Working From The Ground Up:
Participatory Approaches To Community Regeneration In
Social Housing Neighbourhoods

Findings From The Research
Seminar 15th March 2013
WFGU: An Introduction

- WFGU is a partnership between The University of Sydney, The University of New South Wales, TAFE, NSW Health and Housing NSW.

- Aim to identify and trial ways of working with communities that can bring about sustainable changes to health and well-being in social housing neighbourhoods using an action research approach.

- Three phases of the research.

- Distinctive features:
  - Action research approach to initiation, implementation and evaluation of case study interventions.
  - Bottom up approach of working with residents.
  - Joint projects with Industry partners – Housing, Health, TAFE.
  - Located in a highly disadvantaged social housing neighbourhoods in Randwick LGA.
Building Strong Communities and Place Based Strategies

Tony Vinson
1. Present Impediments

Difficulty of conceptualising on a sociological plane

Improving the way a community, as an overall social entity, operates

Well-being over and beyond the benefits wrought by effective services to individuals and households

Some examples: the influence of community level factors on health and law-abiding conduct
2. Intangibles – Like Connectedness, Trust and Collective Self-regulation

Mental health of children - Xue and colleagues’ study; informal social control and social cohesion

High collective efficacy – (informal social control + social connectedness) an important community-level process

Education and health – impact of low collective efficacy
3. Sampson Et Al.

In sum, it is the linkage of mutual trust and the willingness to intervene for the common good that defines the neighbourhood context of collective efficacy

A professional diagnostic/ planning component:

The ultimate purpose of what otherwise can appear to be a large number of segmented activities
4. New South Wales - Disadvantage
5. Victoria Disadvantage
6. The Well-functioning Community

A tool – the community as a system in its own right

• External pattern
  Substance and style of decision making
  Resource generation and allocation

• Internal pattern
  Integration of people, groups and community organisations, and
  Maintaining direction, energy and motivation.
7. Maintaining Direction, Energy And Motivation

POSITIVE INDICATORS

• The community accepts differences in lifestyle and beliefs,
• Tensions and conflicts are not allowed to get out of hand in the community,
• Conflict between organisations is managed productively in the community,
• Differences of opinion are not allowed to cause projects to ‘go off the rails’,
• There is shared responsibility for the sound development of children and young people,
• Wherever practicable, efforts are made to restore those who have transgressed to a productive and satisfying place in the community,
• The community brings people together in ways that set aside their differences,
• The community upholds the rights of people by encouraging social justice and equity, and
• The community periodically re-energises its purposes and aspirations by reviewing what it is striving to achieve.
Community Development, Community Renewal and Community Regeneration Approaches: Concepts and theories

Eileen Baldry
Understanding Spatial Disadvantage

Identification of areas of concentrated disadvantage and multi-dimensional factors (Vinson, 2007)

Since 2000 focus of social and urban policy literature on socio-spatial disadvantage has changed from low income families to social exclusion (Pawson et al, 2012)
Understanding Disadvantage And Exclusion

Exclusion and poverty
Social disadvantage can only be understood using multi-dimensional indicators

Three dimensions of exclusion in Australia (Saunders, 2011)
- Disengagement – withdrawal or non-participation in key activities
- Exclusion from basic services
- Economic exclusion

Groups most vulnerable to deep exclusion in Australia are: the unemployed, people living in public housing, lone parents, Aboriginal people, private renters and people with a disability and carers
Understanding Disadvantage And Exclusion

- **What drives social exclusion?**
  - Vinson (2010) - five forces which drive process of social exclusion:
    - poverty and low income
    - lack of access to job market
    - limited social supports and networks
    - the effect of the neighbourhood
    - exclusion from services

- **Different types of exclusion**
  - Housing researchers (Hulse 2011) distinguish exclusion in terms of:
    - Deep social exclusion - small number of people disadvantaged due multiple factors
    - Wide social exclusion – large number excluded due to one or two dimensions
    - Concentrated exclusion – clustering of people with multiple disadvantages (place based)
Housing - Led Regeneration Approaches

Pawson et al (2012) identifies 5 policy responses in Australia:

1990s housing led regeneration (Randolph and Judd: 2000)
- asset improvement
- housing stock demolition
- management strategies – transfer to community sector
- whole of government approaches
- community development

Deconcentrating poverty
- NSW estate renewal and planned reduction of on-site public housing

Community participation
- Community is engaged in redevelopment of mixed tenure (Coates et al: 2008)
- Tenant participation in renewal is critical to sustainability (Wood, 2002)

Mixed tenure redevelopment

Transfer of public housing to community housing
Family Policy Approaches And Disadvantage

Area based interventions are based on principles of:

- place management
- service coordination
- community involvement (Cortis, 2008)

Children in disadvantaged communities - poor access to services, low levels of community cohesion, high levels of crime and poverty, few family supports (Edwards et al, 2009)

The hard to reach? People who do not use services or participate:

Hard-to-reach households have:

- No father present
- Mother not working and father not working
- Low household income
- Maternal education to Year 10
- A parent born overseas
- Aboriginal child

Problematic focus on perspective of service providers (Edwards et al, 2009).
What Works In Addressing Locational Disadvantage?

Successful place-based approaches and social housing

Focus on people, inequality and place
Macro and micro interventions
Target specific demographic groups in areas
Community empowerment is effective and not tokenistic
Partnerships amongst public, private and community sector
Long term and well resourced – not short term fixes (Pawson et al, 2012; Ware et al, 2010)
What Works In Addressing Locational Disadvantage?

Area based initiatives for families

Community programs result in **modest improvements** in:

- parental involvement in community activities
- joblessness
- social cohesion

‘Community embeddedness’ may have effect on children and families which is not achieved through just providing additional services (Edwards et al, 2009)

**Improved partnerships**

- dedicated funding crucial to building partnerships as is labour intensive
- partnerships need to be supported at service delivery, management and policy levels
- partnerships take time and partnerships benefit from pre-existing local initiatives and networks  (Purcal et al, 2011)
What Works In Addressing Locational Disadvantage?

Increasing social cohesion and reducing disadvantage

- Community development activities (gardens, art, children’s activities) can:
  - Reduce social isolation by creating friendships
  - Create cultural connections
  - Improve public spaces
  - Improve health and wellbeing
  - Reduce crime
  - Create positive senses of energy (Bartolomei, et al, 2003; Coggan et al, 2008, Lane and Henry, 2001)

- Can also reveal tensions

- A community development approach involving number of agencies can reduce disadvantage but ‘need to stay the distance’ over 7-8 years (Vinson, 2007)
The Conceptual Framework of WFGU

Community Capacity Building

- A place-based approach
- A system-based approach
- A cross-sectoral approach
- A strengths approach
- From the ground up
- A sustainable approach
Community Development Initiatives

- *Our Mob Yarning Up*: Aboriginal Tenant Participation Project
- *Get Connected*: Mental Health Project
- *Our Place projects*
- *Connecting with Each Other*
- *In Place* community work
Key Learnings from Case Studies

Alison Wannan
Two Practice And Policy Case Studies

Modest community projects
• issue focused – improving wellbeing and social inclusion
• employed people living in social housing
• linked to everyday life and experiences of disadvantage
• two groups of ‘high need’ tenants - most often ‘invisible’

What we learnt about:
• participatory approaches
• partnership strategies
• the impact of action evaluation on enhancing social inclusion
Policy Context: Mental Health, Housing & Community

Supported housing and high needs

- Increasing significance of social housing for people with disabilities in general and people with mental health issues due to:
  - focus on high needs
  - emphasis on community care
  - reduction in total supply of social housing

Community renewal and regeneration

- Little focus on people living with mental health issues or more broadly people with a disability
Research Context: Mental Health, Housing & Community

- Sustainable supported housing tenancies- what works (Bleasdale, 2007; Muir et al, 2008; Muir et al, 2010; O’Brien et al 2002)
- Social inclusion benefits of housing can help people with disabilities find their voice’ and people with psychiatric disability experience discrimination (Tually et al, 2011).
- Interagency coordination and people’s interaction with agencies has a major impact on daily lives (Beer and Faulkner, 2008; Phillips et al, 2009; Tually et al, 2011).
- People with mental illness are excluded by other tenants and does not belong where the tenant ‘does not care’ or is ‘careless’ (Mee 2009)
- Concentrating people with psychiatric disabilities in large housing estates has negative outcomes (Tually et al, 2011).
- Limited participation of people with psychiatric disability in policy (Battams and Johnson, 2009)
Research Approach

- Established a project group – *service providers as partners*

- Changed direction – *consumers as partners* – employing consumers living in public housing as community advocates

- **Innovation and initiatives** – developed projects to increase social inclusion by improving (1) access to learning (2) opportunities to influence decisions
  - Community based computer course for people with mental health issues
  - *Voices Speak - Lives Change*: Movie about the everyday life of 34 people and change

- **Action evaluation** involving residents and service providers
  - To date - 27 face to face interviews and focus groups with people with mental health issues (no. 18) and service providers (no. 8)
Get Connected
People living with mental health issues in social housing

Voices Speak - Lives Change: Living In Social Housing

Phase 1: Consumers as partners:
Mental health advocates:
- Talk with people about everyday life and what would make their lives easier
- 2 people with lived experience of a mental health problem and living in social housing employed 4 hours a week for 10 weeks

Phase 2: Engaging with residents & services
Mental health advocates:
- talked at agency staff meetings
- Mental Health Month events and BBQs
- contacts with 39 people – 12 interested but proposal to work in a group did not eventuate
Voices Speak- Lives Change: Living In Social Housing

Phase 3: Not a $2 PowerPoint

Over 6 months people wrote and selected images about:
  - Likes and dislikes about their lives
  - Changes they would like to see

Thematic analysis of 234 statements made by 35 people, 32 people lived in social housing

Film by dLUX Media Arts

Movie launched in 2012 Mental Health Month at the Randwick Ritz attended by over 150 people

Action evaluation with residents and providers
Our Mob Yarning Up
Aboriginal Tenant Participation

Policy Context: Aboriginal People And Social Housing

- Social housing is important for Aboriginal people (Milligan et al 2011). Most Aboriginal people in NSW social housing live in mainstream public housing
- Commitment to Improving Service Delivery to Aboriginal People
  ‘One of the best ways ... to continue improving access and sustainable housing outcomes for Aboriginal people is by building trusting relationships between mainstream service providers and the Aboriginal community sector. Community engagement helps us to develop sensitive place based housing solutions and to work constructively together’(Housing NSW 2010: 5)
- In two neighbourhoods 10% of total population are Aboriginal people - 50% under 19 years and 33% of all 0-4 year olds are Aboriginal (ABS 2006)
- Tenant participation structures in Eastern Sydney are not inclusive of Aboriginal people
Our Mob Yarning Up
Aboriginal Tenant Participation

Research Context: Aboriginal Participation

- Increase Indigenous participation (in renewal) through engaging high profile Aboriginal people, working through Indigenous controlled organisations and MOUs with Indigenous participants and organisations (Walker et al, 2007)
- Poor outcomes from imposed non-Indigenous programs where Aboriginal people are seen as recipients not participants (Green and Baldry, 2008)
- Community development activities (e.g. healing day) can increase people’s wellbeing and capacity. Strong links with support agencies are key to sustaining Indigenous tenancies due to social, health and economic needs (Flatau, 2009)
- Indigenous tenants and wider community were frustrated by ‘absence, inappropriateness and tokenism of opportunities for participation in service delivery and policy processes’ (Milligan et al, 2011: 92)
- Public housing staff reported challenges of effectively engaging with tenants. Barriers in delivery of mainstream social housing to working with Aboriginal tenants (Milligan, 2011)
Research Approach: Aboriginal Tenant Participation

- Aboriginal people **active participants**
  - respected local Aboriginal woman employed PT
  - Collaborative approach – Project Steering Committee – Aboriginal people and non Aboriginal people – academics and government

- Aboriginal innovation – participation through community engagement
  1. building connections and trust with Aboriginal tenants →
  2. models to increase communication between Aboriginal tenants and Housing NSW

- Action evaluation - Aboriginal residents, Aboriginal and non Aboriginal workers
  - To date - 14 face to face interviews and focus groups with Aboriginal residents (no. 9), Aboriginal workers (no. 3) and non Aboriginal service providers (no. 3)
Our Mob Yarning Up
Aboriginal Tenant Participation

Community Engagement - Building Trust & Connections

- Working with non Aboriginal services operating in the neighbourhood
- Establishing Aboriginal centre based activities
- Celebrating Aboriginal events
- Running one off activities for Aboriginal families
- Developing cultural projects after talking with Elders
- Holding outreach morning teas in homes of Aboriginal women
- Supporting the community to participate in general community events
- Collaborative work with Aboriginal workers in Health and Education
Our Mob Yarning Up
Aboriginal Tenant Participation

New Ways – Aboriginal Tenants And Housing NSW

- A formal plan – Namatjira Aboriginal CAP Plan *We Live Here -We Know*
- Informal discussions between Aboriginal tenants and housing providers
- Sending messages on boomerangs and hands about living in the area
- Yarning sessions around Dreaming stories and housing
Findings: Participatory Approach

Having a voice is very important

‘...most people I know that have got severe mental illness are too scared... are too intimidated by the whole system they just go back into their cocoon and this project allowed them to speak when normally they’re just unit 3 of 38’

Woman 8 years in PH

‘...people are only margins of society. One of the things that begins to empower us then is realising that we do have a voice and that if we actually use it there is somebody there that will listen. Whether then something is done... but at least to believe that I am a human being’

Man 25+ years in PH

‘there is a voice here for Aboriginal tenants and I think they (non Aboriginal tenants) were quite surprised.’

Aboriginal woman
Findings: Participatory Approach
Employing local people and advocates is critical

- Aboriginal workers and Aboriginal activities in community events
  ‘I guess it makes the kids proud to see that there is a Koori stall and that we do have input into something like this ... It is important for the kids to see something positive happen in their community and to see Koori workers involved too... they feel safe around us and they can trust us...’
  *Aboriginal woman, mother of 5 children*

  ‘She’s part of our mob – the La Pa mob’ *Young Aboriginal woman and mother*

- Having a consumer advocate launch the film rather than a senior govt person
  ‘You know we can identify with Mary and also the people who aren’t consumers can get an insight into people that have mental illness that aren’t the people that they picture in their head. But there’s a person up there that’s very eloquent and very composed and has done something with their life even though they have a serious problem...Just made me think that maybe there’s a possibility that I can have some sort of a decent life’.  *Man living in PH*
Key Findings: Participatory Approach

Diverse experiences of everyday life about what’s good

Voices Speak - Lives Change

A good home – affordable and secure

Good location

Good support services

Our Mob – Tenant Participation

A love for the community here

It is close to our area The La Perouse Mob

Everyone watches out for each other

There is good access and great transport

You can get to the shops easily
### Key Findings: Participatory Approach

Diversity of key priorities about what should change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Voices Speak Lives Change</th>
<th>Our Mob – Tenant participation</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More supports and health services</td>
<td>Facilities for children and families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less isolation – more activities &amp; friends</td>
<td>Community BBQs and fun days</td>
</tr>
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<td>Better expertise of housing providers in supporting people with mental health issues</td>
<td>Cultural awareness training for social housing providers</td>
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<td>Stigma and inequality</td>
<td>Aboriginal people meetings with social housing providers</td>
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## Key Findings: Participatory Approach & Success

### Our Mob & Tenant Participation: initial success measures 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aboriginal tenants</th>
<th>Aboriginal workers</th>
<th>Non Aboriginal workers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal people <em>have their voice</em> and are not represented by non Aboriginal people</td>
<td>People living in social housing <em>have a voice</em></td>
<td>Aboriginal people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing NSW <em>listens</em> to ideas about how to improve things</td>
<td>Aboriginal residents <em>feel they are listened to</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing NSW ensures <em>some actions</em> happen</td>
<td>A <em>couple of things</em> they think are important <em>change</em></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Housing managers and staff feel comfortable <em>talking with</em> Aboriginal tenants</td>
<td><em>Aboriginal people and Housing feel comfortable</em> and create avenues for engagement</td>
<td></td>
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**THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY**  
**WFGU**  
Working From the Ground Up  
**UNSW**  
Australia
Key Findings: Participatory Approach & Success
Voices speak - Lives change

People wanted the film to: | Did this happen?
---|---
Show that our lives are not really simple | Yes - First
To feel make you feel good about doing something good | Equal 2nd
Show that we are different and poorer | Equal 2nd
Will mean people start to make changes | Third
Make people feel something after watching it | Fourth
Be a good production |
Key Findings: Participatory Approach & Outcomes

TAFE Outreach Computer Course

Outcomes for participants

- 2 enrolled in TAFE mainstream courses
- 1 works part time
- 3 participated in *Voices Speak - Lives Change* with 1 as a paid advocate - now appointed to Mental Health Service Consumer Committee

Learning in a community setting

- The teachers ... did not make you feel like if you’d got a mental illness or something, they don’t treat you with prejudice, they treated you just like a normal person
- It could be a stepping stone to go to TAFE

Importance of a regular activity

- For me it was good because it was a thing that was consistent. It was a consistent thing I got used to doing it and it was something that I had to wake up for and I had to do – that why it was good for me...It gave purpose for me again in my life to think of outside, where I thought that there was nothing and my life was going downhill. It made me happy again, a little bit of hope.

Long time since last education

- I have not been to school for 27 years...I got kicked out too, at 14... I haven’t been to school for 21 years...Its 37 years for me
Key Learnings About A Participatory Approach

- Recognise many social housing tenants have significant support needs
- Reflect diversity in building on the strengths of local communities
- Social justice, rights and social inclusion are important in setting the framework
- Major impact of employing local people in building connections and trust, rather than describing people ‘as the hard to reach’
- Reach out to ‘silent’ people to voice their views just not the vocal few
- Good engagement and building trust takes a long time
- Diversify community engagement approaches and not rely on one off events
- Develop projects around people’s lived experiences of disadvantage
- Engage agencies in the development phase – even just for information
- Action focussed partnerships with agencies can increase social inclusion, but need to manage multiple outcome frameworks
- ‘Joined up’ up projects are difficult to establish due to competing agency agendas – very difficult for agencies to redirect resources to disadvantaged places
- Balance expectations of government for predetermined outcomes in short term
- Recognise that participatory approaches will not address major structural disadvantage but can ameliorate aspects of disadvantage and influence policy directions
Policy, Program and Research Implications

Susan Goodwin
1. Action Research: a useful evidence base for program and policy development

Action research is an orientation to inquiry with an obligation to action.
Children And Young People As Knowledge Producers

Research
• Household survey and service providers surveys: ‘young people are a problem’ & ‘more services for kids’

Action
• ‘needs’ established
• Young people speak back

Research
• Research with children and young people:
  • PAR
  • Individual Interviews
  • Focus Group in schools
  • Surveys at community events

Action
• Establishment of Youth Services Roundtable;
• Homework Club;
• Family Fun Day
• Employment strategy

Policy
• informs local
• Information from adult and young residents informs Local and State Government Plans
Over 55s As Knowledge Producers

- **Research**
  - Household survey: ‘more support for older people’

- **Action**
  - Participatory initiatives: barbeques, computer classes, community garden etc

- **Research**
  - Over 55s Research Group formed

- **Action**
  - Over 55s research group set priorities

- **Policy**
  - Policy makers asked to respond to over 55s concerns and issues
People With Mental Health Issues As Knowledge Producers

**Research**
- Household survey and service provider survey:
  - ‘More support for people doing it tough’

**Action**
- Computer classes for people with mental health issues
- Employed Mental Health Consumer advocates from the community
- New collaborations

**Research**
- PAR with consumers
- Project Evaluations

**Action**
- Development of public exhibition: ‘what life’s like’ with a mental health issue living in public housing

**Policy**
- Inclusive policy development in Housing, Health and NGO mental health services
Aboriginal Tenants As Knowledge Producers

**Research**
- Housing Data
- SEIFA Data
- Household Survey
- Service Provider survey

**Action**
- New Collaborations
- Employment of an Aboriginal Tenant participation worker;
- New tenant groups established “Our Mob Yarning Up”

**Research**
- Steering committee
- Evaluation of processes and approaches

**Policy**
- Program recognition of Aboriginal worker and Aboriginal ways of participating;
- Aboriginal Tenant Participation Workers funded elsewhere.
Overview Of Data Collection Methods Used In The Action Research Approach

- Household surveys (2009, 2011)
- Service Provider surveys
- Participatory Action Research
- Individual Interviews
- Focus groups
- Surveys at community events
- Program evaluations
- Analysis of secondary data (SEIFA, Housing)
- Co-research with residents
- Researcher reflections
- Records of meetings & discussions
- Analysis of policy documents
Advantages of Action Research

1. Makes space for innovation

2. Enables sensitivity to specificity

3. Democratizes knowledge production
Additional Findings
Many People Are Long-term Residents

Length of residency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of residents</th>
<th>Under 1 yr</th>
<th>1-5 yrs</th>
<th>6-9 yrs</th>
<th>10-19 yrs</th>
<th>20-29 yrs</th>
<th>30-49 yrs</th>
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**Good Places to Live**

**Most people** agreed or strongly agreed with the following statements:

- I would be willing to work together with others on something to improve my neighbourhood (80.47)
- I regularly stop and chat with people in my neighbourhood (79.69)
- I believe my neighbours would help me in an emergency (74.22)
- I feel loyal to people in my neighbourhood (73.44)
- Overall I am very attracted to living in this neighbourhood (70.31)
- The friendships and associations I have with other people in my neighbourhood mean a lot to me (69.53)

“the fresh air” “the beach” “my friends” “the shops” “transport is good”
Service Providers Are Community Members Too

Most or many service providers agreed or strongly agreed with:

- Overall I am very attracted to working in this area
- I feel like I belong, as a worker, in this area.
- The relationships I have with other workers in the area mean a lot to me and my work.
- If I needed advice about something I could go to another service provider in the area.
- I think I agree with most service providers in the area about what is important.
- I believe that other service providers would help me in an emergency.
- I get support from other service providers.
- Working in this area gives me a sense of attachment or commitment to the area.
- I would be willing to work together with other service providers on something to improve the area.

“I like the strong sense of community and commitment of residents to improve the area.”
Community Events Can Transform Places Of Disadvantage
Need For Better Leadership

Less than half of the respondents agreed with any of these statements:

- Leaders help the community to develop goals for a better future (46.09 %)
- This community upholds the rights of others by encouraging social justice and equity (45.31%)
- Leaders share decision making with community members (41.41%)
- Tensions and conflicts are not allowed to get out of hand in this community (39.06 %)
- Official funds are used wisely and fairly in this community (25.78 %)


Housing NSW (2010). Housing NSW: *Commitment to improving service delivery to Aboriginal people*. Sydney: NSW Human Services.
References


References


Wood, M. (2002). Resident participation in urban and community renewal. Melbourne: Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute