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Author: Sharp, Deborah Inwald, Sophie

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to promote discussion and focus debate about the role and relevance of community management in the non government welfare sector. It argues that it is difficult to get truly community representation on Management Committees, that consumer participation is often avoided because of criticism of the person involved, and that Community Management is now counter productive when it comes to achieving social change. The paper looks at possible alternatives, all of which recognise the need for appropriate skills and knowledge and the need for creating an environment which strengthens the non government welfare sector. **Keyword: Community Development**

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
AND
COMMUNITY MANAGEMENT

By Deborah Sharp & Sophie Inwald

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT & COMMUNITY MANAGEMENT

The aim of this paper is to promote discussion and focus debate about the role and relevance of community management in the non government welfare sector. We feel it is important to focus on the method that manages most of the community work undertaken in Australia.

It is unlikely that we will raise any new issues outside practitioners experience, and that have indeed been raised in other forums, however the debate about the role of Community Management is growing in importance in the economic and social climate of the 80's, as more and more programmes are funded explicitly on the use of Community Management - its current application has implications for the level of change that can be affected for the community and for workers in terms of industrial conditions.

We shall argue that in terms of social change and by that we mean structural change the Community Management model has become (always was?) outmoded and for the most part irrelevant.

The contents of this paper will be

1. A brief look at definitions (so we are at least clear on what we are discussing), a brief history of community management. This has been tackled in depth elsewhere and for those interested we would recommend the following reading: "Community Work or Social Change?"
An Australian Perspective - R. Thorpe, J. Petruchenia
"One Step Forward Two Steps Back" - Betty Hounslow
The hidden problems of Community Management of childrens services
2. A look at the myths and realities of the Community Management model.
3. Some discussion of possible alternatives.

4. How can the community services industry take up the debate - what strategies are feasible?

Before plunging into this presentation we felt we should make clear that both of us have worked in the Non Government Welfare Sector for about ten years. The aim is not to destroy or denigrate years of work in the sector. People say, "let Community Management alone - the work, often innovative and creative is happening". That is true - however we do not feel it is good enough to sweep aside the problems.

We have experienced the positive aspects of Community Management and certainly do not want to argue for the exclusion of non workers from decision making; we both have found the sector creative, flexible and incredibly productive. We believe that local people should be involved in local service provision - what we want to discuss is the myths and realities of Community Management and social change.

Brief Historical Perspective and Definitions

Community Management gained credence as a concept during the late 60's, early 70's, in an atmosphere where resident participation, welfare rights and self-help movements were gaining popularity. It was a time of relative economic well-being and job security (at least when compared to the 80's). It was also a time of extensive questioning about the nature and type of services being provided. Consultation was being encouraged and beginning to happen. Community Management grew as a logical development out of this climate. It was considered to be an innovative (even radical) approach to traditional service delivery; workers hoped the model would enable users to have a greater say in the type of service being provided and this in turn would make the service more relevant, more utilized and better able to meet the real needs of the community.

We are not here to debate whether or not this in fact occurred, or whether the model was successful in the 70's. This paper will look at how the model is working today and how relevant and

productive it is in the current economic and social conditions.

It is certainly still being used as a basis for funding CEP, CTS and being quoted in recent YACS Policy documents e.g. The Neighbourhood Centre Policy - September 1985 which states: "As well as being actively involved in the planning and development of services, residents should have the opportunity to participate in their ongoing management and control . Thus the Community Management model is designed to facilitate services which are flexible and responsive to community needs, which reflect these needs and which are accountable to the people who use them." We shall use this as our definition of community management, because it is a working definition rather than an academic or theoretical one and we are concerned with the practice of community management.

Community Management - A Myth Or Reality

The potentially positive aspects of Community Management have already been listed. In this next section we want to look at whether these potentials are realised, and also examine how the theory of Community Management matches up with what actually happens in the non government welfare sector.

We shall argue that Community Management in fact, functions on a series of interdependent myths, most of which are quite far removed from the reality of the situation.

We wish to stress that this isn't an exercise in knocking and criticising the non government welfare sector, but a genuine attempt to help stimulate debate on what we feel is a very fundamental issue.

The Composition of Management Committees

The popular assumption is that management committees shall be made up of local residents who use a particular service, and their

participation will ensure that the service is more relevant; less patronizing; more effective and so on. There are a number of points to raise in relation to this:

- (a) In our experience one has to plead, convince and cajole people to give up time to be on a Management Committee and that in reality those who end up agreeing are not so much representative of the majority of users, but rather the people who are prepared to go to meetings. Therefore one can hardly assume they are representative of the wider 'community'. In fact one wonders whether this is ever possible to achieve given the fact that few communities in Australia are totally homogenous.
- (b) There can be difficulties for the residents who do participate in Management Committees which can in turn make them very reluctant to do so. For instance, if friends and neighbours are not pleased with some of the decisions made at the service, it can lead to criticism and ostracism of the person involved. This is particularly the case when it comes to matters of employment, money etc.
- (c) Then there is the situation where, to avoid the conflicts and frustrations of being employed by unskilled, politically naive or inexperienced committees, who have little time to spare and limited welfare knowledge, workers encourage their colleagues to sit on management committees. This is not only a far cry from the notion of user control, but it also poses numerous industrial problems.
- (d) Then we have the Community Management model as it is in childrens services. We shall not go into this already well documented debate. However, one aspect is worth noting. By the time a community based child care centre is "up and running", the parents who initially needed the service have school aged children. But they are the ones with the knowledge and experience of childrens services, and who have a large personal investment in the place. So usually, they stay - even though they clearly are no longer users.

Community Development

The Community Management model was seen as fundamental to the practise of community development. The latter was strongly supported by workers who hoped it would mean a move away from the traditional, chairty orientated approach to welfare, towards a system that was built upon a political and class analysis of welfare and welfare provision. Thus it was seen as a way of 'empowering' the disadvantaged through resourcing them to run and control their services. However, in many instances the opposite seems to have taken place. Inadequate funding has meant that fund-raising and volunteerism have remained a part of service delivery, and with them come the fairly traditional approaches to welfare. Both the organisations we worked for, despite ten years of operation on the Community Management model, still see themselves mainly in the mould of running charitable organisations with all the connotations this involves e.g. people working voluntarily, or on small wages, doing long hours and having to fund raise as part of the job. The model therefore appears to have done very little to alter or change this approach or indeed to empower the local community to take control.

We believe that Community Management is now in fact being counter productive when it comes to achieving social change. In a situation where so much energy and time have to be devoted to survival, and to making a defunct model function, then there is very little energy left to work on social issues.

The Management Committee as Employer

ends up being left to the workers to raise any industrial issues. This of course can become very difficult and can cause mistrust and resentment on the part of the management committee. There is also the conflict between a volunteer model of operation, which has historically been the case in many centres and the employment of skilled and trained workers, who should be getting wages commensurate with their training and experience. Obviously an inadequate funding situation only exacerbates these problems because money is always an issue. All these factors together, tend to stop the sector from being considered an industry; hamper attempts to get a recognised award, and reinforce the traditional view of womens work in the caring professions i.e. to be done out of love and commitment and where its rather 'bad form' to expect decent wages and normal employment conditions.

Type of Service Delivered - Who Decides?

Let us again look at part of the statement quoted in the YACS Neighbourhood Centre Policy - September 1985 "Thus the Community Management model is designed to facilitate services which are flexible and responsive to community needs, which reflect those needs and which are accountable to the people who use them".

We would argue that any 'flexibility and responsiveness' is goverened by funding restrictions and the management committee is mainly working on how to make the dollar go further. The terms therefore are very relative.

Similarly it is argued that one of the main benefits of community based services is that it provides a process by which funds can be obtained outside the rigidities of government. But in reality it is the State that decides what funds it 'allows out'. Take for example the recent rise of child abuse as an issue demanding community attention and concern.

Historically the State has been the main service provider in this area. YACS has had to fight for funds for resourcing this programme but it has also decided that it should be a priority

for the community sector. Consequently funds for 'child at risk' programmes have become more available than those for the more traditional services like community development and neighbourhood centres. Indeed these groups have been forced to defend their services in terms of the links with children at risk (or other YACS determined priorities) rather than their original aims. Some Neighbourhood Centres believe that if they do not appear to be tackling the issue of child abuse then their funds may be at risk. There is a great irony in this. These groups did not come together to deal with the issue of children at risk; they lack the skills and resources to address this enormous complex problem, yet some of them have accepted funds to run programmes in this area. At what cost one may ask - the actual funds themselves are still inadequate which means that even given the best of intentions community based groups will be struggling to provide decent services, yet if things go wrong they will be the first blamed.

Should groups do this to get funds out of the State? What strains will it put on Community Management? How does Community Development fit in here? These questions need to be addressed, before groups start running these programmes. There is a real danger that this process simply fits into the conservative notion that the community should take responsibility for its actions (rather than the State) and this again, simply reinforces the role of women as carers dealing with their own problems, individually at home.

The Community Tenancy Scheme is another example of the state specifying areas of need and how the community is to be involved in providing services to meet this. CTS was funded on the understanding that tenants would be involved as soon as possible in the planning and development of the projects. The funding for this programme was extremely rushed and few of the details were thoroughly worked out. Despite it not being a welfare programme community based welfare agencies were encouraged to take up the funding. Bureaucrats were in a great hurry to have the money spent, and tenants on the management committees were being asked to decide on issues of employment, capital expenditure and so on etc. These were completely outside the experience of most tenants.

As all the decisions had to be made quickly, the bureaucrats kept applying pressure. This meant that in reality, workers made most of the decisions.

The inconsistencies of the model become particularly apparent when there is a conflict between what the committee decides staff should work on, and what staff decide they should work on.

A good example is a community organisations involvement with the Anti Freeway Action Campaign. The proposed distributor will cut a swathe right through a local community. The staff worked with the Anti Freeway Action Committee, resourcing them at all levels - i.e. taking minutes, helping with media contact etc. How did the Management Committee respond? Negatively - saying that the organisation was about welfare, not about political campaigns and that the staff should not be working on behalf of only one section of the community i.e. those against the Freeway, whereas what about those who were supporting it. Here is an example of the committee grappling with the fact that the Community was not a homogenous one and did not operate on consensus. They were ill-equipped to deal with this realisation and with the conflict it brought to light between them and the staff.

A similar conflict arose at a community organisation whose worker became involved in publicising the Local Council's proposal to introduce a cook/chill system of meals-on-wheels delivery. A campaign was organised to debate and air the issue which would affect most of the elderly in the area. The committee could not agree that their staff are paid to work on such issues, and furthermore they were nervous that it might jeopardise their relations with Council.

Accountability - Who Is Accountable For What & To Whom?

The Community Management model is often supported on the grounds of greater accountability. Greater then what one is tempted to ask. Womens collectives for example are accountable to users and colleagues and it is a system that works very well.

Our experience has been that management committees see themselves as

accountable to funding bodies. Both our organisations depend on the workers to organise reports, AGM's, the bulk of the work etc. There is no reporting back of any significance to the underfined community which one is meant to be accountable to.

Workers on the other hand have a very direct accountability to users through daily contact; and also to colleagues working in the area on the same issues.

The Transfer of Skills

Another point of the Community Management myth is that in the course of 'empowering' the users, the worker will transfer skills and knowledge to the management committee. There are a few things wrong with this notion.

- (1) It has usually taken the worker several years of study and/or a number of years work experience to gain the knowledge she has. It is somewhat difficult to transfer this to someone you probably see once a month and who contributes their time voluntarily. Besides which they feel they're employing the worker to know about these things, so why should they have to know them.
- (2) The funding realities mean that there is very little time available to put into educating the Management Committee e.g. one metropolitan centre gets funding for 20 hours per week. This is not enough to run a service properly, let alone educate a committee as well.
- (3) Committees often resent staff time being spent on Management Committee matters rather than on service provision.
- (4) We recognise that the problems that have just been cited may be related to the fact that both agencies are ten years old. So lets look at what happens in a 'new' project e.g. The Management Committee of this new metropolitan centre initially did learn to write submissions and discuss the aims of the project etc. However once the model was employed, people wanted action, not 'workshopping'.

The Role Of Community Management As Individual Consciousness Raiser

Many people support and defend Community Management on the grounds of the individual personal growth that it may stimulate for the people involved. But a few things need to be noted here:

We agree that individual consciousness raising is a positive thing and should be encouraged, but to justify a whole mode of management on these grounds hardly seems sufficient.

Also one cannot ignore the fact that most community workers are not equipped to deal with the consequences and implications that this personal growth may have on an individual's life.

Take for example the case of a woman who becomes heavily involved with the establishment of a child care centre and then has to cope with the strains this places on her domestic life because her husband resents the time and attention which is being directed away from him and the home into this community venture.

Who Really Manages In Community Management

The latest funding boom, in the non government welfare sector, has been the spate of job creation programmes (Wage Pause, CEP). Many groups took advantage of these programmes to fund projects they had been hoping to undertake for many years. Leaving aside the job creation debate (which is another workshop in itself) the fact is that the non government welfare sector was funded for a variety of projects. In one centre the staff doubled and the Management Committee had to deal with issues such as:

- * new workers being on higher wages than existing staff
- * increased financial accountability procedures in the form of quarterly returns, separate audits etc.

In one case the workers administered CEP, not the Management Committee. This organisation was lucky to have the core staff to

to cope. The management committee found the plethora of projects confusing. There had been no time for any organised community development work to happen before submissions were due. At the end of it the community is left with raised expectations about services, but no services to meet them.

Conclusions

It seems to us that one reason why the myth is being perpetuated is because there is a reluctance on the part of the community groups and funding bodies to look at alternative forms of management. For the latter it is probably a case of "the devil you know" whereas for community groups it is often a case of being locked into this model, which because it was once considered to be innovative (even radical) many think that it still is, and simply refuse to face the realities of working with it.

Alternatives

The question of alternatives to the Community Management model is we think a difficult one. In terms of developing a model that will mean programmes are managed in a way that leads to social change may well be impossible. It could be that, from the outset, welfare (and we use that term in the widest sense) programmes set in a capitalistic mode and social change are a contradiction in terms.

However, given that we do work in a capitalist society, community based programmes are hopefully here to stay and need to be managed effectively.

The minimum we can do is to improve the current model i.e. to bring it up to date. Currently, some recognition is being given to this improvement: an emphasis on training, ongoing lobby for increased resources for management - provided by the funders rather than being seen as the role of the community worker (mostly, unfortunately, the dollar is slower to appear than the commitment). This movement is happening sporadically in different parts of the sector.

There needs to be a move away from the notion of local-ness for the sake of it. A recognition that management needs appropriate skills and knowledge. That local people may well have that or obtain that but the emphasis need not be on the local. Concurrent with this is a recognition of the role of the worker in policy, work direction and a need for formalisation of workers input into the management process.

Womens' services have attempted to manage their services using the collective approach. Whilst not being without difficulties, e.g. industrially - workers being employers being workers - it has developed a method of breaking down managerial hierarchies (which are surely a contradiction to the aims of community development): of workers and users collectively managing services and providing a range of effective health and accommodation services by and for women.

Unfortunately this model has not filtered to other areas in any appreciable way for example, when the women of a particular group made their first submission to YACS for funding for a worker, they did not wish to nominate Chair, Secretary or Treasurer - they felt they were all responsible - YACS couldn't cope and so to get funding the women had to nominate office bearers.

The question that needs to be asked is why that now the precedent has been set by womens services hasn't the rest of the industry adopted at least some of the characteristics?

One reason is that workers often put changes/improvements to management in the "too hard" basket - that the demands for service delivery etc mean that the management process is way down the priority list.

Another reason is that community management would resist this collectivisation as part of protecting their territory/power from what they would/could see as a takeover by more skilled/articulate people i.e. workers (however we must recognise that in whatever management structure the skilled and articulate hold power). Perhaps the most pertinent reason for non collectivisation is that funders when calling for submissions assume a hierarchy, a Community

Management model - the forms leave no space for alternatives. Small under-resourced groups and over worked workers need more encouragement than that!

Other options for improvement of the Community Management model are problematic e.g. removing workers from the employment of community based groups i.e. set up processes for input by community workers into community groups who are autonomous but the workers are employed elsewhere - in the UK neighbourhood centre community workers are employed by local government - the workers see themselves as primarily accountable to the community groups though this depends on the personal politics of the worker. Problems also arise if groups see workers as representing the funding body.

This type of arrangement is happening we believe in Western Sydney where community workers are employed by the Housing Department to work on housing estates.

Other options would be perhaps the regional employment of workers i.e. through regional councils and/or interagencies. The industrial problems of Community Management are crucial to its effectiveness.

We don't believe the above is an adequate overview but perhaps other options may emerge from this paper.

Strategies For Change

These are always difficult especially if alternatives are not fully developed. One of the greatest barriers to change is the ever growing fear of community groups that funding is in jeopardy. The uncertainty of funding is a great way to ensure that only minimal levels of boat rocking occur.

Obviously if any far reaching change was to occur, community based groups would have to 'close ranks' to lobby together for a change from the funders - peak organisations have a role here - disseminating information, organising workshops etc. The thought of organising this is mind boggling! However, management needs to come

high on everyones agenda - improvements to services can only result.

The continuing use of the Community Management model as a radical way of intervention, leading to social change can deceive those involved, setting up false expectations of the level of power people can obtain and also, workers despair as they see structural problems of poverty, discrimination, unemployment, lack of housing etc remaining essentially unchanged. Both Community Management and workers are set up to fail.

One danger that must constantly be borne in mind is that those who seek to destroy the community based groups may find our arguments useful. We need to create an environment where constructive criticism and a facing of the myths leads to a strengthening of the non government welfare sector.

