

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

WHAT IS IT?



Another Community Resource for the Not for Profit Sector

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COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT WHAT IS IT AND WHAT DOES IT MEAN IN PRACTICE?

What we now call “**community development**” has been around a long time, in many guises.

Community development was first applied in aid programmes to third world countries. This was in response to failures in top-down development programmes promoting things such as birth control or new farming practices. Programmes were designed to help poor communities recognise the causes of their poverty and to develop strategies for improving the situation.

Instead of seeing problems in technical terms such as contraceptive technology or new seeds and fertilisers, the **community development** approach focused on social relations of under-development, such as the role of money lenders and landlords, rather than the need for miracle seeds.

When adopted by industrial countries in the sixties, community development also operated primarily in low socio economic communities. Since then, programmes termed community development have operated at all levels of society.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT – WORKING DEFINITIONS

*“A leader is best,
When people barely know that she exists,
Not so good when people obey and acclaim her.
Worst when they despise her.
Fail to honour people, they fail to honour you.
But of a good leader, who talks little,
When her work is done, her aim fulfilled.
They will all say, we did this ourselves”.*

(Author unknown)

A common definition of community development is a model of working, within self-defined communities of interest, which assists people to:

- Identify issues and problems they experience collectively
- Decide upon a programme of action to address these needs in accordance with their own cultural values
- Identify and secure the resources and skills necessary to implement the programme of action.
- Build on existing community networks to develop better support and community control of services.

Community Development is a set of values which aim to change the world. A changed world is one where people have a strong sense of belonging and a strong sense of control over their lives. What is needed is commitment and co-operation in the task of creating a healthy social, economic and physical environment.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT V COMMUNITY BASED

Community development should not be confused with community-based programming where the professionals and/or agencies define the problem, develop strategies to remedy the problem, involve local community members and groups to assist implementing solutions and work to transfer major responsibility for on-going programmes to local community members and groups.

That is not community development. In a community development model, people themselves define their problems and solutions. In community-based programming, problems and strategies are defined by those outside.

So when we are talking about community development we are saying that people's health experiences need to be seen within the context of their social relationships and the economic and physical environment.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND HEALTH

The World Health Organisation (1986) defines Health as being created and lived by people within the settings of their everyday life, where they learn, work, play and love. Health is created by caring for oneself and others, by being able to make decisions and have control over one's life circumstances, and by ensuring that the society one lives in creates conditions that allow the attainment of health by all its members.

Health is not, as is commonly perceived in our society, the mere treatment of diseases that infect or affect us. As such, it is not the sole responsibility of the so-called "medical experts" but of the society as a whole. Experience and research tells us that poor health is often an outcome of the society which we experience daily.

Community Development involves working with communities to help them identify their own needs and developing ways of improving health through building a more equal society. Equity is a vital concern as it is not just about equal access to services but is about achieving a much more equal society in terms of people's health status.

The countries with the best health statistics are those with the more even distribution of wealth ie the smallest gap between rich and poor. All our leading health problems are triggered by socio-environmental problems which in a more equitable society would not exist. Although people at the bottom are getting the diseases and dying at

Higher rates than those at the top, public health campaigns are often targeted more towards those who are better off.

There are two opposing views. One is that the individual is to blame for his/her own poor health. It is not the community's responsibility. We hear: "If only people would look after themselves and not be irresponsible, then they could be healthy, no matter how poor they are." "Poor people are generally irresponsible, ill-educated and it's not surprising they are sicker. If they spend their money on cigarettes, alcohol and junk food, what do you expect?"

The other view is that people's health status is a result of the access they have to resources such as education, transport, employment, housing. As they cannot control all these things, their worse health status is not their fault. Typical comments from these people might be: "It's much easier to eat well if you have a high income." "Sometimes, it's difficult not to have short-term pleasures, even at the expense of more healthy things, because life is tough on the poverty line." "It's hard to think of the long-term consequence for my health when my day to day survival is such a battle."

People are only as healthy as the community in which they live. The environment which surrounds the community in all senses (physical, social, political, economic and educational) needs to be made as supportive and as healthy as is humanely possible.

The following table illustrates three different approaches to a healthy lifestyle:

Medical Approach	Behavioural Approach	Socio-Environmental Approach
Cardio-vascular disease	Smoking	Poverty Unemployment
Cancer	Poor eating habits	Powerlessness
AIDS	Lack of fitness	Isolation
Diabetes	Drug abuse	Pollution
Obesity	Alcohol abuse	Stress
Mental Disorder	Stress coping	Hazardous living and working conditions
Hypertension	Lack of lifeskills	

The behavioural approach is about healthy lifestyles. Doesn't ask what is it in people's lives that causes them to behave in a certain way although we know that there are several risk factors and conditions such as poverty, unemployment, powerlessness, isolation, pollution, stress, hazardous living and working conditions. To these we can add racism, ageism, and sexism.

The socio-environmental approach is about health promotion *and* creating healthy living conditions *and* supportive environments and as such incorporates the medical *and* behavioural approaches.

OTTAWA CHARTER

At the heart of the Ottawa Charter, with its emphasis on "creating supportive environments" and strengthening community action", is the idea of empowerment of communities with the ownership and control of their own endeavours and destinies. Communities, both geographical and communities of interest (eg women, men) need to be empowered with resources and decision-making power to determine needs and programmes to meet those needs.

All aspects of the Charter are important. For example, "Building healthy policy". Those with the resources must have as well as "mission" statements, "permission" statements, which allow staff to work actively with community groups in developing broader-based approaches to socio-environmental problems.

TREATY OF WAITANGI

Here in Aotearoa, the Treaty of Waitangi provides a manifesto for health promotion which urges the creation of supportive environments where residents take care of each other and the community.

The first step towards empowerment is to return to the community the power of definition. Agencies can help with this by providing information on which decisions can be based. Statistics can be a tool, but we need to retain people's experience and remember that statistics are merely – "people with the tears washed off".

THE ENVIRONMENT

The environment which surrounds the community which is targeted in all senses; physical, social, political, economic, educational needs to be made supportive of that community and its programmes.

For example it has to be asked whether much is gained from teaching parenting skills to people without also trying to alter the environment in which they parent. One of the most supportive things we can do for parents with small children is to offer a crèche so they can have a break.

WHAT IS COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT? WHAT PROBLEMS/NEEDS DOES COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT SEEK TO ADDRESS?

Community development is a set of principles and practices designed to facilitate a participative, “bottom-up” approach to resolving social and economic development issues.

Community development is a process which enables the people of a community to:

- Define their own problems and goals
- Work together as a group rather than solely as individuals
- Act to increase the self-reliance of their community and themselves
- Mediate between groups with conflicting interests
- Minimise dependence on welfare and state funding

Therefore **community development** is a means to achieve particular outcomes.

A community development approach is frequently used in working with communities (geographic or community of interest) which are socially and/or economically disadvantaged.

WHY IS COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IMPORTANT?

Community development has value in that it increases social and economic participation, and empowers people and contributes to their well-being and quality of life.

Community benefits:

Community development acts as a vehicle for the resolution of problems at the community level. In this context, community development:

- Increases the capacity of communities to act on their own behalf, thereby decreasing dependency on Government
- Encourages local co-operation and assistance towards greater community wellbeing
- Pools skills and resources
- Upskills individuals
- Decreases alienation and gives people a sense of belonging
- Provides a way for citizens to be connected and involved with decision making about. And development of, services that affect them
- Enhances democracy by involving people in decisions, including minorities
- Fulfils human need to work together to help others
- Involves community members in local activity which can lead to paid employment and therefore reduces Government expenditure on benefits
- Sparks new initiatives.

GOVERNMENT BENEFITS

Community development can also assist the Government to meet its objectives. In this context community development:

- Increases the capacity of communities to achieve outcomes over and above the direct transfer of resources from government

Complements and supports Government's strategies for economic and social development (which are strongly focused on encouraging people to help themselves)

- assists in identifying more efficient mechanisms for redistribution
- has a leverage effect in that community resources, such as volunteer effort, are mobilised
- allows Government to respond to emergent needs
- reduces welfare dependency and encourages participation
- avoids problems, such as lack of community co-operation and resistance to Government initiatives, that can arise from incomplete consultation and inadequate knowledge of the "real world"
- lowers future Government expenditure where projects seek to reduce the incidence of problems that have costs for society.

For example:

- A community – led project that provided guidance to at risk youth would reduce costs to the justice system
- A playgroup that prepared toddlers for school would improve later achievements in the education system
- A home help scheme that enabled frail and disabled persons to remain in their own homes would reduce costs in the health system
- A local community activity that enhanced skills and work readiness might lead to paid employment and reduce Government expenditure on benefits.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IS A BASIC SERVICE

The belief of community development is that people have a right to be involved in the decisions that affect them, and have a right to resources, based on differing needs.

“Community development is concerned with social change and the redistribution of resources. It is highly political and challenging. It demands commitment and resourcefulness, creativity and optimism; it is not an easy option.

It involves responding to community initiatives. It values human life, endeavour and potential. It also values economic and political equality of opportunity. It is concerned with social change and the redistribution of resources.”

*Colin Dale City Manager
Manukau City Council*

There is a direct link between the Local Government Act and Community Development.

“Community Development is about more than basic physical infrastructure, it concerns itself with matters which address the social fabric that holds a community together.”

Sir Brian Elwood June 1990

When Local Government was restructured in 1989, the aim was to become efficient, accountable, and responsive. Council can use the process of community development to become responsive and accountable to the community it serves.

Community Development acknowledges people as most important “and that in fact the development of the community is a primary rationale for the existence of local government.”

Sir Brian Elwood June 1990

PRINCIPLES OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

1. Acknowledgement of and respect for the Articles and Protocol of the Treaty of Waitangi
2. Acknowledgement of and respect for a bicultural basis for our society
3. Acknowledgement of and respect for the multicultural character of our communities
4. Acknowledgement of and support for the contribution of many communities and agencies toward the social health of the city
5. Recognition that the goals of the community are best identified by the community
6. Recognition that in order to achieve equitable (socially just) development, assistance should be based on the differing needs of groups. This means directing resources to where they are most needed.
7. Belief that community development is about increasing opportunities to take part in decision making.
8. Belief that community development leads to collective identity, strength, and influence within the self-defined community. This means that the wider community also gains because the health of a part of the community has improved without anyone being made worse off.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT VALUES:

He Tangata, He Tangata, He Tangata	People first
Mahi a Iwi	Social Equity
Te Mauri o te Kaupapa	Respect
Wakaia ki te kaupapa	Acceptance of differences
Manaaki tangata	Stewardship
Te mana o te tangata	The right to choose

Community Development is about being involved in decisions that affect you and allocating limited resources according to different needs.

To summarise:

Community development is:
- not just about a way of working
- not just about a philosophy
- a set of values or principles or a view of society

It is about all these things linked.

WHAT ARE THE DESIRED OUTCOMES?

Reflecting the principles and practices of community development community objectives would be determined by each community.

A rigorous evaluation of the benefits associated with community development would require a common issue and a control group as well as a similar community in which a community development approach was employed. By comparing the results in each case you would be able to comment on the benefits derived from the use of a community development approach.

However, there are many examples which can be tracked from practice. For instance, in the health sector there is evidence that a community development approach has achieved improved health results in addressing asthma and diabetes levels among Maori communities. Maori exhibit a high incidence of both these disorders and increased hospitalisation rates. Mainstream delivery of education programmes had limited success in reaching the at-risk Maori population by comparison with community education programmes. The latter involved a change to field based education delivery through recruitment and training of Maori facilitators and enlisting support from community leaders, the target population have been more successfully accessed.

SUMMARY

Allowing communities to define their own health problems means also making sure that people have access to:

- Information
- Learning opportunities for health as well as
- Funding support

The challenge is to become “team players” with other agencies and with the people in communities.

Community development is a set of values which aim to change the world. A changed world is one where people have a strong sense of belonging and a strong sense of control over their lives.

What is needed is commitment and co-operation in the task of creating healthy social, economic and physical environments, and we need to make the healthy choices the easy choices for people within a supportive environment.

Reference: Labinte, K. Community Health Promotion Strategies

CONCLUSION

The Community Development approach is often not well understood and measurement of community development outcomes is still a subject of international debate.