

# Praxis volume two

The second in a series of occasional papers providing space for community practitioners to contribute to the global dialogue about how we build peaceful, just and sustainable communities.

## **Praxis volume two**

This volume is made up of a number of articles written on the topic of 'community development and training'.

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### **Preface**

In this volume of Praxis there we would like to share three very different perspectives on training in the co-op. Firstly, Dave's story on the genesis of our training *ethos*. Secondly, Pete's philosophy on the essence of our training *pathos*. And thirdly, Helen's summary of the latest evaluation on our training *logos*. These reports will give you a feel for not only where we are coming from, but also where we would like to go in the future.'

# **In-Situ Community Education**

**Dave Andrews**

## **1. In-Situ Training I've Received.**

Most of the training that my wife Ange and I have received was from our parents.

My mother and father, Frank and Margaret Andrews, not only took people into their hearts - but also into their home. Home was always open for those in distress. People going through difficult times would stay for a day, a year, or however long they needed.

As a young impressionable boy I can remember the excitement that some of those people brought to our house. A cat burglar, who had just got out of jail, showed us how easy it was to break into our house. And my parents never bothered locking the house after that!

Not all encounters were exciting. Some were actually pretty scary for a kid like me with a vivid imagination. Having a man, who had stabbed someone to death, sleep in the room next to me, made for some very restless nights and some very graphic nightmares!

But my parents taught me to relate to these people as 'people' - not just as 'robbers' and 'murderers' - and, as 'people', they got respect.

My wife, Ange's parents, James and Athena Bellas, operated the Star Milk Bar in downtown Brisbane. It was famous for its food and drinks. And people would come from all over town for a fresh salad sandwich and a mango milk shake.

Every morning, very early, my father-in-law would open up the café. When he did, it seemed like all the hobos round town would emerge from the hiding places they had huddled in during the night and make their way to the cafe. My father-in-law would welcome them in; sit them down; serve them tea and toast; and chat with them about the night they'd had and the day ahead.

If anyone needed a job my father-in-law would leave his brothers in charge of the café and go job hunting with them. If they got in trouble with the police, he would visit them in prison. He regularly visited those who got sick and wound up in hospital. When anyone friendless died, my father-in-law would make sure he went to their funeral, so as no one, no matter how friendless, would be buried without a friend. Often he'd be the only one there.

Ange's dad would invite folk home to share a meal with the family - even though Ange's mum had eight children of her own to feed. If anything, meals at the Bellas' house were even more famous than the milk shakes at the Star Milk Bar, so there was never a shortage of people who were willing to take up the invite - or just invite themselves!

Ange grew up in a large family, which was always being enlarged to make room for one more; her parents taught her the importance of being family to those who had no family. In so doing they introduced Ange to the Greek practice of *sympetheri* - profound reciprocal regard for family - but, at the same time, they totally revolutionised the traditional practice of *sympetheri* to include people whom Greeks traditionally excluded - their enemies - the Turks!

Our parents were shining examples to us of how we could become people who were not preoccupied with ourselves, but could create a sense of community with others - particularly with those who are usually marginalised and disadvantaged. So Ange and I have, quite unashamedly - but not slavishly - tried to copy our parents - and tried to set a similar example for our children.

## 2. In-Situ Training I've Given.

Most of the training that my wife Ange and I have given has been an attempt pass on the lessons we learnt from the previous generation to the next generation - including our own kids.

### Dilaram

In 1973 we set up some communities in India that we called *Dilaram*, or Houses Of The Peaceful Heart, to cater for weary travellers, trekking up and down the Asian hippie trail in search of enlightenment, or a cheap opiate substitute. So it was, in the context of living in a *Dilaram* community, working with disillusioned heroin addicts that our elder daughter, Evonne, learned her first few lessons about helping people with life controlling problems.

### Aashiana

In 1975 we left *Dilaram*, which was working mainly with expatriates, to set up *Aashiana* to work solely with local drug addicts. *Aashiana*, literally meant 'nest', and we hoped *Aashiana* would be a 'nest' where 'wounded birds' could 'mend their broken wings' and 'learn to fly, free, again'. We helped people on the condition that they would help others. So out of *Sahara*, the residential rehabilitation community, emerged *Sharan*, an unusual, innovative, community development organisation, staffed mainly by (ex)drug addicts, who were learning to use their understanding of despair to serve communities who knew nothing

but despair. Thus it was, in the context of the *Aashiana* community, rehabilitating addicts and rebuilding slums, that our younger adopted Nepalese daughter, Navi, learned her first few lessons about helping people overcome life controlling problems that, otherwise, would end in debilitating despair.

#### Waiters Union

In 1985 we returned to Australia, and set up an intentional community network, that we call 'The Waiters Union', in an inner city suburb of Brisbane, which is our hometown. Ange's mum and dad live just up the road from us. So we have come full circle. Back to where we started from.

We still draw reassurance from the inspiration of Ange's mum and dads' involvement in the locality. And we still try to set a similar example for our children as they set for us, of caring for people in the community. It's been awesome for Ange and I to see Evonne and Navi be able to individuate themselves without having to isolate themselves from us - or our world - in the process. So far, we have been able to move from being a nuclear family to being an extended family, including Marty (who married Evonne). And now - as an extended family - we are continuing to extend ourselves, as *sybetheri*, to those in the community who have no family at all.

We decided to call ourselves the West End 'Waiters Union' because we wanted to be '*waiters*' in West End. We didn't want set agendas for people. We just wanted to be available, like '*waiters*', to take people's orders, and to do what we could do, to help them. We particularly wanted to help to develop a sense of hospitality in the locality, so that all people, especially people who are usually displaced in areas like ours, could really begin to feel at home in the community.

There have never been many people in the Waiters Union. We started with two households fifteen years ago; there aren't more than twenty households associated with us now.

The Waiters Union is not a high profile group. As '*waiters*', we try to keep a low profile in the area. None of the activities that we are involved in carry our name. They all carry the names of the groups that organise those activities - which we contribute to - but we do not control.

As a result, a lot of people in our area may know us well as people, but may not even know that the group we are part of exists. Which is fine, because the group exists to promote the community, not the group; and the group can function more effectively as a catalyst in the community if it is prepared to be more or less invisible, rather than attract attention to itself at the expense of other groups. However, we are not secretive. We welcome enquiries and answer

questions as freely and as fully as we can. And we are inclusive. We invite anyone who is interested in our work, to with work us, alongside of us, as partners in the work together.

All the work we do is *self-directed* and *other-orientated*. Each person has the right to shape every group that they are a part of. Being part of a group depends on participation. A person becomes a part of a group, not by jumping through any hoops, but simply by participating in the group. Once a person is a part of the group, they have the right to manage the group they are a part of. We believe people should have the right to shape all the decisions that impact on their lives. And we believe the best way for us to shape the decisions that impact on our lives, individually and collectively, is through the process of consensus.

So all the groups nominate rotating facilitators for their meetings so as to 'be careful to do what', the good book says, 'is right in the eyes of everybody.' As the groups work from the bottom up to empower people, particularly people who are marginalised and disadvantaged, we particularly include people who are usually marginalised and disadvantaged in the decision making process of the groups. So all the groups actually work *with* the people that they work *for*, and in so doing, seek to enable the people they work *with*, as partners, to realize their enormous potential.

Through one group we seek to promote the aspirations of the original inhabitants of our neighbourhood, for whom Musgrave Park - in the middle of the neighbourhood - is still 'sacred ground'. Through another group we seek to support refugees by sponsoring their settlement and the settlement of their families, working through the anguish they go through as 'strangers in a strange land'. Last, but not least - though they are often considered 'last', and treated as 'least' by the powers that be - through a whole range of groups we seek to relate to the people in our community, who are physically, intellectually, and emotionally disabled - not as 'clients', nor as 'consumers', still less as 'users' - but as 'our friends'!

None of these things that any of us are doing seem that great. However, we constantly encourage one another to remember that true greatness is *not* in doing *big* things, but in doing *little* things with a *lot* of love over the *long* haul. And that is exactly what we are trying to do!

Resource Association & Community Praxis Co-op

The Waiters Union has always been a nonformal community network. But over time we have come to recognise the need for a formal community organisation as an auspice for some of our community activities. Usually groups solve this

problem by turning their non-formal community network into a formal community organisation. But, in the move towards institutionalisation, they lose the very charisma of community. The free and flexible, strong but gentle spirit of the community that they started out with, ends up being bound hand and foot by rules and regulations and becoming a slave to the system that it sought to overthrow.

So we decided that we would not institutionalise our community under any circumstances.

Instead we set up a formal organisation as a parallel structure alongside the nonformal network, so that if anyone in the community needed an officially recognised, legally registered auspice for certain activities, they could use the 'Community Initiatives Resource Association'.

To make sure the Resource Association only *serves* as an auspice for the Waiters Union, and does not have the power to co-opt the Waiters Union, it has been designed as a minimalist organisation - with minimal power - apart from its capacity to function as an official, legal auspice for the community.

Since its inception the Resource Association has provided an auspice for managing community property, providing compulsory public liability insurance, and supplying volunteers with the status required by the state. But by far the association's greatest role has been to help establish community programmes which needed legal backing for funding - with maximum accountability, but minimal control. The Resource Association has helped establish dozens of community programmes including the Creative Stress Solutions Project, the Inner City Citizens' Advocacy Group, and the Community Praxis Co-op.

#### The Community Orientation Course

Some time ago, we were asked to set up some training in community work based on our experience. So we set up what we decided to call *The Community Orientation Course*. And so, twice a year, for the last fifteen years, we have run these courses in West End. The courses are run for two weeks mid year, (usually the last week of June to the first week of July), and three weeks at the end of the year (usually the three weeks in December leading up to Christmas). They involve living in West End, with some people from the West End Waiters Union, and include personal reflection, interpersonal interaction, group process, cooperative organisation, whole-hearted, holistic engagement, cross-cultural dialogue, practical service and nonviolent action. The costs of the course are decided by the participants in a group cost-sharing workshop, that we run as part of the course.

People come to the course from all over Australia, and from other parts of the world as well. Lyn and Steve Hatfield-Dodds, describe what the course is like.

'The daily program started with prayer. After breakfast we joined in studies. People shared of their life in the local community - involved in peace networks, community arts, housing assistance, legal aid, refugee resettlement, and offering hospitality and shelter to those without a place to stay. The afternoons were unstructured times, to allow us to get to know the neighbourhood, and its people. In the evenings we had dinner with different members of the network.

Most days finished with a much-needed briefing session. We also managed to squeeze in time to deliver meals on wheels, go on outings (with people who were intellectually disabled), and help out at an evening meal for over a hundred homeless men.'

'The nine of us on the course lived in a group house for the first week, moving out to stay in boarding houses or hostels we found for ourselves in the second week. For many of us this was a difficult and sometimes frightening experience, living in the midst of depressed and often violent lives, and it was good to come back together for the last few days to the security of group living. Highlights of the course for us (included) being involved in a Murri service in a maximum security prison; hearing people's stories; developing friendships; (and) meeting people who not only talk about being compassionate, but who are trying to put these things into practice.'

These courses have been quite formative for hundreds of people, like Lyn and Steve, who have been able to participate in them over the last fifteen years. But they have two major limitations. One, is that the courses are all based in our own neighbourhood; and two, is that we keep the numbers on our courses small in order to facilitate maximum participation in the course, and ensure minimal impact by the course on the community in which it is based.

#### The Local Community Builders' Training Course

A couple of years ago Peter Westoby approached me with the proposal of developing a course that we could provide under the auspice of the Community Praxis Co-op to more people more broadly in the context of *their* own communities. And as a result of discussions with Howard Buckley, who was working for the Social Infrastructure Programme at the time, we developed a course for the Co-op that we delivered for the Caboolture Shire Council, that we initially called *Building Better Communities*. This course - also known as the

*Community Animator's Training Course* - provides an opportunity for people to explore their potential to develop community in their locality.

The Community Praxis Co-op seeks to practice traditional cooperative principles, encouraging the development of acceptance and respect, spirituality and compassion, solidarity and participation, responsibility and competence in the individuals, neighborhoods and organizations with whom we work. And the Local Community Builders' Training Course that the Co-op provides is intended to help people explore their potential to develop acceptance and respect, spirituality and compassion, solidarity and participation, responsibility and competence, both individually and collectively, within the context of their own community.

Given my background its not surprising I would hope that any community development training that we would do would encourage *nonformal, transformational, spiritual, experiential, personal, relational, principle-based, process-orientated, politically-committed action-reflection.*

### **3. In-situ Community Training**

#### ***3.1 Nonformal Training***

*Formal* community development training is usually conducted *formally* in an institution. While *nonformal* community development training is usually conducted *nonformally* in the context of the community itself. *Formal* community development training tends to be *inflexible* - with the content for the learners set by the teachers. While *nonformal* community development training tends to be *flexible* - with content that is set by a community of teachers and learners together.

Most of the community development training I have participated in has been nonformal rather formal, but the formal training that I have participated in informs my nonformal training.

The most useful formal community development training I have received was at the Department of Social Work and Social Policy at the University of Queensland. There, under the guidance of Dr. Allan Halladay, who was Head of the Department, and Mr. Tony Kelly, who was the Senior Lecturer in Community Development, I was privileged to get what I consider to be was the best formal community development education available in Australia at the time.

When I start to think about the most useful formal community development training that I have given myself, I begin to feel a bit ambivalent. On the one hand, there is no doubt in my mind that the training I did at various TAFE colleges - pitched as it was, at a very practical level - was of great help to a lot

of people. But on the other hand, I personally found TAFE colleges the most difficult educational institutions I have ever tried to work with. In each of the three cases where I tried to work with TAFE colleges, the unhealthy culture of the institution adversely affected the healthy quality of the education that we were seeking to deliver.

These experiences only served to reinforce the notion that we needed to find a way to deliver good quality, practical, community development courses - outside the formal constraints of the TAFE system. And for us, this has meant developing community development training options for small groups in nonformal in-situ locations. With community education processes incorporating flexible content prepared by practitioners, with the help of experts, rather than by experts themselves. In the hope of creating co-learning communities who will test their learning through action and reflection in the context of ordinary everyday life.

<b>Community Development Training</b>	
<b><i>Formal Community Development Training:</i></b>	<b><i>Nonformal Community Development Training:</i></b>
• Large groups in formal institutional locations	• Small groups in nonformal in-situ locations
• with school education processes, and	• with community education processes, and
• fixed content - prepared by experts.	• flexible content - prepared by practitioners.
• Teachers teach and learners learn.	• Facilitators create a co-learning community.
• Learning tested by summative evaluation.	• Learning tested by action and reflection.

### ***3.2 Transformational Training***

Some time ago, as part of a reform process started in my state, as a result of the findings of the famous 'Fitzgerald Inquiry' into police corruption in Queensland, I was asked to teach in a course for law enforcement officers. In order to deal with the culture of corruption in the police service that had been brought to light, there was a real concern that *transformation* rather than *information* would be at the heart of this course. That, through the course, the participants would be encouraged to not only discuss and debate issues of personal integrity and social justice but also actually develop a commitment to personal integrity and social justice themselves.

However, though it is easy to *teach* about personal integrity and social justice in the classroom, it is difficult - if not impossible - to actually *learn* personal integrity and social justice anywhere but in the context of the ebb and flow of ordinary everyday life in the community itself.

So we invited students from the colleges where we were teaching to come and live in our community for two or three weeks to *learn* something about personal integrity and social justice.

We introduced them to Aunty Jean, an Aboriginal elder, who not only told them the story of her people and their painful dispossession, but also took them with her to meet her people - some in a maximum security prison, languishing in their cells - and others in a human rights organisation, fighting for their release.

And we introduced them to Father Kefle, an Eretrian priest, who showed them the scars of thirty years of civil war, and they visited refugees who have been torn away from their families, tortured by the very people who were supposed to protect them, forced to flee for their lives, and are now struggling to rebuild a life for themselves as strangers in a strange land.

Some of the students had never actually met an aborigine or a refugee face to face before. Let alone heard their story, or seen their struggle for themselves. These encounters confronted the students with questions that we all have to answer one way or another. Like

- *'How do we, as members of a 'white' society, deal with our 'black' history?'*
- *'How do we, as members of the human family, respond to the desperate plea from our brothers and sisters, not just to address the superficial symptoms, but the underlying causes, of their ongoing pain?'*
- *'And what are you - and I - going to do about it?'*

These are *questions to us*, which call for *answers from us*. Not merely *theoretical* answers. But *practical* answers. Answering these questions is a *moral imperative* that we can accept or reject, but which we cannot ignore.

One of the students who accepted the moral imperative to answer these questions, as honestly as he could, was a cop we'll call Brad who had been on the beat for many years.

Brad said that, like a lot of police, who only ever related to people in their job as sources of information about "criminals", or as potential or actual "criminals" themselves, he had become quite cynical about the public. But, when he took the opportunity to get out of uniform, and to meet people he'd stereotyped, face to face, as fellow human beings, he began to *change*.

The first stage of change was in terms of *perspective*. What we see depends on where we stand. And standing with the very people he had often been expected to take a stand against, helped Brad see a different side to the struggle on the streets than the one he'd seen before.

The second stage of change was in terms of *responsibility*. What we hear depends on whom we listen to. And listening to people who he and his fellow officers didn't normally listen to helped Brad not only hear a different side to the story of the history of our society than the one he'd heard before, but also accept his part as a police officer in perpetuating that history.

The third stage of change was in terms of *pain*. How we feel depends on what we do. And recognising that what he was doing as a police officer was often part of the problem, rather than part of the solution, helped Brad feel the impact of the issues much more acutely than he'd ever felt them before.

The fourth stage of change was in terms of *responsiveness*. We have two options for managing the *pain* that comes from recognising the gap between who we are and who we are meant to be. One option is *rationalisation - changing the ideal*, so it is closer to who we are. The other option is *transformation - changing the reality*, so we are closer to who we are meant to be.

The chance for Brad to choose *transformation* rather than *rationalisation* came along one day quite unceremoniously when a local *Murri* asked him for a smoke. Instead of moving on - *as he usually did* - this time Brad chose to stop, and have a smoke and a bit of a chat - *like he would have done with any of his other mates*. This *small* change was a *big* deal for Brad.

This was the stage of realisation Brad was at when he completed the course. I spoke to him about how encouraged I was about the stages of change he had gone through so far. But I cautioned him, saying, that it would all be in vain, unless he continued to take the change a stage further. The fifth stage of change is in terms of *practice*. We are what we do repeatedly. *Transformation, then, is not an act, but the habitual practice of personal integrity and social justice.*

All quality community development training provides the opportunity for transformation.

### ***3.3 Spiritual Training***

We need to begin with the realisation - our world is in trouble; and religion - which was meant to make things better - has often made things worse. We do not suffer from the lack of religion, but from the lack of love. So, if we are to

have any hope of survival, we need to find a way to be able to care for ourselves, and for our world, once again. It is my view that *a radical spirituality of compassion is not merely our best hope; it is our only hope.*

But, we may well ask ourselves, how can this generation, which is more troubled than ever before - more disillusioned, more lonely, and more depressed; more anxious, more angry, and more aggressive - how can this generation rediscover the capacity to care enough to save us from destruction? Especially when so often so many of us experience so little care ourselves in the increasingly dysfunctional families, disintegrating communities, and destructive political economies that shape our lives? And, everywhere we turn, we are encouraged to opt, not for care, but for the slick quick-fix kill, which doesn't bother about trying to solve problems, it simply blows them away?

The psychologist, Dan Goleman, says that the question about the survival of humanity is a question that all of us will have to answer in our own 'hearts'. He says that at the 'heart' of the matter is 'empathy'. 'Empathy' is the capacity for us to 'feel how others feel'. It is, he says, in 'empathising' with potential victims - people in danger or distress - and 'feeling how they might feel', that we can be motivated to refrain from harming them, and, hopefully, even perhaps consider helping them.<sup>1</sup> Empathy is the basis of compassion.<sup>2</sup>

The philosopher, John Macmurray, says that while most of us might be willing to give intellectual assent in our 'heads' to the priority for us to rediscover our capacity for empathy, it simply will not happen, unless all of us give some emotional affirmation to that intellectual assent in our 'hearts' and make it happen!<sup>3</sup>

The issue is not so much a conflict between our 'heads' and our 'hearts', but a conflict that we have in our 'hearts'.<sup>4</sup> In our 'hearts' we know that we cannot live without love. And that love involves an enhanced 'sensibility' - an enhanced appreciation of, and affection for, one another's lives. But, in our 'hearts', we also know that if we develop an enhanced 'sensibility' towards the beautiful, yet painful reality of one another's lives, it will inevitably entail great agony as well as great joy. So we vacillate. Wanting to become more loving, and wanting to become anything but more loving. Both at the same time.

As we prevaricate we are tempted to withdraw from 'sensibility', which involves a greater sensitivity toward the total reality of one another's lives, into 'sentimentality', which involves more sensitivity to those parts of one another's lives which are less painful, (like rumour, innuendo, scandal and trivia), and less

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1 Goleman, D. Emotional Intelligence, (New York: Bantam Books, 1995) 119

2 *ibid* 328,329

3 Macmurray, J. Freedom In The Modern World, (London: Faber&Faber, 1958) 28-29

4 *Ibid.*, 55

sensitivity to those parts of one another's lives that are more painful, (like disadvantage, disability, disease and death).<sup>5</sup> Thus we tend to retreat into an unreal world of info-tainment, sit-coms, chat-shows, and hot-gos magazines, which give us the illusion of relating to the real world, without relating to the real world at all.

*But, the only way we can live, is to live in the real world. And the only way we can live in the real world, is to love the real world. And the only way we can love the real world, is to overcome our fear of the suffering that love in the real world involves. We must not allow our fear of the suffering to so take over our lives that we put all our efforts into building up our defences against the world, and so alienate our selves from the very reality to which we need to relate. We need to find a faith that can help us overcome our fear of the suffering, so that we can embrace the world as it is, love it, warts and all, and live our lives, with friend and foe alike, to the full.<sup>6</sup>*

It would be my hope that any training we would provide would serve as a step along the way for people exploring a spirituality of compassion that is essential for developing 'community'.

### ***3.4 Experiential Training***

I have found when I talk to people about 'community', most people respond very positively. Sociologists Bell and Newby say, 'everyone - even sociologists - has wanted to live in a community.'

Some say it is because 'community' is a 'touchy feely' word, like 'love', 'romance', 'friend-ship', 'marriage' or 'family', and the concept has 'warm fuzzy' connotations. Certainly, according to Williams, in his book Keywords, the word 'community', 'unlike all other terms of social organisation, (such as 'group', 'party', 'network', 'association', or 'institution') is 'never used unfavourably.'<sup>7</sup>

It maybe an overstatement to say that the word is *never* used unfavourably. But some say that the reason the word 'community' is hardly ever used unfavourably is that we have for-gotten how parochial and oppressive 'communities' can be.

According to Bryson and Mowbray, 'In drawing on the historical notion of community, the Nelsonian touch is applied by communitarians, (turning a blind eye) to the tensions and conflicts that were ordinary parts of their archetypal

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5 Ibid., 88-90

6 Ibid., 58-59

7 Williams, R. Keywords: A Vocabulary Of Culture And Society (London: Fontana, 1976) 66

communities. Gross inequalities, rigid status, blood feuds, intolerance, bondage and ignorance are carefully forgotten, so that "real community" is seen only in terms of cooperation.'<sup>8</sup> And, for some, that may be so.

But the reason the word 'community' is hardly ever used unfavourably by the people I talk to is not that we have forgotten how parochial and oppressive 'communities' can be. Quite the contrary. We remember very acutely the 'tensions and conflicts', that so often have characterised our 'communities'. Yet, for us, the word 'community' is essentially a qualitative term which refers to 'the way we ought to be', liberated from 'intolerance, bondage and ignorance', rather than 'the way we are', circumscribed by 'gross inequalities, rigid status, and blood feuds'.

According to Nisbet, our use of the word is quite typical. Whether we are talking about Confucius, Aristotle, Ibn Khaldun or Thomas Aquinas, the notion of 'community' has always been a 'normative prescription' of an ideal for the world, rather than an 'empirical description' of the real world.<sup>9</sup> According to Bellah, this notion of 'community', which we speak about in qualitative terms, may be 'resisted as absurdly utopian. But the transformation of which we speak is both necessary and modest. Without it, indeed, there may be very little future to think about at all.'<sup>10</sup>

So, for us, 'community' is not merely a 'warm fuzzy', it is actually a 'framework' for building a better world. Yet there is still a lot of confusion about the meaning of the term 'community'.

As long ago as 1955, Hillery noted no less than ninety-four different definitions of 'community'. And more than a decade later, Stacey stated that 'certainly confusion continues to reign over the uses of the term.' So much so, Gowdy once said in frustration, 'it is doubtful whether the concept of "community" refers to a useful abstraction.'<sup>11</sup>

After much study, however, Hillery was able to distinguish three distinctive common elements among the myriad of definitions that he had tabulated. Later Wirth, then Gowdy, confirmed Hillery's findings. They found that, to increasing degrees of significance, the components most likely to constitute 'community' were a common physical location, common social connections, and common reciprocal interactions.<sup>12</sup>

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8 Bryson, L & Mowbray, M 'Community: The Spray-on Solution.' Australian Journal Of Social Issues Vol.16 No.1 p.256

9 Nisbet,R. The Sociological Tradition. (London: Heinemann, 1966) ch.3

10 Bellah, R. et.al. Habits of the Heart (Berkeley: Uni. of Cal. Press, 1985) 286

11 Gowdy, 1982, 374

12 *ibid* p.374

Clark, picking up on the quality of common reciprocal interactions as the most important component in 'community', says in his study of Basic Communities: *'community (is) essentially a sentiment which people have about themselves in relation to themselves: a sentiment expressed in action, but still basically a feeling. People have many feelings, but there are two essentials for the existence of community: a sense of significance and sense of solidarity. The strength of community within any given group is determined by the degree to which its members experience both a sense of solidarity and a sense of significance within it'*.<sup>13</sup>

In his book on community, psychologist Scott Peck said: *'If we are going to use the word meaningfully we must restrict it to a group of individuals who have learned to communicate honestly with each other, whose relationships go deeper than their masks of composure, and who have developed some significant commitment to 'rejoice together, mourn together', 'delight in each other, make other's conditions our own'*.<sup>14</sup>

And after researching five different communities in depth, sociologist Luther Smith wrote: *'The primary indicator of communal well-being is that members feel their fellowship approximates the qualities of a caring family. Hardship and failures will be the occasion for creative solutions and increased resolve. They do not break the spirit of a community. But loss of mutual respect and steadfast caring strikes a deathblow at the very heart of a community'*.<sup>15</sup>

Thus it would be my hope that any training we would provide about 'community' would provide the opportunity for people to *experience* the '*sentiment*' - the '*sense of significance and solidarity*' - at the *heart* of '*community*'. That they would experience the training as an experience of learning to develop '*deep mutual respect*' for one another - like in a '*healthy extended family*' - where they can be free to '*rejoice together and mourn together*' with their neighbours'.

### **3.5 Personal Training**

Community development is a *personal* issue - *it begins with us!*

Leo Tolstoy, the noted author of War and Peace, once lamented, 'Everybody thinks of *changing humanity*, and nobody thinks of *changing himself*'. Unfortunately, for Leo Tolstoy's family, that statement included Leo Tolstoy 'himself'.<sup>16</sup>

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13 Clark, D. Basic Communities (London: SPCK 1975) 4-5

14 Peck, S. The Different Drum (London: Rider and Co. 1988) 59

15 Smith, L. Intimacy And Mission (Herald Press, 1994) 98-100

16 Mead, F. (ed.) Encyclopedia Of Religious Quotations (London: Peter Davis, 1965) 400

Fortunately for us, however, Leo Tolstoy's most famous disciple heeded his exhortation rather than his example. So when he started his movement to change society, Mahatma Gandhi started it by changing himself. This apparently unremarkable process of change in one man's life, was to have such a remarkable impact of international significance, that Albert Einstein was later reported to have said, 'Generations to come, it may be, will scarce believe that such a one as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth.'<sup>17</sup>

Leo Tolstoy and Mahatma Gandhi represent *the choice we have: either we can complain about the way things are, or we can change the way things are, starting with ourselves.*

Those of us who feel tempted to think that we have *no choice*, need to think again in the light of Viktor Frankl's findings. 'Frankl was a determinist raised in the tradition of Freudian psychology which postulates that whatever happens to you as a child basically governs your whole life. The limits of your life are set, and, basically, you can't do much about it.'

'Frankl was also a Jew. He was imprisoned in the death camps of Nazi Germany where he experienced things that were so repugnant to our sense of decency that we shudder to even repeat them. His parents, his brother, and his wife died in the camps or were sent to the gas ovens. Except for his sister, his entire family perished. Frankl himself suffered torture and innumerable indignities, never knowing from one moment to the next if his path, would lead to the ovens, or if he would be among the "saved" who would shovel out the ashes of those so fated.'

'One day, naked and alone in a small room, he began to become aware of what he later called "the last of the human freedoms" - the freedom his Nazi captors could not take away. They could control his entire environment, they could do what they wanted to his body, but Victor Frankl himself was a self-aware being who could look as an observer at his very involvement. His basic identity was intact. He could decide within himself how all of this was going to affect him. Between what happened to him, or the stimulus, and his response to it, was his freedom, or power, to choose his response.'

'Through a series of such disciplines - mental, emotional, and moral, principally by using memory and imagination - he exercised his small, embryonic freedom until it grew larger and larger, until he had more freedom than his Nazi captors. They had more *liberty*, more opt-ions to choose from in their environment; but he had more *freedom*, more internal power to exercise his options. He became an inspiration to those around him, even to some of the guards. He helped others find meaning in their suffering and dignity in their prison existence.

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<sup>17</sup> Mehta, V. Mahatma Gandhi And His Apostles (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977) 46

'In the midst of the most degrading circumstances imaginable, Frankl used the human endowment of self-awareness to discover a fundamental principle about (humanity): *between stimulus and response, (we) have the freedom to choose.*'

We all have the ability to choose, but if we want to bring about change then we need to choose to be 'proactive', rather than 'reactive'. 'Reactive people are often affected by their physical environment. If the weather is good, they feel good. If it isn't, it affects their performance.

Proactive people can carry their own weather with them. Whether it rains or shines makes no difference to them. They are value driven; and if their value is to produce good quality work, it isn't a function of whether the weather is conducive to it or not'.<sup>1</sup>

'Reactive people are also affected by their social environment, by the "social weather". When people treat them well, they feel well; when people don't, they (don't function well). Re-active people build their lives around the behaviour of others, empowering other people to control them. Proactive people feel the affects of their social environment, take the "social weather" into account, and decide how they are going to deal with the conditions. Whether people treat them well or not, they do the best they can. Proactive people build their lives around their own behaviour, developing their power over themselves, so as to exercise increasing control over their responses.'

*It is only as people become less reactive, and more proactive, that they can actually become more responsible. Stephen Covey, the famous American life coach says, 'Look at the word responsibility - "response-ability"- the ability to choose your response. Highly proactive people recognize that responsibility. They do not blame circumstances, conditions, or conditioning for their behaviour. Their behaviour is a product of their own conscious choice, based on values, rather than a product of their conditions, based on (un-thought-through) feelings.' Covey concedes, this is very hard to accept especially if we have had years and years of explaining our misery in the name of circumstance. But until a person can say deeply and honestly, "I am what I am today because of the choices I made yesterday," that person cannot say, "I choose otherwise".<sup>18</sup>*

It would be my hope that any training we would provide would serve as an opportunity for people to develop an awareness of ourselves as persons - our capacity to choose our response to the world around us, and our capacity to change our world proactively - starting with ourselves.

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<sup>18</sup> Covey, S. The Seven Habits Of Highly Effective People (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989) 69-70

### 3.6 Relational Training

Community development is not only a *personal* issue - it is also a *relational* issue. *Change may start with us, but if it stops with us - it will stop altogether! We need to make changes - but others need to make changes too. Unless we all choose to relate to one another proactively we can never hope to experience a healthy sense of community with one another.*

My friend, Mike Riddell says, 'Some people consider it demeaning to have a need for anything else. They follow the illusion of autonomy.' But Mike says 'The teaching of the universe is that all things live together. Nothing is totally independent. All that has life is in relationship.'

Mike says This is not a cause for resentment, but celebration. The tree has need of the soil, the soil has need of the rain, the rain has need of the cloud, the cloud has need of the air, the air has need of the tree, and all have need of (All). None detracts from the other, and in their harmony they allow each other to be fully what they are.<sup>19</sup>

Mike insists 'Humans are intensely relational creatures. (We) need each other. (We) shrivel with rejection and loneliness, (but) flourish with love and affirmation.' And Hugh Mackay, the respected Australian social researcher, concurs, saying, ''We are social creatures - we thrive on our personal connections with each other. We are at our best when we are fully integrated with the herd; we are at our worst when we are isolated.'<sup>20</sup>

According to activist comedian Fran Peavey, there is potential for connectedness with not just the few with whom we share an obvious and immediate affinity, but all our brothers and sisters in the human family, regardless of the glaring differences and ongoing difficulties between us.

'Those of us working for social change', says Peavy, 'tend to view our adversaries as enemies, to consider them unreliable, suspect, and generally of lower moral character'.<sup>21</sup>

Saul Alinsky, a brilliant community organizer, explained the rationale for polarization this way: "One acts decisively only in the conviction that all the angels are on one side and all the devils are on the other. A leader may struggle toward a decision and weigh the merits and demerits of a situation which is 52 percent positive and 48 percent negative, but once a decision is reached he must assume that his cause is 100 percent positive and the opposition 100 percent negative. Many liberals, during our attack on the then-school superintendent (in Chicago), were pointing out that after all he wasn't a 100

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19 Riddell, M. Godzone (Lion: Oxford, 1992) 15

20 Mackay, H. Turning Point (Sydney: McMillan, 1999) 2561

21 Peavey, F. Heart Politics (New Society Publishers, 1986)

percent devil, he was a regular churchgoer, he was a good family man, and he was generous in his contributions to charity. (But) can you imagine in the arena of conflict charging that (he was) a 'bastard', then diluting the impact of the attack with qualifying remarks? This becomes political idiocy."

But, as Peavy points out, 'demonizing one's adversaries has great costs. It is a strategy that tacitly accepts and helps perpetuate our dangerous enemy mentality.' So the strategy may help a group of people achieve a specific outcome in a particular conflict, but the relationships of enmity that the strategy engenders are actually inimical to the development of community.

Hence Peavy says, *'instead of focusing on the 52 percent 'devil' in my adversary, I choose to look at the other 48 percent.* To start from the premise that within each adversary I have an ally.' She acknowledges 'that ally may be silent, faltering, or just hidden from my view.'

But she acts on the assumption that *'apparent enemies' are 'potential allies' - if not friends.*

Robert Putnam refers to Saul Alinsky's approach as *'bonding'*, and to Fran Peavy's approach as *'bridging'*.<sup>22</sup> *Bonds* are strong connections, between like-minded people, that are exclusive. They produce deep, 'thick' trust', and are essential for supporting one another - for 'getting by'. Community organisers like Saul Alinsky help like-minded people *bond* pretty well.

*Bridges* are weak connections - between people who are not alike - that are inclusive. They produce broad, 'thin trust', and are crucial for co-operating with others - for 'getting on'. Community animators like Fran Peavy help people who are not like-minded *bridge* the gap.

Robert Putnam says that *if we are to develop healthy communities that we need to move beyond merely bonding with people who are like-minded people - against people who are not like-minded - to bridging the gaps between people who do not appear to be alike at all.*

'Community' may be an ideal that is worth striving for, but it is not an ideal that can ever be realised as a result of an ideological battle that we fight for in the name of the 'community'. 'Community', as we have said, *is essentially 'a sense of significance and sense of solidarity'* that comes as a result of 'developing relationships' that are characterised by *'mutual respect'*. The *'loss of mutual*

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<sup>22</sup> Putnam, R. *Bowling Alone* (New York: Simon & Schuster 2000)

*'respect' in relationships strikes a 'deathblow at the very heart of a community.'*

Hence it is vital for us to keep in mind the aphorism made famous by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the anti-Nazi German martyr, who said - *'Those who love "community" - destroy "community". Only those who love people ... develop "community".'*<sup>23</sup>

It would be my hope that any training we would provide would serve as an opportunity for people to develop an awareness of ourselves as persons-in-relationships - and of our need to move from dependence, through independence, towards interdependence, characterised by developing relationships of mutual respect between people, regardless of culture, class or creed.

### ***3.7 Principle-Based Training***

Amitai Etzioni, the irascible American communitarian, says when it comes to teaching about *principles* in community development most people think of a lesson in *values clarification*.

'Students are asked to list what is dear to them - money, reputation, power - and then to rank these pursuits in terms of which they hold most important. They fail - and are thus considered in need of moral tutoring - only if they have difficulty in deciding what is up and what is down in their scale of interests.

Etzioni says 'They are further helped to clarify their preferences through exercises such as the 'lifeboat drill', In this exercise students are told to imagine that they are in a lifeboat with a group of people that includes a scientist, an artist, a teacher, and a general (the list can vary). The boat is overloaded, and they must decide whom they would cast overboard first, second, (third) and so on. In this way the students' values are revealed. For instance, do they rank art higher than arms? (Usually the teachers are cast off first and the kids themselves last.)' As long as the pupils are clear on their preferred tossing order, and hence by implication their values, their moral education is considered properly advanced. Under moral reasoning *per se*, nobody is supposed to discuss the question whether they *should* have cast (anyone) overboard or ask why there aren't enough lifeboats to begin with.'

Etzioni concludes, 'Such development of moral reasoning may be helpful, if and when they are provided to people who already have evolved moral commitments. They can help such people sort out how specifically to express and apply their

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23 Vanier, J. Community And Growth (St Paul, 1989) 61-62

generalized sense that they ought to do what is right and to order various moral values when these do not readily dovetail with one another. But for youngsters whose moral commitments are underdeveloped, such classes tend to become idle debating clubs. In moral reasoning teachers are typically expected to be passive discussion facilitators rather than active proponents of values. The students' success in these exercises is based not so much on the depth and scope of their moral sensibilities, but on how well they spin an argument. What is missing between the development of moral reasoning (and the development of) character formation (the ability to guide oneself) is the internalization of (i.e. making part of oneself) commitments to a set of substantive values.' <sup>24</sup>

If we are to help people develop the *principles* required to develop community, then we need to help them not only *clarify their values*, but also *commit themselves to a substantive set of values* - without which healthy community development is a complete impossibility.

I agree with Stephen Covey who says 'these *principles* I am referring to are not esoteric, mysterious, or "religious" ideas. There is not one *principle* that is unique to any specific religion, including my own. These principles are a part of every major religion, as well as enduring social and ethical systems. They seem to exist in all human beings, regardless of conditioning and loyalty to them, even though they might be submerged by such conditions or numbed by (incidents of) disloyalty to them'.

Covey says 'these *principles* are essentially unarguable because they are *self-evident*. (They) are guidelines for human conduct that are proven to have enduring, permanent value. One way to quickly grasp the self-evident nature of principles is to simply consider the absurdity of attempting to live an effective life based on their opposites'.

'*Principles*,' Covey says, 'are not *practices*. A *practice* that works in one circumstance will not necessarily work in another, as parents who have tried to raise a second child exactly like they did the first can readily attest. While *practices* are situationally specific, *principles* are fundamental truths that have universal application. They apply to marriages, to families, to private and public organizations of every kind. When these truths are internalized into habits, they empower people to create a wide variety of practices to deal with different situations' <sup>25</sup>

Probably *the most important of these principles* is what we call '*The Golden Rule*' - that is the basis for building the networks of mutual obligation that provide the foundation for community.

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<sup>24</sup> Etzioni, A. *The Spirit Of Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993) 98-99

<sup>25</sup> Covey, S. *ibid* 34-35

A sense of mutual obligation can be either 'specific' or 'general'. If it is *specific*, the reciprocity is specific - *I'll do this for you if you do that for me*. If it is *general*, the reciprocity is generalised - *if we do what we can to help other people now, then someday, when we need help, someone may help us*. 'The Golden Rule' is a classic call to practice the principle of generalised reciprocity. And the same call is enunciated - with slight variations - in all of the eleven major religious traditions.

In Taoism the call is *descriptive*. 'Regard your neighbour's loss or gain as your own loss or gain.' In Jainism the call is *instructive*. 'One who neglects existence disregards their own existence'. In Hinduism, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Confucianism, Judaism and Baha'i the call is *imperative* and it is framed in *negative terms*. 'Never do to others what would pain you.' 'Hurt not others with that which hurts yourself.' 'What is hateful to you do not do to your neighbour.' 'Do not impose on others what you do not yourself desire'. 'Desire not for anyone the things you would not desire for yourself.' While In Christianity, Islam and Sikhism the call is *imperative* and it is framed in *positive terms*. 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you'. 'Do unto all people as you would they should do to you'. 'Treat others as you would be treated yourself.'<sup>26</sup>

In all these traditions the call for us to practice generalised reciprocity is the same.

<b>The Golden Rule</b>	<i>Hinduism</i> 'Never do to others what would pain you' -Panchatantra 3.104	<i>Buddhism</i> 'Hurt not others with that which hurts yourself.' -Udana 5.18	<i>Zoroastrianism</i> 'Do not to others what is not well for oneself.' -Shayast-na-shayast 13.29
<i>Jainism</i> 'One who neglects existence disregards their own existence' -Mahavira	<i>Confucianism</i> 'Do not impose on others what you do not yourself desire.' -Analects 12.2	<i>Taoism</i> 'Regard your neighbour's loss or gain as your own loss or gain.' -Tai Shang Kan Ying Pien	<i>Baha'I</i> 'Desire not for anyone the things you would not desire for yourself.' -Baha'Ullah 66
<i>Judaism</i> 'What is hateful to you do not do to your neighbour.' -Talmud, Shabbat,31a	<i>Christianity</i> 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you'. -Matthew 7.12	<i>Islam</i> 'Do unto all people as you would they should do to you.' -Mishkat-el-Masabih	<i>Sikhism</i> 'Treat others as you would be treated yourself.' -Adi Granth

<sup>26</sup> Tobias, M (ed) A Parliament Of Souls (San Francisco: KQED Books, 1995) 124-5

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There are no short cuts. There are no quick fixes. We cannot hope to develop community in our localities unless we 'do unto others as we would have them do unto us'.

### ***3.8 Process-Orientated Training***

The *content* of *what* we want to do is community development. The *processes* we want to use are *how* we want to do community development. We want to use *processes* that will not only *encourage the development of community* but also *encourage the development of the people engaged in the development of community*.

People tend to get involved in movements when they get excited. We can get people excited either through '*manipulation*', or through '*motivation*'. '*Manipulation*' involves imposing our vision upon others, and pulling their strings to get them to do what we'd like them to do. While '*motivation*' involves exploring a vision we share with people, and tapping into their passion about what they'd like to do to in order to make their dream come true.

We need to make sure we develop '*processes*' that we use are '*motivational*', rather than '*manipulative*'. And there a range of *motivational processes* we can use to help people explore their vision of community - and help them tap into their passion to make their dream come true.

**The first process is helping people *Articulate Their Vision*.** Articulating our vision is a vulnerable process in which we reveal the desperate hopes we hold dearly in the deepest parts of our hearts.

I remember how scary it was for me when I sat down and wrote out my vision. It seemed too romantic, too idealistic, too unrealistic - and more like Martin Luther King's than my own!

*'I dream of a world in which all the resources of the earth will be shared equally between all the people of the earth, so that even the most disad???*

*I dream of a great society of small communities co-operating to practice personal, social, economic, cultural and political integrity and harmony.*

*I dream of vibrant neighbourhoods where people relate to one another genuinely as good neighbours.*

*I dream of people developing networks of friendship in which the private pain they carry deep down is allowed to surface and shared in an atmosphere of mutual acceptance and respect.*

*I dream of people understanding the difficulties they have, discerning the problems, discovering the solutions, and working together for*

*personal growth and social change according to an agenda of sustainable justice and peace.'*

Every time I share this vision with other people I feel very self-conscious but I have found that if I am prepared to disclose *my* dream that others will normally be willing to share *theirs*.

In an atmosphere of acceptance and respect it's easy to get people talking about their vision of the ideal kind of community that they would really like to live in themselves.

**The second process is helping people to *Communicate Their Vision Through Stories*.** Stories are the best way for people to share their vision. Stories are inclusive. Different people can apprehend them - intellectually and emotionally - at different levels. Stories are also inspirational. They put soul into the body, and flesh on the bones of our airy-fairy dreams.

One of the stories that I love to tell people is about Ronnie and Leon.

Some time back a loud fight broke out next door. However, before I could move, my neighbour, Ronnie, sprang into action. Ronnie called out to the angry young man next door who we'll call Leon, whom, he suspected, might be beating up his elderly parents. 'Leon, Leon!' Ronnie cried. 'What's going on in there? Tell me what's going on in there!'

But there was no reply. Only the pathetic sound of crashing and screaming as if bodies were being knocked about the place. So Ronnie rushed through his house, out the front, and round to the neighbour's house where upon he started banging on the front door, demanding some kind of response. 'Leon!' Ronnie cried. 'Come here! I want to speak with you!'

Again there was no reply. But soon the sounds inside the house began to subside, and somebody opened the door. As soon as the door opened, Ronnie walked straight in and, while Leon was hurling his fists about to prevent anyone from interfering in the fight, Ronnie calmly strode up to Leon, put his arm around his shoulders, and carefully ushered him out of the house.

After Ronnie had taken him round the block a few times, Leon was brought over to join us on the verandah. And while I spoke with Leon, Ange my wife, went over to speak with Leon's mum and dad, about what could be done about his abusive behaviour in future.

As I sat there sipping my cup of tea, sharing a plate of biscuits with Leon, I reflected on the events of the evening. It hadn't turned out as I expected. It was far more traumatic than I had imagined it would be. But it was also far more momentous than I had imagined it would be.

This story says it all. People like Ronnie make community a reality in our locality. They assume responsibility for the welfare of their neighbours. They don't project the responsibility to help on to anyone else. They understand that - in a crisis - responsibility always requires action.

They don't prevaricate, but act promptly and appropriately. And, as a result of their action, minimise the damage that we do to one another.

Whenever I tell a story like this, other people soon pitch in with their *own* stories of people they know who make the dream of community a reality in their locality. And every story they tell encourages people to believe that the dream is *not* an impossible dream. And every story they hear encourages people to believe that they *too* might be able to make the dream come true!

**The third process is helping people to *Demonstrate The Vision In Their Own Lives*.** It's pretty easy to get people talking - and swapping stories about their vision for community. The hard part is helping them clarify their values, check that they are consistent with the principle of generalised reciprocity, and commit themselves to incorporating those values into their lives.

It may be hard, but - deep down - people know that it's got to be done. That they need to demonstrate the values they advocate in their own lives. For it is only as they demonstrate those values in their own lives that they can prove that they are possible to live out in their own locality.

One night I was walking down the street and came across a man being attacked by a couple of hoods, who were stabbing him with the jagged shards of a broken bottle. His face was already covered in blood. And the hands he used to protect his face were already badly cut and bleeding.

I thought, if someone doesn't do something soon, this bloke could be cut to pieces. I looked up and down the street. But no one else was around. I knew I it was up to me to do something myself; but, I must confess, I was tempted to just to walk on by. To pretend that I hadn't seen anything warranting my attention, let alone my intervention.

I was afraid, terribly afraid, and my fear was well founded. There were two men across the road trying to kill someone, and if I tried to help him, chances were that I could be killed too. After all, there were two of them; and only one of me. They looked like street fighters; and I looked like the wimp that I was. I had no weapon, and wouldn't know how to use one even if I had one; and they had shards of sharp glass, that they wielded as wickedly as the grim reaper himself might have swung his scythe.

But I knew it was time for me to act, so I wrapped the tattered rags of my makeshift courage around me, and, with trembling hands, wobbly knees, and a heart ringing like an alarm bell, crossed the road to intervene in the fight. I didn't rush over and try to crash tackle the assailants. That only ever works in the movies. And even then it doesn't work all the time. I simply walked to within ten metres of the melee, propped, and said from a safe distance the most inoffensive thing I could think of the time, which was, 'G' Day.'

The antagonists immediately turned I my direction. Now I had their attention I tried to distract them from further hurting their victim. But the trick was to do it without them harming me instead. So I said to them, in as friendly a tone as I could muster, 'Can I help you?'

The aggressors looked at one another, then at me, and laughed. They thought it was a big bloody joke. 'Does it look like we need any help?' they asked facetiously. 'No.' I said very carefully. 'It doesn't look like *you* need any help. But, it looks like *he* might need some help. What d'you reckon?'

By now they had stopped stabbing their prey, and, in answer to my question, they shrugged their shoulders, and said, 'Well *you* help *him* then!' And with that, they walked off, and left me to care for the mutilated man on the side of the road. He was seriously injured, but at least he was still alive. And so was I.

Talk is cheap. Actions speak louder than words. And there here comes a time for all of us when we have to stop merely *telling* the stories and start *living* out the stories in our own lives.

**The fourth process is helping people to *Cultivate Their Vision in the Lives of Others*.** We can *cultivate* the vision in the lives of others by *articulating, communicating, and demonstrating* the vision of community we have in our own lives, and *inviting* others to participate in the community we are developing with us.

One of the people I decided to invite to get involved with us was a kid in a local hostel with thick glasses, spikey hair, and empty gums named Dean. Dean started his life behind the eight ball. A little kid, at the mercy of big, merciless blokes, in an endless round of foster homes and special schools, Dean was knocked about a lot, and was constantly left feeling completely snookered.

At the age of eighteen Dean was placed in a Linden Court. I remember meeting him well, because at the time the only way Dean knew to express his emotions was by thumping people, and he was apparently so glad to make my acquaintance that he almost killed me.

Since that time Dean and I have become quite good mates. We share a passion for Rugby League Football, and are very passionate supporters of the Brisbane

Broncos, whom Dean and I reckon are probably the best Rugby League team in the world. We regularly go out together with a bunch of friends, to have a barbecue in a park down by the Brisbane River, and Dean has even been known, to drag me into a game of 'touch footy' now and again - which is really to fast for an old fella like me.

Not long ago, a brother-in-law of mine sadly lapsed into an episode of psychotic despair, jumped off the Storey Bridge, which spans the Brisbane River, and tragically killed himself. Needless to say, I was devastated. When I told everybody at church how devastated I was, I noticed Dean, standing in the back of the room, listening intently to me. Before I realised it, he made his way to the front, where I was standing, and stood beside me, with his arm around me, quietly waiting until I had finished what I was saying. Then, all of a sudden, he embraced me, gave me a huge hug, and said, 'Don't worry Dave. I'll be your brother-in-law.'

I'll never forget that unpretentious gesture of care. It was a sign to me that my dream of our locality becoming a community of people who really cared for one another was coming true.

**The fifth process is helping people to *Celebrate The Realisation Of Their Vision*.** Each of us, who feel inadequate, need to be helped to realise our capacity to act. And each of us, who feel afraid, need to be helped to realise our courage to act. Each of us, who feel impotent, need to be helped to recognise the potential of our actions. And each of us, who feel insignificant, need to be helped to recognise the consequences of our actions.

We can do this by commemorating every act of truth as a victory over lies, and every act of love as a victory over hatred. Consecrating every act of justice as a victory over brutality, and every act of peace as a victory over bloodshed. And celebrating every risk a person takes to make a stand - *no matter how small* - as a victory in the battle for light against the darkness.

Each Sunday night, at half-past-six, for the last ten years, Ange and I have met with a large bunch, of up-to-a-hundred people, from all over our own neighbourhood, in the basement of (the rather serendipitously named) St. Andrew's Church.

Sunday night is essentially a gathering of local people - many of whom are physically, intellectually, and/or psychiatrically challenged, and live in extraordinarily difficult social, economic, and political, life-controlling circumstances - who gather together to celebrate their life and faith together.

One of the locals who you would meet if you came to St. Andrew's one night would be Kay Irwin. Kay goes out of her way to greet everyone who comes through the door at St. Andrew's. Her first words are, 'Hi. My name is Kay. I do dialysis.' Kay has a life-threatening kidney complaint. She has waited for a kidney transplant, in vain, for years. So, three times a week, Kay goes to the local hospital to 'do dialysis.' It's a matter of life and death.

But even though Kay's life has to revolve around dialysis, Kay 'does dialysis' in style. She is upfront about her 'struggle'. She wears the scars on her arms as 'badges of honour'. She challenges people to join her in hospital while she is doing dialysis 'if you've got the guts.' Somehow she transforms her struggle into a sacrament for others. She sells raffle tickets to raise money for kidney research. And she draws funny cartoons to give her fellow sufferers a bit of a belly laugh.

If we are to keep going, all of us need to celebrate every single breath we take and every single step we make - like Kay Irwin does- and encourage those around us to do the same.

### ***3.9 Politically-Committed Training***

Jacques Ellul, the French social historian, says 'at the present moment we are confronted with a choice - the "Brave New World" of Huxley - or a different civilization, which we cannot yet describe because we do not know what it will be; it is still to be created.<sup>27</sup> The creation of this 'different civilization', what I call a 'community world', is what 'community development' is all about. Community development is essentially a *political* process. It is *not a party political process*. It is not partisan. It is committed equally to people both on the left and the right. It is *not a state political process*. It does not project our problems and the solution of our problems onto the state. Quite the contrary - it recognises that if we have problems in our communities then we will have to solve those problems ourselves. But it is a *political* process in the sense that *it involves people continually making corporate policy decisions about the nature of our common lives*.

The sociologist Talcott Parsons says, 'the *political* process is the process by which *the necessary organization (for making corporate policy decisions) is built up, the goals of action are determined, and the resources requisite to it are mobilized.*'<sup>iii</sup> This may, or may not, have anything to do with the state. But, *for community development to take place, this process needs to be 'organised for the people, by the people themselves'*. Because it's about *empowerment!*

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27 Ellul, J. The Presence Of The Kingdom (Seabury, 1967) 42

There are two ways of understanding *power*. *Traditionally* our notion of power has been defined as *the ability to control other people*. This *tradition* emphasises *bringing about change through coercion - getting others to change according to our agendas*. While the *traditional* approach advocates taking control of *our* lives by taking control of *others*, the *alternative* approach advocates taking control of *our* lives by taking control of *ourselves*. This *alternative* emphasises *bringing change by transformation - encouraging one another to change our lives, individually and collectively, in the light of an agenda of sustainable justice and peace*.

The traditional notion of power is popular because it often brings quick, dramatic results. But it is characterised by short-term gains for some, and long-term losses for everyone else. Every violent revolution there has been, has - sooner or later - betrayed the people in whose name it fought its bloody war of liberation. The alternative notion of power has been unpopular because it is a slow unspectacular process. But it is slowly - but surely - gaining in popularity because people are beginning to realise it is the only way that groups can transcend their selfishness, resolve their conflicts, and manage their affairs in a way that does justice.

The essential problem in any situation of injustice is - that one human being is exercising control over another and exploiting the relationship of dominance. The solution to the problem is not simply to reverse roles, in the hope that once the roles have been reversed, the manipulation will discontinue. The solution is for people to stop trying to control each other.

All of us, to one degree or another, exploit the opportunity if we have control over another person's life. Common sense therefore dictates that the solution to the problem of exploitation cannot be through the dominant approach to power - with its emphasis on controlling others. The solution is in the alternative - the strong but gentle approach - which emphasises controlling ourselves, individually and collectively, through self managed processes and structures.

Some of us believe if we are to help people - particularly the oppressed - we need to manage their affairs for them. But it doesn't matter how we try to rationalise it, controlling others always empowers us and disempowers those we seek to help. The only way people - particularly the oppressed - can be helped, is for them to be empowered to take control over their own lives. This is why we should not take control over others, no matter how dire the circumstances. Our job is not to seek control, but to enable others to take control over their own lives.

The British community worker, Fred Milson says, our work will be able to be judged to have succeeded or failed, *'by the practical demonstration in all feasible areas, that the community (was able to) define it's own needs and organise (it's own) resources to satisfy them.'*<sup>28</sup>

### ***3.10 Action-Reflection Training***

*We need to remember that - anything that's good enough to do is worth doing badly to begin with - but if we want to do good, then each time we have a go at something, we should try to do it better than we did before. And if we are going to try to do something better than we did before, we need to develop the capacity to reflect critically - but constructively - on our actions.*

To develop the capacity to reflect critically - but constructively - on our actions actually requires more than the development *a way* to reflect on our actions. It requires the development of *a way of life* that is conducive to the development *a way* to reflect on our actions.

We need to make sure we get enough sleep at night, so that in the morning we can wake up not groggy or grumpy, but glad to be alive. And we can give ourselves over to the joy of living.

To prepare ourselves for the day we can take a bit of time just to sense the tensions in our bodies that signal things we are uptight about. Often these are grievances, real or perceived of ways that people thwart our plans. We can note the issues they raise that we need to address. Then open our hands and let our grievances go.

Once we let our grievances go we can begin to let the love flow. We can try to do this by bringing to mind all the people that we are connected to in our community, then one by one, picture their face, speak their name, and pronounce a blessing upon each and every one them, friend and foe alike.

We can often be in a hurry. On the move from morning to night. But at regular intervals throughout the day we can always take the time to stop, to look, and to listen. And to deliberate on the activities, conversations, and undercurrents in our community.

Every now and again we can try to get a bit of distance from our community and put it into a bit of perspective. We can meditate on our community. As it is. And as it might be. Imagining all the things we could do to bring people in the locality together more.

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28 Milson, F. op cit

Because there's so many things we *could* do, it's very difficult to figure out exactly what we *should* do. We are often confused. So we can seek clarity by listening to the still small voice of intuition inside us. We can listen until we hear a word that is right for us. Then we can take that word to heart.

We can take it to heart. But not go for it on our own. We can run it by a group of people whose opinions we trust. And together decide on what we are going to do about it. Discern the direction that we ought to take, on the basis of consensus and consent.

Even if we get the direction right, doesn't mean we get the action right. We may actually get it wrong far more often than we'd like to admit. So it's really important to be a part of a group that can help us monitor our progress by reflecting on our actions.

When we reflect on our actions, we are brought face to face with our failures and successes. And if we're not careful we can let our failures discount our successes. So it's important to be a part of a group that can help us not only evaluate our progress but validate our progress.

One of the many things we have done in our community is help set up all kinds of co-ops.

And one of the co-ops that we started in the block we lived in was a chook co-op. The idea was to keep some chooks for our neighbours at the bottom of one of our neighbours back yards.

In return for putting scraps for feed in the pen, people could get their eggs for free. When the chooks finished laying we would meet under a mango tree next door for barbecue chicken. At one of those gatherings I remember a Greek woman pointing to the gathered throng, and announcing triumphantly - 'this is just like my village at home in Greece!'

Now - *what could be better than that?*

# Training and Soul

**Peter Westoby**

## **Introduction**

In a previous reflection (published in "Praxis Vol. 1" called 'soulful community development' \*)<sup>29</sup> I have argued that the vocation of community development is in danger of being co-opted by modernisation. The modern approach is to take anything that is good, fast track it, package it, market it and sell it.

The training projects called "Building Better Communities" (BBC) and "Community Animators Training Strategy" (CATS) could easily be co-opted in this way - a sense of 'packaging', 'one-size-fits-all' for any community.

This brief reflection is a call to keep in mind these social/cultural and economic/political forces for the trainers, team members and partners.

## **The co-option of community development**

As we move into a new global era of conservatism in the guise of re-allocation of resources away from the poor, the elite will utilise the notion of community and the technique of community development to justify their greed. I sense and see that empowerment is being defined as the poor taking responsibility for their own lives and "professional" community development workers will be contracted to mobilise the poor to build "self-reliant" community organisations.

During such a time more than ever we will need a movement of people committed not to this quick-buck technique but to the soulful tradition of genuine community development - a vocation of solidarity committed to building a soulful civil society. "Building Better Communities" (BBC) and "Community Animators Training Strategy" (CATS) are to be understood contextually within this tradition.

This reflection addresses the issue of how to train people in this tradition. It calls those of us who can influence resources for training to suck in a deep breath and commit ourselves to the real long-term resourcing that is needed to bring genuine transformation.

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<sup>29</sup> In this paper soul is defined as a process of giving full attention, of awakening, of connecting and of dis-continuity.

We need an 'army' (maybe not a useful metaphor during this historical moment) of change-agents that are passionately committed to soulful community and a soulful vocation. I feel that I write this reflection at some risk. For many, even the notion of change-agent reflects a modernistic approach to development - that is, the need for "outside" knowledge and people to "bring" development.

I will however discuss the training of such change-agents despite such risk. In my work I have become more and more convinced that the key to genuine soulful community development is not lots of money, lots of buildings and infrastructure (clinics, schools, roads, water etc.) but the actual quality of the people who dream of a new world and want to take some kind of action - we will call these people the change-agent.

The change-agent, whether an outsider or an insider is the person who can model a new attitude, a new vision, who can bring a fresh energy and insight and who can facilitate the awakening of awareness, imagination and powerful action. It is such a cadre of change agents who will bring fresh hope and a sparkle of transformation in the communities within which they work. The development of such a cadre requires a new commitment from those with powers over the resource allocation of training budgets.

In this reflection I will not concern myself with the methodology, orientation or programmatic issues within the training process - many good books have already been written on such subjects. I will again focus on the heart of training - what is it within training that will awaken people to soul?

### **Training to Re-imagine**

One way of understanding our context for training is the failure of the imagination of modernity and technique - or put more simply, people can no longer imagine a new society based on anything other than what is!!! The media has dominated our dreams, our education has dominated our minds - our heads are so busy with the new information highway that we have lost the capacity to imagine.

It is the thesis of this reflection that the world that we take as given is really only a long established act of imagination that appears to simply be and claims assent as the only legitimate occupant of the field. It follows then that long-imagined lens can be challenged, and a counter given can be imagined. This is the initial role of training for a soulful vocation of community development.

We must train people in a new awareness that the world we have taken for granted in economics, politics and elsewhere is an imagined construct. As it is a

construct, then from any other perspective, the world can yet be constructed differently.

Our goal is not to create a new hegemony in terms of what should be, clearly that would undermine all that has been said. Our goal in training is to enable participants to counter-imagine the world.

I once read an ancient Japanese story "Tea for Two" in which a young highly intelligent and most accomplished young student wished to have an audience with The Grand Master. The young student sat down and the master asked if he wished to have a drink of tea. The student said yes and the master started to pour. He poured the tea until the glass was full and then he continued to pour until the glass was overflowing and then he still kept on pouring. The student jumped up startled by the tea flooding over the tabletop and down onto his legs, "Master the cup is full to overflowing". The Master continued to pour, the tea spilling out onto the table and floor. "As you are" the Master replied.

The story illustrates a problem that many of us have. I have learnt that many of us are so preoccupied with progress and development within the parameters defined to us by the current "given" that there is very little space for us to begin imagining a new world. To nurture imagination we need space and silence - we need to stop pouring tea into a full glass. A training space is such a space - an opportunity to begin this act of imagination.

*In my life there is a reoccurring dream. In the dream I am usually trying to do something or go somewhere. I am racing for a plane or a taxi and I am trying to fill my bag or pack. I always have problems filling my bag; some items fall out or refuse to remain attached. I often miss the plane or taxi. In my dream I am then presented with an alternative; usually it is someone, a friend or relative who is sitting silently or walking up into the mountain to meditate.*

The dream has become a story, an image that presents me with two ways of living. One way is the way of the activist - do, do, do - the other is that of retreat, silence and attention. Clearly neither options are the correct way, there is a middle path. This middle path is the way that enables us to 'both' engage with the world and take time out to imagine and re-imagine a new world. Our task in training participants for re-imagination is therefore about providing counter-givens for re-imagination and also encouraging the disciplines that enable the ongoing task of imagination.

### **Stories and Texts for Re-imagination**

Stories and texts are the vital tools for training in re-imagination - they provide the models, images and pictures that enable us to imagine a new world. We will briefly explore two kinds of story and text. Firstly stories (authors/books) as written texts and secondly models (communities, practitioners) as lived texts.

Re-imagination is often future-orientated. We are attempting to envisage a new world. But when we consider stories and texts that are rich in meaning we see that often they explore the past. Maybe a story that has matured is one that links the past, present and future in a way that combines the wisdom of the past with the imagination of the future.

As a young student of theology I was always fascinated with two traditions that flowed through the story of the Judeo-Christian scriptures. One was a prophetic tradition - it always wanted to bring change, it demanded transformation - it was present and future orientated. The other was the priestly tradition - it always looked backwards - it liked things as they were and upheld the status quo. Here we saw a mature tapestry emerge that combined the past (what the priests saw as important) with the present and future (what the prophets saw as important).

This is our challenge. A tapestry of texts that links us with the past and provides wisdom and insight but that gives a freedom and flexibility to engage with contemporary concerns and struggles.

### **Written texts**

Firstly, let us explore the written text. For a long time my reading of the biblical scriptures has sustained me as a text that inspires the imagining of an alternative world. There is something enriching for the soul when we are reminded through such wisdom that everyone dies and no one can take their wealth and riches with them. There is something enriching for the soul when we are challenged to live by an ethic such as "do unto others as you would like them to do to you".

Such texts ignite possibilities that seem beyond reality and they inspire a hope and memories that within history we have often seen the apparently impossible happen. Such scriptures link us to a far distance history and remind us that history tells stories. I often read scriptures and find myself questioning the miracles that occur as some kind of fantasy. But then I am reminded of modern day miracles that I have witnessed. Who would have ever dreamt that the repressive regime in the Philippines under Marcos could have been removed so quickly, or that the Berlin Wall would so suddenly be dismantled? Miracles occur - and they often fly straight into the face of despairing reality.

Scriptures are full of stories and it is the power of story that unlocks imagination. When I talk of texts I am not referring to textbooks. They are often too dry and technical to inspire imagination; they tend to simply inspire ideology. The kinds of texts we are looking for are texts full of story, narrative,

and people. Story connects with our reality, we can locate ourselves within a story and identify with characters and events - this is the source of their power.

Other kinds of texts and stories that I have found inspiring are the likes of Herman Hess' "Siddhartha" or Ursula La Guin's "The Dispossessed". There are many options. In these training courses one of the challenges for trainers is to find texts and stories that invoke imagination for trainer and participants, stories that are 'yours', that others can engage with. For those of us who wish to sustain a lively imagination that inspires us to build a community world it is important to collect stories and resources to feed our soul. One must remember that we are constantly being fed stories through the newspapers and TV's that imagine a world that most of us do not wish to replicate. To engage our imaginative faculties we must feed alternative options constantly.

Other important texts for those involved in community development are the stories and writings of many author/activists. They are not ideological textbooks but writings that reflect on experience and are informed by certain values, perspectives and praxis. They are essential as training tools in that they invite learners of community development to consider the many methods and tools available to build a community world. Such author/activists would be Mahatma Ghandi, J.P. Narayan, E.F. Schumacher, Helder Camara, Saul Alinsky, Franz Fanon, Paulo Friere, Marcuse, Sheila Rowbotham, the list could go on. Feel free to utilize texts from such people in the training process.

### **Models as texts**

The second text that we wished to explore is that of models. Here it is important to nourish our capacity to re-imagine a new world not simply through engaging with written text but with lived text and story. We actually need to see people and organisations that model the kind of values, commitments and concerns that we ourselves are inspired by. This implies the importance of documenting the lives of individuals and organisations that are modelling a new world.

At this point it would be worth saying that the "reading of such text" should not mean that we set out to imitate people, groups or organisations. Soul calls us to our own authenticity. Soul will draw energy and imagination from others but it will integrate and develop its own story.

These two forms of 'text' come together and as one listens to communities stories memory is invoked. This is the power of text and story - memory and a fight against amnesia.

I have gained inspiration and fresh imagination from peoples of all walks of life. Many of the refugees I work with in Brisbane challenge me and call me to imagine a world of peace and welcome. Their exposure to the harsh realities of brutality and irrationality, their resilience in the face of alienation and exile touch me deep in my soul. My imagination and memory have been activated in a way that never allows me to forget the reality of our own underworld.

Models of work such as local savings and loans co-operatives, unemployed workers co-ops, support groups, community-youth initiatives inspire me, and ensure that I keep believing that it is possible to bring positive change.

Organisations as models and stories also provide an essential tool in empowering us to imagine and work for a new world. Training people requires us to link participants with such organisations in a way that will enable them to sustain their imagination. We must look out for, participate in and nurture organisations and networks that provide a culture, a tradition, a spirit and a structure that is alternative to what "is given". They can be organisations focusing on anything from local development to global development. They may be corporations, associations, networks - but they have one thing in common; they inspire us to imagine and work for a community world.

#### **Training as Psychotherapeutic Conversation**

Any of us who have been involved in forms of re-imagining the world and transforming struggle end up confronted by our need for healing. Our imagination had wakened us to the hope of a new world and we end up being tripped up by our own undoing. Our practice teaches us to be attentive and in that attentiveness we are confronted with aspects of ourselves that need a deeper exploration. Many activists/ community development workers end up seeing therapists/ counsellors.

In our awareness of the layers of resistance within our society and ourselves we simply end up having to confront all the contradictions that our socialisation and biological make-up leave with us. It is one thing to advocate for a world without the divisions of race, gender and class - it is another thing to live without them in our daily lives. We dream of a non-violent world yet our dreams may be full of violence. We dream of a community world but we often wish to withdraw into our private space and avoid the inevitable conflict and pain of genuine relationships. We find ourselves caught up with a part or parts of our self that we cannot understand or even relate to.

It becomes the task of therapy to unravel the contradictions of the many selves that make us "us". The therapeutic challenge becomes to learn to

welcome, relate to, even befriend the many selves and explore a rich depth of self that before we never knew existed.

Training is in many ways similar to this process of unravelling the psychological contradictions within. However, it is not so much about integrating the contradictions of the psyche but integrating the contradictions of genuine social transformation.

When we start with psychotherapy we often subscribe to a way of viewing ourselves, our perception of whom we are. It is essentially our story - in many ways a fictional story as opposed to a factual one because it will have become distorted through all sorts of processes (amnesia, memory, 'blind-spots', socialisation, internal critics etc.) - we could call it our own myth. It certainly is not a story or myth based on facts, but only our perception, our memory of what has happened in our life filtered through all sorts of lenses.

The role of psychotherapy is to "broaden" the myth, to fill it out. The critical task is to awaken imagination in such a way that we do not limit how we view ourselves to old stories - stories imposed on us from others or ourselves. This awakened imagination can lead to much tension and many dilemmas but if we can integrate the new stories emerging, the other selves - then a more creative, integrated and whole person can emerge.

Training could be understood and informed with a similar process. I have outlined four stages to this process within a training framework:

**Stage 1:** Trainers and participants come with a view of the world. This view is purely an 'act of imagination', or put another way: a story, a myth of how it should be and is. Such a story in no way reflects reality. The story has been informed through parental and educational socialisation, gender, racial, class windows and media/political propaganda. Stage 1 of training requires participants to recognise this - to recognise that as an individual 'I do not know the truth' about the world and "I am willing to work with this group of people journeying with me to experience the world differently'. Recognising this is an act of humility that creates the space for 'training'.

**Stage 2:** One of the key training tasks is to provide models, images and pictures of an alternative world that can be left to linger and challenge. These models, images, pictures (we have called them stories and texts) broaden the myth and unravel the old stories. They do not give the "true" story, (there is no such thing), they simply broaden it! In a way this process introduces us to many ways of seeing the world, many perspectives - or many worlds.

**Stage 3:** The next training challenge is to provide space and place for internal struggle in which a dialogue around these stories, perspectives, multiple worlds can occur. Old stories are being evaluated alongside new ones, some myths are broadened, and others are narrowed. There are many tensions and dilemmas and we must encourage one another to engage with these dilemmas with honesty and courage.

Many before us have struggled to make the choice to engage with the marginalised in a struggle for genuine community and justice. Oscar Romero's classic moment of soulful struggle in the desert of El Salvador is an example. There in the desert he knew that he had a choice to either back off from the demands of soul and struggle and accept the world as given by the El Salvadoran government and US allies or he would have to dig deep and find the courage to push on, imagine the world as different, advocate for another truth in opposition to the El Salvadoran government and stand "alongside" the poor with compassion and in solidarity.

The mythology surrounding Moses (the burning bush) and even Christ (at the garden of Gethsemane) lend me to believe that for many of us there will come a moment of such soulful struggle. Often our capacity to deal with these critical moments in a way that will lead us to courage will depend on how sincerely we have struggled with all the small choices and options that have come our way in the toss and tumble of everyday community life.

Or to ground this in the experience of some of the training courses I have run recently in SE Queensland I have often seen people struggling with whether to give up the myth of 'young people are 'hoons' and we need to get them out of our community' and expand the story to engage with the complexity of 'hoons' and 'HOONS', the why's, causes, motivations, options and opportunities for response. It is a painful process for people and as a trainer you can see etched on people's faces the process of working out whether to struggle for inclusive or 'excluding' communities.

**Stage 4** The result is transformation or regression. People give up with the struggle and remain content with the given world or they embark on the life-long journey to live a life that engages with soul and solidarity of mystery, multiple worlds, and hidden worlds.

This is an ongoing circular process. It is the training process itself that must equip participants to constantly engage with the circular process within their work, themselves and networks/organisational forms of support.

### **Training as inspiration not information**

I have outlined a training framework that advocates for the centrality of imagination, stories and text and psychotherapeutic conversation. Finally I would like to make some points about training as inspiration rather than information.

We live in a world that is flooded with information - news, papers, articles, radio, TV, the Internet - an information highway that I am both thankful to have access to, and yet also quite suspicious of. In my own life I have tried to impose limits on this information highway by not having a TV, only reading the weekend newspapers, subscribing to a reputable International weekly newspaper, and listening to the radio only when driving. I limit this flow because the stories within these information sources serve to disempower me rather than inspire me.

Since we started to run the courses 'called "Building Better Communities" (BBC) and "Community Animators Training Strategy" (CATS), we have advocated that if they are to lead to positive social and community change they must be primarily about inspiration, not information.

The trainer brings themselves, their stories, the texts of others, their own imagination, they create a safe space for 'conversation' - but they do all that with an underlying desire to awaken inspiration. People will be motivated not by information alone, but by inspiration!

This does not mean information is not important (and usually we provide people information oriented articles and readings to engage with when they are at home), but we try to avoid the use of the 'training space' to engage with information.

In the dictionary 'inspire' means 'to breathe in', or to be 'inspired' - that is, to 'have something conveyed to the mind under extra-ordinary influence'. This is how I imagine training - a process of participants and trainers 'breathing in' new possibilities - taking the stories, texts, ideas, imaginations deep into the lungs, deep into the selves, and make them a part of themselves. I imagine 'extra-ordinary influences' because a training place should be a safe space to imagine new worlds, discuss possibilities and dream up ideas, actions - and that is extraordinary. It does not take place within most people's households, over dinner tables, in Parliament - it can take place in our training spaces!

Most of us are aware that one of the toughest challenges in life is not so much knowing what to do, but having the motivation and inspiration to do it. This awareness underlies the training framework - it is not hard for people to

awaken to the possibilities of a new and better world, there are plenty of stories and texts that provide wonderful imaginative ideas of what could be - but it is hard to get motivated and inspired to do something and sustain that doing!

# **Reviving local communities through community training: some insights from evaluating the Co-op's training course in 2002**

**Helen Beazley**

In 2002 the Community Praxis Co-operative ('the Co-op') received its biggest single allocation of government funding for training delivery. The Co-op's brief was to deliver nine community training courses in south east Queensland, in communities that were regarded as disadvantaged using a variety of indicators. An in house evaluation of the course was a condition of this funding. As the main target audience of the evaluation was a funding bureaucracy with its particular accountability requirements, many of the findings make dreary reading. However, scattered through the evaluation report are 'nuggets' of valuable learning which have gone some way in helping the Co-op clarify the philosophy, processes, strengths, weaknesses and outcomes of our course. We have drawn out and now pass on these bits and pieces of insight to other community development practitioners who are interested in exploring training as a way to support ordinary people's efforts to build healthy community in their locality.

## **Understanding the course**

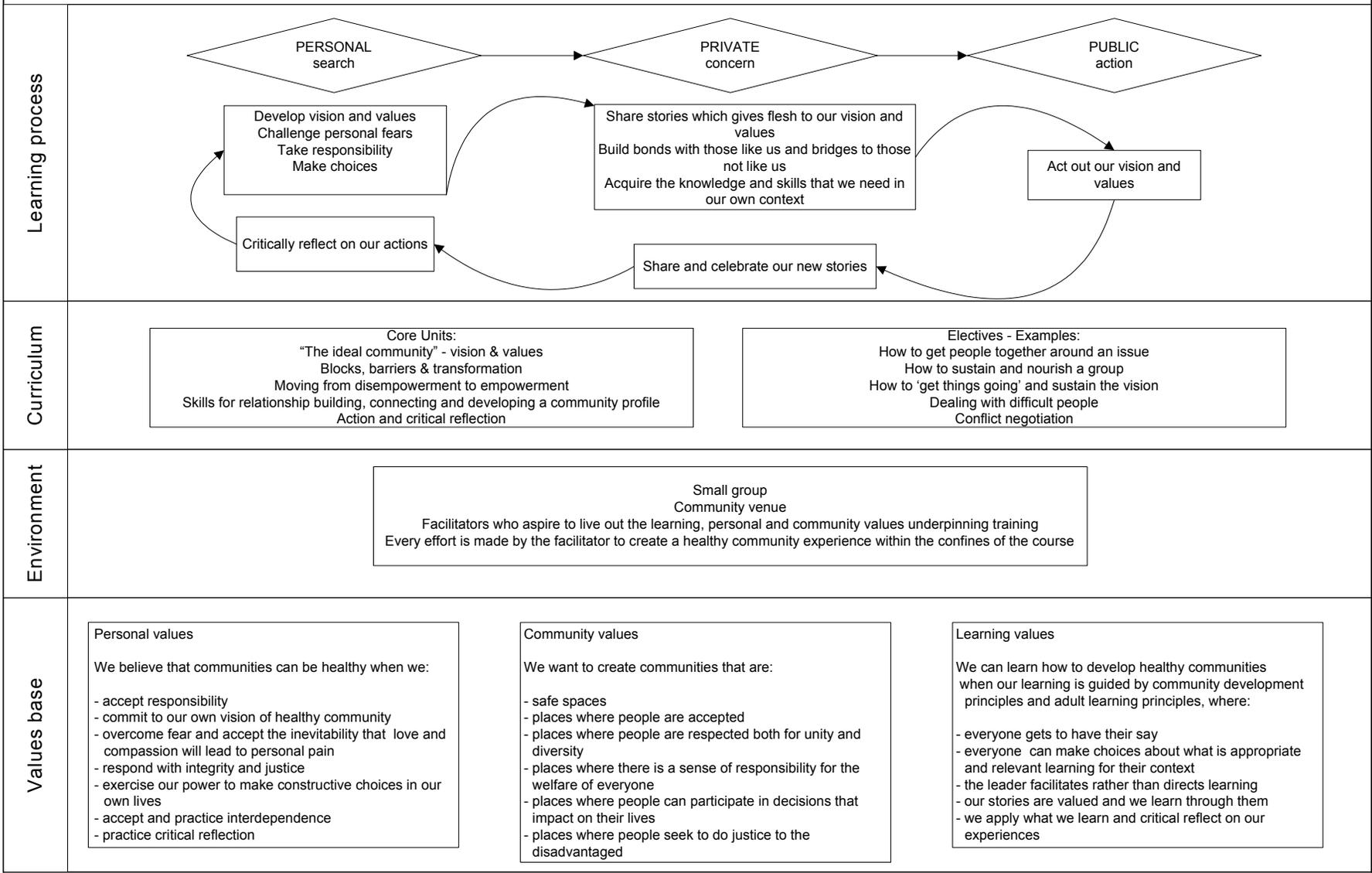
The evaluation came at a significant time in the evolution of the Co-op's venture into community training. For three years the course had been delivered primarily by the two course developers, Dave Andrews and Peter Westoby. In 2002, with a rapid expansion in demand for the course, we have recruited a number of experienced community workers to become lead trainers for the Co-op and have equipped them to deliver the course through a mentoring process. The evaluation has helped document key concepts underpinning the course for the benefit of new trainers and other interested parties. The evaluation's attempts to construct and convey the course's nature, values, philosophy and logic are presented below.

The following is a 'bare bones' description of the Co-op's community training course, although course delivery can vary according to community needs:

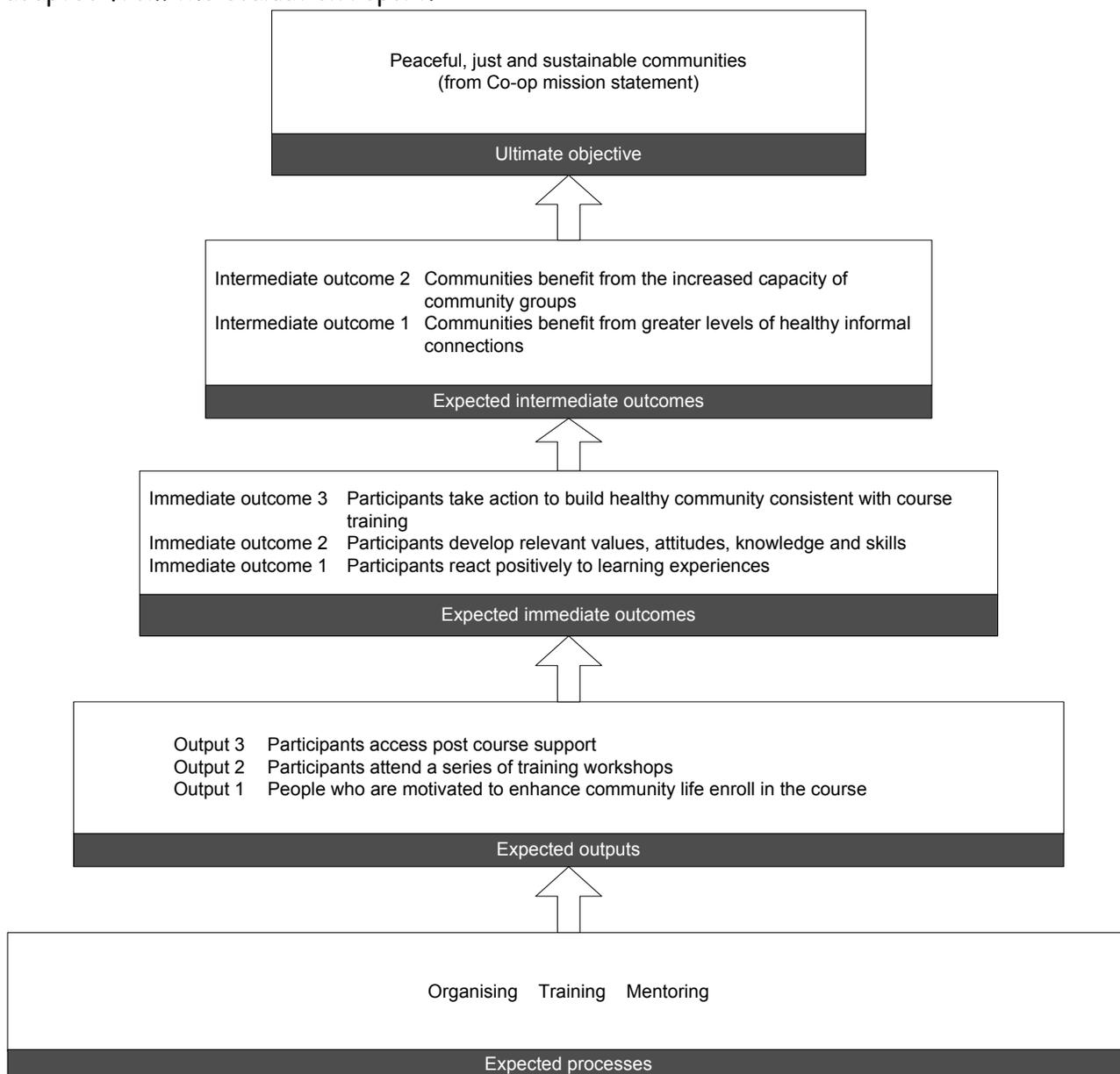
Stages	Organising: building relationships with critical friends, publicity, information Training: 20 hours split over 4 to 7 sessions Follow-up/Mentoring: nature of follow-up varies according to participants and funding arrangements
Training facilitation	One lead trainer (experienced trainer and community worker) and one assistant trainer
Venue	Local community space
Size	10 - 15 participants
Course Structure	3 core units: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The ideal community: - visions and values</li> <li>○ Blocks, barriers and transformation - moving from disempowerment to empowerment</li> <li>○ Skills for relationship building, connecting and developing a community profile</li> </ul> 3 'how to' elective units (negotiated by the group) often selected from the following suite: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Developing community through communication</li> <li>○ How to get people together around an issue</li> <li>○ How to sustain and nourish a group</li> <li>○ How to 'get things going' and sustain the vision</li> <li>○ Dealing with difficult people</li> <li>○ Dealing with difficult organisations</li> <li>○ Strategies for working in the community</li> <li>○ Maintaining privacy and dealing with daily difficulty</li> <li>○ Conflict negotiation</li> <li>○ Surfing our feelings</li> <li>○ How to run a meeting/committee</li> </ul>

A dry outline of the course as presented above does not do justice to the way in which the Co-op's understanding of community, community development, training and transformation come together in course curriculum and delivery. These concepts are fleshed out elsewhere in this volume, with the following diagram developed during the evaluation as a preliminary attempt to illustrate the interplay of these concepts.

# A model of the Co-op's community leadership training



To understand the expected inputs, processes, outputs and outcomes of the course, we constructed the course's program logic. The following diagram is adapted from the evaluation report.



### Characterising, and characteristics of, participants

The substantial pool of funding received by the Co-op came from a program to develop the skills of potential community leaders. However, the Co-op never promotes its course as a leadership course nor does it explicitly identify and recruit community 'leaders'. Rather the Co-op has offered the course to anyone interested, with as few barriers to entry as possible. Thus, evaluating the course against the broader program expectations of recruiting 'potential leaders' brought us into tension with the Co-op's open recruitment policy and

led us to more deeply consider the characteristics of hoped-for and actual participants.

In terms of leadership, the Co-op recognises that there are two types of leader who we want to attract and support: individuals who exercise initiative and apply their skills to *enhancing informal community connectedness*, and individuals who exercise initiative and apply their skills to *enhancing civic institutions*.

Putnam (*Bowling Alone*, 2000, pp.92-93) describes these two types of behaviour:  
*In Yiddish, men and women who invest lots of time in formal organizations are often termed machers - that is, people who make things happen in the community. By contrast, those who spend many hours in informal conversation and communion are termed schmoozers....Machers follow current events, attend church and club meetings, give to charity, work on community projects, give blood, read the newspaper, give speeches, follow politics, and frequent local meetings....[Schmoozers] give dinner parties, hang out with friends, play cards, frequent bars and night spots, hold barbecues, visit relatives, and send greeting cards.*

Experienced Co-op trainers have commented that many training courses only attend to skill development in the area of formal civic engagement. In contrast, the Co-op values both informal and formal behaviours and pays considerable attention to informal relationships and strategies to initiate and develop these relationships.

While the Co-op wants to principally recruit people who will lead the way in *schmoozing* and *maching*, we are happy to include participants whose motivations are reasonably unrelated to leadership development - for friendship or to be personally stretched for example. Perhaps other adult education initiatives could equally meet their needs, such as assertiveness training, a learning circle or self-help group. It is assumed that these individuals are less able or interested in developing and expressing community leadership qualities. Nevertheless, we welcome their participation as the course is structured to provide opportunities for all participants to encounter and generate social relationships, altruism, reciprocity, trust and a sense of belonging, hence enhancing the quality of community life for participants and adding to a community's stock of social capital.

The following table provides a tentative participant segmentation and possible benefits from course participation related to each segment.

Personal profile	Most significant <u>learning experience</u> from participation may be:	Most significant <u>individual outcomes</u> from participation may be:	Most significant <u>community outcomes</u> from participation may be:
<p><i>The self help seeker</i></p> <p>Wanting personal growth</p>	<p>Finding satisfaction and meaning by moving beyond personal needs to community needs</p>	<p>Volunteering with a community group recommended by another participant</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A community group's volunteer capacity strengthened</li> <li>- Increased altruism within community</li> </ul>
<p><i>The friendship maker</i></p> <p>Feeling some to extreme isolation and wanting to meet people</p>	<p>Learning to connect through sharing activities, experiences, ideas and values</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Sense of belonging within course group</li> <li>-Individual confident and equipped to make neighbourhood friendships</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- More informal activity within community</li> <li>- Increased sense of belonging within community</li> </ul>
<p>The social-leader/ animator</p> <p>Moderate to extensive social networks, and wanting to 'be more involved' to create better community life for self and others</p>	<p>Developing personal vision of healthy community, understanding notions of bonding and banding</p>	<p>Applying strategies to establish relationships with people from different cultures</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Development of 'schmooser' community leadership</li> <li>-Enhanced bridging capital within community</li> </ul>

<p>The civic-leader/ animator Moderate to intense level of involvement in a community organisation(s), feeling need for more knowledge and skills to cope with issues organisation faces</p>	<p>Developing greater understanding of how groups function, healthy group processes, how to manage conflict, external environment</p>	<p>Knowledge and skills to support organisation they are involved in</p>	<p>-Development of 'macher' community leadership -Healthier, more sustainable community organisations</p>
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Courses also frequently include participants who find it difficult to establish status and a sense of belonging in their community. As well as creating an accepting environment for these participants for their own benefit, the Co-op recognises that including marginalised people in training enables trainers to role-model inclusive community development. As one Co-op member said, "what integrity do you have when you teach inclusivity but your first act is to exclude certain people from the course."

One information session was attended by Jessica\*, an individual with complex identity issues, a mental illness and high social needs. Trainers were hoping Jessica would decide against doing the course because they suspected her presence would create very difficult group dynamics. Jessica turned out to be one of the most committed participants.

The trainers were able to create a supportive environment for Jessica, and managed group processes in such a way that Jessica was well accepted by other participants. Some participants welcomed Jessica into their own community circle and advocated for her rights for inclusion in the planning of a community event.

\*name changed

We cannot ignore the fact, however, that there can be a downside for participants with significant unmet social and emotional needs. The disbanding of a supportive group at the end of training workshops leads to an experience of grief by all participants, but this grief can be very intense for individuals without other social supports.

## Two lessons in course implementation

Will the people come?

Prior to 2002, the Co-op primarily ran courses as a result of being invited by a community group that was seeking to deal with specific issues emerging from a locality. We have discovered that running community training for more generalised community capacity building objectives within communities chosen principally because they are experiencing disadvantage (as required by the funding body for this project) poses significant challenges both in getting people along and sustaining people after the course is finished.

We discovered that we were most successful at getting good numbers along and maintaining enthusiasm after the course was over where there was:

- ☐ a pre-existing relationship between Co-op staff and the local community
- ☐ a history of Co-op courses having been run in the area
- ☐ strong partnership arrangements between Co-op staff and critical friends (usually a worker in an established community organisation) who can mobilise members of community groups
- ☐ community group infrastructure already present in the community, and
- ☐ an emerging grassroots initiative motivating individuals to seek training in order to move the initiative forward.

It appears to be difficult to negotiate entry and/or attract a sufficiently large pool of applicants when several of these factors are absent. Mass promotion (newspaper, letter box drops etc) seem insufficient to compensate for a major deficit in the conditions listed above in a locality.

In negotiating course funding in communities where the Co-op has no prior engagement and there is limited formal community activity, we are now looking at securing resources for:

- ☐ longer lead in times allowing for more face to face meetings with community leaders and existing community groups, and
- ☐ running a series of courses over an 18 month time frame so that the networks formed by participants in one course can be further augmented by graduates of other courses.

## Whither the project?

The Co-op has a high degree of confidence in the learning process and material of its course, and this is born out in participant feedback (see next section). However, one area where we have done a bit of stumbling around is with the issue of the 'project'.

The funding body for the set of courses that were evaluated required as an outcome that participants would be engaged in a new project emerging from the course.

Taking action is critical to the ethos of the course. An important part of the learning process is narrative action-reflection: learning from one another's stories as we experiment with ways to build a better community. Trainers help participants reflect on their actions using frameworks for community building presented in the course. Nevertheless, as the Co-op worked with the concept of 'project', we realised that the term was not adequately descriptive of the kind of outcomes we hoped that participants would achieve through undertaking the course. Our trainers strongly resisted a rigid conceptualisation of the notion of 'project' and preferred to use such language as 'the next step' or 'activity', believing the language of 'project' may be intimidating or foreign to many participants.

Trainers pointed out that some participants start the course with a depth of personal resources which enables their next step in community building to be a large scale public undertaking; for others a courageous next step in community building is to try and resolve tensions with a neighbour; and for other participants the mere act of attending the course and engaging with other participants is a giant step towards embracing community building. We expect that one of the factors that differentiates the Co-op's work from other community leadership initiatives is the way we value all of these actions as legitimate community building activities.

While the Co-op staff favoured this broad understanding of personal and collective actions that the course wished to inspire, data did indicate some confusion and frustration among participants. One participant told us they were not sure "whether people were aware that this...course was meant to lead them into their own project or not." At least one participant left the course disappointed that the course's primary focus wasn't organising around an initiative from the first workshop. Some participants thought that the course should move more quickly to considering community initiatives. While it may be counter to course philosophy to orient the course towards a group project(s) as the sole or primary part of the curriculum, it is important to ensure that the action orientation of each course is appropriate for each particular group. The criticisms above may also reflect a failure to set expectations and clarify

purposes of the course during the organising stage and at the introductory stage of training.

### **Outcomes: stats and stories**

#### **Stats**

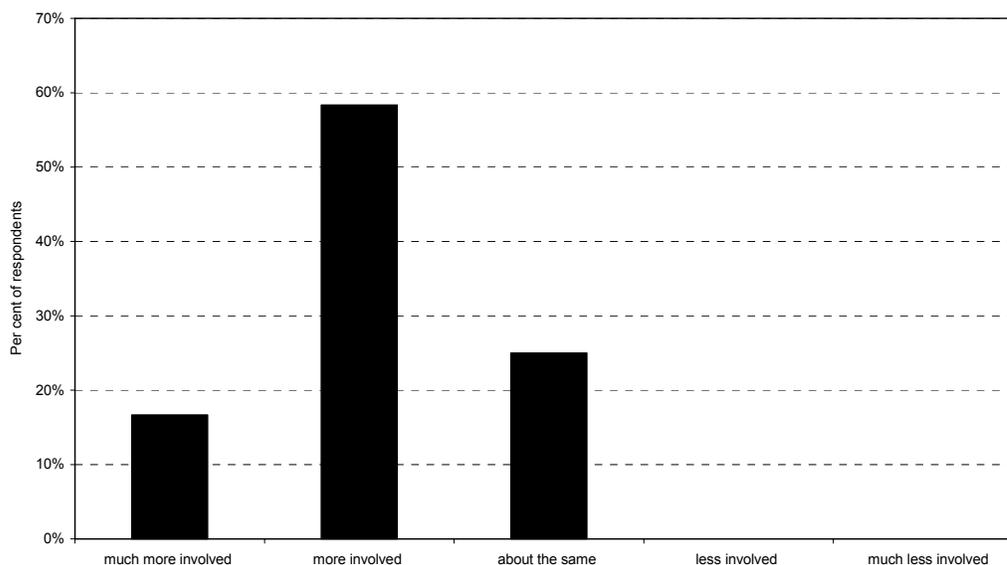
With little experience in the science of research, our data collection instruments, methods and analysis would probably horrify the purist. Nevertheless, the Co-op offers the following stats to indicate how well we are travelling.

Approximately 12 participants commenced each course, with 84 per cent of participants attending more than half of the workshops. While losing an average of two to three participant per course is in line with Co-op experience, in many of the courses we would have liked to have seen more people commencing (section 3.1 discussed difficulties in recruiting participants)

The overwhelming majority of respondents to our end of course questionnaire reported high or very high satisfaction levels with the quality (98 per cent) and relevance (100 per cent) of training. However, we note that satisfaction levels with the course are probably overstated as the data were collected almost solely from completing participants. In any voluntarily undertaken course, dissatisfied participants often express dissatisfaction with their feet.

It is also important to note that training evaluation literature views satisfaction with a course as a pre-condition to personal change, but does not actually mean that personal change will take place. With this in mind, we followed up some participants to see whether participants thought that the course had actually made a difference in their level of involvement in their community. The following graph illustrates responses.

Course effect on level of community involvement



Thus, the data indicate that in the months since training workshops were completed, most participants believed they had become more or much more involved in the community.

Follow up questions revealed that for many respondents, increased or sustained community involvement related to those activities that they were involved in before training. A third of respondents joined with others to work on a project that emerged from the course. Encouragingly, over 80 per cent of respondents felt supported by community networks.

### Stories

Perhaps it is the stories which community development practitioners prefer to statistics to make up their minds about the value of community training. The following are stories we collected along the way (names changed), mostly told by trainers (we acknowledge that the following stories reflect the 'up side' of the course and that course participants will have their fair share of disappointments).

#### Learning to listen and consult

Sara is a tireless volunteer committed to establishing a community garden. In her enthusiasm to make things happen for the community garden she was trying valiantly to get other groups involved. During the course she talked about how she wanted to engage with the local indigenous community so that they could be part of the community garden. She had a myriad

of ideas of how they could be involved. By the end of the course, Sara had changed her tack, instead of telling the Indigenous community how they could be involved she was going to approach one of their network meetings and seek their input as to how the garden might be developed. Sara had decided that the best way to engage others in the project was to open up the project's agenda to others and include their input in its development. This might even mean that the project will look different to how it was first imagined. This shift is significant in how this project unfolds for Sara ...

### *Trainer reflections*

#### **Dealing with 'the garbage'**

There are a lot of complex issues in the Aboriginal Community. We often find ourselves in conflict and factions. We had some issues in terms of services. We had a lot of money put in by Government to set up structures and services but it divided people more. 'Dollars and Division.' The Government is trying to get us to make major decisions before bonding and banding. People get in a position of control with little understanding and are not equipped with the right skills.

The course is an inexpensive really hands on experience that has done more than all the dollars the Government throws at us. The course got rid of a lot of garbage, cut away all this rubbish that was holding us back.

We have a thirst for skills. It doesn't matter who gives it to us, we appreciate it.

The 2003 focus of our Murri Network will be to resolve the issues we have started to talk about in the course.

### *Participant, from interview notes*

#### **Cross culture connections**

Uma from Sri Lanka, came into the course identifying herself as lonely fearful, timid and unconnected with either her local or her cultural communities. Through the course she gained the skills and confidence to introduce herself to a neighbour in her street and to befriend a woman of Chinese cultural background because this was less threatening than approaching a confident English speaker. One exceptional moment for Uma as a participant was an interaction with a participant who has a mental illness, who was making Origami cranes and frogs during the training. During the break Uma approached Jessica who shared the skills with her, the first person in the group to form the bridges of a relationship. It was encouraging to witness these two very non-traditional participants supporting each other's participation.

### *Trainer reflections*

## Cuppa in the community

Deanna is happily involved in her church but confessed that she is not well-connected in the community where she lives. During the course she met with some other women from her church who live in her town and asked if they wanted to have a regular morning tea as away of developing closer connections with each other and to invite other people in the town who were not part of the church. Using the 0-1-3 principle Deanna is working with two other women who liked the idea and is open to where it might lead...

### *Trainer reflections*

## Dealing with conflict and pain

Jack is an intelligent, well-informed person who has considerable knowledge of indigenous issues, both locally and at the national level. Jack has been misunderstood by other indigenous people in the area and often when this occurs goes on the attack and then others reject him and his views. The cycle has continued and has left Jack feeling angry and frustrated and left the wider indigenous community poorer for not listening to Jack's wisdom. During the course Jack came forward with some very blunt attacks (not directed at anyone in the room) about how 'some people' have tried subversively to destroy a local indigenous network for their own gain. What Jack had to say was indisputable. In typical fashion the room fell silent and people wondered if the attacks were directed at them, or even if they weren't, what could they do about it? Gary listened to Jack and took on board some of the comments (not personally but in vicarious manner) and sought to offer some healing for Jack. This was not the cycle that Jack was used to and it provided him with the opportunity to engage rather than withdraw. Gary and Jack entered some dialogue around the problems, the rest of the group entered the dialogue and others felt comfortable about 'venting' their anger too. Gary became more informed of the history of the local network and the gained a greater appreciation for the people involved, Jack experienced some acceptance, others felt this was a safe space to be heard. This was the beginning of our training....

### *Trainer reflections*

## Schmoozing

[My next step is to] keep following the thread of community connections. To keep on looking for, developing and maintaining relationships in my community, with the bigger picture of community development in mind (keep visiting and connecting with neighbours and others) and looking for the opportunity or right moment to facilitate community groups.

### *Participant, written feedback*

## Joining

Sue is a young woman who is passionate about her church and helping other young people, particularly those who are homeless. Sue attended the course as she thought it could help her learn some skills to set up a youth shelter with other members of her church. Through using the 0-1-3 model, Sue has found a whole range of groups and people who are assisting young homeless people and has decided to put her effort into working with these groups rather than try to establish her own youth shelter. Sue now does volunteer work with the local funded youth shelter and acts as an important link between her church and the wider community in supporting and assisting young people.

### *Trainer reflection*

#### Other stories in brief:

- ▣ A local pharmacist decided to 'arm' herself with written information from the local neighbourhood centre so that when people who came in for scripts wanted more information, she could respond in some way.
- ▣ The Community House worker who participated in the course will be co-trainer of a leadership training course being run for the new management committee of the local Youth Service.
- ▣ Six participants of one course have set out to start an arts and crafts co-operative.
- ▣ One participant started planning the "Welcome to [town]" initiative for new residents to make connections with local people and groups.
- ▣ Three members of a mental health support group that had been damaged by bureaucratic interference attended a course. They set out to rebuild the group. This included exploring a training package for people seeking support with mental health issues.
- ▣ Four locals formed a working party to explore the possibility of community use of school pool facilities.

#### Concluding comments

Our evaluation has confirmed a lot of what trainers have experienced anecdotally - strong enthusiasm for the training experience, increased formal and informal community participation, even 'epiphanies' for some participants. We are also learning the effects of the course on social and civic participation, and community network building, can be quite transitory without other conditions being present in the community. Our community training course can

be a significant part of, but not a substitute for, enduring community development processes.

**List of references**

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