

## Community Development & Community Legal Education

### Some definitions of 'Community'

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A 'community' can be constituted in many ways. A community can be based around a locality or place – local, regional, national or even international. For example, people may talk about the views of 'the Brunswick community' or even 'the Australian community'.

A community can also be based around a connection or association such as 'the activist community', or a common intention or purpose, such as an 'industry'.

A community can also be based around identity, for example sexuality or faith, or heritage or nationality, for example the 'Italian community'.

In the context of a community legal centre (CLC), the centre's community will often be defined by the geographically based catchment area it has been established to serve. Alternatively, it may be based around an issue, association or identity that the centre works with.

### Community Development

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This information sheet explores the concept of 'community development'. Community development is a key underpinning objective and strategy of CLE (See *Information Sheet 2 – National Guidelines for the Management of Community Legal Education Practice*).

"Remember that ultimately, the people who have the problems are the only ones who can really understand their situation and tell you how community legal education may help."

GOLDIE, 1997.

### What is community development?

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Community development is about building active and sustainable communities based on social justice and mutual respect. It is about challenging power structures to remove the barriers that prevent people from participating in the issues that affect their lives.

Community development involves exchanging ideas through participation, consultation and education, to achieve empowerment and social justice within communities.

"Community development seeks to make provision for decentralised, less bureaucratic approaches and provide an opportunity for personal participation in decision making and service provision".

CHESTERMAN, 1996

## What words come to mind when we think of Community Development?

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Here are some words and phrases from a Federation brainstorm: open spaces that are not privately owned, participation, balancing power, solutions, mutual benefit, engaging, bottom up not top down, empowerment, exchange of ideas, working with (not for), diversity, choices, strengthening from within (using resources), information, education, needs action to back up words, indiscriminating, skill sharing, knowledge sharing, exchange, dialogue, listening, consultation, different models, organic, building confidence and skill, collective strength.

## What are the values and principles of community development?

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“Community development aims to assist communities to become better informed and to have a more effective voice, and to take an active part in the determination of matters affecting their common welfare.”

CHESTERMAN, 1996.

The principles of empowerment, human rights and social justice are key underpinnings of community development theory and practice.

“Empowerment should be the aim of all community development...empowerment means providing people with the resources, opportunities, vocabulary, knowledge and skills to increase their capacity to determine their own future, and participate in and affect the life of their community.”

IFE & TESORIERO, 2006 P265.

“**Human rights** are a vital component of community development. The fundamental principle is that community development should seek to affirm human rights, and should enable people to realise and exercise their human rights and to be protected from human rights abuse.”

IFE & TESORIERO, 2006 P61.

“**Social justice** expresses the values of equality and fairness. Social justice is concerned with:  
 equal distribution of economic resources;  
 equality of civil, legal and industrial rights;  
 fair and equal access to services, such as housing, health and education; and  
 equality of opportunity for participation and decision making in society.”

KENNY, 1999, P23.

Community development is also built on and encompasses the following values, principles and approaches:

- participation in all stages;
- equality – including recognition of differences;
- challenging power and privilege; redistributing power;
- inclusiveness;
- creating access for people;
- transparency;
- respect – unconditional; positive regard (respect for people but not necessarily for actions);
- building networks and ongoing relationships and support;
- fairness;
- justice for all;
- enabling opportunities for change;
- openness;
- diversity;
- exchange, talking, listening, exploring;
- trust;

- awareness;
- process;
- patience; and
- valuing the knowledge, processes, culture, skills and resources of the community.

## What are some of the methods/techniques of community development?

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Just as there are many different types of communities, there are many different models of community development, and different models will suit different communities.

Because community development is about building relationships between people with different views and backgrounds, it should involve a broad range of techniques and methods.

In practice, community development can involve:

- consciousness raising;
- self help support groups;
- community legal education;
- publications including legal education and other self help materials;
- casework, including test cases and class actions;
- law reform and policy reform involving legal and non-legal issues;
- public forums and speakers;
- building networks – undertaking joint projects with other local community groups on local issues;
- connecting members of the community with common interests and problems;
- action research;
- collective action;
- community building;
- consensus;
- talking, opportunities for dialogue and exchange; and
- opportunities for action driven by the participants – What do you want to do next? How can we/our CLC provide the resources or support for what you want to do next as a community?

## Why is community development important to community legal centres – and vice versa?

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“CLCs are community based, community orientated and responsive to the needs and issues identified by the community that the centre has been established to serve.”

GLANVILLE, 1999

CLC’s close links to their communities are an important part of their effectiveness and accessibility.

Community development is a major role for CLCs, and the provision of legal education is essential to this role. CLCs provide accessible legal information and promote legal education strategies that enable communities and individuals to:

- develop a better understanding of the legal system and the law;
- advocate for legal and social changes which redress injustices and inequities in the law;
- participate in the legal system to make it more equitable and accessible; and
- have participation in, and control over, the work and management of CLCs.

Community development, therefore, is an important part of CLC work just as CLCs are essential to effective community development.

“In essence, taking a community development approach to CLE involves looking at the overall bigger picture of what we are trying to achieve. It’s not simply an information session organised in isolation, organised in the easiest and quickest way so that another statistic can be added to the list of performance outcomes.

Taking a community development approach most importantly sees the process as just as important, if not more important than the product. It is not simply a means to an end. Taking a community development approach stresses the significance of the process of: consulting the community about their needs, understanding the local community, involving them in the planning and organising, taking into consideration their particular needs e.g. disabilities, age, language ability etc. and choosing an appropriate format and approach.”

BRITAIN & BURGESS, 1996.

## Case Study

Since 2007, The Loddon Campaspe Community Legal Centre has convened the Bendigo Family Violence Prevention Working Group. The Working Group has a practical and outcomes driven focus. Its activities include co-ordinating the annual White Ribbon Day activities in the area. In 2008, the town of Strathfieldsaye established a new football club, the first new country league football club in many years.

Based on a Queensland example, the Working Group approached the Football Club president, a local policeman, with a sponsorship proposal. The proposal was considered and accepted by the Club.

As the sponsor, the Working Group provides a small grant to the Club. Working Group members and previous White Ribbon Day Ambassadors are available as mentors and resource people to the Football Club.

The Football Club has agreed to actively support and promote the message - that in their team/ Club/management family violence is not acceptable. The Strathfieldsaye Football Club wants to be known as the club that values positive relationships. The rationale and principles upon which the sponsorship is based have been clearly articulated and discussed with Club members.

A sponsorship logo has been developed. The team have a 'Violence is out of bounds' logo on their football jumpers and the message is displayed on a sign at the home ground. The Club has agreed to nominate a member as a White Ribbon Day Ambassador for 2009 and to participate in the annual activities.

All parties are hoping to continue the sponsorship into the future, possibly incorporating a dedicated day in the football fixture where positive relationships and local family violence services can be promoted.

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## FURTHER READING &amp; RESOURCES

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- Combined Community Legal Centres Group NSW (2004) *Your Guide to Community Legal Education*, Second Edition, Surry Hills, NSW
  - Federation of Community Legal Centres (Vic) Inc, website – [www.communitylaw.org.au](http://www.communitylaw.org.au) - Intranet - Federation Toolkit – Law reform and community legal education – Community Development
  - Muddagouni, R., (2007) *Thinking & Planning Ahead – resource manual for community legal centre staff*, Victoria Law Foundation, Victoria (Chapter 4, Community Development, pp101-116)