



Stories my community told me

**Communities for Children
East Gippsland**

Centre for Rural Communities Inc.
2006

A community development strategy

Dr. Helen Sheil and Neil Smith

Place based strategy

- Employment and professionalisation of local facilitators
 - Nurturing local knowledge
 - Building skills in community
 - Creating local employment
 - Providing access to tertiary education.
- Employment of regional co-ordinator
 - Network support to local facilitators
 - Liaison with project partners
 - Profiling strategy.
- Sustainability of strategy
 - From short term to long term
 - From part-time to full-time
 - Development of community plans
 - Growing trust in community partnerships.



Place based planning

- East Gippsland – 38,000 people across 20,000 sq. kilometers
Two regional centres (16,200) and 15 communities between 170 and 3000. More than half live in communities of less than 3,000 people.
- Each community has a unique landscape, population and history.
Investment in status and visibility of local knowledge.
- Building on past successful approaches (EGAP, YouthCAAB).
- Co-ordinated facilitators located within communities.
- The Municipal Early Years Plans and Kilmany Unitingcare goal of establishing partnerships with communities in the interests of children and families recognized the need for diverse approaches.



STUDY CIRCLES



- Are used around the world to assist people meet and learn together
- Usually consist of about 10 to 12 people. The small group democracy of study circles provide a safe forum. Differences can be respected enabling people to develop community plans.
- Usually run for 10 sessions though groups may choose to continue meeting.



The *Building Rural Futures through Co-operation* study circle kit



- Invests in local people.
- Enabling:
 - participants to focus on the future of their community
 - the unique characteristics of each community to become visible in future planning
 - the community heart to beat more strongly in future planning by listening to the stories of local people.



People and places

Paul Harper x2

Buchan, Buchan South, The Basin
Timbarra, Gillingal, Murrindal,
W Tree, Butcher's Ridge,
Gelantipy, Wulgulmerang,
Seldom Seen

Michelle Theobold

Orbost, Marlo,
Orbost North

Judy Ireland

Paynesville,
Eagle Point,
Raymond Island,
Bairnsdale

Fiona York

Goongerah
(both sides of river)
Cabanandra

Jo Nunn, Helen Sheil,
John Ireland
Co-ordinators

Naomi Gordon

Mallacoota

Bruce Smith, James Hill x 2

Omeo, Benambra, Ensay,
Swift's Creek

Jo Nunn

East Bairnsdale

Di Rumble

Lakes Entrance





Paul Harper x2

Buchan, Buchan South, The Basin
Timbarra, Gillingal, Murrindal,
W Tree, Butcher's Ridge,
Gelantipy, Wulgulmerang,
Seldom Seen

People: 24 women, 18 – 68 years old, inc 3 grandmothers, majority parents had children under 5, some part-time or self employed, some on health care cards, some tertiary educated etc.

Beginning Establishing study circle problematic –no childcare.

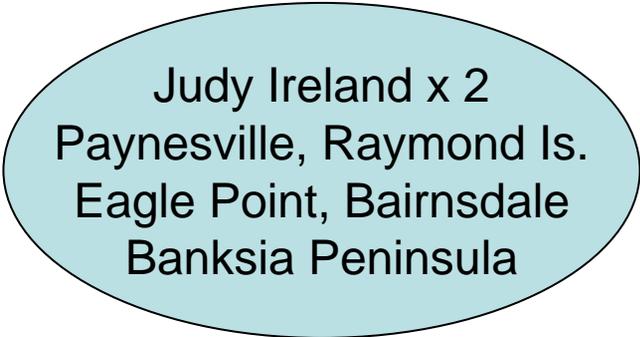
Frustration at lack of after hours/ holiday care; socialisation for children; services available to young families; limited hours Bush Nursing Centre; lack of mobile phone coverage.

Developments from study circle people gained skills to work together and confidence to tackle issues collaboratively.

Hosted 'Information Day on Services for Young Families'.
Welcomed service providers and explored options.

Future participants continue to meet and work on issues (eg community bus, mobile phone coverage, Family Mentor Program).

Buchan connected to other communities, regionally, nationally, internationally (Buchan – Bali connection).



Judy Ireland x 2
Paynesville, Raymond Is.
Eagle Point, Bairnsdale
Banksia Peninsula

Provided: safe meeting space for people of different ages, experience and interests to connect and find ways of working together in the interests of children and families.

Beginning

- Difficulty of distance for families of all ages no longer living near extended family.
- Being welcomed to new community.
- Caring for self and children with change in relationships.
- Creating more child friendly services.
- Child safe public spaces.

Development

- Connection across difference.
- Growth in personal confidence, awareness of services.

Actions

- Creation child friendly medical facilities.
- Creation of brochure welcoming new residents.
- Drew attention to safety issues at coastal playground.
- New partnerships with organisations and Shire.



Community stories exhibition

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To dnoel arit at
Community Stories



Date: Tuesday 29th September 2009
Time: 6:00pm
Venue: East Giggelard Art Gallery
2 Nicholson Street, Balmaclella

REP:
Lisa Rutherford @ Kilmoryn Nursing Care
Phone: 01222 9800



Extending engagement:

- Beyond surveys, questionnaires and focus groups to include photos, songs, stories, drawings and artifacts.
- Through different ways of listening.
- Through public celebration of children.
- From individual thoughts to shared activities.

Stories:

- foster personal development
- expand understanding
- create opportunities for change
- shape future activities



Map experiences, visions and strategies of communities through the voices of community members:

- *Small enough for children to be known by name – this provided a safe environment (Mallacoota).*
- *Sense of caring, friends, neighbours, strangers helping each other – could be an emergency or when something needs fixing.*
- *If you have children under 5 and want to work in Buchan or Lakes Entrance or Bairnsdale – you cannot! By living in Buchan you lose the right to work because there is no regular childcare.*
- People in Goongerah have a history of self help and cooperation – eg the school and CFA. However, this level of self-help can lead to burnout and divisions. They are keen to be linked to other networks. The study circle provided ways to rebuild relationships.



Facilitate processes to welcome new families:

- Increasing visibility and access to existing groups.
- Developed a brochure for new residents with local tips:
 - Call at Paynesville Op shop and ask friendly volunteer.
 - Visit Paynesville Neighbourhood Centre
 - Contact local community radio etc.
- Supporting small group democracy - people able to be welcoming and tolerant of difference.
- *People have been absolutely amazingly welcoming and open to our arrival – we couldn't have chosen a better, richer environment to bring up our kids – new Bairnsdale resident.*
- *Outreach program for services to link with and to promote activities such as fun days, educational programs, health services who can work with us.*
- Inclusive celebrations – Community stories exhibition.



Investing in learning to inform the development of strategies for the Communities for Children project:

- Community partnerships benefit from changed relationships and practices from all parties.
- To support this transition:
 - 1) Learning within communities - *Building rural futures through co-operation* study circles with TAFE accreditation – Certificate 3 Communication skills.
 - 2) Facilitated by skilled local facilitators with access to Monash Graduate Certificate in Regional Community Development.
- Linked to regional organisations:
Project partners – Communities for Children
East Gippsland Institute of TAFE
Monash University
East Gippsland Shire.



Identify opportunities to improve access to children and family services:

- Possibility of a local small community group engaging with wider community to plan for the future.
- Omeo Childrens' Centre – partnership Shire, Hospital, Country Fire Authority, State Government Departments -
 - Providing fencing and shade at playgrounds
 - Providing more changing room facilities
 - Creation of more walkways suitable for prams.
- Use of parent supported playgroups to overcome shortage of childcare – support from Playgroups Victoria and Remote Family Services.
- Space to talk – realising that often interests and concerns for families are the same for other people.
- Issue of access to heated pool in Omeo area for mothers and babies led to inquiries to Dinner Plains for access to their pool.



Identify and document common themes across communities:

- Importance of safe, welcoming environment for children— inclusive of natural environment.
- Communities welcomed outreach approach and network opportunities this offered.
- Relevant facilitator skills essential - part-time, short term employment difficult to maintain continuity. Communities often dealing with complex and challenging issues. Co-ordination critical.
- Study circles often unknown – initially a barrier. Participants became more confident and connected - able to work in partnership with organisations to discuss issues and seek reasonable solutions.



Difficulties encountered:

- Skill level of facilitators/coordinator.
- “Working to a budget” - allocated too few hours to coordination.
- Lack of childcare.
- Support from educational institutions critical but vulnerable.
- Working from distance limited engagement.

– Lessons learned:

- Importance of local ownership of outreach program to support continuity.
- Importance of leaning from past to inform present and future.
- Importance of building trust and partnerships.
- That there is considerable interest in this collaborative approach – potential for new partners.
- Importance of network – of this strategy and other partners.



Work to be completed:

- Meeting with study circle participants - questionnaires and focus groups.
- Meeting with strategy partners – questionnaires and focus groups.
- Maintaining contact with facilitators.
- Finalising and showcasing report.
- Strategies for maintaining outreach network
 - East Gippsland Shire
 - Swift's Creek Community Centre
 - Centre for Rural Communities Inc.

