



INSTITUTE OF
— PUBLIC —
ADMINISTRATION
AUSTRALIA

Changing the WAY
GOVERNMENT
WORKS

NEW INTERESTS - NEW ARRANGEMENTS

BACKGROUND REPORT

*Department for
Victorian Communities*



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Conference partners wish to thank the many government agencies and the communities involved in the initiatives this report profiles for sharing their learnings about community strengthening and linking up.

Each of these case studies provides a link to further information.

ACRONYMS

AIIMS	Australian Inter-service Incident Management System
ATSI	Australian and Torres Strait Islanders
AVCLP	Alpine Valleys Community Leadership Program
DCBP	Darebin Community Building Project
DEET	Department of Education & Training
DHS	Department of Human Services
DIIRD	Department of Innovation, Industry & Regional Development
DOI	Department of Infrastructure
DOJ	Department of Justice
DPI	Department of Primary Industry
DVC	Department for Victorian Communities
GVT	Growing Victoria Together
IPAA	Institute of Public Administration Australia
FAIR	Family Abuse Integrated Response
LLEN	Local Learning and Employment Network
LPP	Local Priority Policing
LSC	Local Safety Committees
MDVS	Mallee Domestic Violence Service
NRMG	Northern Regional Managers Group
PASCAL	Place Management, Social Capital and Learning Regions
PCCC	Police Community Consultative Committee
RCDO	Rural Community Development Officer
RDV	Regional Development Victoria
RLCEP	Rural Leadership & Community Events Program
STP	Schools Travel Planning
TBL	Triple bottom line
VCAL	Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning
VLESC	Victorian Learning and Employment Skills Commission
VPHS	Victorian Population Health Survey

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Changing the WAY GOVERNMENT WORKS

NEW INTERESTS - NEW ARRANGEMENTS

1. INTRODUCING THE CONFERENCE

Changing the Way Government Works (New Interests - New Arrangements) coincides with a growing recognition nationally and internationally about the importance of investing in communities as a field of public policy.

Stronger communities produce benefits that are substantial and tangible, but the role for government in building stronger communities is less clear.

The traditional view has been that this is an area beyond government's reach and can either be ignored or left to non-government agencies.

However, recent academic research and public interest discussions, in Australia and overseas, have combined to reveal an important role for government in supporting and undertaking community strengthening actions.

This Conference will examine more closely the nature and implications of this new role for government in four major areas:

- ~ Developing ways of measuring community strength and building an evidence base to support and help evaluate specific community intervention strategies;
- ~ Designing new administrative arrangements that recognise local problems may require local solutions which cut across traditional departmental boundaries and levels of Government;
- ~ Constructing innovative ways of planning and working which bring community and business together to develop community strengthening activities; and
- ~ Examining the new role for the public sector in an environment where social policy promotes community strengthening actions, and the public sector capabilities, cultures and structures needed to support community strengthening.

Changing the way Government Works will bring together leading policy makers, academics, practitioners, and community and business figures from Australia and overseas, to discuss and debate the public administration challenges of government working differently.

CONFERENCE PARTNERS

Conference Leader: The Department for Victorian Communities

Since its establishment in December 2002, the Department for Victorian Communities (DVC) has been building the foundations for achieving its goal of strengthening communities through a more integrated approach to planning, funding and delivering services at the local level. The combination of the ten portfolios gives DVC a unique opportunity in this approach.

For more information on DVC visit the website (www.dvc.vic.gov.au).

Conference Partner: IPAA Victoria

The Institute of Public Administration Australia (IPAA) is the peak national professional association for the public sector and an important source of intellectual capital and information about government policy, new ideas and future directions in public administration.

For more information on IPAA and conference details visit the website (www.vic.ipaa.org.au).

Conference Supporter: PASCAL Observatory

PASCAL is an international research and policy development alliance that aims to influence government policy and practice in place management, social capital and learning regions. PASCAL provides a strategic information tracking and sharing service which includes monthly reports, briefings on emerging topics, a clearinghouse, research and consultancy services and seminars.

For more information on PASCAL visit the website (www.obs-pascal.com).

2. CONFERENCE BACKGROUND REPORT

This background report has been prepared to set the scene for the Conference. It is a starting point for exploring trends in research, social policy and public administration. While designed for Conference participants, the background report will also be a useful reference for anyone interested or involved in these fields of work. Key references from the literature used in preparing this report can be found on the DVC website (www.dvc.vic.gov.au).

The report:

- ~ outlines the Conference themes;
- ~ summarises current debates and policy responses around community strengthening and linking up;
- ~ describes the Department for Victorian Communities' lead role in community strengthening and linking up; and
- ~ provides some exemplar case studies of key Victorian government initiatives.

A selection of these case studies will be presented at the Conference.

The background report will be complemented by a post-conference publication of select proceedings. This will be made available free of charge. As part of this process, selected case studies from this background report will be further developed as more useful research and learning tools.

3. CONFERENCE THEMES

The Conference draws on local, national and international research, policy and practice to explore the inter-related themes of community strengthening and linking up.

It showcases research, policy responses and exemplars of these approaches in four modules:

- ~ How do we know it works? Measuring community strength
- ~ What are the new governance models? Changing the way government works
- ~ How can we create enterprising communities? Government, business and community working together
- ~ How will the future public sector work? Designing the capabilities and cultures for community engagement

How do we know it works? Measuring community strength

Community strength is increasingly seen as a public good but often we do not know whether these types of government interventions work. And the role of government in building social capital remains contested. Do we have the evidence to improve how governments invest in community strengthening interventions? How can local level data be used to match investments on government initiatives to the character of areas?

Key issues are:

- ~ The use of indicators as a measurement tool
- ~ National frameworks developed to measure wellbeing and assess the role of government in building social capital
- ~ Evidence that community strengthening works
- ~ The shift in government from measuring outputs to 'managing for outcomes'
- ~ Practical examples of how local level data can be used to develop planning tools to improve government expenditure decisions.

What are the new governance models? Changing the way government works

Governance arrangements are recognised as key to strengthening communities and underpinning successful and sustainable community strengthening interventions. Joint action challenges the traditional way government organises – typically local problems do not respect departmental boundaries or levels of government. Local governance involves a range of local actors that need to organise differently. Local Government has a pivotal role to play in leading partnership approaches to community strengthening.

Key issues are:

- ~ trends in governance and their application in Victoria - the institutional arrangements and the relationships
- ~ new models for community engagement in Australian jurisdictions
- ~ the pivotal role of Local Government in developing new local institutions and leading community strengthening initiatives
- ~ tools for planning and delivering services locally and pooling resources
- ~ the trend to place management as a strategy for taking joint local action and devolving power.

How can we create enterprising communities? Business, community and government working together

New social partnerships between business, community and government can play a role in tackling social problems at the local level. Alongside the tradition of philanthropy new models of corporate sector engagement in community strengthening are emerging. Some of these are expressed in movements such as social and civic entrepreneurs. Social and community enterprises represent one approach to getting private sector corporations involved in the generation of community profit.

Key issues are:

- ~ The development of cross sectoral partnerships between the corporate sector and State and Local Governments
- ~ Links between philanthropy and community strengthening
- ~ Community foundations as vehicles for developing local partnerships in regional communities and strengthening their economies
- ~ Corporate social responsibility – leadership by business and the role of government
- ~ Planning for community and the respective roles of government, business and community
- ~ Approaches to harnessing the capacity of local entrepreneurs.

How will the future public sector work? Designing the capabilities and cultures for community engagement

Community engagement is the new mantra and the public sector must prepare to make the transition from gate-keeper to door-opener. New roles are emerging in the public sector as facilitator, enabler, and broker. What are the public sector capabilities and cultures that underpin innovative governance arrangements and cut across traditional departmental silos? And does government have a role in building the capacity of communities to participate in local partnerships?

Key issues are:

- ~ the critical role of trust and culture in public/private partnerships
- ~ useable knowledge in the public sector and the importance in public administration of valuing local know how
- ~ aligning public sector capabilities with innovative governance models
- ~ incentives in the public sector to encourage linked up programs and service delivery
- ~ skilling up communities to participate in new local partnerships.

4. CURRENT DEBATES AND POLICY RESPONSES – COMMUNITY STRENGTHENING AND LINKING UP

Many of our current public administration systems and structures were designed in the post war period of the 20th century as solutions to the particular problems of the day. Maintaining full male employment, industry protection, meeting the needs of a growing population were fundamental challenges faced by society. Issues such as the environment, international competitiveness, social cohesion and public safety had yet to manifest themselves in ways that would draw them to the centre of policy debates.

Since this time, the social, cultural and economic context in which government operated has changed profoundly, particularly in the past two decades. Driven by forces as diverse as technology, globalisation, and changing values, we now face a significantly different social and economic landscape, which in turn is leading to new demands and expectations being placed on government.

The question facing our traditional governance frameworks and policy approaches is whether they are still relevant to society's changing circumstances.

In recent times policy interest is growing in the disconnection between government's traditional departmental structures and their capacity to address emerging complex problems.

The importance of investing in local communities is now cutting across traditional political divides. Nationally and internationally all levels of government are responding by developing new ways of working locally that can promote social, economic and environmental outcomes.

Public policy has become infused with concepts such as community building, community strengthening and building social capital. While these concepts sound nebulous, what they reflect is the recognition that over the past decade or so, people are increasingly looking to their local communities for a sense of identity, well-being and security. As people sense their control over the 'external' world has diminished, so their expectations about influencing their local community have risen. Communities want to have a say in shaping their future directions, setting local priorities, and controlling resources to deliver their outcomes.

These changed expectations are challenging our traditional public administration arrangements and practices, and highlighting the importance of establishing local institutions to meet local needs.

International and local research on community strengthening identifies a consistent set of characteristics in successful strategies:

- ~ Building social networks – people with strong social networks have better health, more people to turn to in a crisis, greater levels of participation in civic life and higher hopes for the future.
- ~ Promoting local leadership – local leaders have a 'vision' for their communities and how to achieve their goals; are well connected to local networks; are knowledgeable about the workings of government; and have an interest in the overall wellbeing and prosperity of their communities.
- ~ Encouraging local ownership and control – successful strategies involve a wide range of stakeholders, have a key role for local government and encourage the involvement of volunteers.
- ~ Facilitating innovation, creativity and sustainability – successful strategies question existing approaches, identify new stakeholders and foster new partnerships and collaboration.

Recent research in Victoria and New South Wales shows the protective effects of strong communities, and that they can break the cycle of disadvantage. These findings have profound public policy implications – community strengthening interventions are an important vehicle for reducing inequality and addressing disadvantage. They are a new form of prevention and early intervention that touches all government departments. And the solutions may not be complicated, such as volunteering and being active.

Increasingly community strengthening is at the heart of what governments do, not at the margins.

What is community strengthening?

Community strengthening is about creating sustainable networks through local level partnerships involving key stakeholders and community representatives to achieve agreed policy and service delivery outcomes for their communities. Community strengthening strategies aim to build collaborative relationships between individuals and groups to achieve common objectives. Many see community strengthening as the foundation of a new approach to social policy.

What is linking up?

Community strengthening strategies work best when they are linked up at the local level. Increasingly governments are unable to act alone in addressing the complexity of contemporary problems, and must link up across government departments, with business and community. The shift from the term 'government' to 'governance' is an expression of linking up the knowledge, resources and capabilities of different agencies, spheres of government, community groups and the business sector. Comparable overseas jurisdictions are successfully experimenting with joined up models. Nationally and in Victoria there are examples of these approaches.

What does it mean for the way government works?

Community strengthening strategies entail the need to re-think the way in which governments work with local communities. It is not about more funding but using existing resources differently and better. At the centre of this approach is a core set of principles:

- ~ Client focused – viewing the world through the lens of clients
- ~ Place – creating a single face of government at the local level
- ~ Enabling – emphasising the role of government as facilitator and enabler
- ~ Subsidiarity – devolving service planning and delivery locally
- ~ Partnership – developing cross sectoral approaches between government and the corporate sector around a joint approach to social responsibility
- ~ Local capacity and leadership – harnessing the capacity of local leaders and entrepreneurs.

These principles refocus government service delivery through the lens of the client – be they an individual, a family, a group or a community.

5. DEPARTMENT FOR VICTORIAN COMMUNITIES' LEAD ROLE IN COMMUNITY STRENGTHENING AND LINKING UP

The Department for Victorian Communities is the Victorian State Government's lead agency for community strengthening and linking up.

In achieving its goal of creating Victorian communities that are active, confident and resilient, DVC is aware of the need to change the traditional way that government works. This means engaging with communities in a way that taps into local knowledge, learns from local ideas, and plans government investments at the local level.

DVC's work is underpinned by the following values:

- ~ Communities first – engaging with communities and planning together
- ~ People and place – highlighting the importance of people and place, and the difference between the needs of people and local areas
- ~ Doing government differently – taking on the role of broker and facilitator, and being responsive and flexible to community needs.

By communities DVC means groups of Victorians who share a common sense of belonging and where there is a level of trust between members. Communities can be based around where people live, such as their neighbourhood, suburb or town. Communities can also be based around common interests such as water conservation or sporting activities, or sharing a common identity, such as age, culture or lifestyle. What is important is that community members feel a sense of identity, belonging and connection, and a willingness to work together to achieve common goals.

DVC research shows that a strong community is one constituted by people that understand its social, economic and environmental assets and are working towards sustainability (DVC, August 2004). Strong communities also understand and work with their most disadvantaged populations to ensure minimum standards for all. To do these things, members of a strong community need to be engaged, involved, feel capable of working through issues and be supported through external partnerships. This research also shows that many indicators of community strength have increased over the last three years.

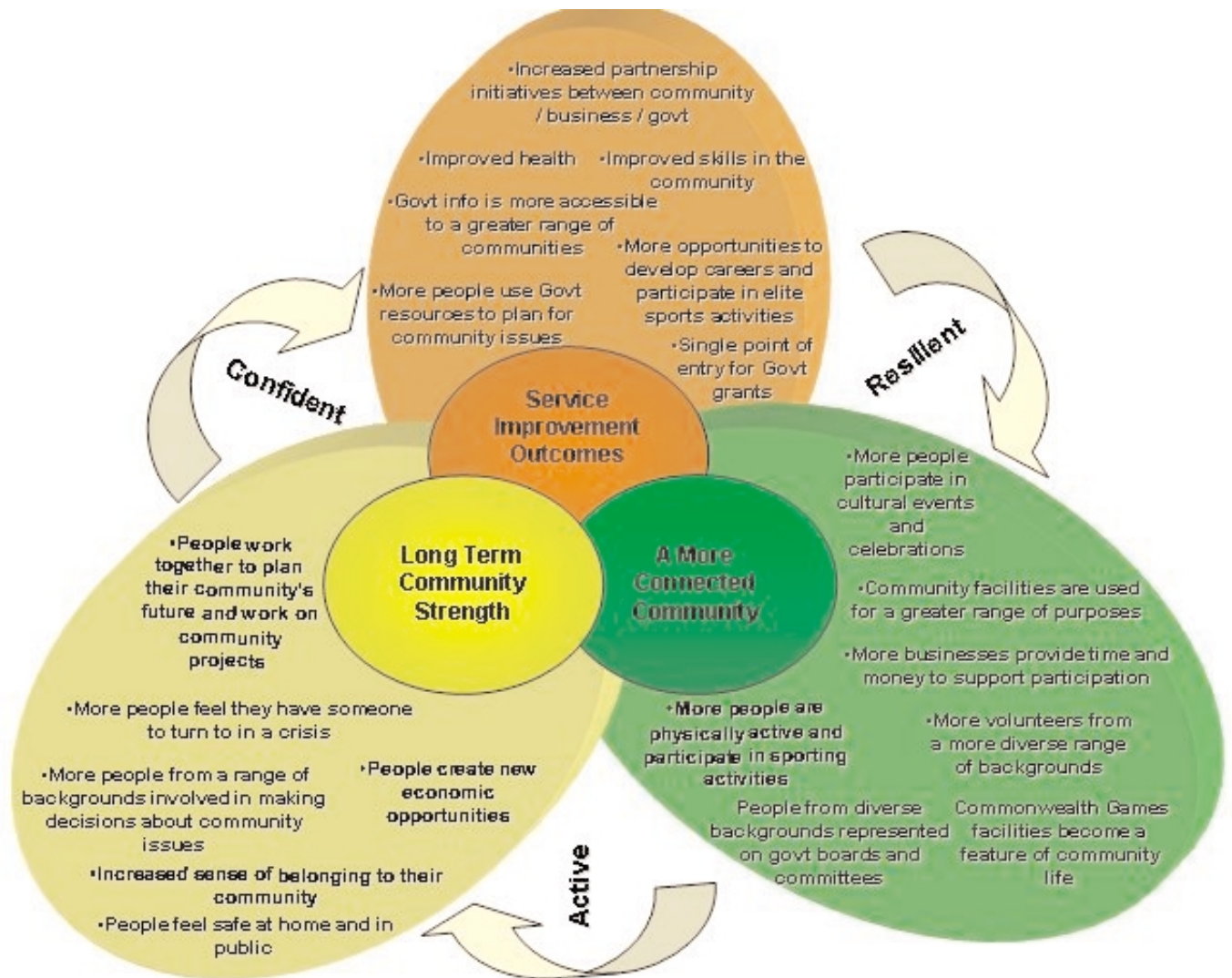
DVC has developed an Outcome Framework to enable the department to understand and measure the cumulative impact of its community strengthening work. International and national experience has shown that successful community strengthening strategies impact on communities in three ways:

- ~ Improve services;
- ~ Increase community connectedness; and
- ~ Foster long term community strength.

DVC's Measurement Framework is based on these three outcome areas, and each has a suite of outcome measures grouped underneath. These measures identify the specific impacts DVC is seeking for Victorian communities.

Each of the outcome measures is underpinned by an indicator which provides DVC with a way to monitor and demonstrate its progress. The Outcomes Framework is used to drive the priorities identified by DVC's Ministers, and informs the department's investments, strategies and projects.

Figure 1. The Department for Victorian Communities' Outcomes Framework.



6. CASE STUDIES OF VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES IN COMMUNITY STRENGTHENING AND LINKING UP

The case studies in this background report were selected by Victorian agencies as exemplars of their approaches to community strengthening and linking up. They profile a range of initiatives from across government that tackle issues as diverse as neighbourhood renewal in disadvantaged areas; partnerships for local level education and training; emergency responses to drought that build community resilience; strengthening leadership in regions; local network policing; place-based approaches to master planning in growth areas; sustainable transport options for schools; and community building.

To enable comparisons and help identify the lessons learned from these Victorian Government experiences, each follows a consistent format:

- ~ Overview of the initiative;
- ~ Snapshot of achievements;
- ~ Secrets of success;
- ~ Lessons for government;
- ~ Next steps; and
- ~ Where to obtain further information about the initiative.

In describing the lessons for government, each case study relates its learnings to one or more of the conference themes – measurement, governance, capabilities and cultures, and enterprising communities. The concluding discussion on next steps points to the initiative’s potential influence on the government’s future policy or program directions in community strengthening.

The first of the case studies sets the scene with evidence from a DVC research project that community strength can be measured and monitored. DVC is using this research for a range of purposes, such as examining the role of government in terms of the most effective community strengthening strategies; streamlining reporting about community strength; improving government’s resource allocation and accountability for its community strengthening investments; and promoting the importance of local area data for community-based priority setting.

These exemplars demonstrate the importance of flexible community strengthening strategies that avoid a one-size-fits-all approach. The key lessons are that the success of community strengthening initiatives is influenced by:

Governance

- ~ Models that build trust, commitment and cooperation with stakeholders
- ~ Communities engaged in collaborative partnerships
- ~ Local Government is an active partner and appropriately resourced to support community strengthening
- ~ A place-based approach is adopted and uses a manageable scale.

Leadership

- ~ Strong leadership, commitment and support exists at senior government levels
- ~ High level political commitment is evident in government
- ~ Strong local leadership and community engagement exists.

Linked-up approaches

- ~ A linked-up approach is adopted across government to identifying issues and developing solutions
- ~ The commitment of all government agencies with interest is obtained
- ~ Cross-agency agreements are in place.

Sustainability

- ~ Community strengthening is recognised as a long-term undertaking to achieve tangible and sustainable outcomes
- ~ Factoring in the time it takes to communicate the government's message and ensure the community's voice is heard
- ~ Flow-on benefits for local communities are achieved that extend beyond the initiative
- ~ Strategies and plans are implemented to ensure the initiative is locally sustainable after the program ends.

Flexibility

- ~ Flexible funding and resource allocation models are in place
- ~ Programs are tailored to the community's capabilities, culture and demographics
- ~ Programs are flexible and responsive to community needs
- ~ Grants guidelines are simplified
- ~ Government has permission to take acceptable risks to kick start community strengthening initiatives.

Each of the case studies in this report tells a different story about their potential influence on future policy and program directions for community strengthening, either within individual agencies or across government.

These include:

- ~ Integration or mainstreaming of community strengthening approaches into core business and reporting practices;
- ~ Implementation of more flexible and locally responsive funding arrangements;
- ~ Identification of effective community engagement processes for replication across the agency;
- ~ Development of mechanisms for continuing interaction with community stakeholders;
- ~ Commitment to undertake further research and evaluation of initiatives to ensure future programs incorporate learnings; and
- ~ Identification of changes in the way government works to effectively implement community strengthening and linked-up policies and programs.

By using practical program examples, the background report seeks to provide insights into one of the conference's key questions: *whether the emergence and convergence of new ideas around community strengthening and new public administration arrangements constitute a paradigm shift?*

6.1 THE INDICATORS OF COMMUNITY STRENGTH IN VICTORIA PROJECT Department for Victorian Communities

Overview

Since 2001, the Department for Victorian Communities (DVC), in conjunction with the Department of Human Services (DHS), has been developing a set of indicators on social capital concepts within the Victorian Population Health Survey (VPHS). The results, and some discussions of their implications, have been reported in the annual DHS Reports: *The Victorian Population Health Survey: selected findings*. The results are reported at the State level only.

In the last few months DVC has been developing a key set of indicators from the VPHS that can be used at the Local Government Area (LGA) level. Twelve indicators have been selected. These are:

- Can you get help from friends, family or neighbours when you need it?
- Do you feel safe walking alone down your street after dark?
- Do you feel valued by society?
- Do you feel there are opportunities to have a real say on issues that are important to you?
- Do you help out as a volunteer?
- Are you a member of an organised group, such as a sports or church group or another community organisation or professional organisation?
- Have any of these groups you are involved with taken any local action on behalf of your community in the last two years?
- Do you have school-age children?
- If yes, are you actively involved with activities at their school?
- Have you attended a local community event in the past six months, such as a fete, festival or school concert?
- Do you think that multiculturalism makes life in your area better?
- Could you raise \$2000 within two days in an emergency?

A further three indicators will be added examining participation:

- In sport and recreational activities;
- By parents in schools; and
- On decision making boards or committees (leadership).

A report, *Indicators of Community Strength in Victoria* (2004), has been published and can be found on the DVC website (<http://www.dvc.vic.gov.au>). It describes time trends in the indicators, and examines demographic and geographic breakdowns.

The report's key messages are:

- There have been improvements in six of the key areas of community strength over the last three years across Victoria. More Victorians now feel:
 - ~ safe on the streets after dark;
 - ~ that diversity makes the areas in which they live better;
 - ~ that there are opportunities to have a real say on issues that are important; and
 - ~ that they are valued by society.
- People who participate, and those that can get help when needed, are healthier and have more positive attitudes about where they live and about society in general;
- More Victorians are also volunteering; and
- There are still some improvements that could be made in terms of population groups, with ethnic and low socio-economic groups participating less.

DVC has now run a pilot in four LGAs and found there is significant variation in key aspects of community strength across the pilot LGAs. This suggests that community strength can usefully be used as the basis of policy and planning decisions. The results of the pilot can also be found in the report *Indicators of Community Strength in Victoria* (2004).

The survey is now being rolled out over the remaining 73 LGAs in Victoria and a complete data set will be available by November 2004. DVC is in the process of developing an “intervention logic” for the participation indicators in the set (participation in sport and recreation, on decision making boards and committees, volunteering, parents in schools, membership of groups, etc). The intervention logic will describe why participation matters and interventions that have been evaluated and proven to improve participation in each of the indicator areas. This will provide the beginnings of a menu of interventions that policy makers and communities can examine when considering issues in local areas.

DVC works closely with a range of groups interested in indicators at the LGA level. The DVC indicators focus on factors that allow community members to be engaged and feel confident to work through issues for their communities. Other sets are now under development that cover a broader definition of community strength, including community assets, sustainability and minimum standards for all. For example, the Outer Eastern Sustainability Indicators Project, a joint initiative by the Knox, Maroondah and Yarra Ranges Councils and Swinburne University of Technology, includes a set of 33 indicators in the categories: (communities that are) active and healthy, accessible, prosperous, protective of the environment, well designed, well built, culturally rich and encouraging of learning.

DVC will continue to work with councils, other departments, state government authorities and other community groups to further develop LGA level indicators. It is ultimately hoped that an information system will emerge that contains core components that are comparable across all LGAs, but with other modules that allow individual areas to monitor aspects of particular local interest.

DVC will also continue to work with other State and national agencies to align data collections on aspects of community strength to maximise comparability.

Snapshot of Achievements

In the 1980s, the idea of social capital became popular with governments and academics all over the world. It has not, however, translated into significant public policy action for a range of reasons, including the failure of the social capital policy community to reach agreement on indicators. As a consequence, social capital and its many policy manifestations – such as community building, community strengthening and neighbourhood renewal – have remained opaque and distant to the public. Yet the consequences of the absence of social capital can be immediate and devastating with the loss of community infrastructure and identity being linked to significant health and other social problems.

The *Indicators of Community Strength Indicators in Victoria* (2004) report represents a significant step towards bridging the gap between social capital theory and policy action by providing indicators to direct policy and planning decision making. This work remains at the forefront of developments in the field of social capital measurement, in particular because it can report the indicators over time (from 2001), and at the local area level. The indicators meet the two criteria recognised internationally for indicators that are well used in policy debates (beyond technical accuracy). They are linked to public policy objectives at all levels of government (and can therefore be acted on), and, they use publicly understood concepts and can therefore be readily adopted by the public and policy makers.

The mandate of the Department for Victorian Communities is to strengthen communities and join up services across Victoria. The research emerging through the indicator project provides an important evidence base for informing this new field of government policy.

Lessons for Government

The lessons of the project for government to date are that:

- ~ The important outcomes of community strength can be measured and monitored;
- ~ Community strength has a different character across local areas and that locally specific policy initiatives and planning could therefore impact on community strength; and
- ~ Partnerships will lead to the development of important data sources at the local area level that will be of use to a range of parties including Local and State Governments.

Future Policy Directions

Future directions of the project are described above, but will include further development of the indicator sets, continued monitoring of time series information and working with other groups to develop a more broad information system on community strength at the LGA level.

Once the full data set across LGAs has been collected it will be possible to analyse the community strength data against other outcomes important to government (e.g. education, health, etc) in order to determine the contribution of community strength to those outcomes. This will also allow for the examination of resource allocation models that take into account community strengthening. This work will begin early 2005.

DVC's indicators project will add to the growing evidence base that robust networks are critical to the development of strong communities. The findings are contributing to our understanding of the way in which partnerships between key stakeholders – government, community and business – can support community strengthening at the local level.

Further information

To learn more about the Department for Victorian Communities visit the website (www.dvc.vic.gov.au).

6.2 NEIGHBOURHOOD RENEWAL

Department of Human Services

Overview

Neighbourhood Renewal is a community strengthening initiative that brings together the resources and ideas of residents, governments, businesses and community groups to narrow the gap between disadvantaged communities in Victoria and the rest of the State.

Neighbourhood Renewal is contributing to the Growing Victoria Together agenda to reduce inequality and create more cohesive communities by:

- ~ Tackling a number of the root causes of disadvantage;
- ~ Organising responses around people and the places they live, work and play in to better connect government programs to real community needs;
- ~ Building new partnerships across government and communities; and
- ~ Empowering communities to be part of the solution.

Each Neighbourhood Renewal project in Victoria is implementing a six-point plan of action to:

- ~ Increase people's pride and participation in their community;
- ~ Lift employment and learning opportunities and expand local economies;
- ~ Enhance housing and the physical environment;
- ~ Improve personal safety and reduce crime;
- ~ Promote health and wellbeing; and
- ~ Increase access to services and improve government responsiveness.

Pilot projects in Wendouree West and Latrobe Valley started in 2001-02. The initiative was formally launched in 2002-03 with eight new projects. Five more started in 2003-04. Projects are formally funded for a five-year period. To sustain progress beyond this time, place management arrangements will become an on-going way of government working with communities in all areas selected for Neighbourhood Renewal. The funding commitments for Neighbourhood Renewal include the Department of Human Services' (DHS) allocation of \$108m in 2002-2004, \$45m in 2004-05 from its Housing & Community Building Division; and the Department for Victorian Communities' (DVC) allocation of \$5m in 2002-04 from Employment Programs.

Government, community and business resources and programs are being linked-up to more effectively target the interconnected causes of disadvantage. At a statewide level a Neighbourhood Renewal Branch has been established in DHS' Office of Housing to spearhead change. Partners in Neighbourhood Renewal include the Departments of Human Services; Education & Training; Infrastructure; Innovation, Industry & Regional Development; Justice (including Victoria Police); Sustainability & Environment; and Victorian Communities. Other important statewide partners are the Sustainable Energy Association of Victoria, VicUrban and VicHealth.

At a local level, whole-of-government action is being delivered through neighbourhood projects that bring together residents, service providers, local businesses and regional and Local Government leaders. Each project is developing local action plans that define how its community will be revitalised.

Fifteen communities across Victoria have been selected for renewal because of their relative disadvantage compared to other parts of the State. Project locations range from inner-city housing estates (like Collingwood and Fitzroy) to outer-suburban communities (like Werribee and Broadmeadows), to regional locations (like the Latrobe Valley and Wendouree West in Ballarat).

To make things happen, projects typically employ a project or place manager, project staff, community development workers and employment and learning coordinators. Projects link-up housing, education, employment, policing and health and community services in a way that makes sense at the local level.

Projects use public housing works as a catalyst to lever investment from other parts of State, Local and Commonwealth Government and from industry and community enterprises. This is used to create jobs, stimulate local economic growth and provide better services.

Unemployed residents receive on-the-job training as they improve neighbourhood amenity. Many residents move into ongoing employment that has been created in the neighbourhood as a result of renewed local investment and enterprise.

Snapshot of Achievements

In a short time, houses have been upgraded, local environments improved, jobs created, streets made safer and residents are getting better access to health and community services. Most importantly, residents are having a real say in shaping the future of their neighbourhoods. Below are some examples of the kind of positive changes that are occurring.

Increasing people's pride and participation in the community:

- ~ 15 projects across Victoria with 50 per cent resident participation in governance of many projects;
- ~ Projects have established community gardens, neighbourhood barbecues, arts projects, festivals and family fun days to enhance pride and participation;
- ~ Local Government is leading community development activities in many neighbourhoods; and
- ~ In 12 months there was an average 14 per cent net perceived improvement in community pride (with the Long Gully project registering a 27 per cent net improvement).

Lifting employment, learning and enterprise opportunities:

- ~ 1000 community job places have been created through a partnership between the Office of Housing and the Community Jobs Program;
- ~ 60 per cent of trainees were placed into ongoing employment or further education;
- ~ Resident employment clauses in DHS contracts are providing sustainable work options to long-term unemployed public housing tenants;
- ~ A 16-week rent freeze is creating incentives for public housing tenants to get work;
- ~ Numerous community enterprises have been created in catering, construction, IT, furniture removal, human services, etc;
- ~ Schools are participating in renewal and engaging communities to tackle local educational issues;
- ~ Student absenteeism has reduced by up to 40 per cent in the Glendonald Estate area in the Latrobe Valley; and
- ~ In 12 months there was an average 15 per cent net perceived improvement in local education and training opportunities (with the Wendouree West project registering a 25 per cent net improvement).

Enhancing housing and the physical environment:

- ~ 2500 properties have been upgraded and improved;
- ~ 130 new properties have been built;
- ~ 1000 Sustainable Energy Authority of Victoria energy improvements to low-income houses are reducing greenhouse emissions and saving residents approximately \$100 per year on energy bills;
- ~ The Department of Sustainability and Environment is providing urban design assessments that support the redevelopment of once derelict "no go zones" into vibrant public places with better housing, streets, parks and shopping areas;
- ~ Turnover in public housing stock is down in one third of Neighbourhood Renewal areas;
- ~ Acceptance rates of public housing stock are up in 90 per cent of Neighbourhood Renewal areas;
- ~ Median house prices are up in 70 per cent of Neighbourhood Renewal areas, increasing the value of public housing stock; and
- ~ In 12 months there was an average 37 per cent net improvement in resident perception of housing conditions (with the Fitzroy project registering a 63 per cent net improvement).

Improving personal safety and reducing crime:

- ~ Victoria Police has allocated a senior officer to each Neighbourhood Renewal area to work with the community and other stakeholders;
- ~ Crime Prevention Victoria initiatives are creating safer homes and streets;
- ~ Property crime is down in 60 per cent of Neighbourhood Renewal areas;
- ~ Crimes against the person are down in 90 per cent of Neighbourhood Renewal areas; and
- ~ There are significant reductions in crime in "hot spots" with one area in the Latrobe Valley registering a 41 per cent reduction.

Promoting health and wellbeing:

- ~ By addressing key social determinants of health like unemployment, housing, crime and social exclusion, Neighbourhood Renewal projects are working to reduce the burden of disease in disadvantaged communities; and
- ~ Health promotion, prevention and community and family support services are being better targeted and coordinated in Neighbourhood Renewal areas.

Increasing access to services and government responsiveness:

- ~ Neighbourhood Renewal teams are establishing offices directly in the communities they serve;
- ~ Community hubs are bringing key services into disadvantaged neighbourhoods;
- ~ Government departments are responding to local priorities and working to implement Neighbourhood Renewal Action Plans; and
- ~ In 12 months there was an overall net improvement in resident perceptions about government performance. In the Fitzroy project there was a 38 per cent net improvement.

Lessons for Government

Neighbourhood Renewal provides a tested and effective place-based planning and governance framework for government and service providers to be more responsive to disadvantaged communities.

Interim evaluation results drawing on administrative data and community surveys show Neighbourhood Renewal is achieving positive outcomes against all performance measures and objectives.

The central learning from Neighbourhood Renewal is that it is possible to re-engage communities that are excluded from the political and social mainstream - if government listens, then acts, collaboratively and quickly. It is possible to reverse decline in disadvantaged neighbourhoods if government investment connects with communities' aspirations and builds their capacity. By empowering local communities and better harnessing and coordinating local and regional resources, Neighbourhood Renewal has taken an important step towards creating more inclusive and healthy communities.

From a policy and practice perspective, the reasons why Neighbourhood Renewal has succeeded include:

- ~ A clear policy framework, objectives and method of evaluation established from the outset of the initiative;
- ~ Achievement of a strong mandate, leadership and support - politically, bureaucratically and from the community sector and residents;
- ~ Establishment of place-management teams with a geographic focus working on a manageable scale;
- ~ Emphasis on community participation in planning and governance connected to social investment and service delivery outcomes;
- ~ Multi-level negotiations and agreements between government departments and with relevant Ministers; and
- ~ Structures and processes that address the intersection of top-down and bottom-up decision-making and the nexus between horizontal and vertical integration.

Future Policy Directions

To sustain and strengthen outcomes in 2004 and onwards, Neighbourhood Renewal will be integrated or 'mainstreamed' into the core business practice and reporting requirements of all participating State Government departments in Victoria. Ongoing place management arrangements will be implemented in all locations selected for Neighbourhood Renewal in Victoria via a number of mechanisms including:

- ~ Development of targets for each department in Neighbourhood Renewal areas;
- ~ Specified roles for relevant parts of government in implementing Neighbourhood Renewal Action Plans;
- ~ A stronger role for Local Government in creating sustainable local governance and area planning;
- ~ Establishment of consistent regional whole-of-government structures with discretionary powers for coordinating government activity between departments at a regional and local level;
- ~ Implementation of more flexible funding arrangements to better respond to locally identified priority issues; and

~ A stronger role for the State Government's State Coordination and Management Council in monitoring departmental input to Neighbourhood Renewal.

An evaluation framework was developed concurrently with Neighbourhood Renewal policy to measure progress against each of the initiative's key objectives. Thirty progress indicators and data sources were chosen on the basis of their validity and usefulness for local action planning, further refinement of Neighbourhood Renewal policy and the extent to which the Neighbourhood Renewal initiative could reasonably expect to influence the factors being measured.

The evaluation relies on data from a number of government departments. Data for the remaining indicators is being collected using a community survey. The survey has been designed to be implemented by local residents and to give them power over information in a way that helps build their capacity and participation.

Community survey data presented in the 'Snapshot of Achievements' section is interim data currently available from eight project areas. Further data is being collected from the remaining seven project areas for future publication.

Further information

To learn more about the Neighbourhood Renewal initiative visit the website (www.neighbourhoodrenewal.vic.gov.au).

6.3 LOCAL LEARNING AND EMPLOYMENT NETWORK

Department for Education and Training

Overview

The Local Learning and Employment Network (LLEN) initiative was introduced in 2001 by the Victorian State Government. It was implemented as the first major initiative to support government's view that determined action was required to consolidate and integrate post compulsory education and training as identified in the Ministerial Review of Post Compulsory Education and Training Pathways In Victoria (2000).

The LLEN initiative brings together providers of education and training across the traditional boundaries (i.e. schools, TAFE, Adult & Community Education, employers, Local government, industry, and other agencies at the local level) as a means of meeting the needs of specific communities. It provides a framework for a range of stakeholders at the local level to work together to improve the education, training and employment outcomes of young people.

LLENs undertake local strategic planning, develop partnerships across stakeholders, and facilitate and support a range of initiatives to improve the education, training and employment outcomes of young people. LLENs provide local advice on state-wide policy and program issues to the Victorian Learning and Employment Skills Commission and the Department of Education and Training (DET).

There are 31 LLENs providing a statewide network. LLENs are incorporated associations which provide the local ownership of the initiative. Over 5100 individuals and organisations are LLEN members, with 600 participating on its Committees of Management. LLEN membership comprises 13 per cent from industry; 97 per cent from government secondary schools; 94 per cent from Catholic Secondary Schools and 41 per cent from independent secondary schools.

Snapshot of Achievements

Community-based Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning – Central Ranges Local Learning and Employment Network (Pilot program 2003)

The Central Ranges LLEN covers the Macedon Ranges, Mitchell and Murrindindi Local government areas.

Research undertaken by the LLEN identified that in Mitchell North a high number of young people, particularly in the 15-18 age group, were unemployed and not in education and training. Further, that the education and training needs of this group of young people would not be met by the traditional mainstream approach to education and training.

To re-engage some of these young people in education and training the LLEN facilitated a partnership of local education and youth support agencies which developed a community-based Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) that was flexible and responsive to the needs of young people.

Features of the program include:

- ~ A collaborative management model involving Central Ranges LLEN, Seymour Technical High School and Berry St, Victoria, Seymour Office;
- ~ Collective responsibility and accountability for the education and training and employment outcomes for young people;
- ~ An individualised learning program focusing upon relevant, applied learning experiences;
- ~ Delivery of a program in appropriate settings to the participant, not in a traditional setting;
- ~ A partnership approach to program delivery, where both education and training providers and community agencies contributed to program content and delivery; and
- ~ Shared use of human, physical and financial resources.

The program has been extensively evaluated using a range of methods including surveys of project partners, other interested agencies, students, parents and other support people. The evaluation clearly reinforced that the program succeeded in providing a positive learning experience for disengaged young people.

Two consistent themes emerged in relation to the participants:

- ~ Benefits of participating in a program designed specifically for them; and
- ~ Challenges of delivering a program to a group of young people whose lives are complex and difficult.

However, it was found that the community based VCAL is not suitable for all disengaged young people.

Further, a better defined selection process will ensure that it is aimed at the group most able to benefit from it.

The current project partners have also gained a better understanding of the culture and processes of the other partners and have forged positive working relationships.

The community based VCAL is continuing in 2004 and plans are currently underway for 2005. The effectiveness of the partnership between the lead agents in bringing the community based VCAL to fruition is demonstrable recognition of the value of community based networks working towards a common goal.

Lessons for Government

The LLEN initiative aims to increase collective responsibility and accountability at the local level for the education and training outcomes of young people.

A key lesson from this initiative is that good governance is integral to achieving successful outcomes from locally based initiatives, such as LLENs. It demonstrates that good governance provides a framework that enables the development and management of an organisation through defining the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders, and focusing on strategic and measurable outcomes. Further, good governance has proven to be integral to developing the necessary trust between the LLEN partners and creating sustainable change in LLEN stakeholders' behaviour.

The connections between LLENs and their local communities has enabled them to successfully contribute to the implementation of statewide education and training initiatives, such as the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning and School-Based New Apprenticeships.

Future Policy Directions

The current funding agreements between the Victorian Government and the LLENs will begin to expire late in 2005. The Victorian Learning and Employment Skills Commission (VLESC) has been asked to provide advice to the Minister for Education and Training on options for the future of the LLEN initiative as a strategy for achieving the Government's objectives in post compulsory education and training. As a part of providing this advice, the VLESC appointed external contractors to undertake a review of the LLENs initiative. The VLESC advice is currently under consideration.

Further information

To learn more about the LLEN initiative visit the website (www.llen.gov.au).

6.4 LOCAL PRIORITY POLICING

Victoria Police

Overview

The Local Priority Policing (LPP) philosophy through the Victoria Police's Strategic Plan 2003-2008 *The Way Ahead* is aligned to key outcomes as set out in *Growing Victoria Together*. In partnership with other departments, organisations and the community, Victoria Police has an important contribution to make to the Government's focus on the GVT aims of safe streets, homes and workplaces and building cohesive communities and reducing inequalities. LPP, introduced in 1998, is a comprehensive philosophy and strategy governing the manner in which policing services are managed and delivered to the community in Victoria.

One of the main features of LPP is that the local community is an active participant in shaping police service priorities and, importantly, that local police will be more accountable for the quality and mix of services they provide to the local communities they serve. The key mechanism to achieve this is a state-wide network of strategic partnerships known as Local Safety Committees (LSC). A LSC is a multi-agency and community forum made up of representatives from government, non-government and community agencies and organisations at the local level who share a collective commitment to improving community safety.

The ultimate aim of LPP is the delivery of police services that achieve the following outcomes:

- ~ Support for the government's commitment to a whole of government approach to community safety and crime prevention;
- ~ The effective identification and fulfilment of local community needs and expectations;
- ~ Decreased community fears and concern about crime;
- ~ Increased public confidence in the accountability, professionalism and integrity of police;
- ~ Increased accountability to local communities for police service outputs with a focus on preventive and reactive measures of police effectiveness; and
- ~ Engagement with other government, non-government and community agencies and organisations to facilitate a coordinated response to community safety issues.

The major focus of the LSC structure is to develop a multi-agency community safety plan to address community safety issues specific to each geographical location. For example, a LSC in one municipality may choose to address problems associated with alcohol-related violence in and around licensed premises, whereas another LSC may choose to develop a more strategic response to family violence. The policing strategies included in the community safety plan form part of the overall police action plan for each area.

LSC are not intended to be forums for grass roots community representation and may be more accurately described as a management committee. Membership is drawn from agencies that provide a tangible community safety service. LSC members are ideally managers of services at the operational level similar to the Victoria Police District Inspector and should have the ability to allocate resources to validated community safety issues.

Snapshot of Achievements

In recognition of the role of community policing, LPP required a significant cultural shift by Victoria Police. This was to reorientate management and policing service provision to consider collaboration through partnerships and development of both reactive and pro-active measures to address crime and safety issues affecting the community. LPP implementation was completed in 2001 and has been evolving during this time.

Key achievements to date include:

- ~ Establishment of 64 LSC operating across the State with every municipality represented in these forums;
- ~ Development of an annual Community Safety Plan which is actioned and implemented by each LSC and representative agency;
- ~ The development of a Statewide matrix of local issues being addressed through Community Safety Plans which are the subject of whole of government program development or specific focus. This has become a ready reference for the emergence of thematic issues experienced across the State, which require broader organisational strategic planning;

- ~ Identification of knowledge management and information sharing from these plans which allows for other local government areas which experience similar problems to be aware of what is occurring elsewhere and promotion of information sharing around specific initiatives;
- ~ Creation of a partnership approach to ensure services are tailored to meet the individual community safety and wellbeing issues specific to a particular local government area. This includes consideration of over represented and vulnerable groups within particular communities;
- ~ Promotion of community acknowledgment of their role and responsibility in assisting to provide a safer Victoria. It also provides a formalised process to achieve this platform and influence the provision of government services including the provision of policing services at the local level;
- ~ An organisational focus which requires police to consider pro-active measures to address the causal factors of crime and safety;
- ~ An integrated framework which aligns with the Victoria Police Corporate Planning cycle and which requires the inclusion of community safety plans into regional business plans; and
- ~ Providing a structured process for community engagement and input into the delivery of policing services at local level.

Below are two examples of programs developed from a LSC.

Graffiti: A community initiative in Greater Geelong

Like most populous places, Geelong had a problem with graffiti. The major problem was that the perception of safety was diminished because of the "broken windows effect". As with most problems, the responsibilities did not lie solely with one organisation. The early work of the Geelong Police Community Consultative Committee and then LSC identified and validated this issue as a serious community safety and security concern for the constituents of Geelong.

The result was the development of the City of Greater Geelong Graffiti Strategy. This was framed around three key elements:

- Rapid removal through a coordinated approach;
- Prevention and policing; and
- Local Government and community partnerships.

The strategy saw the co-ordination of resources from a range of community partners and engagement of the community in the reduction of problem graffiti. Approximately 50 different community initiatives for reducing and managing graffiti were identified and implemented. These initiatives have assisted in a reduction in recidivism.

FAIR Program

The Family Abuse Integrated Response (FAIR) Program was established in Swan Hill in May 2002, in conjunction with Mallee Domestic Violence Services (MDVS). It involves a 24-hour referral service by Police to the MDVS when attending domestic violence incidents (with the permission of the victim). MDVS then provide support for the victim throughout the process of intervention. A case management model is utilised and supported by the police prosecutor throughout the entire court process. Since the implementation of the FAIR program, the success rate for the granting of Intervention Orders at the Swan Hill Magistrates' Court is 86 per cent (20 per cent above the State average – based on 2002-03 figures). The FAIR program has now been operating throughout the entire Swan Hill-Gannawarra District and has been expanded to Bendigo. Indicators regarding repeat recidivism and re-victimisation show positive outcomes.

Lessons for Government

The overarching principle of LPP is to facilitate government agencies working together with the community, local businesses and other relevant agencies specifically in relation to the issue of community safety.

Several internal reviews of LPP have been conducted with key recommendations made to further enhance organisational capacity to support the program. The main focus of the recommendations has been structural and educational requirements to assist in strengthening organisational commitment to LPP's philosophy and underpinning principles.

LPP shows positive outcomes can be achieved through whole of government involvement in problem identification and the implementation of solutions.

LPP also demonstrates that processes can be developed which engage communities, empower individuals and community agencies to participate, and contribute to local strategies around community safety and well being.

The measure of LPP's strength is demonstrated by the level of commitment of all government agencies to the program.

A key learning of LPP is that its success is contingent upon strong leadership and community engagement, including robust structures and sustainable partnerships.

One of the strengths of LPP and the LSC's structure is that it is designed to tailor the provision of services specifically to meet the requisite skills, capabilities, culture and demographics of any location.

Next Steps

Whilst LPP has been successful there is an opportunity to further enhance the philosophy through:

- ~ Developing local managers to understand the drivers and causal factors of crime and helping identify opportunities for linking up with other agencies to address these factors;
- ~ Encouraging leadership that is not police centric;
- ~ Linking up with other government initiatives and programs - including those with a community strengthening focus - such as Neighbourhood Renewal;
- ~ Identifying and encouraging effective community engagement processes and innovation where this has been achieved with the view to replicating this across the organisation; and
- ~ Enhancing understanding and organisational learning in relation to community needs and perceptions of crime and how this impacts on confidence in policing.

Further information

To learn more about Local Priority Policing initiative visit the website (www.police.vic.gov.au).

6.5 TRANSIT CITIES

Department of Sustainability and Environment

Overview

The Transit Cities program is a joint transport and land-use initiative to create well-designed, well-located and well-connected developments at strategic locations across Victoria. It promotes diverse land use (medium-density housing, shops, offices, cafes, libraries, education facilities) to create vibrant communities where people can have easy access to modern life. Transit Cities will give easy access to a wide range of affordable transport options and will be matched by improvements to Victoria's bus, tram and train networks. In outer suburbs especially, better transport links will reduce isolation and increase access to services and employment.

The Transit Cities Program is closely aligned to three major State Government strategies:

- ~ Growing Victoria Together – the Victorian Government's overarching vision statement which establishes the policy settings and decision-making framework for the State's future growth directions;
- ~ Linking Victoria – the Government's vision for investment in the private and public transport needs of the State, a \$5 billion blueprint for the development of new and improved public transport networks and facilities as well as road upgrades; and
- ~ Melbourne 2030 Strategy – the Government's vision for the development of Melbourne over the next 30 years launched in October 2002. It contains strategy directions which link transport, sustainability, economic growth and residential development outcomes.

In summary, Melbourne 2030/Transit Cities aims to provide greater choices in urban environment with:

- ~ People of all ages living in a variety of housing designs, some big, some small;
- ~ A variety of uses including retail, employment, leisure, education and housing;
- ~ Differing building scales depending on local character;
- ~ High quality design to protect the local amenity;
- ~ Better linkages to public transport; and
- ~ A great public realm.

The Government is supporting Activity Centres and Transit Cities through the Budget:

- ~ 2001-2002 State Budget – \$2m over four years for initial master planning;
- ~ 2002-2003 State Budget – a further \$10.5m allocated;
- ~ 2003-2004 State Budget – further \$4m over 2 years; and
- ~ Melbourne 2030 grants of \$5.6m.

Transit Cities' 'whole of government' approach is based on:

- ~ Co-operation between departments and agencies;
- ~ Coordination and leveraging of public sector investment;
- ~ A business plan approach to development staging and future government investment; and
- ~ Development of 'Priority Action' Plans.

Both the Department of Infrastructure (DOI) and VicUrban are key players in the delivery of Transit Cities and Activity Centres. They have an implementation role in delivering on the Master plan/Structure plan visions. There is also large coordinated investment from TAFE, hospitals, and the police. A high-level inter-departmental coordination group has been established which meets regularly to assist in coordinating government departments and agencies' activities. Regular meetings with political champions are also organised who assist in providing coordination at the political level.

Snapshot of Achievements

The Dandenong Saleyards development site in Dandenong is a prime example of identifying a strategic re-development opportunity. Known as Metro 3175, this \$250m development is a partnership between the City of Greater Dandenong and VicUrban. It is the first major investment in residential development in Dandenong for over 20 years. This project, which covers over 20 hectares of prime land adjacent to the Dandenong railway station and the Dandenong Central Activity District will explore and use innovative urban

design concepts to provide new forms of housing design and mix. It is intended that this project will demonstrate to other developers how a strategic re-development site can be developed in an integrated manner.

Since 2001, there has been over \$900 million of public and private investment in Transit Cities: Dandenong \$250m; Box Hill \$196m; Ringwood \$170m; Sydenham \$185m; and Frankston \$120m. Discussions with investors and developers indicate that this level of committed and approved investment has occurred due to:

- ~ The private sector's confidence in the program;
- ~ The government's commitment to the program;
- ~ Government investment in infrastructure;
- ~ Stakeholder input into the master planning process; and
- ~ The governance arrangements which are being put in place to guide the program.

The Transit City model locations have been selected based on the current known available opportunities to influence urban design outcomes and the ability to leverage private and public sector investment around five key areas. Government is committed to capital investment in these four areas: hospitals; education; community safety; and public transport. The fifth area is private sector investment in retail shopping centres. Shopping centre owners are keen investors as they are always looking for the competitive edge which will keep their centre at the forefront of the retail market.

In a recent survey at Sydenham by the City of Brimbank, 33 per cent of the nearby residents indicated knowledge of the program and 73 per cent supported the Transit City concept. This result is very encouraging as it demonstrates that the Transit City message is being well received.

The government is currently piloting partnership approaches through the Transit Cities program.

Partnership Pilot: Place Manager

A place manager is a dedicated project officer or expert employed by State or Local Government. As the name suggests, the place manager's focus is within a spatially defined location. Typically, the principal aim of the role is to manage or facilitate research, planning and development for targeted actions and programs, to achieve a set of pre-determined or agreed government and community-based outcomes for the particular location. This model provides the benefits of a dedicated officer creating a link between State and Local Government and can demonstrate commitment to a project at the State Government level through resource allocation.

Place managers can come from a diverse range of professional and vocational backgrounds, such as planning and urban design, urban geography, economic development, project management and social planning. A place manager was appointed for the Ringwood Transit Cities Program in November 2002. In this case, the place manager was a qualified town planner employed by the State Government and based at the City of Maroondah offices.

The place manager's role at Ringwood was to manage and coordinate detailed feasibility studies and market research, investigate opportunities for joined-up government projects, manage minor capital works and leverage private and public sector investment. Specifically, this is achievable by encouraging a place-based approach for projects to be planned and implemented, rather than more traditional approaches, such as taking a theme, system, or function-based approach. The place-based approach aims to prioritise the programs of different organisations, and streamline planning by taking a holistic approach, so resource allocation and delivery times can be coordinated.

The appointment of the State Government place manager at Ringwood provided an effective link between both levels of government at the officer level and was complemented by an advisory committee. Also, being based at the council provided opportunities to network and communicate with councillors and local community representatives about the program.

Lessons for Government

The Transit Cities program is a model for different approaches to master planning. DSE is formulating a range of governance arrangements to support Transit Cities with its stakeholders – particularly Local Government – that best reflect local conditions. These have been progressively put in place to guide the program. Examples include a Development Board at Dandenong, Advisory Committees at Sydenham and Ringwood, and a Place Manager at Ringwood (highlighted above).

Transit Cities shows the importance of adopting a business plan approach to secure continued government investment. It also needs to demonstrate that government investment in Transit Cities will leverage private sector involvement and commitment. The adoption of a multi-year strategy will ensure that the timing of government investments dovetails with relevant outcomes in Melbourne 2030.

Local Government is a critical partner in Transit Cities and plays an important role in championing the program. Transit Cities works best with the active and continued involvement of senior Council officers, Councillors and Mayors. It plays an important role in spreading the message about Transit Cities and articulating its needs and goals.

Achieving a whole of government is also about having political champions. In Transit Cities this is achieved through regular meetings convened by DSE with the Parliamentary Secretaries for Planning and Environment and Infrastructure, who assist in providing program coordination at the political level in government.

Future Directions

Transit Cities is undertaking a Triple Bottom Line (TBL) study to identify indicators and undertake baseline assessments of Transit Cities in regard to sustainability issues. These include car and public transport usage, crime rates, and greenhouse impacts. This will enable the State Government to monitor improvements and to implement changes. Examples of the indicators that will be used include:

- ~ Train patronage;
- ~ Proportion of main streets with active frontages;
- ~ Diversity of housing types; and
- ~ Accessible pedestrian walking routes.

Further information

To learn more about Transit Cities visit the website (www.dse.vic.gov.au).

6.6 RURAL LEADERSHIP AND COMMUNITY EVENTS PROGRAM

Regional Development Victoria

Overview

The Rural Leadership and Community Events Program (RLCEP) was a \$3.6M program over three years from 2001/2002 to 2003/2004. Funding assistance under the program was delivered under two separate 'streams' – leadership and events. The program's objectives were to:

- ~ Assist rural and regional communities to encourage and strengthen leadership, creative skills and capacities that are essential to their social, economic and commercial growth and development; and
- ~ Provide assistance for local communities to foster and enhance community events that reflects the spirit of those communities.

Eligible regional councils or regionally-based incorporated bodies were able to apply at any time for one-off funding for leadership projects (up to \$50 000) or events (up to \$10 000) on a dollar-for-dollar basis. The nine urban/rural fringe councils around Melbourne were also eligible for consideration. No funding rounds applied. However applicants were required to first meet with one of Regional Development Victoria's Rural Community Development Officers (RCDO) to discuss the project's eligibility before an application was lodged. Although councils could auspice applications on behalf of unincorporated community groups, project delivery was ultimately the responsibility of the grantee, as stipulated in the program's grant conditions.

The program normally sought to support new projects. However, existing leadership schemes were eligible to establish *additional* initiatives that are discreet projects. Funding was also provided for additional components of existing events.

Projects aligned to the philosophy and objectives of the RLCEP generally:

- ~ Created or built upon partnerships at the local level;
- ~ Promoted local participation at various stages i.e. before, during and after project delivery through government investment in infrastructure;
- ~ Were supported by people other than the applicant organisation;
- ~ Increased RDV's knowledge of, and engagement with local communities via RDV's network of RCDOs;
- ~ Reflected rural and regional community priorities; and
- ~ Promoted the community's identity and capacities.

The types of leadership projects that were funded included seminars aimed at: stimulating interest within local communities in developing leadership skills and creative capacities; improving presentation skills; submission writing and negotiating skills within local communities; developing knowledge of and participating in regional networks; working with and influencing the three levels of government; accessing government, business and other opportunities for their communities; and delivering local community projects, among other activities.

The types of events projects funded included: community festivals usually held over public holidays; other local celebrations and commemorations; street parades; field days; music festivals; poetry festivals; film festivals; arts and craft markets; and food and wine events, among other activities.

Snapshot of Achievements

At the conclusion of RLCEP, 282 projects had received core funding support. Approximately 40 per cent of the funding was allocated to leadership projects with the remaining 60 per cent of funds going to events projects. Additional program funding of \$500 000 ('Drought Assistance' and other funding) boosted the number of projects supported by 74, with some 356 projects finally being supported overall.

A successful example of a leadership project funded under RLCEP is the Alpine Valleys Community Leadership Program (AVCLP), an initiative of a group representing region-wide community and industry interests. Involving the communities of the North East and Border region, the AVCLP is modelled on the Williamson and Fairley Leadership Programs in Victoria. AVCLP offered participants the opportunity to share the knowledge of local, regional, state and national leaders with a range of industry, government, business and community experiences. Initiated in partnership with the Australian Alpine Valleys Agribusiness Forum and auspiced under

North East AgCare, the AVCLP developed into an independent entity with the support of its own voluntary Board of Management and the communities of the Wodonga, Towong, Alpine, Indigo and Delatite Shires.

The program was initiated in response to a demand for leadership development at a local level, which was identified as crucial to the future development of regional communities. A key objective of the AVCLP was developing formalised community leadership training programs and encouraging broad community awareness, access and involvement.

Self-help underpinned the AVCLP initiative, with speakers and program venues contributed by various private industries, Local Government and government authorities, business and community groups as in-kind sponsorship. This kept program costs low and encouraged direct involvement and empowerment for communities within the region to support the objective of developing grassroots leaders with the potential to reinvest their skills locally.

Program participants, each of whom made a \$500 contribution to ongoing operational costs, have so far directly supported administrative costs. RLCEP funding supported the skill development components, a Melbourne visit, and the opening and closing retreats.

Full-day seminars for the AVCLP were conducted at venues spread across the region and were held fortnightly. The program days were based around issues facing the region. Skills workshops are also conducted throughout the year.

Participants have recommended the program to others saying *'I highly recommend the AVCLP, it was a fantastic experience. It has developed my awareness of community issues and what I can contribute back to the community.'*

Another participant said of the program *'...it has given me personal skills I didn't have previously. It has given me ideas of the ways people approach situations and has provided me with the confidence to go into my community with those skills.'*

Lessons for Government

The success of RLCEP lay in its capacity to readily respond to community aspirations. The program guidelines were not overly prescriptive and allowed a large range of different types of projects to be supported, which might otherwise have not fitted anywhere else. RDV's regional presence – through its RCDO network – was another critical success factor, as assistance was on hand to help guide project development prior to any application being lodged. The absence of funding rounds also assisted RDV to respond quickly to emerging opportunities and at the time when the community was most ready to proceed.

Program 'Exit Surveys' at project closure/grant acquittal stage consistently showed that communities appreciated on-the-ground assistance and funding assistance which may be applied to a range of different projects that fit in with the community's timing (i.e. weeks, not months before the outcome is known) and local project design. The message here for government is that one size does not fit all.

Evidence suggests that it takes years of investments across both capital works and community strengthening projects before growth is evident and additional opportunities can be realised. For example, a refurbished community hall leads to new community events and fundraising opportunities; a new shopping strip streetscape leads to new businesses locating; and improvements in civic amenity and community pride lead to renewed utilisation of local parks and economic activity.

The lessons from RLCEP indicate that there is a place for government to take appropriate risks with public money to facilitate new ways of strengthening communities. The program highlights that government has a role to play in kick-starting new initiatives where local funds are insufficient.

Other important lessons from RLCEP are that government does not have all the ideas or insights regarding a community's preferences, and flexible program design and delivery complements and reinforces what communities want.

Future Policy Directions

The RLCEP was discontinued in 2003/04 as there was no additional funding allocation in the 2004/05 State Budget. There is a strong potential for the RLCEP to influence the government's agenda for community strengthening. In addition to ad hoc inter-agency communications about RLCEP, the potential remains to share and institutionalise RLCEP's strategic learnings across government in a more systemic fashion.

Regional Development Victoria's Community Development Program is continuing in the interface council areas. This program provides similar matched funding to councils and community groups (up to \$10 000) for events-based projects (no leadership initiatives) which are also expected to have an economic development benefit attached, consistent with RDV's focus and role in community development.

Further information

To learn more about Regional Development Victoria visit the website (www.iird.vic.gov.au).

6.7 TOWONG DROUGHT EMERGENCY RESPONSES

Department of Primary Industries

Overview

In 2002 and 2003, the Towong Shire Local Government Area was affected by the compounding impacts of bush fires followed by an exceptionally dry autumn. As a result, this area of North East Victoria – previously thought to be drought-proof – was declared to be in Exceptional Circumstances by the Commonwealth Government, after application by the State Government.

In response to requests from the Towong Shire, the Victorian Minister of Agriculture met with a delegation and gave a commitment to send the Dry Seasonal Conditions Taskforce established by the government to assess the situation and advise the government. In July 2003, the Taskforce visited farms and met with local representatives to discuss options that might support the community.

The members of the Taskforce observed financial and emotional stress. An immediate issue identified by the Taskforce was farmers' perceptions of the low value and limited availability of Exceptional Circumstances support payments. This perception was widely accepted resulting in a negative impact on the number of applications for support made to Centrelink and the Rural Finance Corporation.

The Taskforce gave an undertaking that a rapid government inter-agency response would be provided to support the Towong community through August and September and beyond. It was agreed that the response would provide advice on feeding and livestock management, applying for financial assistance and emotional support.

The Department for Primary Industries worked with the Towong Shire to provide and assist with the *Emergency Drought Response* and *Community Recovery* programs. This took a multi-agency approach in design and delivery allowing a large spectrum of community issues to be dealt with in the two programs. The Drought Response commenced in July 2003 and ended in September 2003.

The aims of the *Drought Response* were to:

- ~ Provide immediate individual contact with all landholders and businesses associated with agriculture to offer assistance, and gather information to assess the magnitude of the drought impact, both short and long term; and
- ~ Offer each farm or business a personal visit, or a package of information in the mail to provide advice on feeding livestock, assist with applications for financial assistance or provide direction to other agencies.

Other agencies involved in the *Drought Response* were Department of Sustainability and Environment, Department of Human Services, Rural Finance Corporation, Regional Development Victoria, Centrelink, Upper Murray AgCare (Rural Financial Counsellors) and Victorian Council of Churches. The *Drought Response* program was managed through an Australian Inter-service Incident Management System Incident Control System (AIIMS ICS)-type structure and comprised 'operations', logistics and communications units.

The ongoing *Community Recovery* program, managed by Towong Shire, involves representatives of community groups, DPI, Department of Human Services, Rural Finance Corporation, Regional Development Victoria and the local Rural Financial Counsellor working through regular committee meetings.

The aim of the Recovery program is for the Towong Shire to achieve a higher level of readiness and ability to deal with exceptional circumstances by 2008.

Snapshot of achievements

The Recovery Program's success was underpinned by a number of factors:

- ~ Its engagement with local people in developing appropriate responses for the community;
- ~ In conditions of exceptional circumstances government departments working together, recognise that the community's health, income, physical environment, and other characteristics are intertwined and require a linked-up government approach;
- ~ A demonstrated mechanism for continuous interaction and cooperation between the public, local authorities and government agencies;

- ~ A high level of assistance and commitment from key members of the Towong Shire staff, in supporting the Response and Recovery programs;
- ~ Excellent communication and liaison between the DPI Drought Response Manager, Towong Shire representatives and the Department of Human Services' Coordinator; and
- ~ The development of a strategic plan to strengthen community skills so that by 2008 the Towong Shire is ready and able to deal with exceptional circumstances.

Lessons for Government

In a review process it was found that key elements of success in undertaking the *Response* and *Recovery* programs include the high level of assistance and commitment from Towong Shire staff, together with other Government support. An important outcome from this experience is the greater acceptance by both the community and government agencies to cooperate for the good of all.

An important lesson for government is that community leadership is an important element of success in multi-agency activities. While the goal of the *Drought Response* program was to provide immediate support, the *Recovery* program through the *Community Recovery* Committee aims to achieve sustainable results.

From the perspective of landholders, through the review they identified changing beliefs of living in a drought-proof region in which there was some complacency about drought. Landholders recognised that their traditional attitudes and beliefs led them to be reactive rather than proactive and that they must develop their skills and knowledge to adapt and move forward.

The experience shows that even with the compounding effects of bush fire and drought – communities like the Towong Shire with high levels of community strength – appear to be resilient in exceptional circumstances. Thus they are able to deal with associated impacts and longer term recovery processes.

Future Policy Directions

A strategic plan for the *Recovery* program has been developed. The plan is being evaluated to determine future actions required to meet its goals.

The *Recovery* program provides a good case study of a government/community partnership aimed at strengthening communities. As part of the next step, evaluation is being built into projects which will enable successful aspects to be identified for wider application to other Victorian Communities, where appropriate.

Importantly, the program has become solely Shire (community) driven through the *Community Recovery* Committee, with government agencies becoming ongoing partners through the recovery stages. However, no specific time-frame can be set for the recovery phase.

The lessons learned from this program are transferable to other municipalities implementing community strengthening strategies – especially those building skills, capabilities and resilience – and linking up programs and services, across agencies and levels of government, in partnership with communities.

Further information

To learn more about Towong Drought Emergency Responses visit the website (www.dpi.vic.gov.au).

6.8 TRAVELSMART

Department of Infrastructure

Overview

TravelSmart is a voluntary travel behaviour change program aimed at encouraging people to reduce private vehicle travel in favour of more sustainable modes such as walking, cycling, public transport and car sharing. TravelSmart consists of two projects – School Travel Planning and the Schools Curriculum Pilot. TravelSmart Education operates as part of the Integrated Transport Projects team in the Integrated Planning Branch of Planning and Policy at the Department of Infrastructure.

School Travel Planning Project

The School Travel Planning project was funded by the Victorian Greenhouse Strategy (and also is listed as Action 7.4 of that strategy). It was set up as a partnership between Department of Infrastructure (DOI) and Department of Education & Training (DE&T) in 2002. A Reference Group was set up with membership from DOI, DE&T, Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) and VicRoads. Thirty-four schools were chosen following nomination from the nine regional offices of DE&T, based on a set of criteria relating to: percentage of children living within four kilometres of school; identified travel issues; proactiveness of school in addressing problems; and regional equity. Each school agreed to conduct a baseline and follow up survey, assist with focus groups, and to develop School Travel Plans in return for funding and assistance.

Schools Curriculum Pilot

The Schools Curriculum Pilot was developed with agreement from DE&T. Following a tendering process in 2002, a contract was awarded to consultants GDP Consultancy Pty Ltd and Dynamic Outcomes Pty Ltd. They have developed curriculum materials and processes and piloted with six schools in 2003. This was evaluated and refined and is being re-tested with the original schools plus a further 14 schools.

After extensive review of theories and models of behaviour change, a curriculum was developed based on five key stages: program establishment; teacher preparation; program delivery; teacher support; and evaluation. The first two stages included recruiting schools and providing professional development for teachers delivering the materials.

The program being delivered includes:

- ~ Classroom activities for years five and six (around the themes of the environment dimension, physical activity, transport/travel dimension);
- ~ Whole-of-school activities and events designed to engage the whole school community;
- ~ Involvement of parents/carers and families in activities linked to the classroom program; and
- ~ Promotion of the program within the local community.

Snapshot of Achievements

A survey was delivered to 34 schools in mid 2003. In primary schools (29) both parents and students completed the survey, and in secondary schools (5) the survey was completed by students only. Of the surveys delivered, 12 000, or approximately 70 per cent, were returned. Focus groups were also conducted with each school. The survey showed that 80 per cent of primary and 60 per cent of secondary students from the 34 schools live within three kilometres of school. 59 percent of primary and 51 per cent of secondary students are driven to school 5 days per week.

The major reasons stated for this travel choice were:

- ~ Distance – Primary 28 per cent, Secondary 34 per cent;
- ~ Roads/Traffic – Primary 29 per cent, Secondary 6 per cent;
- ~ Personal Safety – Primary 25.5 per cent, Secondary 3 per cent;
- ~ Convenience – Primary 22 per cent, Secondary 16 per cent; and
- ~ Time – Primary 9 per cent, Secondary 21 per cent.

The focus groups/group discussions in each school delved further into particular local issues. In many cases, participants in the focus groups became part of steering committees to develop school travel plans. Each school identified a set of responses to the barriers determined, then developed a School Travel Plan (STP). These STPs include an implementation plan made up of such measures as:

- ~ Promoting the benefits of walking, cycling, car pooling, and public transport to students and parents;
- ~ Conducting walk and ride to school days and other events;
- ~ Providing rewards and incentives for walking and cycling;
- ~ Improvement of bicycle parking, security and shelter;
- ~ Bicycle education programs and bicycle maintenance;
- ~ Conducting programs such as Walking School Bus;
- ~ Negotiating with public transport providers regarding routes, timetabling and stops, and improving school buses and end of trip facilities;
- ~ Developing partnership with local businesses eg bicycle shops delivering bicycle maintenance workshops;
- ~ Liaising with LGAs to improve road safety around the school – including minor road works, road marking and signage, establishing crossing supervisors, etc;
- ~ Strengthening relationships between school and Local Government Authorities (LGAs) and community organisations; and
- ~ Supporting activities for children and parents, including: developing a community gathering and meeting place for parents and volunteers (particularly the culturally and linguistically diverse); to lead Walking School Bus Routes and then stay for a chat and tea or coffee; walking and cycling clubs; school and community mapping; and developing “Big Brother – Big Sister” programs between primary and secondary schools.

Warrnambool West Primary School has had great success in setting up walking clubs as part of its school travel plan. Already there are ten clubs of twelve members each in a school of 360. The children name their club and every person who walks or cycles gets a token which goes into a prize box and is drawn at assemblies.

According to the school Principal, Philip Barnes, the change has been dramatic. He has observed a change from a crowded “double-parked” street prior to beginning the school travel plan to finding as few as two or three cars at 8:55 in the morning.

In order to further encourage the walking and cycling clubs to be sustained, as well as others who use active transport to school, recommended routes to school are also being developed. When signage and road markings are completed, the whole school will be taken by bus to the beginning of the routes. By participating in a school outing, students will be made familiar with the routes in an enjoyable atmosphere.

Bike Ed has been very successful for Warrnambool West, being a former state champion of the Bike Ed Challenge. By increasing students’ bike proficiency, knowledge, and safety, this program aims to overcome a major barrier to parents accepting cycling as a viable school travel choice. Walking and cycling days are also planned to encourage walking and cycling to school.

Other strategies that are specific to certain schools include the development of measures to create community connections between parents at Southvale Primary School in Noble Park. Because up to 88 per cent of children do not speak English at home, the school Principal, Susan Barford, and the City of Greater Dandenong had difficulty getting sufficient volunteers to run the Walking School Bus program.

In order to create a climate of trust (many of the parents have experienced traumatic events in their country of origin), part of the school travel plan includes the development of a parents’ community room/coffee club. At the recent launch of their plan, Southvale enlisted the skills of local parents and friends to serve a yum cha breakfast. While this strategy does not involve a direct travel related theme, it is clear from many of the focus groups that trust and community connectedness is essential to build before many people will feel safe enough to allow their children to join a Walking School Bus, or car pool, or catch a bus or tram.

Two schools in the TravelSmart School Travel Planning Pilot have an almost complete range of programs included in their school travel plan. Both Southvale Primary School and Carrum Primary School have a Walking School Bus program, a bicycle club, a range of special events and promotional campaigns, innovative local projects, as well as the TravelSmart Education Curriculum Project.

Lessons for Government

Formal evaluation of both projects is yet to be completed. In the School Travel Planning project a follow up survey and focus group will be conducted in each school later this year.

However, anecdotally, there are positive outcomes. These include increased walking and cycling and decreased car trips, improved local areas (safer, less cars) and increased community connections (parental participation, etc). The initial TravelSmart Schools Curriculum Pilot had evaluation activities built into the program (eg. schools surveys and family cars survey), in addition to post-program evaluation measures (interviews with key school personnel, parents surveys, focus group discussions with students, annotated teacher workbooks). Lessons from this evaluation were incorporated into the Stage 2 Curriculum Pilot.

School Travel Planning (STP) appears to work well with other programs such as VicHealth's Walking School Bus program and VicRoads Safe Routes to School. At this stage, the umbrella effect of the STP seems to have the potential to enhance the effectiveness of the component parts of the STP.

A key lesson for government is that success is linked to local ownership, commitment, and governance arrangements that encourage these characteristics. At this stage the STPs demonstrating the strongest results are those with the active involvement of the school, the parents, students and the community. In terms of governance, while the DOI and the Project Reference Group monitors the progress of the participant schools, schools with an active and diverse local steering committee appear the most successful.

As a pilot project the School Travel Planning project has shown that further materials and training would be useful for similar projects in the future. To this end, a School Travel Planning Guide is being developed to provide a directory of the range of travel related programs currently offered to the school community and to offer 'how to' assistance for a range of entry points. The Curriculum project offers professional development training for teachers participating in the curriculum project.

An important discovery of the STP project is the potential for a greater relationship between Local Government and government schools. During the process of developing school travel plans, many participant schools have further developed relationships with their Local Government.

A number of initiatives developed as part of schools' STP have led to relationships with:

- ~ Local business – such as local bicycle shops who have provided training, information, advice and sponsored maintenance;
- ~ Builders – who have constructed bicycle shelters; and
- ~ Community organisations – such as Bicycle Victoria who have designed secure and safe bicycle shelters.

Others have developed websites through this involvement. The Southvale Primary School established an on-line forum for participant schools through the program 'My Connected Community' (known as MC2).

Future Policy Directions

Further testing of the School Travel Planning methodology is planned for areas with traffic congestion from 2004-2006 (about 12 schools). A School Travel Planning Guide will be developed in 2004-2005.

It is hoped that the TravelSmart Education (schools) program will further influence government policy and program development if it provides evidence that reducing car trips to school can:

- ~ Increase community amenity, by reducing congestion and making streets safer;
- ~ Improve community connectedness, through carpooling, walking and cycling together; and
- ~ Increase trust, by increasing people's knowledge of their neighbourhood.

Further Information

To learn more about TravelSmart Education visit the website (www.travelsmart.vic.gov.au).

6.9 DAREBIN COMMUNITY BUILDING PROJECT

Department of Justice

Overview

The Darebin Community Building Project (DCBP) is one of the ten Victorian Community Building Demonstration Projects funded by DVC. The Department of Justice (DoJ) is the lead State department for the DCBP. The DCPB commenced in August 2001 and will be completed in August 2005. It is auspiced by the City of Darebin and located in the neighbourhood of East Preston and East Reservoir with a population of 12 500 people. According to the ABS Census of Population and Housing 2001 data the community is an ageing community, over a quarter of families are single parents, indigenous people make up 1.8 per cent of the population and 20.5 per cent of households have no motor vehicle.

An extensive community consultation was held in the first six months of the DCBP and the following key aspirations were identified:

- ~ Increased community safety;
- ~ Social connectedness;
- ~ Improved public housing;
- ~ Increased access to public transport particularly on Sundays;
- ~ Economic development; and
- ~ Opportunities for young people.

These key issues are addressed through a diversity of activities and actions that engage residents, State and Local Government, community organisations and agencies and business.

DoJ has resourced a three-year full-time Senior Project Officer position. It convenes the Northern Regional Managers Group (NRMG) which was established to respond to the DCBP and other community building and whole of government programs in the northern metropolitan region. Senior management representatives of all State Government departments and Victoria Police meet every two months and Local and Commonwealth Government representatives and agencies attend when required. The NRMG has recently become active in responding to whole of government issues raised by the local Neighbourhood Renewal projects.

The objectives of the program are to:

- ~ Improve the social, economic and environmental well-being of disadvantaged neighbourhoods in the Community Building location;
- ~ Listen to local people and promote their capacity to address issues of disadvantage in their community;
- ~ Work to devolve decision making and project action as much as possible, to the local community; and
- ~ Develop policy and processes to help establish long-term, multi-sector partnerships and whole of government action concerning the priority issues identified.

The project has a Management Committee and a number of community partnership groups have developed in response to the key issues. These groups (listed below) feed back key issues to the Management Committee and to the NRMG.

Reservoir Community Improvement Group is a new partnership of local residents, police, Office of Housing and other State Government representatives and Darebin Council. This group came together aiming to improve living conditions on public housing estates in East Reservoir.

Growing Together Group is a new group of residents who have come together to organise community events and improve community connectedness.

Koori and Police Liaison Group is a new group which has formed to build stronger relationships between police and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families in the Reservoir location.

Transport Working Group is a partnership of the Department of Infrastructure, Darebin Council, Northland Shopping Centre, local bus companies and Metlink that is working on improving bus services and infrastructure in the locality.

Darebin Local Safety Committee is an existing group facilitated by Darebin Council with an extensive representation of government and community organisations that respond to the community safety issues in the project.

Community Building and Young People Working Group is a new group that brings together workers from key youth services to provide young people with more access to services and recreation opportunities and add value to existing services.

Snapshot of Achievements

Public Transport – Bus services on Sundays

The Transport Action Group has completed a bus stop audit in the Project location. Council and DOI have committed infrastructure funds that will result in modest but visible infrastructure improvements including new bus shelters. A successful Travelsmart grant will focus on supporting older adults to confidently use public transport. A DOI budget bid is being developed to provide bus services in the location on Sundays, focusing on addressing social disadvantage and improving community connectedness.

The secrets of the group's success to date are the willingness of the partners to meet, share knowledge and work together to respond to a community identified issue and the facilitation role played by the lead government department.

Community Connectedness – Growing Together Group

A group of local residents that started meeting 12 months ago have organised and successfully run a series of community events including neighbourhood festivals, outdoor film night, barbecues, community safety audits and community safety month activities. This group has learnt organisation skills and leadership, how to run meetings, and to listen and accept different opinions. They have completed event management training to enable them to promote, comply with regulations and run a major public event.

The secret of the group's success is the resourcing of a community worker with the appropriate skills and sufficient time required to develop a group, build trust and impart skills to emerging community leaders.

Increased Community Safety – Koori/Police Liaison Group

This is a locally-based project bringing together Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) residents from Reservoir and Police to better understand cultural issues and to link and understand services available for these people. Through building trust and relationships and exchanging stories and information at a local level, it is anticipated that the local ATSI residents will have a better relationship with the local police and that the police will have an increased knowledge of ATSI cultural issues and support services.

Economic Development – Broadway shopping precinct

The project has recently received funding (from the Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development's Streetlife program) to engage local traders and residents, and to make the Broadway a more vibrant and attractive place to shop.

The success in obtaining the funding was to link economic development staff with community development staff to integrate a sustainable community strengthening approach within an economic development project.

Lessons for Government

The project is due to complete an evaluation by early November 2004. The following are some of the learnings identified anecdotally to date:

- ~ Community strengthening takes time and resources to ensure sustainable outcomes;
- ~ Sustainable outcomes from community strengthening and linking up projects require longer than three years;
- ~ Successful linking up outcomes require the commitment, understanding and endorsement by senior management in State Government. The lead department role is also critical to facilitate the community strengthening and linking up work across State and Local Government and with the community;
- ~ Local Government is a critical player and needs to be adequately resourced to enable effective community strengthening and linking up outcomes;

- ~ The governance of community strengthening is complex and multi-layered. It takes time to ensure that the community's voice is both heard and listened to by government. It also takes time to share and convey information from the government to the community in a way that is meaningful and empowering; and
- ~ The understanding and endorsement of senior management in government is critical to the success of community strengthening and linking up.

Other lessons for government are that the skills required to implement community engagement models and community strengthening initiatives are quite specific. For example, key staff engaged in these projects are required to act as brokers, facilitators and enablers. These roles require particular capabilities and experience including:

- ~ Knowledge and understanding of how government works (at all three levels);
- ~ An understanding of the local community and their needs; and
- ~ The ability to facilitate and negotiate partnerships to enable creative, sustainable and shared outcomes that benefit local communities.

It is also important that workers in community strengthening projects are either co-located or allocated substantial time to work in the local area or region where the project is based.

Future Policy Directions

The project is funded until August 2005. The current focus is on looking at solutions to develop local ownership and cross-sectorial partnerships that are embedded and sustained within a whole-of-government framework. The project is working on a Sustainability Plan that is based on a place-based framework. It will determine what each of the stakeholders can support, establish ongoing partnership structures between community and government, and determine if and what additional resources may be required.

The emerging consensus between researchers, practitioners and policy makers indicates that community strengthening projects such as this require a six to ten year timeframe to create tangible, long-term and sustainable solutions.

It is hoped that the Darebin project – along with the State Government's other nine Community Building Demonstration Projects – will be evaluated and the learnings taken to shape future community strengthening policies and programs recognising such elements as:

- ~ The integral role of Local Government;
- ~ The timeframe and resources required to achieve sustainable community strengthening, particularly in disadvantaged areas; and
- ~ The changes that government will need to make to effectively implement community strengthening and linking up policies and programs.

Further information

To learn more about Darebin Community Building Project visit the website (www.communitybuilding.vic.gov.au).

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