

# **Facilitating Leadership: A Community Capacity Building Approach to Health Promotion**

Vogt M<sup>1\*</sup> & Binns T<sup>2\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Launceston City Council Launceston, Tasmania, Australia

<sup>2</sup> Aged, Rural and Community Health – Department of Health and Human Services,  
Launceston, Tasmania, Australia

## **Abstract**

The paper focuses on community capacity building initiatives developed in partnership between various stakeholders (community members, all tiers of government, service providers, etc.). With reference to relevant theory and practical case studies, attention will be paid to facilitating community leadership in a way that genuinely engages community members as citizens. Focus areas will include: participatory health promotion practice; shared vision building and its role in facilitating effective program/service delivery; the development of sustainable community-based partnerships; and the development and use of innovative community engagement methods/resources.

The paper specifically refers to 'Tasmania Together' (2001) as a means of building authentic partnerships between stakeholders (community members, all tiers of government, service providers, etc.). It concludes on a note arguing that this model is one that effectively places health, wellbeing and quality of life on the policy-making agenda in all sectors and at all levels of government (DHHS 2002, p. 7).

## **Introduction**

Community capacity building is widely acknowledged as an important community development strategy. Its strength lies in its ability to empower community members as citizens to self-manage their lives and environment through facilitating leadership and engagement in the building and enactment of shared community vision.

Contextualised within the framework of community development, the following paragraphs will explore these concepts, particularly as they relate to the practice of health promotion. In direct relation to this practice, it will be argued that community capacity building can indeed be described as health promotion's invisible handmaiden, increasing the achievement and sustainability of its intended outcomes (DHHS 2002, p. 10). It will also be argued that the building of healthy partnerships, whose efforts work towards improving quality of life, also create healthy and sustainable communities.

Using the Tasmania Together (2001) community vision-building approach as a case in point, the ability of intergovernmental and community-based partnerships to authentically engage citizenry in the building and enacting of community vision will be discussed. Further to this,

the Tasmanian State and Local Government Partnership Agreement will provide an example of the success of Tasmania Together to strengthen the community capacity building process.

In the end it will be concluded that the Tasmania Together model effectively places health, wellbeing and quality of life on the policy-making agenda in all sectors and at all levels of government (DHHS 2002, p. 7).

### **Shared vision building: A community development approach**

Community development, in theory and in practice, is underpinned by principles promoting community vision building and collaborative action. In saying so, it supports the belief that when empowered to do so, all people possess valuable skills, strengths, assets and knowledge that can be contributed towards mobilising community vision into action (Binns and Vogt 2002, p. 4).

Notably, community development is something that cannot be imposed on communities (Ife 2002, p. 148). Rather, it is something that is created from within a community, by and for the members it represents. For this to be possible, however, it is necessary that societal structures are such that they enable community members to collectively and responsibly take control of the *organisation* of their lives (Kenny 1999, p. 25). Necessary also are structures and strategies that build community capacity in a way that enhances existing strengths, draws on existing knowledge and fosters community resilience.

Building shared vision and promoting collaborative action are key to the process of community capacity building, particularly regarding the facilitation of community leadership. These concepts offer a potential pathway for their working with stakeholders (community members, all tiers of government, service providers, etc.) to collectively envision their future in a way that meets both common and divergent needs.

The collaborative nature of shared vision building is one that necessitates open and explorative dialogue. Indeed, such dialogue is required, if common understandings between people are to be facilitated. Given this, processes that build respect, trust and empowerment are key to its success.

Shared vision building also provides a valuable means for mutual learnings to occur between stakeholders (Coleman 2001, p. 12). Whilst such learnings are valuable for a number of reasons, they are particularly important with regards to converting vision into action. Specifically, the process of learning together enables stakeholders to gain valuable knowledge of each other's strengths and assets in a way that provides a clear pathway for action planning.

Important to an understanding of shared vision building, however, is the notion that vision, is not in itself, a solution to community problems or a means for change (Senge 2001, p. 214).

Rather, it is the *process* whereby vision is authentically built and shared (Senge 2001, p. 214) that provides a foundation for problem-solving and/or change to occur.

In saying so, shared vision building provides an important tool for gaining greater consensus amongst various stakeholders (Ames 1996, p. 9). Such consensus is achieved by fostering open and authentic dialogue between participants in a way that builds connections amongst them. Notable also is that connections of this kind form an important first step in establishing the type of trust and *organisation* required for effective community building to occur.

Drawing on the Tasmania Together process, the following paragraphs will provide an example of shared vision building in practice.

### **Tasmania Together**

Tasmania Together (2001) is a long-term and ambitious community-driven vision for Tasmania. Essentially, it represents "...a twenty-year social, environmental and economic plan..." (Community Leaders Group 2001, p. 3) that belongs to the Tasmanian community as a whole. Compiled in accordance with the shared wishes of people from every part of the state, the document contains one vision, 24 goals and 212 benchmarks (Community Leaders Group 2001, pp. 3-7). Founded on the work of a 2.5-year intensive community consultation, the Tasmania Together process offers insight into the effectiveness of community development practices in empowering communities to be the driving force behind change.

The process began by identifying a group of community leaders within Tasmania. Democratically appointed, the role of these leaders was one of administering and facilitating the process. In effect, this group operated as the interface between the government and the community in building and articulating a shared vision for Tasmania. In all, the consultative process was intensive, and has been applauded as being one of a kind. It has also been applauded as a process that continues to empower community members from all walks of life to genuinely participate in its visioning process. A variety of participatory opportunities were made available. These included: a state-wide search conference; public meetings; consultation with community organisations; written submissions; comment sheets; website messaging; and community postcards. The success of Tasmania Together to authentically engage the community can be seen in the numbers of those participating. As an example, over 60 public meetings were held, over 100 community organisations consulted and 160 detailed submissions were received from businesses, peak bodies and individuals (Community Leaders Group 2001, p. 4). Also received were over 4000 comment sheets, 2500 postcards, and over 6200 messages from website visitors (Community Leaders Group 2001, p. 4). "Not one word was wasted. Every submission was entered into a database...[and collated]...into areas of common interest — themes that people felt most strongly about" (Community Leaders Group 2001, p. 4). Given Tasmania's small population, these rates of community engagement are significant.

Table 1 outlines the overarching vision and 24 goals articulated by the Tasmanian community.

**Table 1. Tasmania Together goals**

<b><i>The Vision</i></b> <b><i>Together we will make Tasmania an icon for the rest of the world by creating a proud and confident society where our people live in harmony and prosperity</i></b>
<b>Our community</b>
1. Ensure all Tasmanians have a reasonable standard of living with regard to food, shelter, transport, justice, education, communication, health and community services.
2. To have a community where people feel safe and are safe in all aspects of their lives.
3. Recognise and value the many contributions that volunteers and unpaid workers can — and do — make to their community.
4. Create a culture that encourages people to learn and develop new skills, including life skills, throughout their lives.
5. Develop an approach to health and wellbeing that focuses on preventing poor health and encouraging healthy lifestyles.
6. Develop an approach to the health and wellbeing of the Tasmanian community through the delivery of coordinated services.
7. Foster and value vibrant and diverse rural, regional and remote communities that are connected to each other and the rest of the world.
8. Provide a valued role in community life for Tasmania's young people now and in the future.
9. Foster an inclusive society that acknowledges and respects our multicultural heritage, values diversity and treats everyone with compassion and respect.
<b>Our culture</b>
10. Acknowledge and respect the contribution that the Aboriginal community and its culture have made and continue to make to Tasmania and its identity.
11. Have Tasmania recognised nationally and internationally for its innovation, pursuit of excellence and creativity in arts and culture.
<b>Our democracy</b>
12. Provide all Tasmanians with the opportunity to participate in decisions that affect their lives.
13. Have a system of government that is open, seeks and listens to people's views and ideas, and uses them in decision making at all levels.
14. Ensure there is greater cooperation at all levels of government and among political parties to improve the lives of Tasmanians.
15. Have a system of government that is accountable to the people and plans for the future at all levels.
<b>Our economy</b>
16. Increase job and meaningful work opportunities in Tasmania.
17. Maximise the opportunities available through information and other technologies.
18. Ensure education and training provides our workforce with the skills to support our business and industry.
19. Have an internationally focused business culture that creates business investment and growth and encourages enterprise, innovation and excellence.
20. Promote our island advantages including our 'clean green' image, natural resources, location and people.
<b>Our environment</b>
21. Value, protect and conserve our natural and cultural heritage.
22. Value, protect and maintain our natural diversity.
23. Ensure there is a balance between environmental protection and economic and social development.
24. Ensure our natural resources are managed in a sustainable way now and for future generations.

Source: Community Leaders Group (2001)

Tasmania Together is significant in terms of its whole-of-state visioning process. Furthermore, it provides a sound example of how the actions of government bodies (local and state) can be effectively aligned to community vision in a way that encourages their accountability to it. An example of this can be seen in the efforts of the Tasmanian Department of Health and Human Services in its priority to assist in keeping the community healthy, through the development of its Corporate Plan 2003–06. Specifically, this plan draws upon the Tasmania Together commitments and benchmarks (DHHS 2002, p. 1) and in doing so aligns itself to the articulated shared vision of its broader community.

Of additional note, is Tasmania Together's deliberate focus on realising articulated goals. Indeed, to this day, the process has succeeded in securing the support (both in principal and in action) of both government (local and state) and the community. Significant is that this has been achieved in a way that has seen Tasmanians from all walks of life working together towards a common vision and purpose.

Evidence of its progress can also be seen in Tasmania's Partnership Agreement process: a process that, state-wide, continues to progress the vision, goals and benchmarks articulated in Tasmania Together. Essentially, the partnership agreements provide a mechanism for state and local governments in Tasmania (and their respective stakeholders) to work collaboratively for the benefit of the Tasmanian community (DPAC 2005, p. 2). In short, they signify the government's broader agenda to explore and implement genuine initiatives that work to enhance Tasmania's social and economic development (DPAC 2005, p. 2). Its links to Tasmania Together, in effect, represents the government's commitment to aligning itself to the vision and goals articulated by its broader electorate in a way that encourages governmental accountability to it. An example of this is, the success of Tasmania Together to secure the support of Labor, Liberal and the Greens in a way that sees "...government agencies having their policies and budgets linked to its benchmarks" (Community Leaders Group 2001, p. 3).

In addition, Tasmania Together has been successful in achieving a wide range of community-based results, demonstrating its ability to engage with people in a way that facilitates participation and leadership. An example of this can be seen in the achievement by Tasmanian local governments through the Partnership Agreement process to work positively and cooperatively with young people, enhancing their leadership skills and promoting their sense of community belonging. Indeed, the percentage of local governments who have established youth advisory groups has increased from 30 per cent in 2001 to 83 per cent in 2004 (Community Leaders Group 2001, p. 64; Tasmania Together Progress Board 2004, p. 6).

That Tasmania Together has succeeded in achieving community-based results, thus far, provides further evidence of its accomplishments. Moreover, it provides a sound demonstration that "...answers can emerge only from the collaboration of people with different

interests, knowledge, and points of view who are willing to 'craft' and answer together" (Kelleher et al. 1996, p. 25). In this way, Tasmania Together has accomplished the task of "...making every citizen an acting member of the government, and in the office nearest and most interesting to ...[them, attaching them by their]...strongest feelings to...[their]...country, and its...constitution" (cited in Putnam 2000, p. 336).

Undeniably, collaborative processes of this kind are valuable not only in terms of their outcomes, but also in terms of their capacity to increase the breadth, depth and inclusiveness of shared community dialogue. Indeed, they represent an effective mechanism for building and sustaining community capacity. Linked to this notion, Kenny (1999) argues that by empowering communities in a way that increases their capacity to self-manage, community development based strategies of this kind have the potential to enhance democratic participation (Kenny 1999, p. 152). In relation to this, it may be argued that, in addition to increasing the various capacities of communities, the meaningful inclusion of community members in facilitating the process of change and development, increases the likelihood of successful and sustainable outcomes. Indeed, a strong argument can be stated to claim that "...unless citizens...[are]...actually engaged in the large political decisions of their lives, the results...[will]...inevitably be flawed" (Beresford 2000, p. 149).

In conclusion here, shared vision building, through its capacity building process increases not only the knowledge, power, confidence and skills of community members, but their belief (as individuals and as a collective) that it is possible to manage community change in a way that is self-determining, rather than simply be changed (Kenny 1999, p. 155). In light of this, the following paragraphs provide an exploration of community capacity building in the context of health promotion practice.

### **Building community capacity in health promotion**

In the beginning of this paper it was claimed that community capacity building can be described as health promotion's invisible handmaiden, increasing the achievement and sustainability of its intended outcomes (DHHS 2002, p. 10). Indeed, Crisp and Swerissen (2000) argue that, in relation to a range of health promotion strategies, community capacity building is a term expressing its overall aim to proactively address community health issues in a way that can be sustained (Crisp and Swerissen 2000, p. 33). In support, Arole et al. (2004) asserts that a key benefit of community capacity building in health promotion is its role in facilitating social capital and social cohesion, all of which contribute towards people and communities managing their own concerns and issues (Arole et al. 2004, p. 130). They go on to argue that, "The role of the community in promoting good health is vital. Communities become healthy when people foster the talents and leadership of the community...[and]...work together to build on community potential" (Arole et al. 2004, p. 130). This claim supports the argument that the building of healthy partnerships, whose efforts work towards improving quality of life, also create healthy and sustainable communities.

In relation to Tasmania Together it may be argued that the process has provided valuable support to health promotion practice in the state. Specifically, the goals and benchmarks articulated in the document provide a solid backbone upon which effective health promotion strategies can be developed, implemented and held to account. As an example the health promotion practitioners in the state demonstrate in their practice a strong commitment to working with the Tasmanian community in achieving their shared vision and in doing so align their strategies to its framework. Indeed, funding from a variety of sources is made accessible to health promotion workers whose practice encourages healthy lifestyles using a community capacity building approach. This commitment to assisting the community to achieve their vision and goals illustrates the role of health promotion practitioners to ensure health promotion is 'everybody's business'. In doing so, it helps to build and sustain a healthy Tasmanian community. Moreover, it also illustrates the success of the Tasmania Together process to help this happen.

### **Conclusion**

At the beginning of this paper it was posited that the strength of community capacity building lies in its ability to empower community members as citizens to self-manage their lives and environment through facilitating leadership and engagement in the building and enactment of shared community vision. A discussion of the Tasmania Together vision building process demonstrated that indeed this is the case.

Following from this, a discussion of capacity building in the context of health promotion further demonstrated that the Tasmania Together process continues to provide guidance and support to its overall aims. In doing so, the effectiveness of community capacity building to make health promotion 'everybody's business' was also highlighted. Given these discussions, it was effectively illustrated that the Tasmania Together model is one that effectively helps to place health, wellbeing and quality of life on not only the policy-making agenda but also at the forefront of the collective community.

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