nobody except
          my small community. Before I came to Australia I was very outgoing and
          very happy and I have so many things in my mind but when I came here I
          was dead. But when I started with this group I… it was like I was dead and
          was resurrected. That's true. And I'm alive because of this group. I found
          so many happiness coming here. (MWN, 30/5/2007:31).

Locally-based community organisations often make a significant contribution
by engaging in activities that do not necessarily deliver a service as such..
Community organisations funded to provide specific services like housing,

communities (Wilkinson, 2005). Wallerstein (2006) conducted an international literature
review aimed at evaluating the effectiveness of empowerment and participatory strategies to
improve health. Her work demonstrates that the "most effective empowerment strategies are
those that build on and reinforce authentic participation ensuring autonomy in
decision   making, sense of community and local bonding, and psychological empowerment
of community members themselves"(Wallerstein, 2006: 5). She explains that active
participation of citizens in community organisations is critical in "reducing dependency on
health professionals, ensuring cultural and local sensitivity of programs and facilitating
capacity and sustainability of change efforts" (Wallerstein, 2006: 8).

counselling, case management or respite value processes and activities that do not directly provide services. Ironically, these processes and activities that are not services themselves often produce results for people that could easily be measured within an outcomes-based framework. Not just providing a service is underpinned by the practice conviction that "reciprocity is the foundation of mutual respect" (Sennett, 2003: 219) and that the quality of the relationship is central. For example, the importance of reciprocity and 'not providing' a service is well illustrated in the following field notes from Interchange Illawarra(a respite service for people with an intellectual disability and their carers) concerning Tom, a young man with an intellectual disability:

> Tom was very keen to mow the lawns. He arrived with a pair of gloves and a terry-towelling hat. He asked Sam whether he would be mowing. She said, "Yes of course you can do some mowing, but you do too much for us". She talked with him about the different activities that had been arranged that he had indicated he would like to participate in. He agreed to do both the mowing and participate in the peer support program. Later he started to mow the lawns with a push mower (no engine) and pushed the mower vigorously despite the fact that the blade settings were out and so the mower didn't cut the lawn all that effectively. He kept mowing for most of the time we were there and only stopped when workers insisted that he have a drink. He looked happy and satisfied with his work. He clearly loved mowing and felt he was contributing and providing a service in this way (Interchange, 1/5/2007:4).

Tom's mowing contributions demonstrate the intra-connections between reciprocity and a sense of belonging. Thus, practices of respect/recognition and practices of belonging and participation are threaded through one another in the backyard of the Interchange Illawarra premises.

Practices of respect and recognition

Locally-based community organisations contribute to overcoming the kinds of oppressions, humiliations and sufferings that concern people's sense of well-being, esteem and respect. To convey respect entails finding the words, the gestures, the layout of the physical space that makes respect felt and persuasive (Sennett, 2003). The Southern Youth and Family Services worker who verbally challenges the behaviour of a homeless young person without turning them off; the Interchange Illawarra worker who, with a gesture,

gently dissuades the child with autism not to jump down onto the tracks to see why the train is late; the West Street counsellor who negotiates to sit side by side facing the door with the client who is feeling uncomfortable and trapped sitting face-to- face: - all perform respect.

Our research demonstrates that knowing how to work with regard and response-ability in asymmetrical power relations and the quality of these relationships are critical in facilitating service participants' struggles over social justice and contributing to their health and well-being

Engaging collaboratively, practising mutual respect, overcoming judgment and privileging the expertise of service participants are also entangled with another practice evident in all of the sites in this study: *deliberately blurring and creating fluid boundaries between, workers, service participants and management committee members.* In observations at the Warrawong Community Centre:

> The [community kitchen and lunch] volunteers are all people from the local area. There are no clear distinctions between people who use the service, participate in the community centre, volunteer and work in the Centre… Everyone seems to 'muck in' together (WCC, 24/4/2007:3).

Indeed many of the workers in both observations and discussions identify as being *of* the community rather than providing services *to* or *for* the community.

The West Street Centre (a counselling service for women who have experienced sexual assault in their childhood) workers too deliberately create processes that blur the status boundaries between the counsellors, the women who use the service and the management committee members. They create processes where service participants are invited as experts or consultants to shape the direction of the practices and activities of the service. At the same time, the workers recognise the complexity involved in processes that deliberately disrupt power relations and status boundaries. In their documentation of these processes, they explain:

We have also become much more aware of the complex and at times contradictory dilemma of committing to a process where we ask those that we work with to position themselves as our consultants. This is not necessarily the easiest path to tread, as it has so far invited us to ask even more questions of ourselves, rather than just coming up with needed answers. Much of the feedback we are receiving has been very positive and this encourages us to continue to work in this way (WS documentation, 2007:18).

Practices of representation and participation

Locally-based community organisations make a vital contribution by enabling representation, advocacy, participation and voice for service participants and local communities. These contributions are well illustrated in Finessa's story.

Jaana: I always remember one of our board members Finessa, who got involved in our centre. Finessa couldn't read or write, she was illiterate and got involved in our centre, and when we asked her to come on the board she said: "I've got nothing to contribute". She joined the board and got involved. She lived in Warrawong and got involved when they closed down the Centrelink office in Warrawong. She got involved in the action campaign to get the Centrelink office back. From that she went on to represent people living in poverty at the ACOSS, the Australian Council of Social Services conference in Adelaide. So, she flew to Adelaide and presented and she was part of policy making. From a person who couldn't read or write, she became part of policy making. She spoke in terms of "because they've closed down the Centrelink offices that's going to cost me four loaves of bread to get to Wollongong on the bus, so that's four loaves of bread I won't be able to feed my children" and people took notice of that sort of stuff (Discussion 1/9/2008:20).

Finessa's story illustrates multiple aspects of representation, participation and activism threaded through involvement with locally-based community organisations. The ways of organising at the community centre enabled Finessa to play an active role in shaping the work of the centre as a member of the board of management representing the members of the organisation. This experience challenged her sense of disempowerment- *I've got nothing to contribute*. Her involvement facilitated her development the leadership skills, self-confidence and understandings to actively campaign to reopen the Centrelink office (the government agency responsible for income support payments in Australia). At the community centre, her expertise that was born of experience, her 'insider expertise' (Richardson & Le Grand,

2002) was recognised and respected. The local community organisation connected Finessa to a nationally based anti-poverty campaign, where her voice made a genuine contribution in the policy-making process. Lister argues:

> The right of participation represents an important means of recognising the dignity of people living in poverty. It is saying that their voices count; that they have something important to contribute to public policy making…Such recognition is crucial to counteracting the disrespect with which many people in poverty feel they are treated by the wider society (Lister, 2007: 440).

The local community organisation through a range of ongoing practices is able to support local people, like Finessa, to overcome the many and intra-connected barriers that make participation in invited policy-making spaces difficult. These practices include the modest redistribution practices that assist in the struggle for day-to-day survival such as meeting the financial costs involved in advocacy efforts and enabling the purchase of appropriate clothes. These micro-practices intra-act with recognition practices that foster self-respect, esteem, confidence and voice. The local community organisation also enables access to the advocacy and lobbying 'tools of the trade' such as faxes, computers, internet access, jargon-busting glossaries and political contacts databases.

The ways of organising and the governance of locally-based community organisations are distinctive, from those of large non-government organisations, for-profit organisations and government bureaucracies. Most locally-based community organisations are -managed by democratically elected management committees. The management committee is elected by the membership of the organisation. This way of organising means that it is by no means unusual for a service participant to become a member of the board of management of the organisation. Williams and Onyx argue:

There are some distinctive characteristics about these community organisations that enable them to act in ways that larger, more bureaucratic organisations can't match. They are likely to have their ears to the ground in ways few organisations do. They hear distress and name it before others are even aware there is a problem. They can, and often do, mobilise an instant response to that issue by way of emergency support, advocacy, information, preparing a submission to government or establishing a service on a volunteer basis (Williams & Onyx, 2002).

Community management offers the possibility of participation. For example, not every young person involved in Southern Youth and Family Service participates on the board but inclusion as a possibility signals to young people that the value of their voice and participation is welcome and recognised.

The distinctive governance in community organisations affords a particular opportunity to build local people's leadership and gives people a greater sense of control over their lives and future. Developing a greater sense of agency and control over one's life was evident in Finessa's story at the beginning of this section. These features are also illustrated in Sam's description of the organisational hierarchy and structure of Interchange Illawarra:

Sam: … if you look at it from an organisational flow chart perspective, we actually have all of our consumers and families at the top and then we have the management committee drawn from this group. The management committee are our overseeing body. Then there is me [the manager] and the other paid workers and volunteers(Interchange, 12/6/2007:3).

Sam's description contrasts to other common ways of organising such as government bureaucracies, large charitable organisations, corporations and small businesses. Not only are the people with a disability and their families seen as an integral part of the structure of Interchange Illawarra, they *are at the top* of it's organisational chart.

Locally-based community organisations also make a significant contribution by standing alongside service participants, assisting them to pursue their rights and advocating to decision-makers on behalf of individuals and on community issues. Their role in systemic advocacy and representation contributes a public sphere in which contested ideas are debated to formulate public policy (Staples, 2007: 5). This in turn enhances participatory democracy in Australia.

Practices of redistribution

Many locally-based community organisations engage in practices and provide services and programs that contribute towards remedying what Fraser (1997) terms distributive injustices[3]. These injustices are socio-economic in character and rooted in the political-economic organisation of society and include exploitation, poverty, economic marginalisation and deprivation Many service participants involved in locally-based community organisations experience poverty, unemployment and homelessness. Our research project demonstrated that locally-based community organisations enable access to material and socio-economic resources such as housing, food, clothing and money, education, and employment, transport and to activities and opportunities that service participants would otherwise be unable to afford or access.

Case study: the Warrawong community kitchen and lunch

This case study demonstrates how the contributions discussed are intra-related a characteristic not captured by the accountability and perfromancee measurement frameworks currently used by funding agencies in NSW.

Before discussing the community kitchen and lunch, we want to outline the environment within which the Warrawong Community Centre intra-acts. It is

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[3] Of course, it would not be legitimate to expect local community organisations to effect redistribution of wealth on a large scale as there are many other apparatuses and configurations of power active in the production of inequality in the region.

located in Greene St opposite a Dept of Housing bed sit complex along with two other housing department complexes of one and two bedroom units in the adjacent street. Warrawong has been identified as the most disadvantaged community in the Illawarra region and one of the most disadvantaged suburbs in the country in Vinson's (2007) report called *Dropping off the Edge: the distribution of disadvantage in Australia*. Most of the people who come to the community lunch live in the local area and many come from local Department of Housing estates. The majority are living in poverty, are often in crisis situations, have complex mental health issues, drug and alcohol problems or a combination of both. Many are long term unemployed and are often lonely and isolated (WCC documentation). The area has a reputation of having a high crime rate and as being dangerous. As one of the local Koori leaders commented:

Donna: That kitchen is good; it has got a hell of a lot of people that live in Greene Street. Greene Street is a no go area. It's a very rough area that that community centre works in (WCC, 23/8/2007:19).

Some of the people who participate in the community kitchen and lunch are not only materially marginalised in the economic sense but their bodies are physically excluded from most of the shops and offices in the suburb. The company, that owns the majority of the commercial area, bans them from entering any of their premises. Even government agencies such as Centrelink, which is responsible for income support in Australia, leases its premises from the company and the bans effectively prevent some residents putting in the forms that ensure they continue to get their income support payments. As the Warrawong Community Centre workers explain:

Cheryl: What happens with Westfield, because we've met with Westfield over the last couple of years too, is that is that we've got to ring the security guard. The security guard will escort them. You say 'I'm coming over to put my form in' and I've done that on quite a few occasions for a client, I ring them up, and they have to go through the pictures which is Hoyts, up the stairs, go to Centrelink, put their form in, come back down straight away. So you ring the security guard, okay, so and so's coming over in five minutes, they need to put in their form.The banning also means no doctors, no dentists, no Bunnings, no McDonald's, all that is owned by Westfield.

Lynne: They get banned from all if it?

Cheryl: Yes.

Thelma: Yes, and then they have to spend their pittance of money that they get at the bloody servo [petrol station], which costs them a fortune…that's the only place they can get food. Isn't it ridiculous? (WCC, 23/5/2007: 31-32)

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Here we see that the movement of the residents in the shopping centre is restricted and constrained.

It is within this context that the community kitchen provides lunch four days per week for between 50-80 per day and many of those people explicitly identify the lunch as contributing in alleviating economic hardship. For example, John explained:

> I'm on a disability pension and often I come and have lunch here at the Warrawong Community Centre. Sometimes, if it weren't for this service, the days before my pension would be pretty lean. I think they are such a wonderful service for those of us surviving on social security (WCC, 24/5/2007).

Other participants commented: "This is the only decent meal I have all day" "It's here or steal it" and "I'm not sure I would even be living right now if it wasn't for the community lunch and Cheryl and Thelma [the workers] (WCC, 24/5/2007).

Although the lunch is clearly an example of practising redistribution, it is also thoroughly intra-twined with practices of respect, recognition, representation and belonging. In observations of the community lunch we noted that the material layout of the dining room and the way the lunch is organised and performed embodied relations of respect. In contrast to other soup kitchens we have witnessed, there are no queues at the community lunch. People sit at tables that they set out in the community hall and are served at their table, restaurant style, by the lunch volunteers. After everyone is served the workers and volunteers take off their OH&S clothing (caps and gloves), the only markers that distinguish them from those attending the lunch, and sit down as companions at table to share in the food. The way the lunch is organised made and served is crucial to the contribution it makes to local people's health and well-being.

A couple of lunch volunteers talking in the context of the wider community's perception of the people living in the area around the community centre, explained:

Nicole: …the biggest problem is people's perception. Because they're homeless, because they use drugs, because they drink, because they're whatever, but they are still human beings. They're still entitled to the same thing that you and I are, no matter what their circumstances and that's what we provide here.

Rod: …once they come through the front door, the respect is here. No matter what they're from and no matter what they've been on, no matter what they've been doing. They know the minute they walk through that front door, it's got to be ultimate respect and they get it back (WCC, 14/8/2007:4-5).

So, through the lunch it is clear to see the practices of redistribution, respect and recognition. While the participants and volunteers articulate the value of the much-needed free meal they receive at the community centre, they also clearly value the way the community lunch enables them to experience friendship, solidarity and a sense of belonging in their community. Thus the outcomes of redistribution and social inclusion are interrelated and co-emerge in the on-going practices of the Warrawong community centre. A local Koori leader whose extended family has established a market garden supplying fresh vegetables to the lunch, but who does not attend the lunch herself, explains:

Donna: We know people that live there as well you know. They're black and white but they have found something in that kitchen. They will go in there and they will volunteer and they will help set up the tables, set up like all the food and help wash up, clean up. So that's given them something down at that community to be really proud of, they really belong. So now we're all trying to fight for funding to keep that kitchen going. Because it's a necessity. You get a lot of kids in there eating, babies and all in there. They need to keep that kitchen open (WCC, 23/8/2007: 19).

In Donna's comments we see the intra-connections between meeting the bodily necessity of food, achieving recognition and self-respect, experiencing a sense of belonging and the practices of representation and voice. Thus, in the Warrawong community kitchen and lunch, the producing of food for distribution, the practising of mutual respect, community and class and the

struggles over representation and political voice are enfolded into and produced through one another in the on-going becoming of Warrawong.

This case study is illustrative of the contributions of locally-community based organisations. Through practising redistribution, respect, recognition, representation and belonging, they create a 'politics of possibilities' (Gilmore, 1999), ways of responsibly imagining and intervening in the multiple scales of injustice locally (Barad, 2007).

Conclusion

In this section we have articulated the distinctive contributions of locally-based community organisations by discussing their role in facilitating service participants experiences of and struggles over social justice and their contributions to improving the health and well-being of local people and their communities. The research shows that practices such as: supporting and facilitating horizontal relationships between service participants; engaging in activities and processes that do not deliver a service as such; and creating opportunities for people to participate and give back are crucial in service participants experiencing mutual respect, recognition and a sense of belonging. The section also demonstrates the quality of relationships between service participants and workers and service participants' struggles over social justice. Both the 'belonging role' of community organisations and their contribution of performing respect in ways that reach across the boundaries of inequality have been largely overlooked in both current accountability and performance reporting systems and the literature.

Our observations, worker and significantly service participant accounts challenge the dominant economic and managerial discourse that currently emphasises service provision and the purchase of welfare outputs. Our research illustrates that 'good' practice in locally-based community organisatons is more about creativity, improvisation and context sensitive

embodied judgements than applying already determined interventions and being accountable to performance measures for reaching pre-specified outcome targets,

The experience of community organisations shows social justice practices cannot be established at a point in time once and for all. Social justice practices are never achieved, but are under constant development. The service participants' struggles over social justice are likewise never 'finished'. The open-endedness of struggles over social justice thereby require measures that are capable of capturing their qualitative, relational, ethical and dynamic nature.

Measuring the contribution of community organisations

The previous section, by focusing on the practices and practicing of social justice, offers an alternative to the approach currently institutionalised in government administrative systems that position community organisations as sub-contractors accountable to government for delivering measurable outputs, outcomes and efficiencies in specified service provision contracts. There is growing concern by orgaisations that the lack of recognition and understanding of their distinctive practices is threatening their survival.

In this section, first, we discuss the framework proposed in the Issues paper, second we outline some of the challenges in a framework that seeks to capture the contributions of the third sector as whole, and third we point to some possible ways forward. We use the introduction of Friedman's RBA into community organisations in NSW as an illustrative case study example.

The Issues Paper Conceptual Framework

This conceptual framework is an improvement on prescriptive subcontracting measurement arrangements currently used by both state and federal governments. These contractual arrangements are characterised by funding bodies deciding the funding priorities, the services to purchase, the desired results and performance measures for evaluating the attainment of results . It would be preferable if government set clear **broad results** for their programs. Local people and local services could then decide how these broad results could best be achieved in their communities through their knowledge of what strategies, processes and interventions work best. To the extent that this conceptual framework in the Issues Paper takes this approach, ie setting **broad results** such as service, connections, advocacy, existence and consumption outcomes and impacts across domains of community wellbeing, then it is an improvement on more prescriptive models.

It is important to ensure that individual organisations do not have to align their efforts in a linear manner to a result pre-determined by the funding agency. Our research demonstrates that in the daily work of locally-based community organisations there are no guarantees. It is often impossible to anticipate and plan how an attempt to enact social justice and care will turn out in practice. There are only the ongoing efforts to contribute to just living. Our study demonstrates that attempts to fix specified results adopting practices used in locally-based community organisations don't make sense. Working out the destination is part of the process (Mol, 2008). The contribution of locally-based community organisations through the practices they engage are not equivalent, interchangeable, standardised but distinctive, situated and local Each bears responsibility and accountability for enacting social justice and care in a multidimensional matrix of face-to-face relationships.

The key, often life changing element of *relationships* that are fostered in local community based organisations, is not captured in current performance measures and is not recognised in this conceptual framework. The contribution of locally-based community organisations in performing respect in ways that reach across the boundaries of inequality, difference and dependency is largely overlooked in the proposed framework. The framework also leaves out any mention of equality and social justice. Thus, the struggles over humiliation, poverty or loss of respect, which from the accounts of service participants are the most significant contribution made by these organisations to their individual well-being and the health and well being of their communities is absent in the proposed framework.

 Our submission, therefore, points to the need for measures that recognise and appreciate the different knowledges and the distinctive roles and contributions of the diversity of organisations that make up the not-for-profit sector. Service participants from locally-based community organisations can

provide critical information to policy-makers about the practices necessary for ensuring people can participate actively both in the conditions of their own care and in the health and well-being of their communities. Our research shows that locally-based community organisations deserve to be recognised, measured and improved on their own terms.

We warn against adopting a 'one size' fits all approach for evaluating the effectiveness of not-for-profit organisations, For example, a New Zealand study (Aimers & Walker, 2008) evaluated two contrasting organisations, one a small 'belonging' community organisation working with Pacific Island immigrants and the other a large charitable organisation delivering child and family services. By evaluating each organisation against the performance measures from the model appropriate to their way of working and practice standpoint they concluded both organisations were effective and successful. However, when each organisation is evaluated against the other model neither organisation can be demonstrated as effective. This suggests that government funders should accept a range of methods for evaluating contribution rather than endorsing one standardised, centrally mandated performance measure evaluation model.

We agree with the position expressed in the Issues Paper that impacts are the result of complex interactions and entanglements, involving community organisations, government, economic and social conditions (not to mention communities, individuals, local environments etc). Consequently attribution for impacts is difficult to isolate, and contributions are always partial. The current emphasis on partnership complexifies accountability and the attribution for outcomes. We suggest the Productivity Commission framework should focus on analysis of contributions and outcomes rather than just focusing on measuring outcomes and impacts. This requires a move away from linear models of accountability and measuring contribution to networks of accountability and contribution.

Challenges in developing and implementing a national measurement framework

There are many challenges in developing a useful conceptual framework for measuring the contributions of the not for profit sector. Flexibility and diversity is required. If a 'one size fits all' measurement approach is adopted then there is a risk that diversity will be lost – we become what we measure. The richness, depth, specific character and effectiveness of local practices may be bleached out. An understanding of the diversity and subtlety of practice and contributions in locally-based community organisations has to be reflected in any framework that tries to measure their contributions.

Furthermore, as stated previously, we agree with the Issues Paper's acknowledgement that attribution for impacts is often difficult and many of the contributions in themselves are alone not sufficient for benefits to arise.

For example, locally-based community organisations do not have the scope to be held accountable for changing community-wide indicators such as the unemployment or crime rate. On the other hand, project level outcomes for which they can be held accountable, such as assisting 10 'at risk' young people into employment or transforming a 'dangerous' public space into a community garden, are specific and local. Thus, community organisations face a conundrum in responding to demands for outcomes-based accountability. If they focus only on the project level outcomes over which they have the most control, they risk default on the larger question of accountability to the funding agency's statewide or national results.

The importance of high quality readily available statistical data

Statistical measures are invaluable and developing high quality indicators an important and necessary endeavour. Credible statistical representation is one aspect of building connections and coalitions to facilitate struggles over social justice and improve community well-being in the public domain. Access to 'impersonal' and powerful quantitative data is vital to effective public

representations of what community and other justice seeking projects mean. Statistics have an important but fraught history in the crafting of authoritative, impersonal knowledge in democratic societies, like Australia.(Haraway, 1997).

We currently have a lack of attention, especially at the local level to collecting statistical data relevant to struggles over hardship, humiliation, inequality, belonging, representation and redistribution. We urge the Productivity Commission to recommend increased funding and staffing of institutions like the Australian Bureau of Statistics that produce reliable statistics. Locally-based community organisations should also be resourced to produce statistical representations of our contributions and to contest the interpretation of statistics. For example, the efforts of the Illawarra Forum in developing sector-wide plans based on agreed results and performance indicators have been severely hampered by the lack of statistical data available to use as indicators, particularly at a local level[4]. Although the ABS Census material has useful demographic data, specific data relating to health and education in particular are simply not available to us. While some data may be available within government departments, they appear to be reluctant to release it

The lack of local data renders the policy push to outcomes-based accountability and the use of indicators to evaluate success or otherwise impossible to implement and thus, mere rhetoric. Similarly to other studies in North America (Zimmerman & Stevens, 2006), of individual community

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[4] [4] Health data is a particular problem. It is collected by the South Eastern Sydney and Illawarra Area Health Service SESIAHS but is not available by small geographic areas. SESIAHS covers approximately 6,331 square kilometres including highly urbanised areas of eastern Sydney, southern Sydney, Wollongong and Port Kembla, and the predominantly rural areas of Kiama and Shoalhaven and comprises 13 local government areas (LGAs). We failed to find current local data in the areas listed In Appendix 1

organisations, the demand for outcome measurement compounds their workload and they struggle with finding ways to get meaningful measures without diverting resources from services, programs and activities into paperwork .

Further, the communicability of numbers across wide distances, which constitute their claims to 'objectivity', allows decision-makers to rely on expert representations and substitute statistics for trust, face-to-face relations and direct experience. Quantitative measures are ill adapted to express the ethical, relational dimensions of what goes on between people involved in locally-based community organisations.

The critical role of service participants in measuring contributions
Given the documented difficulties of measuring the performance and contribution of the not for profit sector it is unsurprising that existing models do not capture all the relevant contributions of locally-based community organisations. Service participants are currently left out in developing indictors and measures and evaluating the contributions of the not-for profit sector. However, our research demonstrates that they can offer essential information about contributions that will be lost from measurement and evaluation without their involvement.

 In our research, service participants, those who most closely experience the impact of community organisations highlight new ways of conceptualising the contributions of these organisations. Furthermore, our research and other research such as Cortis(2006) suggests that service participants prefer and offer ways of evaluating contributions that are qualitative, informal and experience-based.

Privileging quantitative measures

Current measures privilege quantitative data over qualitative. The World Health Organisation (WHO) advocates that to be comprehensive and useful measures should combine numbers and stories. WHO argues that reliance on quantitative data alone can itself be exclusionary, as those most marginalised such as the homeless or those suffering from a mental illness are the least likely to be counted in measures of social exclusion (CSDH, 2008).

If the Federal Government adopts a measurement framework that gives preference to quantitative measures alone, critical evidence about effective contributions of local community based organisations is lost. Indicators and quantitative data currently relied on in accountability processes hamper the inclusion of the local experience and knowledge of both workers and service participants, and fail to capture the real impacts and results to which organisations contribute. Unless the view that valuable knowledge is quantitative in character is avoided in the conceptual framework, practitioner and service participant contributions will continue to be marginalised and diminished through the insistence that they take an 'expert,' statistical representational form.

Our research suggests that qualitative data is more likely to make visible the value of locally-based community organisations in our communities. Our research demonstrates that harnessing local knowledge of practitioners and service participants requires facilitating a conceptual framework that assembles and takes seriously all relevant stakeholder perspectives, diverse knowledges and methods, rather than privileging those conceived quantitatively (Healy, 2003; Turnball, 2009). In such a framework descriptive and interpretative 'local' understandings need to be valued alongside calculative, quantitative 'expert' understandings.

Furthermore, reliance on quantitative data excludes from mattering all the practices that cannot be constituted as 'a service'. Yet, these practices were identified as crucial in contributing to peoples' struggles over recognition, belonging and living justly. Our experience shows that there is simply not an adequate or feasible statistical indicator currently available for every important result.

Proxy measures

The issues paper suggests the development of proxy measures to capture the contributions of the not for profit sector. In our research, service participants identify the *quality of relationships* as crucial in the contributions community organisations make to their lives. However, given the tendency of measures to shape what is done and encourage an instrumental and bureaucratic approach (Tsoukas, 1998) it would be counterproductive to directly measure the quality of relationships.

Our research suggests service participants and practitioners could play a key role in developing proxy measures. For example, service participants identified characteristics such as flexibility in responding to individual issues and needs, open-endedness in worker availability and a welcoming, informal atmosphere, as factors that contribute to quality relationships. Proxies could then be developed based on whether organisations have the ways of working in place that are known to impact on the quality of relationships. This may include for example, adequate staff numbers and good working conditions, local decision-making processes, an informal, friendly atmosphere, the absence of time pressures for workers and activities that offer participation and reciprocity.

The development of such proxy measures would however require more detailed research on the organisational arrangements that strengthen relationships between workers and service participants and between service participants

Case study: the Implementation of Results Base Accountability Framework with DoCs funded services in NSW.

This case study draws on the experiences of the local community sector in the Illawarra implementing the results based accountability (RBA) framework (Friedman, 2005). This framework has been adopted by the Human Service departments of the NSW government as its agreed form of measuring outcomes and applying for funding. The NSW Treasury now requires all departments justify their budgets on their ability to achieve the desired outcomes.

As the preferred model of the NSW Dept of Community Services (DoCS), they have mandated its introduction into all the non-government organisations that they fund. DoCS are gradually introducing a service provision model, where they purchase the delivery of community services through purchaser-provider contracts. DoCS is particularly interested in evaluating the objectives of the non-government organisations to see if they are funding those organisations that align with intended DoCS results. An aim of DoCS has been to reduce complexity and in this way form a unified, simplified service system. DoCS argues results-based accountability is the ideal model for realising these aims (Izmir, 2004).

The model is used at a population and agency level, and works towards desired results and outcomes, which are measured through data-based evidence. Outcomes are planned at different agency levels to contribute to overall results, which, in this case have been determined by DoCS.

Friedman's version of RBA is different from more traditional audit, accountability and consultation processes in that it attempts to integrate performance measurement, collaborative planning and participatory decision

making, and takes seriously the link between program level and population level outcomes. What people have appreciated about its use is the focus on outcomes rather than outputs. However it is derived from the protocols of financial accountability and is mostly used to manage service provision and ensure the efficiency and effectiveness of government spending. As such it is a tool that favours bureaucratic systems and accountability.

Our research investigating the capability of RBA to translate and bring forward the practices and contributions of locally-based community organisations, in planning community services identified some issues that may be of interest to the Productivity Commission Inquiry.

Like all measuring apparatuses, RBA selects aspects of the world for measurement – the world does not present itself in performance measurement terms. These have to be abstracted from far more complex practices. Such processes of abstraction include procedures of simplification and standardisation involving matters of judgment, priority, choice and interpretation (Healy, 2004). Through RBA, practices and activities are necessarily decontextualised for the purposes of quantification. Results and performance measures are disentangled from the complexity of organisational and community life. In our experience of RBA local knowledge is often lost through the results based accountability planning tools which tend to simplify, standardise and co-ordinate both information and effort across the heterogeneity of institutions, organisations and community practitioners in the community services sector.

Whether deliberately or not, the measures, which are usually imposed on organisations as part of their contracts, can dictate the processes that are used, and distort the character of what they claim to measure. For example, during our research, Southern Youth and Family workers discuss how the monitoring requirements designed to assist homeless and at-risk young

people to obtain employment or education is paradoxically making it more difficult to engage with and build relationships with the young people.

Julia: I think there are some [of the previous] government's accountability processes that are working detrimentally against relationships with young people… they [the youth workers] are locked into how many numbers they've got to get and how they've got to do it. Their diary is controlled by Centrelink and they have removed - government has, I believe - quite deliberately removed any capacity for community development, training infrastructure support, all that.

Felicity: And it goes back to what we were talking about earlier about the client contact as well. At the moment because we do have to have all this data all these numbers and everything It's constantly looking at numbers. I dream of the data, the numbers at night. It's all I see and yeah the quality and depth of the client contact has really declined in the last couple of months because of the pressure of the data and monitoring requirements… It's harder to keep that relationship and the trust going within the strict monitoring requirements.

Julia: We've always kept outcome data long before other agencies did and long before it was popular; we've been doing that for 15 years… We believe we can prove through our data that the extra push for employment and all those things has not made any difference but we have diminishing relationships, diminishing confidence with the young people, diminishing ability to form relationships, those sorts of things. (SYFS 12/9/2007:35).

This example illustrates that performance measures can be used as a form of micro-management that risks recreating in community organisations the same bureaucratic structures that have made contracting out a popular option for government agencies.

During our observations of an RBA process, one of the study participants explained the effect of specific performance measures on community care services:

 A family tell us what they would really like is to be able to have a weekend away with the whole family, rather than respite care for a weekend. But the performance indicator is the number of respite hours delivered. That's what counts .

This situation means that to improve their performance according to DADHC (the funding body), the service has to provide the family with more of what they don't want.

During our observations of RBA processes some of the practices and contributions of locally-based community organisations were lost in translation. For example, the ongoing efforts to contribute to respect in the co-emergence of relations, identified as critical in service participants struggles over social justice faded into undifferentiated background in the privileging of measurable and temporally determinate results in RBA. Some of the social justice practices of inclusion and belonging, such as the importance of 'not providing a service' and 'paying attention to what goes on between people' were excluded from mattering during intra-action with RBA. Perhaps not surprisingly these on-going practices of social justice were transformed into end-states, results to be achieved, on the scale of the mega and the measurable. The dilemma is well illustrated in the comment from one of the workers at Warrawong Community Centre:

> Sometimes it's 5 minutes, 5 minutes of feeling respected, of feeling valued in someone's life, sometimes it's just being really listened to, what sort of result is that?(WCC 24/4/2007:4)

Many locally-based community organisations engage in community development efforts and prevention-focused programs. The outcomes that these programs are designed to influence are often far into the future and beyond the community organisation's ability to reasonably collect data (Campbell, 2002).

However funding bodies using an RBA measurement process assume that outcomes can be achieved within reporting periods of 12 months. For example, a member organisation of the Illawarra Forum was invited to work in a local Aboriginal community. It took 6 years of effort in their work together before adequate trust and mutual commitment developed to allow the work to extend beyond the immediate service they provided to something

that was having a major impact. The first few years were funded by the organisation's own fundraising, and then they attracted some government money. Ironically one year after the project began having a significant impact, the funding ceased.

Community practitioners struggled to work out how to account for the importance of relationships in the struggles of service participants over social justice within RBA For example a community worker gave an example of taking 18 months to effectively engage an Aboriginal family struggling with severe domestic violence.

"How would I measure that?" he asked. "These measures are reportable on a yearly basis. But it took years to see the result"

Our research demonstrates that locally-based community organisations can achieve results and can be accountable to multiple stakeholders, but warns against a single, centralised standardised approach.

Enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of the not-for profit sector

As acknowledged in the Issues Paper, there are many factors that influence local community based organisation's ability to operate efficiently and effectively.

However, the most substantial influence on the community sector has been the significantly changed public policy environment in which they operate. Policy is part of a range of conditions pressing community organisations to adopt a more corporate and managerial style, reshaping the relationships between community organisations, government institutions and communities (Keevers, Treleaven, & Sykes, 2008). They have had to deal with an increasingly legalistic environment with more stringent OHS legislation, employment responsibilities, contracting and tendering of services, emphasis on development of partnership, changed funding accountabilities and the

introduction of various accreditation processes (Keevers et al., 2008; Suhood et al., 2006)). At the same time their ability to adapt to these changes has been influenced by the quantity of human and financial resources.

Almost all of the policy interventions impacting on local community service organisations are linked to and shaped by neo-liberal public policy that have created many contradictions and tensions for our organisations. Current research confirms the risks for locally-based community based organisations:

> Government-driven programmes, strongly informed by neoliberalism and competition policy, may emphasise efficiency and output rather than effectiveness and outcomes (O'Shea, Leonard, & Darcy, 2007: 50)

Organisations have been under great pressure to successfully adapt, remain viable and flourish in their service delivery, community development or policy and advocacy roles.

One of the consequences of this shift in the social policy context is that locally community based organisations are often torn between the needs of the funding agency and the needs of the community. Their ability to respond to the needs oftheir communities has been threatened by increasing accountability and legal requirements and funding policies and processes (Keevers et al., 2008) .

In this section we look at the impact of some of the key features of the policy context in which locally-based community organisations operate and the challenges and issues this environment creates both for them and for the effectiveness of the community sector in general. First we consider the impact of the regulatory environment, in particular the lead agency / partnership funding model which has significant implications for service delivery, accountability and measurement. Second we discuss service delivery issues

including short term funding, competitive tendering and volunteers. Each
section includes illustrative case study examples

Regulatory environment

Government agencies moving to 'lead agency' network models of funding- some issues.

As identified in the issues paper, it is our experience that government
agencies seem to prefer to deal with bigger and fewer agencies in an effort to
increase efficiencies in dealing with the not for profit sector. For some time
small community organisations have been asked to develop formal
partnerships with larger organisations, with each other, and with
government, through the move both at a Federal and State government level
to adopt a lead agency model of funding. This model of funding both
complicates and has implications for accountability and measurement of the
contributions of the community sector.

The lead agency model whilst aiming to create a more co-ordinated and
efficient service system results in a transfer of certain regulatory functions
from government to a large non-government agency. The monitoring of
service quality and outcomes is then the responsibility of the lead agency,
which is required to develop regulatory and accountability infrastructure (for
which they receive government funding) that already exist in government
agencies. This results in inefficiency and duplication of effort and a lack of
demonstrable gains in delegating this function. Furthermore, in our
experience in the Illawarra, the inexperience of some lead agencies in
operating as a funder can create less transparent and less effective
monitoring, regulation and contractual arrangements. It is also our experience
that there is little accountability to government or transparency about how
those partnerships are administered and/or maintained, once the funding has
been received.

The lead agency model also has implications for measurement of the effectiveness of community services effort. This model is based on a partnership arrangement that implies all partners are included in designing and setting up of contractual arrangements and measurement of the impacts of those arrangements. There is a paradox in the co-existence of partnership in policy development concurrent with individualised contractual relationships in funding for program delivery (Baulderstone, 2006b)

There is a contradiction between the conceptual framework for measurement in the Issues Paper and the lead agency model of funding. The framework appears to be designed for single line contractual arrangements and doesn't account for the current partnership models, not recognising that individual organisations can only ever make a contribution to impacts and outcomes.

Case studies

The following case studies illustrate some of the concerns about the lead agency model of funding previously outlined. In the Illawarra region two examples of this funding model are the Brighter Futures program through the NSW Department of Community Services and the Communities for Children, a federal funding program through the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). In both these programs a non-government agency operates as the budget holder and lead agency for a range of integrated services for the targeted populations.

In Brighter Futures, the tendering process required the lead agency to identify local partnerships with specialist and local community organisations as part of the selection criteria for providing a network of services. These examples from locally-based community organisations demonstrates the effects on service delivery arising from poor contractual arrangements developed by the lead agency:

Noah's Ark Centre of Shoalhaven

At the end of the first financial year of the contract, June 2008, the lead agency in the Shoalhaven cancelled the contract with a professional, successful organisation (*Noah's Ark Centre of Shoalhaven*) that provides specialised early intervention services to children with special needs including children with very difficult behaviours and children on the autism spectrum. Nowra and the Shoalhaven generally have a large proportion of children with special needs. The contract was cancelled just one month before the end of the first year of the contract, so Noah's had little time to find new funding to maintain the vital service they had built up through the contract.

Waminda

This same Lead Agency in the Shoalhaven approached a very effective Aboriginal Women's Health organisation, Waminda, to conduct an Aboriginal playgroup in partnership with the Brighter Futures contract. After a few months the Lead Agency insisted Waminda could only include children in the playgroup who were referred to them by the Brighter Futures lead agency. At this stage Waminda had 22 Aboriginal children already in a playgroup, and the Lead Agency had 2 Aboriginal families, one of whom had been referred from Waminda. Compliance with the terms of the lead agency contract would have resulted in the 22 Aboriginal children being ineligible for participation in the playgroup. Following the dispute Waminda refused to sign a partnership agreement. They continued the playgroup, and reported to the Lead Agency at the end of the year even though there was no reporting framework and no formal request for such a report including financial reporting. Waminda's playgroup continues but not funded by or in partnership with the Brighter Futures program.

Attending to service delivery issues

Short-term funding

For many years, the funding environment has been characterised by an increasing reliance on short-term project based funding with little option for long-term, recurrent funding. The resulting increased administration and accountability, makes it difficult to plan on a long-term basis, attract and retain skilled staff and meet the costs associated with the management and administration of organisations. In addition staff must spend a significant amount of time seeking funding to allow for expansion of the service or for new projects to be completed ((Suhood et al., 2006; Williams & Onyx, 2002)). Thus, the prevalence of government funding programs that are based on short-term contracts for one-off, time limited projects has a significant impact on the nature of services that can be delivered and the sustainability of any level of co-ordinated or integrated service systems.

Numerous federal and state government initiatives, that attempt to contribute to the resolution of significant social needs, rely on short term funding. These are being applied to a variety of crucial service delivery areas as child protection, community development, early intervention and prevention services targeting families with very young children.

A clear example of the impacts of short-term funding occurred in the Southern Suburbs of Wollongong in 2007. This area is identified as one of the most disadvantaged areas in NSW and is specifically identified in the NSW State Plan as an area for particular attention.

At this stage community organisations had put in place a series of co-ordinated programs for the most disadvantaged people in that area. These included:

- A community kitchen in the Warrawong community centre that operated four days per week and had become the hub of that

community. Disadvantaged community members were involved in cooking and serving meals, local agencies made links with the community through the kitchen and significant social capital was generated (discussed early in this submission).

- A community development worker at Coomaditchie United Aboriginal Corporation who assisted local community members, provided services in the broader community and promoted an artists co-operative.

- A breakfast program for disadvantaged young people at Berkeley

- A community garden on the Coomaditchie site which provided food for the community kitchen

- A broad based service for street workers providing showers, storage, health services, referrals and support

- A service for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people providing casework and support.

All of these services were due to close within a 12 month period because the funding sources under which they were initiated, such as the Community Solutions program and the Area Assistance Scheme only allowed for time limited projects and once having received one round of funding, these services were ineligible to apply in another round. Funding under the Area Assistance Scheme could be applied for in the area, but only for new initiatives, not for ones that had proven to be successful.

Extensive lobbying was undertaken and the majority of services have received some rescue package style funding to enable them to continue for another defined period.

This form of funding works against an evidence-based concept of allocating funding to proven models of delivery. It mitigates against service planning, integration of service systems and creates wastage in the time that has to be allocated to lobbying for the continuation of projects. All the projects were

recognised as valuable by the NSW government and worthy of continuation. The problem was that the funding system couldn't accommodate successful pilot projects.

An example of disproportionate accountability requirements on small amounts of short-term funding is a local Shoalhaven project:

DEWR, through a JET project, is funding a children's crèche for 11hrs a week at *Nowra Family Support Service*. The crèche is to support and encourage women to get back into the workforce, through attending courses, groups and gaining skills. It is funded on an annual basis and has been running this way for 5-6 years.

- The small number of hours means the organisation can only employ on a casual basis. This makes it difficult to comply with appropriate industrial conditions.

- There is excessive reporting for this level of funding. They have to provide an activity report every quarter as well as a half yearly and yearly utilisation report.

- The short-term nature of the funding has not allowed them to plan long-term.

- The annual nature of the funding requiring annual submission writing, and the excessive accountability means that the work to maintain the funding almost outweighs its benefits, and certainly is run at a loss by the organisation.

Time limited contracts and the uncertainty of renewal creates major workforce issues. Experienced staff are lost at the time contracts are due to expire leaving the organisation with the need to recruit at short notice and begin the orientation, induction and training cycle again. For example *Barnardos South Coast* was told so late about its federally funded Communities for Children funding this month, that one of its service delivery partners had

already lost a valuable and highly qualified staff person who was anxious that she would be out of work if she stayed.

It is very common, in all government departments, for renewal of funding advice to be given just as the contract is about to end, or even after the contract has expired.

Competitive tendering and funding levels

The move to bring community services into a market model with mandated competition has transformed relationships between government and community sector organisations (Baulderstone, 2006a; Keevers et al., 2008). It has significantly altered the level of control that community organisations can exert on the development of local programs designed for specific local characteristics. Increasingly, instead of funding community organisations through submissions based on locally –determined needs, specific services and programs are purchased and delivered according to pre-determined contracts and funding agreements (ACOSS, 1999; Baulderstone, 2006a; Everingham, 2001).

This model of tendering specified services has reduced community organisations' levels of autonomy and independence. Organisations increasingly become an outsourced arm of government. In this relationship, governments are setting the funding amounts, specifying the services, the outputs to be delivered, the outcomes to be attained and selecting the organisation(s) to fulfil the contract. The community organisation then is responsible for achieving the service results and quality but has no control over the determination of those results or the funding available to attain the results (Andrew, 2006: 319). As there is generally only one purchaser in the community services market (the government agency) it is not possible for the community organisation to refuse inadequate funding (Keevers et al., 2008). Again, responsibility falls to the community organisation to resolve inadequate funding levels internally. According to Galbally(2004), contracting of services and competitive tendering have encouraged atomised

and individualised services, emphasised through-puts and hindered a sense of belonging and control for community members accessing community organisations.

Further, once put out to tender, the process for community organisations has become unnecessarily onerous. The requirement to provide in every tender evidence on organisational capacity, funding viability, governance and management and financial systems is repetitive and unnecessary. In NSW, services funded by the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care through an Integrated Monitoring Framework process undergo a thorough on-site audit into their management, financial and other governance systems. Even though this evidence has been collected on by the Department, the tender documents still require it to be repeated in length on every tender submitted. To add to the complexity, different government departments ask different questions against these criteria, this results in organisations being unable to create a template to be submitted for every tender, but must reword the evidence to answer the variety of questions asked each time.

Contracts and competitive tendering introduce uniform accountability for small and large organisations alike. These accountabilities often work against the capacity of locally-based community organisations to remain responsive and flexible to community needs, as they are forced to allocate a disproportionate amount of their organisational resources to management functions.

Issues relating to volunteers
The majority of locally-based community organisations rely on volunteers to enable them to provide a diversity of programs and services and to manage their organisations. Volunteering can be for many people a way of being included, feeling like you belong and putting back to the community you live in.

A lack of resources restricts the number of volunteers and provides impediments to the kind of work volunteers can do. You have to train volunteers. There is an advantage for volunteers that they do get trained in first aid and other training alongside workers; but only if the organisation can afford it.

Legislation in NSW forbids the provision of free police checks for volunteers, as is required of staff that work with children and minors. It would appear that the situation is being legislated to change from next year, but it has been in existence for many years. There are severe limitations on volunteers who haven't had a police check.

- *Nowra Family Support Service* cannot use volunteers to work with families. Hence they have only two volunteers from professional backgrounds that work in administration and another that mows the lawn.

- *Aunties and Uncles Illawarra* provides 'aunties' and 'uncles' who voluntarily foster children from 'at risk' families for one weekend a month and sometimes for several days in school holidays. This volunteer fostering provides respite for the mother and an alternative model of living for the child. The children have been referred by DoCS or Community Organisations but under NSW legislation, Aunties and Uncles Illawarra is not allowed to provide free police checks on the adults who are taking the children into their homes. Aunties and Uncles Illawarra has taken the issue up with DoCS and the Commission for Children and Young People but have been told it is against the legislation to have volunteers checked. Organisations consequently have become reluctant to refer families to the program.

Governments generally like community organisations to use volunteers without recognising and resourcing the level of work and responsibility involved.

The Volunteer Home Visiting program run by Families NSW is totally unrealistic in its allocation of funding to recruit, train, match and monitor volunteers. "It would be really easy to run this program badly" reported one of our member organisation, because of the unrealistic assumptions and specifications.

Volunteering can provide important benefits for the volunteers themselves as well as in the service they provide to the community.

- A very good example of this is the *Community Centre at Bellambi*, a housing estate in northern Wollongong where residents are elderly people and people with high needs. On minimal funding, but with committed staff, management committee, and over 100 volunteers, the centre is a vibrant place where people of the community experience welcome, trust, comfort, connection, confidentiality, empowerment and pleasure. Volunteers, under the guidance of the Centre Coordinator, run the information and referral program, some of the administration, the daily breakfast program for children and lunch for all who want to come.

While these are really vital services the volunteer program is also an avenue for people who are feeling isolated, depressed, and needing social connection. The work gives them a social outlet, meaningful work, living and employability skills, and confidence. Often they are able to move on to employment or other fulfilling activities. For those people, as Vinson points out in his research into disadvantage in NSW and Victoria" strengthening the social bonds between residents can be an important first step in minimising the harmful effects of disadvantageous social and economic conditions" (Vinson, 2007: 98). Volunteering does that and more.

Recommendations

We propose the following recommendations to the inquiry:

Valuing contributions of locally-based community organisations

1. A major contribution of locally-based community organisation is their daily work in practicing social justice in a world of inequality. They play an important and distinct role in encouraging belonging and inclusion, conveying respect and recognition, enabling representation, advocacy, participation and voice, and contributing towards remedies for distributive injustices. These contributions must be recognised in any accountability and performance reporting systems that endeavour to measure their impact. The proposed framework omits any mention of equality and social justice.

2. By focusing attention on the relations between people and by working in ways that enable reciprocity and respect across the boundaries of inequality, difference and dependency, locally-based community organisations play an essential role in strengthening communities. The proposed framework must endeavour to design a system of measurement that captures the qualitative, relational, ethical and dynamic nature of the not-for-profit sector, and in particular locally-based community organisations within it.

3. Very little research has been conducted into the contributions and practices of locally-based community organisations, even though they constitute the vast majority of organisations in the not-for-profit sector in Australia. Further research is required to better understand the different ways of practising, organising and managing that is distinctive and characteristic of these organisations. Further research can help to examine the links between these practices and the contributions they make to improving the health and well being of individuals and communities.

Measuring the contributions of community organisations

4. Recognition by governments of the distinctive practices of locally-based organisations is an important first step. Any framework that attempts to

measure their contribution and evaluate their performance must do so on their terms. Governments should accept a range of methods for evaluating contribution rather than endorsing one standardised, centrally mandated performance measure evaluation model.

5. Service participants from locally-based community organisations can provide critical information to policy-makers about the practices necessary for ensuring people can participate actively both in the conditions of their own care and in the health and well being of their communities. They therefore should play a role in developing indicators and measures and in evaluating the contributions of the not-for-profit sector.

6. Access to rigorous and credible statistical data, particularly at the local level relevant to struggles over hardship, humiliation, inequality, belonging, representation and redistribution is lacking. We recommend increased funding and staffing of institutions such as the Australian Bureau of Statistics that produce reliable statistics and for locally-based community organisations to produce statistical representations of their contributions.

7. Indicators and quantitative data currently relied on in accountability processes hamper the inclusion of the local experience and knowledge of both workers and service participants, and fail to capture the real impacts and results to which organisations contribute. Our research suggests that qualitative and interpretive data is more likely to render visible aspects of the contributions of locally-based organisations to our communities that quantitative data is unable to count.

Enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of the not-for-profit sector

8. Small locally-based community organisations, which constitute a significant proportion of the not-for-profit sector, require different accountability mechanisms (administrative and grant processes) than

large organisations whose greater economies of scale, better position them to survive the current environment. Reducing red tape for small, local organisations is imperative.

9. Currently both state and federal governments decide funding priorities and use prescriptive sub-contracting arrangements that tend to encourage a 'one-size fits all' approach. It would be preferable if governments set broad results for their programs, and local people and community organisations decide which strategies and interventions would achieve these results in their communities.

10. The current lead agency model relies on robust and ethical partnership arrangements between large regional/ state based or national agencies and smaller local organisations to deliver services to diverse communities. Experience to date has demonstrated that these partnership arrangements require mutual accountability, better monitoring, more transparency and processes for evaluating their effectiveness.

Attending to service delivery issues

11. The prevalence of government funding programs that are based on short-term contracts for one-off, time limited projects impedes the development of sustainable, co-ordinated and integrated services in communities across Australia. Where proven models of intervention are working, there must be opportunities to access recurrent monies, and associated evaluation and performance measurement systems.

12. The contracting of services and competitive tendering model has encouraged atomised and individualised services, and puts at risk the capacity of locally-based community organisations to encourage a sense of belonging and control for community members participating in and accessing their organisations. It reduces their autonomy and independence. A better model of supporting the work of these

organisations, based on identification of local need, negotiation of funding levels and performance targets and measures is required.

13. The lack of recognition of the contributions of locally-based organisations is reflected in the low wages, conditions and security of employment for those that work in these organisations. The complex skills and knowledges demonstrated by workers within these organisations is rarely acknowledged. There is an urgent need to review the wages and impediments that current funding arrangements pose to retaining staff and therefore expertise within the not-for-profit sector.

14. There is a lack of resources for workforce development and restricted career paths for those working in locally-based community organisations that also need to be addressed.

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Appendix: List of data that was unavailable in Illawarra

Rate of low birth-weight babies
Rate of hospital admissions for preventable health issues (including mental health)
Rates of hospital reported unintentional injury
Waiting list for Public Dental service
Waiting list for public surgery
% of GPs in relation to population who bulk bill
Rate of risk alcohol drinking
Rate of self rated good health
Rate of overweight and obesity
Rate of smoking
Rate of diabetes or high blood sugar
Rate of high and v. high psychological distress

Public housing waiting list
Numbers of people who are homeless

Maternal education levels
Literacy and numeracy benchmarks
Participation rates in early childhood/ pre-school activities
Rate of school attendance – multi year comparison
Rate of retention to Year 10 and Year 12
Rate of suspensions and expulsions
Education involvement of students from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds, from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
Education involvement of the Out-of-Home Care (OOHC) Program, kids with disabilities
Rates of post school education compared to state ie vocational, university, apprenticeships, traineeships.

People feeling safe
Older people feel safe using public transport at night
Rate of minority groups accessing services
Rate of civic participation (eg P&Cs, community committees, visiting politicians, signed petitions etc)
Rate of social participation – groups, meet friends
Rate of volunteering (not Work for Dole)
Attended a community event in the last 6 months; people can be trusted; visits neighbours