

Partnerships & Collaboration

From time to time most centres will work in partnership or collaboration with other organisations in their community. It may simply be that an organisation asks the CLC to provide a guest speaker for a seminar that the organisation has organised and promoted. Or perhaps the CLC and another organisation have been successful in a joint application for funds and will be running a project or producing a publication together.

CLCs also work collaboratively with other CLCs – the Federation provides great opportunities to work in partnership both through ongoing working groups or short term groups or projects. In fact the very information you are reading is a result of CLCs successfully collaborating through the Federation’s Community Development and Legal Education Working Group.

There are many benefits in working collaboratively, including:

- broader resource base;
- strengthening links with community;
- shared workload and responsibility;
- spread of skills, ideas and contacts; and
- building relationships, networking and having some fun.

Case Study

Local community collaboration in action

During its planning processes the Eastern Community Legal Centre (ECLC) identified that it wanted to work more closely with local migrant communities. Instead of putting time and resources into setting up groups, booking venues and publicity, ECLC decided to work collaboratively with local specialist organisations. One of these was the local Migrant Resource Centre (MRC). This collaboration allowed ECLC to put its resources into CLE activity planning and delivery, while the MRC identified the need, organised the venues and did the publicity. Another useful outcome of this collaboration was the knowledge and experience that the MRC brought to the process, particularly regarding newly arrived communities.

Partnership Continuum

McLeod (2003, p3), notes that “a distinction can be made between the purpose and nature of partnerships” and suggests that partnerships may sit at different points along a continuum: networking – coordinating – cooperating – collaborating.

Creating Successful Partnerships

There is a lot of information available giving guidance on what makes a successful partnership. Some common themes are outlined below.

- get to know each other first – It's important to take the time to find out about each other. Understanding and respecting the different cultures, values and resource capacities of each partner is an important first step in establishing good working partnerships;
- explore what you both want – What is it that you each want from the partnership? All partners have something to contribute and are seeking some benefits or outcomes from the relationship. What are the expectations? It is important to articulate, document and communicate your understanding or the roles and responsibilities of each party;
- communicate – Having realistic expectations and being able to communicate openly and honestly is essential. Unresolved issues and misunderstandings can lead to a breakdown in the relationship and in turn negate any benefits for the broader community. Be open to test and trial new ideas within agreed parameters; and
- all relationships change – be prepared and open to monitoring and reviewing the relationship. Take a problem solving approach to issues that arise. It is important to keep the spark and to nurture the initial enthusiasm.

Case Study

Local community collaboration in action

Peninsula Community Legal Centre is involved in the Community Car Connections Program in partnership with New Hope Migrant & Refugee Centre, Frankston City Council, Victoria Police, the Department of Justice, Vicroads, Frankston Magistrates' Court, RACV, Consumer Affairs Victoria and the Sheriff's Office. Each organisation brings their expertise to a nine week program offering people from newly arrived communities help to gain a better understanding of driving in Australia and to form connections with local agencies. The program is viewed as important not only to improving participant's road safety but also to helping them settle into and participate fully in Australian life.

Clarify Roles & Expectations – avoiding the pitfalls

CLC experience suggests that working collaboratively with other organisations can also have some pitfalls, especially when roles, responsibilities and expectations have not been clarified.

Centres may wish to consider preparing a written document – a memorandum of understanding or partnership agreement – when planning to work in partnership or collaboration with other organisations. The document should be present and future focussed and may include matters such as:

- clear statement of respective roles, responsibilities and expectations;
- how finances, staff and other resources will be managed;
- the financial and in-kind contributions that each organisation will make;
- division of tasks;
- how decisions will be made;
- how disputes will be resolved;
- how the contribution of each party will be acknowledged;
- ownership/copyright of materials;
- how decisions will be made about reproduction or changes to materials; and
- responsibility for reporting and accountability.

A number of CLCs have drawn up and used the above type of documents. Ask around for examples and assistance if your centre is considering developing an agreement. Also, check the *Federation Toolkit*.

The Federation of Community Legal Centre (Victoria) Inc, as the peak body for Victoria's community legal centres, provides many opportunities for collaborations between centres, with other partners in the community sector, private profession and government. Contact the Federation Secretariat to find out more.

Case Study

CLC collaboration in action

The Northern Metropolitan Community Legal Centres Co-operative Legal Services Capacity Building Project has been created

“to improve access to justice for disadvantaged communities of the Northern Metropolitan Region (NMR) of Melbourne. This will be achieved through innovative coordination and cooperation between existing legal and related services...The project will scope legal need and legal services, and build on existing strengths of CLCs and their cohorts to achieve innovative coordination and delivery of legal services”

FEDERATION OF COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRES, 2008.

Fitzroy, West Heidelberg, Darebin, Moreland, Broadmeadows and Whittlesea community legal centres, along with legal aid representatives, are involved in this Project.

Case Study

Legal sector collaboration in action

The Victorian Legal Assistance Forum (VLAF) has been established to promote collaboration and co-operation in the delivery of legal services for socially and economically disadvantaged people in Victoria. Members of VLAF include the Federation of Community Legal Centres, Law Institute of Victoria, Victoria Legal Aid, PILCH, the Victorian Bar, Victoria Law Foundation, Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service and Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service (Victoria). VLAF has established a Publications and CLE Working Group to explore opportunities for collaboration between stakeholders. (Information taken from VLAF and Federation of Community Legal Centres websites).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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- Federation of Community Legal Centres (Vic) Inc. (2008) *Extracts from Northern Metropolitan Region Application to Legal Services Board 2008-2009 Major Grants Program*
- Federation of Community Legal Centres (Vic) Inc., *Federation Toolkit* (Managing People – Partnerships) www.communitylaw.org.au
- Florance, A, (2009) Interview, Peninsula Community Legal Centre Inc., Frankston
- McLeod, J., (2004), The Partnerships Analysis Tool, VicHealth, Victoria <http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/~media/ResourceCentre/PublicationsandResources/General/VHP%20part%20toollow%20res.ashx>
- Nash, A (2009) Interview, Federation of Community Legal Centres (Vic) Inc., Carlton
- Victorian Legal Assistance Forum website – www.vlaf.org.au

FURTHER READING AND RESOURCES

- Australian Government (no date) [community.gov.au](http://www.community.gov.au) website – Community Development – Community Partnership, <http://www.community.gov.au/Internet/MFMC/community.nsf/pages/section?opendocument&Section=Community%20Partnership>
- VicHealth, (2001) *Fact Sheet 1 Partnerships*, Carlton South. http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/~media/ResourceCentre/PublicationsandResources/General/Fact%20Sheet_Partnerships.ashx