



# Good Policy

NEWSLETTER OF GOOD SHEPHERD YOUTH & FAMILY SERVICE SOCIAL POLICY & RESEARCH UNIT

## Working across sectors: language, power and supporting structures

Tanya Corrie, Social Policy Researcher, Good Shepherd Youth & Family Service

**The political and economic climate is ever-changing. Government is now seen as less of a 'fixer' of social problems and more of a facilitator or partner, enabling other groups to share in the responsibility of tackling them.**

An aversion to risk in the name of fiscal responsibility is the dominant paradigm through which much social policy is viewed.

At the same time there is a push toward service and policy innovation. The community sector is continually being asked to look for new ways of doing things that maximise social outcomes while minimising cost and risk. A real tension exists in this space: innovation is inherently risky and these risks cannot be absorbed by one group alone.

Cross-sectoral collaboration is one way of overcoming some of these challenges. In this issue of Good Policy, we explore collaboration in the context of policy innovation and how working together can enable a stronger, collective voice.

Professor Peter Shergold sets out the context for collaboration in his opening article. Extracted from his keynote address at last year's Power to Persuade Symposium,<sup>1</sup> Professor Shergold reflects on his role as a public servant and lays down the challenge to those in advocacy organisations to embrace new ways of doing things and to think differently about the policy process. He points out that policy makers in government operate within a very constrained environment and as such tend to avoid risk, rather than appropriately manage it. This means other sectors potentially have a greater

capacity to innovate, and this is where their power must be harnessed.

Professor Shergold also highlights that the research-evidence-policy nexus is not linear, and that policy making is messy and opportunistic. However, as Dr Gemma Carey notes in her article, it is within these messy and opaque spaces that there is the greatest opportunity for innovation.

As Dr Carey's article explores, collaboration does not happen by osmosis: it must be deliberate, planned and organised. This was the impetus behind the development of the Power to Persuade Symposium – to bring together sectors to dialogue across their differences and enable greater collaboration in influencing policy. Dr Carey reflects on some key lessons to be observed when working across sectors, and inhabiting the spaces 'in between'.

In stepping into other people's spaces, mindfulness of power is also important. In the absence of understanding power dynamics, a dominant voice can silence those who are marginalised by this power. This is Rodney Vlasis' eloquent take on working with women's organisations to address men's violence against women. He highlights that it is predominately men who need to be responsible for their violence against women, yet the voices of men cannot dominate the conversation. It is through naming and claiming male privilege that respectful conversations can happen across the different groups.

Susan Maury's article also provides an example of understanding power when working across groups. In her article, Maury reflects on the fact that building supportive structures to rebalance power and deal with tensions within groups

is vital. In working with marginalised communities to improve their children's learning environment, fractured groups are able to come together if there is a common goal and supportive structures in place.

Joe Morris of the Yarra Drug and Health Forum also highlights the power of bringing different community groups together for a specific goal. In seeing the harm alcohol and other drugs were having in Yarra, the community has come together to advocate for policies that minimise this harm.

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**Professor Peter Shergold**  
Chancellor, University of Western Sydney

# Reflections on public

*This is an edited extract of a verbatim presentation to the Power to Persuade Symposium, held in Melbourne on 21 August 2013 by Good Shepherd Youth & Family Service and The Centre for Excellence in Intervention and Prevention Science.*

Professor Shergold AC is the Chancellor of the University of Western Sydney. He has had a distinguished academic and public service career that spans over three decades. As the Secretary of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet from 2003–2008, Professor Shergold was the nation's most senior public servant. In two decades as a senior public servant he established the Office of Multicultural Affairs, headed the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), and was Public Service Commissioner. He was Secretary of several government departments, including the Department of Education, Science and Training, and the Department of Employment, Workforce Relations and Small Business.

My speech today is focused on how to improve the participatory nature of our democracy and, with that goal in mind, how to engage in cross-sectoral collaboration in designing and delivering public policy. I will concentrate my attention on the role of the community sector and how not-for-profit organisations can best exercise influence.

Some of the most interesting and insightful things that I learned in 20 years as an Australian public servant are based upon my failures. Of course I contributed to many things that went well in my career, for example, the development of the National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia (1988); the response of the Commonwealth Government to the Mabo High Court decision on native title; the implementation of a new way of delivering labour market services through the creation of a contestable Job Network; and persuading the government and John Howard to commit to an emissions trading scheme (although after the election of Kevin Rudd, that never saw the light of day).

But when I look back, what I think about most is what went wrong. Why, in spite of being for five years Secretary of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, was I often unable to change policy directions in the way I

would have liked? Why was it so difficult to tackle in a substantive way, the fact that so many – too many – Australians feel powerless and disengaged, and remain dependent on welfare? Why, so often, when we sought to persuade citizens towards more pro-social behaviours, did we keep falling back on taxation and regulation, and therefore risk resistance to a legislation-driven 'Nanny State'? Why, in spite of the fact that I was CEO of ATSIC for three years, did the appalling level of social and economic disadvantage of Aboriginal Australians remain so pronounced?

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**Making public policy is complex and in some ways far more challenging than in the private or community sectors.**  
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The first thing I have learned is that the presentation of 'evidence' is rarely sufficient to drive significant change. Making public policy is complex and in some ways far more challenging than in the private or community sectors. I say that for this reason: in the public arena decisions virtually always face vocal opposition within our parliamentary and party-based system of democracy – opposition

both from inside Parliament, including its committees, and from outside. Decisions are scrutinised through a plethora of administrative review mechanisms, with public servants highly accountable for their actions. There is also intense media scrutiny, with governments seeking to control a 24-hour news cycle for 365 days a year.

Now all of these things are intrinsically good: legislative oversight, greater administrative review, careful judicial interpretation of legislation and the investigative powers of the 'fourth estate'. They do mean, however, that influencing, designing and implementing policy is often extraordinarily difficult. Two things are starkly obvious to me. First, that the role for advocacy organisations and lobby groups is quite challenging, because they have to decide where and at what stage in the political process they seek to intervene for maximum effect. Second, that they have to balance advocating publicly and influencing privately: when do they speak out and when do they negotiate behind closed doors?

Change is not easy. Community organisations find themselves working in a remarkably risk-averse environment. Governments are understandably wary of

# policy

failure and sensitive to criticism, and Ministers (and more particularly their public servants) often prefer to avoid risk rather than to manage it prudently. Consequently, when they are trying to influence public services, not-for-profits and social enterprises will often find that from their perspective the bureaucracy is overly cautious and prescriptive. Too often public sector agencies tend to focus on process compliance rather than on outcomes performance. In consequence there is a bureaucratic tendency, not intentional, to undermine innovation. It is much easier to innovate in the community and private sector, where – unlike governments – there is not always a ‘board in opposition’, ready to criticise. Not-for-profits, as well as for-profit businesses, find it easier to be entrepreneurial. Taking a ‘courageous’ decision has a quite different meaning in the public sector.

When I used to welcome the best and brightest graduates into the elite program of the Australian Public Service I found that they sometimes harboured a naive view of policy development. They imagined that they would be tasked to collect the ‘evidence’ for policy change; then synthesise, conceptualise and analyse that information and convert it into policy options; which would then be decided upon by a Minister and approved by Cabinet; after which they would translate the policy decision into payments, programs and services; and – at the final stage of the process – oversight the policy’s evaluation. In 20 years, I never saw a policy that was developed by such a neat, linear process. In the real world it doesn’t happen.

Rather, public policy is iterative in nature and to a very significant extent it is opportunity-driven. That is not to say it is worse than ‘evidence-based policy’: it is just that the complexity of policy development rarely conforms

to textbook principles. Nor does it mean that evidence is unimportant, but advocacy organisations have to appreciate that ‘facts’ are not objective in the most fundamental sense. At the end of the day, who is it that poses the questions and who is it that says for what purpose the evidence is collected? Predominantly it is elected governments that decide what evidence is to be collected and for what intent.

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### Change is not easy. Community organisations find themselves working in a remarkably risk-averse environment.

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The evidence that organisations present publicly or privately to influence the government process can be remarkably effective, although there is plenty of evidence presented by governments in order to justify decisions that have already been taken for other reasons. In other words, there is often post-facto rationalisation through evidence, rather than the policy development on the basis of evidence.

A major difficulty is that to a large extent the advocacy of community organisations (and the evidence they provide on behalf of their proposed course of action) gets intermediated through senior public servants, through ministerial advisors, and through the collective responsibility of Ministers themselves. They are usually not in the room when decisions are taken. It is easy for the message to get lost in translation.

Please don’t misunderstand me. It remains a fundamentally important role of organisations to collect and mould the evidence. Sometimes it can be used to frame political discourse. One of the most useful things that

organisations can do is to use evidence to create a public mood (to ‘socialise’ ideas) so that opportunities for action are widened or political opportunities can be seized when they arise. Sometimes the capacity for initiatives comes about because of political change and not just through the election of a new government – often the most fundamental changes in direction are when Prime Ministers or Premiers or Ministers are replaced within the same government.

One of the key jobs that advocacy organisations have is to stay engaged at the very point at which they may think that the job is done. The announcement of a new policy simply opens a gateway. A community organisation needs to stay involved throughout the process of implementation – negotiating the legislation and administrative guidelines, agreeing on outcomes and participating in evaluation processes. They need to be part of designing the program. This is the ‘evidence’ upon which government programs will continue, be refined or be closed down.

Not all advocacy will be successful. Sometimes, organisations have to admit that they cannot, in the foreseeable future, turn the tide of political discourse in Australia. What other second-best options are acceptable? How can the arguments be better aligned to the public or political mood? Who is the most likely to be persuaded: don’t just talk to the Minister, don’t just talk to their political advisors and don’t just talk to senior public servants – it is the group of them together that has the impact. What other organisations can be persuaded to form a collaborative front? How can the media be convinced that the issue is significant? It is through exploring all opportunities in a creative manner that a mood for change can be created.



# Navigating the complexity of learning to work in the spaces

**Dr Gemma Carey**

Research Fellow, National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health, Australian National University

*Between the idea, and the reality, between the motion, and the act, falls the shadow.*

– TS Eliot, *The Hollow Men*

**In many western countries there has been a significant shift over the last two decades in the way we view good policy. Good policy now needs to be evidence-based and embrace organisations and actors outside of government. These are laudable aims, but can they be achieved?**

Dr Mark Matthews at the Coombs Centre (Crawford School of Public Policy, ANU) believes that “politics and policy don’t have an easy ‘technocratic’ relationship with each other that is ‘solved’ by evidence”.<sup>1</sup> He argues that we should not shy away from the ambiguity that is created when these two worlds collide – between evidence and politics lie creativity, innovation and potential.

When we think about the policy process more broadly, the same can be said of the different actors engaged in making policy. Between policymakers, the community sector and academic researchers lie the answers that we need to address pressing social issues, whether it be for policy design or implementation.

As Margaret Atwood puts it, we live in a “relational world where energy is located in the spaces **between**” different entities.<sup>2</sup>

This ‘between’ space is opaque and messy. We know what the entities are, but we do not know how they interact with one another. We do not know how we – as individuals and organisations – can navigate this space in between and how we might access the energy that exists within it.

Through the Power to Persuade Symposium, we have tried to navigate the in-betweens. Power to Persuade brings together the community sector,

academics and policymakers for frank and open discussion about the challenges, pressures and expectations of these different sectors.

The symposium is led by myself and Good Shepherd Youth & Family Service with the support of:

- Victorian Council of Social Service
- St Vincent de Paul National Congress
- The Brotherhood of St Laurence
- The Victorian Department of Human Services
- academic institutions.

These organisations sit on a multi-agency reference group which informs the symposium’s focus annually. Through Power to Persuade, we aim to build understanding and collaboration between these sectors, helping to facilitate better social and public policy.

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**...the greater the diversity of views gathered, the more likely it is that creative ways forward will be found.**  
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In many fields, from healthcare to social policy, we are experiencing a renaissance when it comes to embracing the ‘messy’. ‘Systems thinking’ – where we learn to look beyond objects to embrace the

relationships between them and the messy ‘whole’ they create – has seen significant advances in recent years. For example, there is a growing understanding that while the natural sciences may be able to identify issues, to effectively explore social problems such as obesity, crime and tobacco control, a more holistic approach needs to be taken. This may include a multi-lens approach incorporating public health, psychology, sociology, policy and regulation.

In addition to shedding new light on social issues, systems thinking has given rise to new principles and methods for creating and leading change in a complex environment. Some of these principles closely reflect what we have learned from our experiences in navigating the ‘spaces between’ through Power to Persuade. These are:

## 1. **Begin by listening**

Different sectors speak different languages, work in different ways and experience different challenges. It is important to take the time to listen and understand these experiences in an open and reflective manner.

## 2. **Start with questions**

Listening is a good first step, but questions are better. Questions yield deeper insights, and increased understanding of others’ needs.

# social policy: 'in between'

For example: How do you see your professional practice? What challenges do you experience that I may be able to help with? What can I learn from you? These types of questions lead to more innovative, holistic thinking.

### 3. Approach with humility

Each of us can only speak from our own experiences, which may differ significantly to those in other sectors. In fact, the community, academic and government sectors are made up of vastly different professional practices, constraints and expectations. Remember, you do not know everything or others different ways of knowing.

### 4. Value difference and diversity

Diversity has been a key ingredient for both a successful Power to Persuade program and in the behind-the-scenes work to curate the event. As Atwood suggests, the greater the diversity of views gathered, the more likely it is that creative ways forward will be found. In addition to openly expressing opinions and experiences, this requires us to critically examine the differences between our perspectives. Through this process, perspectives can be radically transformed.

### 5. Follow through

Whether on an individual, organisational or sector-wide level, change is almost always incremental. This means 'sticking with it', working through temporary impasses and accepting set-backs as par for the course.<sup>3</sup>

Working in this way has helped us to see standard concepts, such as 'evidence' and 'advocacy' in a new light. We have learnt that evidence takes

many forms and its value is, to a large extent, in the eye of the beholder. While public debate may centre around the need for more evidence-based policy, anecdote still trumps evidence when it comes to the day-to-day practice of policymaking and negotiating the surrounding politics. Meanwhile, advocacy is not just the business of the community sector, or even those outside of government. While not referred to in the same terms, policymakers and public servants are in fact frequently engaged in advocacy efforts within government. In understanding how these concepts relate to and are interpreted within different sectors, we are enabled to move past unproductive stereotypes and entrenched positions.

While we have been enlightened and inspired by experts who have presented at Power to Persuade, we have learnt volumes from the experience of developing and leading this unique cross-sectoral forum. As well as the skills and principles discussed above, we have experienced first-hand the value of working across sectors and encouraging others to grapple with the 'spaces between'. Only in stepping into this unexplored territory can we harness the energy that exists in these opaque and messy terrains.

- 1 Matthew, M (2013). *Improving collaboration between the Australian Public Service and researchers*. Crawford School of Public Policy, Canberra, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet
- 2 Adapted from Atwood, M (2003). *Leading Change: A Guide to Whole Systems Working*. Polity Press
- 3 Ibid

\* For more information refer to [powertopersuade.org.au](http://powertopersuade.org.au)

## Working across sectors: language, power and supporting structures

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This article explores the slow, iterative nature of the policy process. It also highlights that often you need to influence at many levels in order to see the change you would like – from community through to policy makers.

Collaboration for policy influence can work at many levels. It can be at the political level, as highlighted in Professor Shergold's article; at a sector level, such as with Dr Carey and the Power to Persuade; between different groups within a sector, with No to Violence and women's organisations; and between diverse stakeholders within a community, such as Joe Morris's and Susan Maury's examples. We hope this edition of Good Policy provides some insight into the different ways and means of collaborating across different groups and between different sectors.

1 The Power to Persuade is an annual symposium designed to bring the community, government and academic sectors together and foster cross-sectoral collaboration. For more information go to [powertopersuade.org.au](http://powertopersuade.org.au).

We are Good Shepherd. Our mission is shaped by our inheritance of the vision, courage and audacity of Saint Mary Euphrasia Pelletier and the Good Shepherd tradition she began. Ours is a vision for promoting a world of justice and peaceful co-existence. Ours is the courage to embrace wholeheartedly innovative and creative ways of enabling people of all cultural, religious and social backgrounds to enjoy the fullness of life, which is the right of every human being. Ours is the inheritance to boldly challenge those structures and beliefs that diminish human dignity. We work to ensure the value of every human being, the communities that enable us all to thrive and the integrity of the environment that guarantees both.



# Men and men's services working to end men's violence

Rodney Vlais  
NTV Manager, No To Violence, ntv.org.au

**When the main title of this article first passed through my fingertips onto the keyboard, my immediate reaction was to dismiss it and come up with something different. It's a clunky title, and contains the word "men"/"men's" three times.**

It dawned on me, however, that the repetition of this word was quite symbolic of some of the tensions involved in men and women working together in this social justice struggle. It was poignant how in my first, almost stream-of-consciousness attempt to create a title, the word 'men' appeared three times, and the word 'women', only once.

The word 'men' does need to be there, it needs to be in the picture. It is **men** who cause the vast majority of intimate partner violence, interpersonal violence, family and domestic violence against women. It is **men** who need to take individual and collective responsibility to work hard towards ending our violence. It is **men** who need to identify the ways that we (writing as a male) benefit from unearned gender-based privilege and entitlement, who need to re-shape our visions and practices of masculinity, and uproot structural and cultural processes that render women as objects, or as creatures, or as something to offload invisible burdens of responsibility onto.

If as men we are to truly join this struggle, and accept the double helix of 'out there' social justice work and 'in here' personal transformation, we need to do more than be at the periphery. Ethically, we can't just wait

for women to identify the patriarchy in our ways of being and doing, to take the risk to speak up (only to often not be listened to, or not be listened to in the same way as if the same words were being spoken by a man). As men, we need to be attentive, discerning, noticing, and 'out there' with other men about our collective responsibilities to re-weave gender-based power, to transform what masculinities mean to us. To proactively invite other men to consider what caring, intimacy, relationship, community and belonging might mean for us and for those we love.

This means taking initiative. It means men speaking up at White Ribbon Day events, taking some public centre stage. It means men taking the lead in increasing our involvement in the early childhood education sector, in doing more of the primary caring in our families, in attending to the internal, relational aspects of the organisations and networks we have influence over. It means spotting opportunities to express our dissent at a sexist joke or comment. It means men becoming trained to work passionately, sensitively and intelligently as family violence practitioners, including as men's behaviour change program facilitators<sup>1</sup>.

Yet, in men stepping up, taking centre stage, taking initiative, working hard – something that far, far too few of us men actually do – we face a challenge, a struggle to do this in ways that do not make our contribution to patriarchy worse. Just like the title of this article, there is the danger of women and children, including those who have struggled against men's violence and gender inequality for decades, becoming displaced. In the space of just a few years of men (necessarily and

vitality) entering this struggle, the very hard-fought gains that women have achieved to have a voice, to be heard, to be seen to have legitimate needs for safety and dignity... can abruptly become re-marginalised. The danger, yet again, is of men entering and colonising another space that does not 'belong' to us as our 'property'. A space that men might see as vacant, empty, terra nullius.

How we enter this space of attempting to prevent, or respond (for example, through men's behaviour change program work) to men's violence against women, and how we work with women colleagues, is crucial to our efforts to transform patriarchy. Violence against women prevention consultant Tracy Castelino, a strong advocate for men to be involved in this work, talks and writes about the problems with superficial notions of 'partnership' between women's and men's services, as part of family violence service system integration reforms. She invites us to consider what it might mean to erroneously assume a level playing field between men's and women's services, and the consequences this might have for women's voices and preparedness to speak up when they are concerned about the use of gender-based entitlement or privilege by male colleagues. Tracy encourages male family violence workers to understand the history of women's struggles to be heard in the family violence space, and how the experience of men and women doing this work is not the same<sup>2</sup>.

No To Violence runs workshops such as *Superman? Really?* to humorously (and seriously) invite men to consider the superhero capes that we might wear when doing this (or any social justice or human services) work – the Capes

# against women

of Goodness, Privilege, Benefits, Hyper-masculinity and Secrecy<sup>3</sup>. What might it mean, for example, in our relationships with women colleagues, if our image of being 'a good man' prevents the women we work with from speaking up when we (invariably, at least from time to time), operate out of a blind spot to our own or other men's patriarchy? What might it mean if women do all the behind-the-scenes, 'invisible' logistical work to organise an event where our role is to provide the high profile, public speaking?

Becoming aware of our privilege in our working relationships with women colleagues, of the ways in which men's family violence services might benefit from something other than a level playing field, is not all navel-gazing gloom. It's an opportunity for us men to become more alive, to evolve and grow – not in ways that re/colonise women's spaces and bodies – but rather, towards more intimacy, interdependence, depth, meaning and adventure in our lives. How we attune to and develop partnerships with women and women's services, how we pay attention to context and physical and relational space, has a substantial bearing on our efforts to be both alive and impactful in this work. To become different, or 'better' men, for all the women, children, men, creatures and ecosystems that do not share our privilege, and for how we experience the precious opportunity of life.

1 See [ntv.org.au](http://ntv.org.au) or [mrs.org.au](http://mrs.org.au) for information about these programs and how they operate.

2 See [ntv.org.au/conference/workshops/nov-14-s1-2/#s1-1f](http://ntv.org.au/conference/workshops/nov-14-s1-2/#s1-1f) for a transcript of a 2012 workshop that Tracy presented on these issues, or go to [ntv.org.au/conference/responses/practitioner/](http://ntv.org.au/conference/responses/practitioner/)

3 See [ntv.org.au/conference/workshops/nov-15-s6-2/#s6-6j](http://ntv.org.au/conference/workshops/nov-15-s6-2/#s6-6j), or go to [ntv.org.au/conference/responses/practitioner/](http://ntv.org.au/conference/responses/practitioner/)





# Yarra Drug and Health Forum

**Joe Morris**

Executive Officer, Yarra Drug & Health Forum

**Collaboration is the only way that the Yarra Drug & Health Forum ('the Forum') has been able to achieve positive results that benefit the general population and people in Yarra with alcohol or other drug (AOD) issues.**

The overall goal of the Forum is harm minimisation – that is, to address AOD issues by reducing their harmful effects on individuals and society. The ways the forum addresses issues of harm minimisation are through:

- community education
- collaboration and networking
- advocacy
- service delivery and improvements.

Funding for programs and services is dependent on the policies of the federal, state and local governments. The Forum in this sense must work with parties of all political persuasions, particularly the State Government and the councillors for the City of Yarra.

Ultimately, the Forum wants to achieve the best programs and/or policies for harm minimisation. We believe to do this we must work with whichever political party is in power at the time – otherwise we will be doing a disservice to the people we are working for. While we do not agree with every government policy, we recognise the importance of maintaining focus and constructive communication with all parties.

Research forms a core part of our capacity to affect systemic change. At times we carry out our own research into possible solutions to the harmful effects of AOD issues. We also analyse external research on programs or policies that have successfully minimised harm elsewhere. We then provide this evidence to the appropriate government representatives for consideration of new approaches to harm minimisation.

This does not always happen quickly. We have to accept that change is not always going to happen overnight. Patience and consistency of message are key.

The Forum advocates for policies and programs that minimise harm through a number of activities. Monthly meetings are held in which the membership can report on what they are seeing in the community regarding drug and alcohol abuse, the Executive Officer and Executive can report on their work, and invited speakers can educate the membership on emergent issues. The Forum also runs

four community events a year on topics that relate to AOD in the community.

A fortnightly email newsletter is distributed to the membership which covers relevant articles, research, news reports, training programs, seminars, conferences and employment opportunities. The Executive Officer attends community meetings such as community safety working groups to hear from residents about their concerns relating to AOD issues; this informs the Forum's advocacy platform for services to address these concerns.

Finally, the Forum prepares submissions to the State Government regarding matters relating to AOD.

Two examples of this advocacy in action are the proposal to install syringe dispensing units and supervised injecting facilities in Victoria. Both services have been operating in Sydney for over 20 years. These examples are explored in the case studies below.

## Case Study 1: Syringe dispensing units

The Forum first put a proposal to the State Government in 2002 to trial a syringe dispensing unit in Yarra. This proposal was rejected by the government, with one reason being legal concerns. Over the past 12 years we have continued to pursue this proposal with subsequent governments without success. In November 2013, the State Government informed the Forum that there was now no legal impediment against syringe dispensing units being installed in Victoria. The proposal is now able to be considered as a new policy.

While this overcomes one hurdle in implementing this change, it does not mean it is time to go ahead. Agencies have to be sensitive to community reactions. There are still people and business associations in the City of Yarra for and against syringe dispensing units. Agencies have to acknowledge the concerns of those against the dispensing units, and build understanding that they will reduce the harms caused by incorrect syringe disposal (such as blood borne viruses).

## Case Study 2: Supervised injecting facilities

The proposal to install supervised injecting facilities in Victoria has had a similarly chequered career. In 1999 the Liberal Government supported the installation of a supervised injecting facility in Melbourne. Government also supported Wesley Central Mission in building the facility prior to giving the final 'rubber stamp' approval. In early 2000 an election was called and, upon winning the election, the Labor Party



withdrew support for the facility. The purpose-built facility was mothballed until recently, when it started to be used for other activities.

When the new Liberal Government came into power last year, the Forum hoped that they would reinstate their support for supervised injecting facilities. However, the new group of politicians were not in favour. The Forum has continued to carry out research and to lobby government about this issue by presenting positive outcomes of similar facilities from Sydney and overseas.

The balance is important – we are careful not to become such a nuisance that no one will consider the proposal any longer. It is our hope that in the future – as with the syringe dispensing units – there will be at least one supervised injecting facility in Victoria, and that this will bring benefit to the community through the prevention of fatal overdoses and a reduction of public injecting.

### Key learning

The Yarra Drug and Health Forum has been operating for many years, representing an incredibly large and diverse constituency. It has been successful through its very specific focus. Other things we have learned are that:

- cross-sectoral collaboration can strengthen policy advocacy
- there are many mechanisms required for cross-sectoral collaboration to work – communication to and between the different

groups is key, as is creating the right environments for different groups to have their input

- it is important to retain a sense of independence from auspicing organisations when bringing people from different groups together to discuss policy issues
- avoiding party politics and other political issues allows for a greater credibility
- research is important for presenting viable alternatives to existing policies
- change is slow – maintaining a consistent policy message allows for the issues to stay on the agenda
- you need to know when to pull-back – it is important not to overdo the messaging as this can cause people to stop listening
- it is not just government that needs to be influenced – policy changes impact the community and particularly controversial policy requires the influence of both government and community
- working across groups and sectors can be of key importance when there are multiple groups impacted by policies
- cross-sectoral forums need an open and collaborative structure

And so in closing I repeat my first statement: Collaboration is the only way that the Forum has been able to achieve positive results that benefit both the general population and people in Yarra with AOD issues.

The Yarra Drug and Health Forum was founded 16 years ago by drug and health agencies based in the City of Yarra. It is funded by the Department of Health through the Municipal Drug Strategy Program and the City of Yarra Community Partnerships Program. Membership is open to any AOD worker, police officer, resident, business owner, or agency representative who has an interest in the AOD situation in the City of Yarra. In March/April 2014, the Forum had 600 members across these diverse groups in the community, with approximately 100–150 actively participating. The Forum is auspiced by North Yarra Community Health; however, it has the freedom to operate independently and to elect its own Executive Committee. The Executive Committee provides ongoing support to the Forum's Executive Officer (the only staff member) and is elected annually from the active membership of the Forum who regularly attend its monthly meetings.



# Community transformation: a story of collective impact

**Susan Maury**

Social Policy Researcher, Good Shepherd Youth & Family Service

## This is a small but thrilling story of collective impact that has the power of advocacy at its centre.

Communities are dynamic, complex systems which sit at the intersection of human networks, system norms and failings, and environmental realities. We know from Tony Vinson that disadvantage is often concentrated and entrenched in particular geographical locations.<sup>1</sup> We also know, from our own experiences as well as through the accumulated knowledge of practitioners in Australia and globally, communities can be incredibly difficult to change in meaningful and lasting ways. When individuals or agencies feel the need to 'claim the change' as their own, even more barriers are created.

Happily, although it happens slowly and imperfectly, individuals and organisations do learn from the past and we continue to make progress – albeit in fits and starts. The concept of collective impact is one such learning.

Collective impact involves a range of stakeholders agreeing on the change they wish to see, then coordinating interventions and measuring outcomes collectively. While the concept is still a fairly new one, there is hope that "substantially greater progress could be made in alleviating many of our most serious and complex social problems if nonprofits, governments, businesses, and the public were brought together around a common agenda to create collective impact."<sup>2</sup>

The Westpark community in Hastings, on the Mornington Peninsula, is an example of a community which – despite the efforts of many players over many years – has had trouble turning its story around. It ranks low on the SEIFA<sup>i</sup> index, the AEDI<sup>ii</sup> and on NAPLAN<sup>iii</sup> results<sup>iv</sup>. On a more tangible measure, residents avoid the park located at the centre of the housing estate as it is a magnet for anti-social activities such as graffiti, property destruction, drug use and even the occasional violent attack.

However, in 2013 a range of discreet initiatives came together in a powerful way. The primary players were Good Shepherd Youth & Family Service, Department of Human Services (DHS), and the Linking Schools and Early Years (LSEY) project, overseen by The Royal Children's Hospital Centre for Community Child Health.

### Collective impact involves a range of stakeholders agreeing on the change they wish to see, then coordinating interventions and measuring outcomes collectively.

Good Shepherd Youth & Family Service has been a strong community presence on the Mornington Peninsula for over 20 years, and has operated a community house in Hastings since 2005. In 2010 Good Shepherd moved into the beautiful, purpose-built Wallaroo Community Centre, adjacent to both the Westpark housing estate and Westpark Primary School. The facility provides a range of community services including a kindergarten, children's holiday program, and maternal and child health. When the Linking Schools and Early Years (LSEY) project started in 2008, Hastings was one of three pilot areas. Wallaroo Community Centre was an integral member of this partnership, which focussed on how to ensure children start primary school engaged and ready to learn. At about the same time, the Victorian Government funded the Hastings Neighbourhood Renewal Initiative through DHS. This is described as "a long-term commitment by the state government to narrow the gap between disadvantaged communities and the rest of the state."<sup>3</sup> The initiative was designed as a collaborative process, which also involved Good Shepherd's staff in Hastings.

Independent of these initiatives, Hastings Westpark Primary School welcomed new leadership in late 2011. This enabled a range of reforms at the school, including introducing the highly acclaimed Walker Learning Approach, with the goal of raising student performance and revitalising the school community.

In 2013, just as these major initiatives were winding down, Good Shepherd was looking for a place to conduct a short, sharp piece of research which would pilot a school engagement tool for parents of vulnerable children. Through contact made by the Peninsula staff, I was invited to conduct it at Hastings Westpark Primary School. Nine mothers from the area met for three, three-hour sessions at Wallaroo Community House, to develop a vision ("What do we want for our children in their school years?"), create a plan to support that vision (for families, for the area schools, and for the community), and to share the plan with key community stakeholders in order to gain support and commitment to taking action (self advocacy).

This research took a positive, strengths-based approach and utilised an empowering methodology, which the mothers embraced. Their fierce commitment to their plan was evident in their passionate and articulate presentation of it to the government, school, and community members whom they had invited to the advocacy workshop.

Under other circumstances, perhaps their passion would not have been enough. However, due to the cumulative work of the other initiatives in the area, a welcoming structure was in place. There was already a plan to create a Westpark Resident's Action Group, and the research participants saw this as the perfect venue for creating community support for their plan. They also created opportunities to share it with parents at the school through conversations at social functions which

# SOCIAL POLICY NEWS

## Upcoming event

### The Power to Persuade Symposium

The Power to Persuade Symposium is being held on 16 September 2014 at the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons in Spring Street Melbourne. This annual event is co-hosted by Dr Gemma Carey, population health researcher, and Good Shepherd Youth & Family Service, with the support of: St Vincent de Paul Society National Conference, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Victorian Council of Social Service, and Victorian Department of Human Services

The symposium connects government, academics and the community sector to discuss how to co-create better social policy. This year The Power to Persuade will focus on working across sectors to improve social policy design, implementation and outcomes. The forum will explore practical strategies for building relationships and understanding across the different sectors.

The comprehensive one-day program includes a range of expert presenters, panels and workshops.

Confirmed speakers include: **Jane Caro**, social commentator and education activist; **Cassandra Goldie**, Australian Council of Social Service; **Professor Brian Head**, University of Queensland; **Professor Cathy Humphreys**, University of Melbourne; **James Button**, author and journalist; **Professor Roz Hansen**, international urban planner; **Professor Mark Matthews**, Australian National University; **Professor Jo Barraket**, Swinburne University of Technology; and **Dale Renner**, strategy consultant.

For more information, please go to [powertopersuade.org.au](http://powertopersuade.org.au)

## New blog!

Good Shepherd Youth & Family Service is a partner in an exciting new blog about social policy, The Power to Persuade. Australian-focused but with a global scope, the blog was set up to complement the successful Power to Persuade symposium. Like its offline equivalent, it aims to improve understanding and communication between the main groups involved in the policy process: government, academics and the community sector.

This blog aims to be a fresh voice in a world of elite academic journals and stuffy policy forums. Power to Persuade is a place where anyone can contribute to the knowledge and debate around social policy.

We welcome contributions from anyone who is interested in the social policy process. To offer a contribution, please email [submissions@powertopersuade.org.au](mailto:submissions@powertopersuade.org.au) or visit [powertopersuade.org.au](http://powertopersuade.org.au)

## New book

Kathy Landvogt signed a contract with UK publishers Routledge; with co-editors Gemma Carey and Jo Barraket, for a book about policy processes based on the *Power to Persuade* Symposium series. Chapters will include past symposium speakers, as well as contributions from Crittenden Women's Union and Wider Opportunities for Women in the US.

they organised, including a free movie night at the school and a Christmas barbeque held at the Community House. The links to DHS and the LSEY project resulted in funding two critical inputs – a Parent and Family Engagement Worker situated at the community house, and funding to revitalise the problematic park. With support from school staff, a Parent's Group was formed and now meets fortnightly.

Progress is being made on virtually every aspect of their plan, because the mothers understand it requires collective action in order to achieve impact. They are savvy in advocating for their plan. This commitment coupled with the fortunate timing meant there was a supportive system in place for the parents. This has given the Parent Action Group incredible energy and influence. It is also a beautiful demonstration of collective impact: a plan undergirded by agency support, government support, and a broadening base of community support.

What can we learn from this story about community transformation? Firstly, empowerment principles are not only still relevant, but are central to achieving any lasting change. As this project demonstrates, the catalyst can be quite small and targeted. An empowered group, however, is not enough. In order to thrive, they need a supportive structure which provides them with a place to speak and connections which help turn plans into action. The Westpark community was fortunate to have this already in place, but this is probably the exception rather than the rule. In instances where there is no supportive structure, the group must have the skills and determination to create their own. In both scenarios, self advocacy is at the centre of their success.

- 1 Vinson, T (2007). *Dropping off the edge: the distribution of disadvantage in Australia*. Jesuit Social Services / Catholic Social Services.
- 2 Kania, J & Kramer, M (2011). *Collective Impact*. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, Winter 2011, pp. 36-41
- 3 Accessed from the Mornington Peninsula Shire website on 5/03/14 at [http://www.mornpen.vic.gov.au/Services\\_For\\_You/Other\\_Services/Neighbourhood\\_Renewal\\_-\\_Hastings](http://www.mornpen.vic.gov.au/Services_For_You/Other_Services/Neighbourhood_Renewal_-_Hastings)

- i SEIFA is the 'Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas'. It is a measure of relative socio-economic disadvantage. A low rating means an area experiences a higher level of disadvantage relative to other communities.
- ii AEDI is the Australian Early Development Index. This measures the progress made by children in areas in reaching certain development milestones.
- iii National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy tests school children at different points and ranks their skills in literacy and numeracy.
- iv Based on 2012 results, the most recent data set available at the time of publication.

# SOCIAL POLICY NEWS

## Completed projects

### The Right to Refuse – Magdalena McGuire

The Right to Refuse was an action research project undertaken by Good Shepherd Youth & Family Service, DV Vic and Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand into the issue of forced marriage in Australia. The report sets out the findings from the *Right to Refuse* forum that was held in September 2013 and was attended by a variety of professionals from the domestic violence, sexual assault, legal, young people and health sectors; as well as the key issues that were raised in the literature on forced marriage.

The research confirmed that forced marriage is a complex problem that requires a targeted, cross-sectoral response. The research also confirmed that forced marriage is not an exotic problem that exists 'somewhere else' in the world. Rather, it is a problem that is faced by women and girls in our own community.



### Uplift: An empowerment approach to parent engagement in schools – Susan Maury

This short, sharp piece of research piloted an empowering methodology, in which the process encourages agency and confidence in parents through the process of self-identifying what effective support of their children's learning looks like to them, and how to measure it over time. This research focused on parents – their voice, their viewpoint, their vision of how support could be improved. Since the completion of the research a year ago, the participants have self-identified as a community action group and, working together with established community groups, have made progress on virtually every aspect of their plan.

## Publications

Beyers, Gareth and Corrie, Tanya: *Submission to National Consumer Credit Protection Amendment (Small Amount Credit Contracts) Regulation 2014 Exposure Draft*, Good Shepherd Youth & Family Service and Good Shepherd Microfinance, 4 March 2014

Beyers, Gareth; Corrie, Tanya and McIlwain, Gillian: *Submission to Financial Systems Enquiry*, Good Shepherd Youth & Family Service and Good Shepherd Microfinance, 31 March 2014

Landvogt, Kathy: *Submission to Federal Inquiry into the Role of the TAFE System*, Good Shepherd Youth & Family Service, 7 March 2014

Landvogt, Kathy: *The 'hot potato' of school costs*, VCOSS Voice Blog, 11 March 2014

Landvogt, Kathy: *Prevention of Violence against Women and Children – Submission to National Plan to Address Violence Against Women*, Good Shepherd Youth & Family Service, 13 March 2014

Landvogt, Kathy and Maury, Susan: *Addressing the Divide – Submission to the Inquiry into the approaches to homework in Victorian schools*, Education and Training Committee of Parliament of Vic, Good Shepherd Youth & Family Service, 17 January 2014

Maury, Susan: *Settling at School: Evaluation Protocols*, Good Shepherd Youth & Family Service for Southern Ethnic Advisory and Advocacy Council and Hands-On Learning, March 2014

Milne, Sandy: *Submission to the Senate Economics References Committee Affordable Housing Enquiry*, Good Shepherd Youth & Family Service.



Susan Maury, Magdalena McGuire, Tanya Corrie and Kathy Landvogt of the Social Policy & Research Unit

## Announcements

Good Shepherd Youth & Family Service's Social Policy Research Unit would like to thank Magdalena McGuire for her exceptional contribution to Good Shepherd's research and advocacy work. Magdalena is leaving Good Shepherd to take up a role as a Senior Policy Officer with the Office of Women's Affairs. We wish her well in her new role and offer our sincere gratitude for her commitment to the organisation and the consistent high quality work she has produced.

## Presentations

Corrie, Tanya: *How a little bit of data goes a long way*, Presentation to Australasian Evaluation Society, 17 April 2014

Corrie, Tanya and McGuire, Magdalena: *Economic Abuse: the hidden cost of family violence*, Presentation at Women's Health Victoria Seminar, 3 December 2013.

Landvogt, Kathy: *Women, leadership and social policy*, Good Shepherd's International Women's Day celebration at Abbotsford Convent, 13 March 2014.

## Contact us

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