

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This material was produced with funding from the Commonwealth of Australia and the Australian States and Territories. AHURI gratefully acknowledges the financial and other support it has received from the Commonwealth, State and Territory governments, without which this work would not have been possible.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study has used a focus group method to explore the relationship between community strengthening and community housing. Three focus groups were held — with providers, with tenants and community members, and with government and non-government policy makers.

The main conclusions of the study include: -

- While there is often a whole of government or cross-portfolio commitment to community building, the drivers and policy focus for community building are varied and often vague.
- There is little understanding in current community building programs of the contribution of effective housing provision to sustaining communities (with the exception of estate renewal or indigenous community renewal).
- Community housing providers, the community stakeholders and tenants explicitly identify community-building objectives as being an important element of their activities. Collectively, community housing providers undertake a range of activities from improving housing access, personal development, brokering more effective access to community services, supporting social and economic engagement by tenants and supporting economic initiatives. The focus of their activities is on strengthening communities in ways that support greater social inclusion for their tenants or target groups.
- There is considerable scope for better linkages between community building initiatives and community housing agencies
- Policy makers – both housing administrators and those focusing on community building – accepted the potential role of community housing, in supporting key aspects of community building. However, this was qualified in a number of ways. A key issue was how significant their impact could be if they manage only a small amount of the surrounding the housing stock in a community. There was agreement that they can be particularly effective in rural communities and in providing affordable housing to mitigate social exclusion in high cost city communities, but more evidence was sought for their impact in other areas and any special advantage in estate renewal.
- Participants identified five key success factors in ensuring effective community strengthening: -
 1. awareness of and by the local community;
 2. effective partnerships/ community linkages;
 3. committed boards with a capacity for vision,
 4. flexibility in responses, and
 5. additional resources to enable them to engage in more than core housing activities
- To achieve this, it was proposed that community building be more explicitly recognised in community housing programs and, conversely, community housing organisations be encouraged to take up opportunities through community building strategies.
- Policy makers suggested three broad approaches that need to be adopted:
 - a) building greater awareness of some of the community building strengths of community housing;
 - b) making some approaches (specifically supporting individual functioning as a basis for community participation) explicit as an objective of community housing management, promoting it and building the management practice that can meet it; and
 - c) developing further evidence.
- Expanding the point about further evidence, the policy makers suggested that further research be undertaken in the following areas:

- Research **in detail** the practices of a number of community housing organisations currently successfully undertaking community renewal activities (in public housing estates) with the objective of unpacking the critical success factors and contributions of these organisations.
- Investigation of the extent to which strengthening the capacity of disadvantaged individuals impacts on the wider sustainability of communities. The research should document the links and outcomes.
- Identify community housing's contribution to meeting objectives of sustainable rural communities - particularly for low-income earners;
- Explore the contribution of community housing to assisting people to make the transition from homelessness to long-term housing.

1. INTRODUCTION

Policy makers are increasingly aware of the need to strengthen communities to counteract the growing patterns of social exclusion in Australia today and to support greater social and economic participation. This interest in strengthening communities has been demonstrated at both the Commonwealth and State levels. At the Commonwealth level, the process of strengthening communities is evident in two policy areas: -

- There is an increasing focus on Indigenous communities with allocation of funds from the Stronger Families and Communities strategy and pooling of resources from different commonwealth agencies (FACS, Health, Centrelink) to target particular communities.
- The Stronger Family and Communities Strategy is the main vehicle for a Commonwealth focus on community building. The specific projects are driven by State Committees, which develop priorities for funding application.

Using NSW as an example of interest amongst the States, community building is being driven by the Premiers Department and is primarily being given effect through regional coordination management groups — 11 regions in total. All government services contribute to their funding and so have a vested interest in its success. While, the first two years have involved getting the government agencies to work together, there has been a shift in the last 18 months to a regional service delivery plan in consultation with local communities (including local government), which aims to identify priorities across agencies or government work in communities. Specific projects in each of the regions have been funded and the participants in the projects extend beyond state government agencies, to local government and the private sector. A place management network has been established, which engages a loose connection of people who are working with communities, to strengthen communities. A Community Builders website is being revamped and has a much stronger focus on community involvement and ownership¹.

Governments are becoming aware of the need to better understand the community, neighbourhood and social relations required to *sustain social and economic participation* by individuals and families. The recent interim report of the Reference Group on Welfare Reform, *Participation Support for a More Equitable Society* (2000), has placed this issue at the centre of social policy. Much of the discussion to date has concentrated on exploring social capital, drawing internationally on the work of Putnam (1993) and in Australia Cox (1995) and Winter (2000). There has been very little research to identify the impact of housing on accessing the networks, relationships and services underpinning sustainable social and economic participation.

Community housing is a model of social housing management that has frequently claimed strengths in creating community sustainability (see, for example, NCHF, 2000b). Whilst it would seem likely that community housing organisations play an important role in assisting their tenants through the housing services they provide there has been little explicit research to detail their precise activities. This research project has been commissioned to fill this research gap by exploring the role of community housing in community strengthening.

Now that the background for the current study has been described, the next Section outlines the in detail the research objectives of the study.

1.1 The Research Objectives

The primary objectives of the research are to:

- help identify the extent to which the form of housing management provided by community housing organisations plays a significant role in building stronger communities and, if this is significant,
- whether the existing contribution could be built on through government policies to strengthen or expand that role.

¹ <http://www.communitybuilders.nsw.gov.au>

These twin objectives mean that this project specifically focuses on policy-relevance. It does not merely aim to understand what community housing provision does to provide better outcomes for tenants and for the communities in which they operate, but rather, whether what they do in this respect furthers the specific public policy objective of building stronger communities. Similarly, it does not simply seek to propose specific policy initiatives to further support community building by community housing providers. Rather, the project aims to identify whether policy makers accept that there is a potential role for community housing and whether this role will be pursued in the future.

At the same time, the research also seeks to better understand *how* community housing providers contribute to building stronger communities. The aim is to discover approaches that can be replicated and to better understand the conditions under which such approaches might be possible. Its objective is:

- To systematically identify the areas in which community housing management is understood to specifically assist in strengthening communities, and using this framework as a basis, to provide a preliminary identification of practical management strategies that can particularly be applied by community social housing managers to strengthen communities. This will include identifying to what extent each of the three distinct policy objectives associated with ‘stronger communities’ — economic development, community renewal and sustainable participation — can be furthered by community housing management.
- To build on this discussion by housing managers, by identifying the lasting benefits tenants and other community stakeholders have found these actions to produce; and whether they are seen to have genuinely strengthened community capacity or to have provided a foundation for individual and family social or economic participation.

The final objective of the research² is to raise awareness of the potential importance of housing and, in particular, community housing management to community building. Most current community building policies or programs make little or no explicit reference to housing — except in the case of public housing estate renewal and indigenous housing. The research sought to understand whether community housing organisations are perceived by the community and by policy makers to have any specific strengths and advantages that could be better utilised. This includes consideration of the extent to which community management experiences can provide a generic management model that can be adopted by other social housing managers or whether community management has specific advantages, and should be promoted in its own right.

Finally, it should be noted that the focus group methodology did not prove suitable to identify from practitioners the *specific activities* tried to date that have ‘worked’ and those that have not. Such detailed evaluations require individual organisations to be studied in some depth. The framework of community building activities identified through this research, however, provides a basis for such further research.

1.2 The research questions³

To meet the objectives of the research, a number of questions have been generated:-

- What outcomes are meant by ‘strengthening communities’?
- Do community housing organisations contribute to these outcomes?
- Do community housing organisations make a significant contribution to strengthening communities?
- What are the key success factors for community housing providers?

² Note that this objectives was only indirectly referenced in the original research proposal but developed during the project as a result of inputs from the reference group.

³ Note that these research questions were not explicitly stated in the original research proposal

- What policy initiatives are possible to build on identified community housing strengths in community building, given the policy context? What further evidence base is needed?

1.3 The structure of the report

The final report for this project consists of five sections:

- Section 2 describes the method used in the project
- Section 3 outlines the project findings organised by a series of key research questions
- Section 4 describes the conclusions of the study

The report also includes five appendices:

- Appendix A lists the participants in each of the focus groups⁴
- Appendix B contains the Running Sheets for the focus groups included in the study
- Appendix C contains the Background Papers that were distributed to each of the focus group participants
- Appendix D describes some details of Housing Plus
- Appendix E contains a literature review of community strengthening

⁴ Note that separate Background papers were only prepared for Workshop 1 and Workshop 2. Workshop 3 participants were provided with the previous background papers and the key questions for the workshop were provided via email

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Overview

The research consisted of three full-day focus groups. These were comprised of, respectively:

- providers, identified by their peers and government administrators as making a contribution to community strengthening and drawn from a wide range of inner city, other metropolitan, rural and remote communities in Queensland, NSW, the ACT Victoria and SA;
- tenants and community members, such as local government or local health workers, with some association with the community housing providers; and
- policy makers from central agencies or Commonwealth agencies with an understanding of community strengthening policies, community housing program administrators and the non-government policy community.

2.2 The limitations of the research

It is important to stress that the purpose of the research was to establish whether or not there is evidence to suggest that community housing (as a sector) has *the potential* to play a role in community strengthening. It is not being undertaken to establish whether the community housing sector *in general* is engaged in community building. It has been presupposed that it is not – although it would be a separate research project to test this presupposition. The evidence being sought to establish its potential is, whether or not, there are **at least some** community housing organisations that do undertake such work. The corollary to this question is whether, were such a potential to be established, there is a basis for public policy action to further develop and widen such potential contributions.

2.3 The use of focus groups

The use of focus groups for this project was chosen for a number reasons. The main reason was to relatively simply identify whether or not there was a basis for future more detailed work. At the same time, it provided a context in which, in a loosely structured way, the three stakeholder groups crucial to future development – providers, communities and policy makers – could be engaged in a discussion of the objectives, outcomes, approaches and opportunities. The more specific rationale for focus group discussion were:

First, because the purpose was to identify the potential for community housing to contribute to community strengthening, it allowed the researchers to select organisations that were already seen by their peers or external stakeholders to be engaged in community strengthening. The focus group allowed us to explore the *extent* to which this highly selective group do or don't undertake activities that could be described as community building and how this arose from their organisational goals and position in the community. Second, it allowed us to identify in a very preliminary way approaches that might be of sufficient interest to suggest further more quantitative or evaluative work to be undertaken to understand these fully. Third, it allowed the objectives and approaches of the providers to be contextualised by understanding how they affected or reflected the two communities with whom they work – their community of tenants and the local community.

2.4 Selection of participants

Focus group participants were drawn from South Australia, Victoria, NSW and Queensland⁵. They were selected with the advice of the reference group.

The 12 participants in the first focus group were selected from a list of providers developed on the advice of the provider peak body and the administrators in each of the four states, with the aim of identifying organisations that are currently seen to be engaged in activities that

⁵ Participation of the other States was hindered by the limited budget of the study

might contribute to community strengthening. Attempts were made to ensure that providers working with indigenous communities⁶ were included and that a co-op⁷ was also included. Emphasis was placed on reflecting activities in a range of communities in relation to three criteria:

- locational (especially rural and remote);
- communities experiencing major stress (particularly in public housing estates); and
- communities of interest (such as people living with HIV/AIDS).

In three cases, the Diamantina Shire, Van Lang housing co-operative, and DASH youth housing, it was not possible for the organisations to send a representative. Because these organisations were seen to be important, telephone interviews were undertaken in one case and tenants or community representatives attended the second focus group. (See Appendix A for the list of participants.)

The 13 participants in the second focus group were drawn from tenants or community stakeholders identified by the provider organisations participating in the first focus group. The criteria for inclusion were that:

- participants were sufficiently familiar with the work of the housing provider to be able to contribute;
- there was a mix of tenants and other community stakeholders; and
- there should be at least two local government stakeholders.

The 12 participants in the final focus group were identified through the project reference group. The participants represented a balance between community housing administrators, broader government agencies (such as State central agencies and the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services) involved in community building strategies, local government and the non-government policy community.

2.5 Conduct of the focus groups

Each focus group was a full day (from 9.30 to 4.30). A running sheet was prepared in advance to provide a structured approach to the day (these are contained in Appendix A). However, questions were designed to be as open ended as possible and an attempt was made not to constrain discussion. Participants in the first two workshops were provided with a background paper specifically prepared to reflect the outcomes of the previous workshop. (See Appendix C) In the case of the first focus group, the background paper was adapted from a discussion paper, which was the result of an earlier national workshop held by the NCHF in Melbourne, at which representatives of community housing peak bodies, Commonwealth and State government, National Shelter and AHURI discussed the relationship between housing generally and stronger communities, the current policy objectives relating to stronger communities (including the Welfare Review) and areas in which community housing might contribute. Participants in the final workshop were provided with the previous background papers and an email detailing the questions which would be addressed at the workshop.

The focus groups were led by the two NCHF researchers with the participation of Dr Peter Phibbs (Sydney University AHURI Research Centre).

2.6 Data and analysis

The main source of data was the focus groups. However, additional information was provided by some before and after focus group telephone conversations and in some cases some

⁶ Inclusion of indigenous housing issues in all research projects is an important element of AHURI's research strategy

⁷ Co-ops are an important strata of community housing that are often seen to behave differently than other parts of the community housing sector.

written material forwarded to the project team. The data used to address each research question is described below.

2.6.1 *What outcomes are meant by 'strengthening communities'?*

Data –The data used to answer this question was drawn from all three focus groups.

- In the providers' group it was drawn from the discussion of the questions:
 - 'Thinking about the work that you do in your communities [beyond tenancy/ asset management], what is it you are trying to achieve?' and,
 - ' "Social mix" is often said to be important – is it to you? What does it mean for your tenants or communities?'
- In tenants and community members group, it was drawn from the discussion of the questions:
 - 'Thinking about the communities you live in or work in, what do you value most about it, what do you like most, what things do you wish it had, what things make it hard?'
 - 'Thinking about the all the places you've lived, where have you been most and least happy, what made the difference, what impact has it had on your life?'
- In the policy makers group, the data was drawn from three sources:
 - discussion by the group of the relative importance of a list of possible drivers of community building objectives presented in the background paper for the group,
 - specific accounts by government participants of the place of 'community building' in their jurisdiction's policies or programs.

Analysis – The research question was explored in three parts:

- *The outcomes sought by government policies* – particularly whether participants believed that government has identified clear outcomes under the term 'stronger communities', what outcomes were accepted by the participants, and the similarity or difference in emphasis between the different policy communities represented.
- *The outcomes sought by providers, their tenants and community members* – the data was analysed by grouping outcomes described in both the provider and tenant/ community focus groups. The preliminary framework for this categorisation was developed by the provider focus group in order to confirm the level of consensus about outcomes described. The characteristics described by tenants and communities were also used to confirm and, in some instances expand, the characteristics of these outcomes. Finally, the analysis sought to evaluate whether the outcomes clustered mainly around 'shelter' or core housing management outcomes or whether they included outcomes related to community building more widely.
- *Consistency with policy opportunities* – These two sets of responses were compared to establish whether the outcomes sought by government and by providers, their tenants and community stakeholders were consistent. In particular, it aimed to evaluate whether the similarities or differences might prevent community housing from being seen as relevant to policy development in this area.

2.6.2 Do community housing organisations contribute to these outcomes?

Data – Again the data was drawn from all three focus groups.

- In the providers' group it was drawn from the discussion of the questions:
 - 'Thinking about what you do in your communities (beyond tenancy/asset management)... What steps did you go through? What really made a difference? What one thing really stood out as important?'
 - 'How did you work with other parts of the community? How did the relationship help you/ them?'
 - How do you work in communities that are falling apart/ have tensions?'
 - A very brief account from each participant of the communities they work in and how they respond to the pressures of those communities. In some cases these were supplemented with telephone follow-up.
- In tenants and community members group, it was drawn from the discussion of the questions:
 - 'Thinking about the housing options available in the community you work in, what difference is there between them?' (asked of community stakeholders)
 - 'What makes (CHOs) different to other landlords?'
 - 'What ways do you see CH getting involved in the community where you live or work?'
 - (In response to some strategies identified by providers) 'Have you seen or been involved in any of these?' 'Are there other ways the CHOs get involved?'
- In the policy makers group, the data was drawn from the discussion of:
 - discussion of the initiatives being undertaken by community housing organisations identified from the previous two groups; and
 - unprompted discussion of specific types and areas of community housing activities identified by the policy makers as being of interest.

Analysis – This section was analysed with three objectives. First, to identify the range and kind of activities that are undertaken by some community housing providers that could be seen as strengthening communities. Second, as with the previous research question, to explore the extent to which the range of community housing activities identified extend beyond 'housing management' functions into clear 'community strengthening' activities. And again, like the first question, the extent to which these activities are seen by policy makers as relevant to their policy and program development.

- *Range of activities* – The analysis of these activities was undertaken in two parts. Initially activities were grouped according to the categories established in the consensus 'framework' agreed by the provider focus group. For the analysis, the researchers further grouped these into three classes of services, reflecting a prima facie community building spectrum: 'housing services', 'community services', 'economic services'. Building on this, a further categorisation was proposed by the researchers to test two hypotheses:
 - that the effects of activities undertaken by CHOs can be seen on a continuum from activities that primarily relate to the housing business (keeping the organisation viable), through those that relate to the building the tenant's individual capacities, to those that relate to community capacity building; and
 - that core housing services may have effects that build individual or community capacity.

The use of responses from both the providers and tenant and community groups provided limited confirmation by enabling any significant contradictions between these two groups to be identified.

These analyses were supplemented by brief descriptive summaries of the main approaches taken by organisations to the principal stresses of their communities.

- *Relevance of these activities to community building* – The extent to which these activities clustered at particular points of the two continuums (business capacity: individual capacity: community capacity; and housing service: community service: economic service) was noted. While acknowledging that the provider participants had been selected by their peers as being engaged in community building, the presence of reported activities at the community capacity and community service/economic service ends of the continua, was seen as a prima facie measure of whether community housing providers undertake activities relevant to ‘community building’
- *Policy makers’ perceptions* – The policy makers’ responses were analysed in two parts. First, by grouping the strengths identified by policy makers under a number of areas of service delivery agreed by the group to be where community housing has significant capacity for community building. Qualifications about the evidence for these assessments were also noted. Second by grouping the kinds of outcomes policy makers saw community housing as delivering. Within these groups the assessment of the relevance of these outcomes to community building was noted. Differences in these assessments – particularly between participants from different parts of the policy development community (eg. Local government) were noted.

2.6.3 *Do community housing organisations make a significant contribution to strengthening communities?*

Data – The data used to answer this question was principally drawn from the tenants and community focus group drawing mainly on an aspect of the questions that provided data on outcomes sought by tenants (Q1 above). However, a specific sub-question – ‘can community housing organisations be lead agencies or social entrepreneurs?’ – was also explored drawing on data from the providers and policy makers groups.

- In the provider group the data was drawn from responses to the questions:
 - What is it about being a CHO that means you are able to work with the community?
 - How do you know you are making a difference?
- In the tenant and community group it was drawn from responses to the questions:
 - (responding to activities identified by providers) What is distinctive about the way community housing organisations get involved in the communities they work in?
 - Thinking about the places you’ve lived, where have you been most and least happy, what made the difference – *what impact did it have on your life?*
- In the policy makers group data was drawn from responses to the question:
 - Can the core business of community housing providers be seen as a key strategy to strengthen communities; or is it a relatively unrelated social objective?
 - Are community housing organisations lead agencies (or social entrepreneurs) in community strengthening? What is meant by the term ‘social entrepreneurs’?

Analysis – The data from tenants and providers was grouped into a spectrum of the principal effects that were reported to result from community housing activities – starting from the most individual effects to those relating most to the wider community. These were further broken down into the features of community housing management that contribute to these effects. The question of whether community housing has specific advantages as an agency to achieve such benefits was explored principally by the policy makers. The analysis consists of (i) a report on the aspects of community housing identified by the group that might enable it to be a leading agency and (ii) the group’s assessment of how significant these were.

2.6.4 *What are the key success factors for community housing providers?*

- *Data* – The data to answer this question was drawn entirely from the providers group in response to the questions:
 - What led you to the kind of work we have been talking about? How did it come about?
 - What did you need to make it work? Was there one thing that was crucial?
 - Were there particular problems or barriers in doing this kind of work?
 - Did you see you were taking risks? What were they?
- *Analysis* – The data was separated into two parts – the drivers for undertaking their housing work; and key success factors. These were then considered from two perspectives: first to explore whether the drivers of these housing organisations were similar to those described by other ‘community builders’; and second, whether the key success factors might suggest how a community housing organisation positions itself as an organisation within a community.

2.6.5 *What policy initiatives are possible to build on identified community housing strengths in community building, given the policy context? What further evidence base is needed?*

- *Data* – The data for this question was drawn entirely from the policy makers group in response to the questions:
 - What policy initiatives/ objectives/ strategies are being implemented to achieve community building outcomes?
 - What policy measures could enhance community housing capacity or overcome current barriers?
 - Could/ would governments resource initiatives like ‘Housing Plus’?
 - Would focusing on the community strengthening aspects of community housing assist in getting your policy objectives up?
- *Analysis* – The overall policy context and importance of community building was described by stakeholders. The discussion was analysed to identify the coherence of this policy climate and the opportunities it presented to support the community building aspects of community housing. In the process, the connection between housing policy objectives generally and community building policies was explored. The different emphases in different jurisdictions were noted. The opportunities and preconditions for supporting community housing community building activities in the policy climate was analysed by the policy maker’s group itself by developing an agreed rationale, and principles for future policy development; initiatives that might support the development of community housing’s contribution, and future research related to some agreed gaps in knowledge that currently act as an inhibition on wider support of community housing role in community capacity building.

2.7 Presentation of the data

Selections of the data from the providers and tenants and community members focus groups (both illustrative examples and/or direct quotes) have been included in each section of analysis to enable the ‘voice’ of the participants to be reflected together with the analysis. The policy makers’ focus group involved more explicit ‘presentations’ of policy directions in various jurisdictions, agreed opportunities and specific principle, and further possible action – including research needs. These have been directly reported in the text.

2.8 Some methodological issues

The research is limited in two ways. First it is largely a scoping study. Its data – particularly that derived from the first focus group comprised of providers – is mainly intended to identify

presence/absence of activities, in order to establish a possible range of activities related to community strengthening activities. That is, it shows that at least some community housing organisations undertake such activities and that, therefore, others could.

Second, it is not possible to do more than note congruence or gaps between the objectives and threshold issues reported by the difference focus groups. It was not within the scope of such a small-scale study to undertake any more detailed analysis of the implications of these differences or congruence.

Finally, and most important, because the participants in the provider and community stakeholders were selected from those providers already identified by their peers as successful, it might be expected that the accounts would be particularly positive. These **cannot** be taken to provide evidence that positive responses are generalisable to the sector.

2.8.1 *Community characteristics*

The next section of the report provides a *post hoc* analysis of the location and communities from which providers participants were drawn, presented at Section 4. This analysis was undertaken for two reasons. The first was to exclude the possible objection that the range of activities reported was a product of a skewed selection of participants – in terms of the location or type of communities (particularly in terms of the nature of the stresses being experienced by that community).

Second, this overview of the diversity of ‘communities’ and ‘community stresses’ in the communities from which focus groups participants were drawn also provides some insight into what the researchers mean by communities, and what kind of community stresses might ‘community building’ be expected to alleviate.

The source for this ‘overview’ was the information reported by participants in the focus groups and where necessary, some supplementary information provided by participants in follow-up phone calls.

2.9 User group

This project established a reference group for the project. This reference group is comprised of one State Manager of the community housing programs (Qld), the executive officer of the national provider peak body (ACT), and a leading provider (Vic). The group is not called a user group since key “users” are contained in the final workshop of the project.

3. STUDY FINDINGS

This chapter, using as headings each of the research questions identified in Chapter 3, provides the findings of the study.

3.1 What outcomes are meant by ‘strengthening communities’?

3.1.1 Introduction

The question of what outcomes are meant by ‘strengthening communities’ was explored in different ways across all three focus groups. The aim was to answer four questions:

- To what extent are there common understandings across the policy community of what is meant by community strengthening? In particular, are there clear policy drivers that might identify the policy relevance of various approaches to community building?
- How are community strengthening objectives reflected in current housing policy and what opportunities do community strengthening programs/policies present for housing policy makers?
- Is the focus of community building policies the same as the objectives of community housing providers — at least insofar as they are focusing on their interaction with the wider community?
- Do the objectives of providers reflect the outcomes sought and perceived by tenants and community partners?

While the policy drivers and current housing policies are explored further in section 5.5, the other questions are explored below.

3.1.2 What outcomes do policy makers seek?

The range of possible outcomes

A number of different objectives have emerged in the policy literature that reflects some of the different kinds of community strengthening noted above. While few are really independent of each other, they are sufficiently distinct to attract different levels of support and action:

- To allow government to move to *locally driven solutions* and flexible responses rather than relying on centrally designed programs. Locally driven solutions require a local community capacity to develop solutions which build stronger communities.
- To give communities — particularly distinct regional communities — the *capacity to respond to change* such as economic shocks. This most often focuses on building the capacity for economic development.
- *Overcoming the social dysfunction* and reduced life opportunities in areas with high concentrations of social disadvantage — particularly public housing estates and indigenous communities.
- Providing *social mix*. This is usually driven by a concern to *break up concentrations of disadvantage* —to inject new economic demand, leaven the prevalence of anti-social effects such as crime, and to avoid inter-generational unemployment and alienation.
- An alternative ‘social mix’ objective. This is to *maintain social diversity* and resist the displacement of vulnerable groups. More generally, *to maintain social cohesion* by increasing tolerance and/or reducing the visible manifestations of disadvantage.
- To *sustain social and economic participation*. (McClure Report) This involves overcoming barriers including the lack of affordable housing and the lack of community support.

The policy makers’ focus group was asked to consider this list of possible outcomes⁸. The focus group participants confirmed that these somewhat diverse issues are all, to different

⁸ Note that this list was compiled by the research team

extents, drivers of current policies (See section 5.5.1 Policy Context for a discussion of the how these different emphases are reflected in different jurisdictions). As can be seen from the discussion in 5.5.1, the last four objectives — breaking up concentrations of disadvantage, social mix, and sustaining economic and social participation were more likely to be mentioned by housing policy makers or, in the latter case, the Commonwealth, than by central agency representatives. At the same time, participants reinforced three points:

- Firstly, that there is considerable diversity of emphases in policies related to community strengthening, although largely within the range of objectives described above.
- Secondly there is still considerable uncertainty among policy makers about some very central issues such as the relationship between ‘strengthening communities’ and ‘local economic development’; and
- Finally that the strategies related to achieving the outcomes are far less systematic than might be expected. As a result, some have failed to explore questions like, what specific infrastructure and what lead agencies are particularly important to building stronger communities. In particular, it was suggested that the findings of this research may fill a vacuum — at least in regard to the role of housing and housing management.

3.1.3 *Clearer terms?*

While a common language is being used in relation to the term ‘strengthening communities’, participants agreed that there is still considerable looseness in terms. In Queensland, for example, it was reported that while there are common elements in a number of broad government initiatives, there is no cohesive policy in place. South Australia has a general commitment to strengthening communities, but no strong definition of it. Following a change of government in Victoria, the idea of strong communities has become a distinguishing feature of the new government, but the practical meaning of this is currently being worked out through new program development. Participants agreed that there is still work to be done on clarifying the variety of terms used by governments.

Since the use of terms such as ‘community strengthening’ are still being clarified by governments, it was suggested that there may be an opportunity to use research such as this to help illustrate what it might mean practically, and where community housing might contribute. It was argued that this would be consistent with the principle that expertise on the ground (good practice) should inform interpretations at the policy level.

3.1.4 *Characteristics of stronger communities*

However participants noted that some specific programs have identified characteristics or measures of stronger communities. Similarly, measures of social capital have also been identified, which help clarify this notion (see, for example, NSW Premiers Department, 2000: Appendix D)⁹.

After considering the characteristics from the NSW Sustainable Rural Communities Project, the following central characteristics of successful community building initiatives were agreed on by participants to be the characteristics sought by most policy makers in the area:

- Local action, local solutions
- Participation and cooperation
- Working together to achieve environmental outcomes
- Involves partnerships
- Community leadership
- Sense of inclusion (equity objective); and
- Avoiding concentrations of disadvantage.

⁹ See, for example, NSW Premiers Department (2000) – Rural Communities Project, Appendix D.

It appeared that that the latter objective was more likely to be mentioned by policy makers from housing departments/agencies than by the “central agency” or those involved in specific community building initiatives.

3.1.5 *Policy foci*

Equally, it was agreed that there are a number of specific focuses for policies on strengthening communities. The term is noticeably used in the following areas:

- rural communities
- areas experiencing growth pressures
- an explicit discourse on Indigenous communities and
- concentrations of social disadvantage — particularly in public housing estates.

3.1.6 *What outcomes did providers, their tenants and community stakeholders seek?*

The elements of ‘strong communities’ that were relevant to participants in the first two workshops and their work in the community might be grouped in six main areas:

- social mix, cohesion and tolerance
- equal access to social infrastructure — overcoming exclusion from housing and services
- neighbourhood functioning, reversing community breakdown — environmental amenity, safety, freedom from crime
- community relations that support and strengthen social participation
- community relations that support and strengthen economic participation; and
- stable community that sustains strong and diverse local economy and services.

The first striking observation is that participants talked explicitly about having objectives — as housing providers or as tenants and community members associated with housing providers — that parallel the objectives of community building programs.

It is generally true that participants placed the greatest emphasis on the objective of providing social mix (as a strategy for inclusion) and ensuring that social exclusion was not fuelled by their constituents lack of access to appropriate housing and services. Their next greatest emphasis was on the process of inducting excluded individuals and households into ‘community’, with an ultimate goal of full economic and social participation. A minority of providers explicitly saw their activities as a way to achieve wider economic outcomes such as economic development or community growth. However participants saw their activities as providing a strong foundation for such outcomes.

The following describes the objectives in more detail.

3.1.7 *Sustain social mix and build social cohesion and tolerance*

Participants suggested two relatively distinct objectives in this area, specifically to:

- maintain diversity required to avoid unhealthy communities with ghettos of the rich and poor, thereby building a socially just community in which disadvantaged people have a place. This community encourages and models tolerance; and
- build a sense of belonging among disadvantaged groups by integrating tenants into the wider community of peers.

“If you are going to have a tolerant, broad minded, holistic, truly representative community, a **real** community, its got to be made up of all branches, all in our community have to be represented there otherwise you’ve got ghettos of the rich and poor and it is not a healthy community.” [Provider]

“Diversity is in the first paragraph of our Corporate Plan so it’s not just about politics... it actually feeds through all the technical levels of the organisation... so we might do rubbish, we might do aged care and other things but over-riding all of that is the key goal which is to maintain and protect the diversity.” [Local Councillor]

“If you develop the right sense of community they’ve got that acceptance when new people are coming in.” [Tenant]

“(Tenants liked the fact that there was) no social stigma... they felt they fitted into that street, they want to be part of the broader community, they do not want to be on the fringe.” [Provider]

3.1.8 *Ensuring equal access to social infrastructure*

This objective makes it clear that community housing organisations give the highest priority to overcoming social exclusion, but it also reflects a view that social infrastructure — particularly appropriate housing — is fundamental to any community capacity building. Again there were two distinct aspects to this objective:

- Firstly, to supplement an unresponsive housing market. This goes beyond simple housing delivery as it involves a very active response to emerging gaps in local housing markets. Underlying this is the fundamental importance of access to housing in determining all social and economic participation. The housing market contributes to social exclusion in a number of ways: Poor location of affordable housing, unmet housing need for specific groups, poor standard of rental housing, discrimination, unsustainable tenancies, lack of access to home ownership and community stability.

“We are being told by our community that these are the people who are not being housed easily.” [Provider]

“We are also negotiating with the DoH office to see if we can use untenanted bedsits to start to address the growing homelessness problem among young people. The problem was identified by a local Councillor who is on our board.” [Provider]

“(trying to place housing next to schools and transport) ... that is our first priority and if it happens to be next too that mansion, too bad! But we do a little bit of education with that person before we move our tenants in.” [Provider]

“It is really a matter of having people around the community all the time who have been there long enough and have the information to spread it within the community... if you can get the information to them through their own networks.” [Tenant]

- Secondly to ensure equal access to services/ infrastructure — i.e. reduce locational disadvantage. This ranges from ensuring that disadvantaged households are well located to access basic community services, to bringing services into a disadvantaged community. Just as important, participants emphasised the need to ensure access to *information* about services.

3.1.9 *Reversing community breakdown — neighbourhood functioning and community renewal*

While a minority of participants spoke about estate renewal, participants identified one or more of the more specific objectives that, together, comprise a response to extremely dysfunctional communities:

- to reverse environmental deterioration and the visible signs of abandonment
- to increase safety and health
- to reduce crime by displacing an existing exploitative culture; and
- to build a sense of community ownership, specifically by offering residents choices.

“We started with the environment around us, and give people the security... we worked 24 hours when we first started, we were on call.” [Provider]

“The association have had discussions with community police as well as neighbouring businesses to develop strategies to keep the dealing from their buildings ... We are at early stages, but it is something we have recognised and something tenants have been active about as well.” [Provider]

“I didn’t want to be cornered in somewhere I was supposed to call home and feel like I was having to say OK, I accept what is going on around me even though it is wrong and goes against all my morals, my values, my sense of security and safety, whatever. It is not how I wanted to live my life.” [Young tenant]

3.1.10 *Supporting and strengthening social participation*

Participants reported a number of objectives in relation to supporting social participation. Suggestions included to:

- Reduce isolation — particularly where tenants have experienced sustained exclusion (such as homeless people, young people or indigenous people), a primary objective is to create a *community within the community* that provides basic human contact within an accepting environment.
- Build *personal empowerment* as a precondition for participation through greater control of personal surroundings and reduced isolation.
- Develop trust and respect to build *mutual cooperation*. In some cases habits of respect for others have not been established, in others, identifying a common goal or project leads to a range of mutual support activities. These can range from shopping for others, to school car sharing, to very active neighbourhood watch.
- Identify *key people* in the community to broker integration into wider community activities
- Establish personal *networks* that provide a continuity of experience within the community, networks of information based on community knowledge, and which sustain a community over time.
- Encourage *micro enterprises* and participate in wider *community mutual support activities*, including fruit and vegetable cooperative or parenting and support nights.
- Support *active citizenship* in which tenants campaign for services for the whole community or actively engage in local government issues.

3.1.11 *Strengthening economic participation*

“Community housing is part of the community, not separate to it, a small community within a larger community.” [Tenant]

“For most of them [young single tenants] it is the first time they have been somewhere where they have control for themselves, they have some ownership, they are with people they judge as their peers and they are accepted within that group.” [Tenant & chair]

“I’ve made it. I’m here. I’ve actually got my own place. I don’t have to share anymore. I’ve actually got a say, I’ve got a choice in where I’m living... that brings confidence and control for people who’ve mostly had no control.” [Tenant support worker]

“We’ve got poor tenants in our local community housing who are running major political campaigns in the community. Now, if you rip those people out of their community and they are unfamiliar with their surroundings because of state and

While more attention was paid to social participation, a number of participants also identified economic participation as one of their objectives. These included:

- Responding to tenants’ life transitions that would lead them to want to enter or re-enter the workforce — young people, or people whose health status has changed;
- Supporting skills development; and
- Supporting workforce entry.

“Essentially it is about keeping people as independent and autonomous as possible, with all those other services that may be necessary from time to time (so that they can re-enter the workforce).” [Provider]

Beenleigh Housing run a job network agency for Muri people and link in with large recruitment agencies like Drake as well. They also provide training including interview

3.1.12 *Strengthening the local economy and services*

While most of the objectives discussed related to the specific needs of their tenants (even though these responses may have gone well beyond mere housing responses), a number of participants also identified broader community objectives. These included:

- Developing community agency networks and community services ranging from training services to nursing homes with the aim of building community self-sufficiency;
- Developing small businesses within the community — from lawn mowing to caravan parks;
- Building demand to sustain local businesses by sustaining a diverse population (in terms of income, ethnicity etc) which demand diverse services; and
- Reversing decline in marginal communities by stabilising the population.

“You find coming out of local government policy now, issues that are focussing on small businesses, and diversity of small businesses for instance our tenants would probably go and get their shoes repaired rather than go and buy a new pair, and it keeps the diversity of small business within the municipality.” [Provider]

“The availability of housing has also facilitated a higher level of population growth, which is currently standing in excess of 6% per annum. This extra population has filled an existing need for employers both in Council and private enterprise. Population growth has also made it viable for existing businesses to expand and provide a better range of services. There have also been a number of new small businesses established.” [CEO, Council]

3.1.13 *Possible limitations of current community building approaches and the relevance of community housing objectives*

Social Inclusion (equity/social mix)

Despite the broad coincidence of concerns identified by policy makers and community housing providers, one difference stood out. Community housing providers placed primary emphasis on social equity — social inclusion — as a core concern of community building. Unless this concern is shared by policy makers, community housing activities that respond to this priority are unlikely to be seen to be contributing to current policy concerns. This issue was explicitly explored in more detail with the policy makers’ focus group.

The question was posed whether ‘social inclusion’ of disadvantaged groups is explicitly seen an integral characteristic of a strong and sustainable community and an integral objective of strengthening communities, or whether it is simply a desirable add-on to core economic or environmental objectives.

While participants recognised the importance of social inclusion at all levels of community strengthening, it was suggested that this is not necessarily an accepted position across government. It was agreed that in the past many community building initiatives have ignored the issue of equity; and instead, the tendency was to focus on the mainstream of economic growth, often without any concern about what that did in terms of disadvantaged groups in the community (e.g. low-income workers, Aboriginal groups etc). Participants identified a need to reconnect social and economic objectives.

Some participants noted that equity and inclusion has been acknowledged internationally as a key indicator and objective in the related areas of ‘healthy communities’. This is exemplified in a move from measuring per capita levels of health outcomes in communities, to focusing on *the gap* in health outcomes between the rich and the poor.

Some reservations

If it is somewhat unclear what governments hope to achieve from community strengthening, it also became evident that there is less confidence among non-government policy makers about the effectiveness of current community building approaches. The following concerns around government role in strengthening communities were raised by providers and policy makers:

- At the most general level, participants noted the lack of policy continuity (or history) between new community building approaches and the (largely abandoned) support for ‘community development’ in the seventies and eighties. It was noted that community development is also about “communities enabling themselves”.

- Nonetheless, it was noted that a ‘whole of government approach’ is a new commitment to marshalling resources across silos at a local level (although there is still considerable uncertainty about the practical meaning of ‘whole of government approaches’). On the other hand, concern was expressed that the current initiatives are a top-down approach — that local solutions are constrained by too narrow a set of government interests and a failure to respond to existing community initiatives.
- Despite the new objective of communities being empowered to draw together the diverse resources needed to meet local objectives, it was suggested that sometimes giving communities the tools to enable themselves is still undercut by centrally determined government program objectives and funding decisions.
- At the same time, the new emphasis on community building through partnerships suggests that, rather than marshalling public resources more effectively, government may be abrogating their responsibilities and transferring them to the community. It was suggested that some states have a history of under-funding of social policy and social services generally. In this context, some participants asked, “Is the term ‘partnerships’ simply a code for smaller government?” On the other hand, some partners are insufficiently engaged. In particular, local government may not be sufficiently well targeted by current Community Strengthening tools.

3.1.14 *Conclusions*

Overall it was striking that community housing providers, their tenants and community stakeholders articulated clear objectives that related to community building as well as housing provision. Overall these parallel the objectives and outcomes agreed by policy makers. Perhaps even more striking, providers identified as key themes all the characteristics or measures of strong communities identified by the policy makers. While providers did give priority to the needs of their tenants, they appeared to do this with the recognition that the needs of their tenants could only be met within robust wider community relations.

There were, however, some differences in priority within the broader objectives. Community housing providers and their communities spoke most forcefully about inclusion, social mix and participation (although it should be noted that social mix was a specific topic explored with the focus group). With some notable exceptions, providers focused less on economic outcomes for the community — although economic participation by tenants was a clear objective of many participants.

This reverses the order of priority that appeared to be reflected in the policy makers’ discussion. In fact, policy makers agreed that there is still uncertainty about the way that objectives such as social inclusion and economic strengthening contribute to each other, and suggested that there is room for further research in this area. Moreover, policy makers from housing agencies were more likely than those from central agencies to give priority to building social mix and responding to pressures of gentrification.

3.2 Do community housing organisations contribute to these outcomes?

3.2.1 *What services do community housing organisations provide that strengthen communities?*

The kinds of objectives identified by participants and discussed in the previous section, reflect the activities that community housing organisations undertake to achieve their objectives. The following section looks at the specific services delivered by the participants that contribute to building stronger communities.

Community building activities range from activities focussed on responding to *tenant* needs, to those that are more overtly related to working *in* the community. Continuing the discussion begun in the previous section, we will consider whether the services focused on tenant needs can, in fact, be seen as part of a continuum of services that provide a necessary basis for stronger communities. No less important, is our consideration of whether these housing related activities are perceived by policy makers as contributing to community building, or whether they are perceived simply as a service to particular tenants.

To help understand the wider impact that even core ‘housing services’ provided by community organisations can have, the following community strengthening impact matrix is proposed. By distinguishing between different types of *services* and different types of *effects* or outcomes, it allows us to consider whether even core ‘housing services’ might have community capacity building effects. At the same time the discussion made it clear that, although a real estate agent will only provides services related to the top left hand box, a community housing organisation may deliver community or even economic services that are outside a core housing business. These are the kind of activities funded through the Housing Plus program in the UK (See appendix D).

Community strengthening impact matrix

Outcome / type of service	Keeping the organisation viable	Individual capacity building	Community capacity building
Housing services			
Community services			
Economic services			

The following section draws together all the services/ activities reported by participants under the three headings of housing services, community services or economic services. Because this section is mainly intended to clarify the range of services, little reference is made to particular comments by participants. Such comments are mainly reported in section 3.3 — perception of whether the contribution to community building is significant.

It should, of course, be noted that the focus group did not seek to draw out all activities or services of the housing providers, particularly the day to day housing management activities, but rather discussed activities perceived by participants to relate to individual capacity building or community strengthening.

3.2.2 Community housing services and their outcomes

1. Housing services

The three broad kinds of housing services were discussed by participants — housing supply and access, sustaining tenancies and tenant participation — illustrate the way that even community housing core business reaches from a housing management business into individual capacity building and then to community strengthening.

Supply/access

Ensuring that there is a supply of affordable housing accessible to low income and disadvantaged households in their communities is the core business of all social housing providers (although community housing providers focus more explicitly on particular communities). It is important to recognise that this core housing function is also a precondition for social inclusion— although clearly it is not sufficient for social mix, diversity or cohesion. Participants noted three distinct ways that they undertake this core business:

- **Providing non-discriminatory access** — Like all social housing providers, the core business of community housing providers is to provide non-discriminatory access to housing for low income or disadvantaged households. Most important, although currently controversial, this is access to housing security. Participants noted that this is fundamental to employment, to schooling and to social networks.
- **Identifying specific housing need** — Many community housing providers actively identify groups for whom there is little or no appropriate housing and then develop appropriate services.
- **Mediating private market** — Finally, many providers actively mediate access to and appropriateness of existing private rental housing by headleasing stock. In some smaller rural communities, community housing providers are the only source of rental housing and will move into general housing where there is market failure.

“People say to us ‘we just want a nice place to rent that we know we are not going to get kicked out of if we do the right thing’... that is where we come in.” [Provider]

“...especially when you see what happens in towns where there is no DoH office, like Ingham, where they have rent arrears and property damage. [The association] often receives phone calls from local people asking if we can manage the housing and whether they can do something.” [Provider]

Sustaining tenancies

The maintenance of tenancies — the undisruptive enjoyment of the occupancy and regular rent payment — is a basic aspect of all rental housing management and relates to conducting a viable business. But in the private market — and often in public housing — the success or failure of a tenancy is up to the individual. In contrast, participants described a number of services through which providers work to *ensure* that the tenancy (and hence secure independent living) can be sustained:

- ***Flexible management*** – Provider participants argued that this is definitive of community housing. The significance of this approach is that it not only sustains the long term viability of the tenancy, but also provides solutions to factors in tenants’ lives that have far wider impact on their capacity for social and economic participation. Participants described establishing a basis of trust as tenancy managers from which the *causes* of rent arrears could be identified and solutions brokered. Participants reported identifying issues such as drug and alcohol dependency, gambling, or living skills.
- ***Flexible allocations*** — Flexibility is not restricted to the responses to individual events. Participants stressed the importance of an approach to allocations that placed priority on allocating housing in such a way as to support sustainable relationships and networks within the community. This is was perhaps the critical factor in Argyle Community Housing’s success in recreating a strong and vibrant community in the Claymore housing estate (see the summary of Claymore at the end of the section).
- ***Overcoming property damage and destruction of neighbourhood amenity*** — The most noticeable result of community decline is the deterioration and destruction of housing, and all aspects of neighbourhood amenity. Participants from Claymore discussed in detail the absolute priority given to that reversing this by both providers and tenants. But a number of other participants also discussed the impact of improving neighbourhood amenity and the ability to undertake this together with community members.

“The key to making it work is being responsive as issues come up.” [Provider]

“The community will contact us if there is a problem. Even our tenants, who we get to know quite well, will contact us. They might ring and say, ‘look, I know so-and-so has been in the TAB a lot lately or there has been a lot of fighting coming out of one of your houses’, so they’ll let us know before problems escalate and that is when we can get involved and contact the family about their issues and come up with solutions with them.” [Provider]

“We are allocating them housing that suits their needs... we are not trying to put a young person in a block of older people or a vulnerable person in a high-risk area, that is one thing we are doing right.” [Provider]

“Argyle spent a lot of time improving the environment when they first moved into the Claymore estate as it was one of the main issues identified by the tenants. This included street clean-ups, if there was new graffiti it was painted the next day. They also got the Office of Community Housing to put in trees.” [Provider]

Participation

Community housing organisations are unique in the Australian housing system in the emphasis that they place on participation by tenants as an essential part of housing provision. While other activities that contribute to wider social and economic participation were described (see below), examples are frequently given of the pathway from tenant participation, to further training, into employment and community leadership roles. The tenants in the tenants and other stakeholders’ focus group described two different forms of participation:

- ***In tenant activities*** — Most often tenants participate in day to day activities relating to the housing organisation — from social occasions to maintenance and information provision.

“We have get-togethers, a welcoming morning tea for new residents... as we do these more regularly people get more involved.” [Provider]

“The Management Committee of [the] Association has an item in its budget to support tenant’s activities for instance, they recently held a tenant initiated art exhibition and some works were sold. They are also looking at setting up internet access for tenants.” [Tenant & Chair]

- ***In housing management decisions*** — Many community housing tenants are partly or (in the case of co-operatives) wholly responsible for the management of the organisations. Participants reported this as creating an ethos of self-reliance, enabling housing provision to be appropriate and responsive to the needs of specific groups (for example elderly Vietnamese), and built skills that were the basis for wider social and economic participation.

2. Community services

Unlike other housing providers, community housing organisations also provide a number of services that could broadly be described as ‘community services’. In most cases, what is provided by the organisation is facilitation or brokerage. But in a number of cases this indirect community service becomes much more direct (see the descriptions at the end of this section).

Providing access to support services

A number of community housing organisations specifically target tenants with special needs — from people living with HIV/AIDS to young people exiting crisis accommodation. For these organisations, linkages to relevant support services are a prerequisite for sustaining

independent tenancies. Many others provide housing for low income tenants generally. But for these households too, there may be considerable barriers to access to a range of community services such as family support services, health services, or childcare.

- **Provide linkages to support services** — Only a minority of community housing organisations are also direct providers of support services. Most, however, play an active role in establishing strong links with support services. In some cases these will be formal support agreements, whereas in others they will enable providers to inform or broker tenants' access to services. This clearly goes beyond a housing service, but reflects a wider objective of supporting independence and autonomy of tenants.
- **Undertake pastoral work** — Some participants described a proactive form of informal support that might best be described as 'pastoral work'. One participant from parish based service explicitly described pastoral work with tenants. Others, such as Argyle, established a partnership with nuns living on the estate to deliver these kinds of services. But a number of tenants and providers described a similar form of mentoring activity.
- **Manage community services** — A minority of participants described a more direct role in the provision of community services that stretch the bounds of a traditional view of a housing organisation. These range from Argyle's role in establishing (with other partners, including police) a community service centre in the estate, to the delivery of community housing through a neighbourhood centre that also provides a range of community services. However, the most explicit example was the indigenous housing network, Combined Housing Organisation, a number of whose member housing associations provide services such as nursing homes and HACC services.

"MACHA grew out of need for housing identified by the local community support agencies in the Adelaide CBD." [Provider]

"Having a role model and somebody who knows you within a community housing organisation is a big asset for tenants." [Tenant]

"Particularly around the issue of mental health... we are trying to now get resources into our system to provide the sort of ongoing support that in a sense is a responsibility that has been abdicated by the system to a large degree. There has been no transfer of resources." [Provider]

Community development

A number of community organisations specifically see themselves as undertaking community development. This is clearest in the case of Argyle's work in estate renewal. But it is also an explicit part of the work of the Combined Housing Organisation who see this as fundamental to providing appropriate housing services to indigenous communities. CHO employs a community development worker. A number of participants described participation in local inter-agencies as an essential part of their work.

Participation

It was noted above that community housing organisations explicitly establish tenant participation activities and programs. However, participants also reported a number of ways in which community organisations support or enable tenants to participate in wider community activities.

- **In community activities** — A number of participants placed great importance on organising community events such as barbecues parties and sports events. Such an event in Claymore was the catalyst for establishing the trust and support of the community. Combined Housing use such events to support the whole Murri community (and non-indigenous members).
- **With the wider community in mutual support** — Building on the base provided by mutual interaction within the housing organisation, a number of participants reported a range of mutual support activities. These may be as simple as car pooling, they may be

developing a submission to enclose a street so children can play safely, they may be parent support nights, or street clean ups, or ongoing structured activities like the neighbourhood watch street patrols organised by Argyle tenants in Proctor Way. In the US and the UK, such mutual support activities have been fundamental to fighting apparently intractable problems of drugs and street violence.

- ***In wider community politics*** — A number of participants also reported the involvement of organisations and tenants in local campaigns and local government.

“Creating links with other community organisations to bolster your organisation and them... and they create a feeling of community.” [Tenant]

“It is very important not to impose our sense of community on our tenants.” [Provider]

“A MACHA tenant stood for local Council in the last election because of a growing awareness among our tenants that local government has a direct impact on them.” [Provider]

Advocacy

Finally, a small number of participants reported that their organisations were considering a more formal advocacy role on behalf of their community members.

3. Economic services

The provision of economic services takes housing organisations farthest away from their core housing role. Nonetheless, a number of participants described a range of direct and indirect services to support either economic participation or the local economy itself.

Participation

Not surprisingly, the majority of the ‘economic’ activities reported by participants related to supporting the economic participation of tenants.

- ◆ ***in Labour market programs*** — Three organisations reported providing training programs. These included programs to develop literacy skills, a Work for the Dole program for young people, and a job network agency for indigenous people. One based in Beenleigh (a member of the CHO) is investigating becoming a registered training organisation.
- ◆ ***in Job search*** — The same organisations report providing training in job interview skills and Beenleigh has formal links with a major job placement agency.
- ◆ ***in Micro-enterprises*** — A number of participants also reported establishing micro-enterprises with tenants such lawn mowing businesses, or fruit and vegi co-ops.

Commercial enterprises

Very few organisations establish other commercial enterprises or actively engage in local economic development strategies. The main exception is the Combined Housing Organisation which because it has a clear focus as lead agency working towards self-determination for indigenous people, argues that there is a responsibility to build community strength in every way. It was explicitly argued that since there will never be enough money to meet community housing need through government grants, it was incumbent on the organisation to build capacity in other ways. Some other community housing organisations, however, have taken up more commercial housing businesses — such as caravan parks or commercial rental. Others stress that there is a specific impact on local businesses from the diverse community membership facilitated by community housing.

- ◆ ***Undertake commercial enterprises*** — members of Combined Housing are involved in a range of commercial enterprises including a shopping centre and a business incubator.

- ◆ **Sustain/develop local businesses** — Two organisations, St Kilda Housing Association (together with its local counsellor) and Diamantina Shire, specifically argued that the establishment of community housing supports a number of small businesses or a more diverse range of community services than would otherwise be possible. In Diamantina, the explicit rationale for community housing was to build a sufficiently stable population to support the establishment of local business.

Retain skills/develop community leaders

The same two organisations also specifically work to retain skills in their community. In the case of Diamantina, this is a product of more housing and employment opportunity which help retain what would otherwise be a transient workforce. The Combined Housing Organisation is exploring an explicit strategy to program to attract young Aboriginal professionals back into the community.

3.2.3 *The community housing organisations and their role in community strengthening*

This section summarises the role of community housing in community strengthening identified during the project in a variety of communities. These notes were compiled from the records of the focus groups, some before and after focus group telephone conversations and in some cases some written material forwarded to the project team.

Diamantina Shire Council¹⁰

Diamantina is a case study of community housing being used to consolidate a marginally sustainable community. In this case, the community housing programs were initiated and delivered by the Shire Council. Council specifically identified a housing response as the means to stabilise and grow the population and the economic base of the two main towns — Birdsville and Bedourie.

Previously, housing was usually only available to people employed by the Council or state government. Other residents lived in overcrowded conditions in caravans and various demountable structures. The housing shortage created a number of problems. Even though there were employment opportunities available in the area, Council and businesses could not employ new staff as there was nowhere for them to live. The high cost of construction and the absence of a property market made it virtually impossible for any private individual to get finance to construct their own dwelling.

Council was successful in getting funding through the Queensland community housing program for three projects over three years. These projects have provided good quality, low maintenance housing, which has been designed to cope with the harsh climate.

It has had a positive effect on communities in a number of ways. The government investment was heartening and improved the morale of the community significantly. Community housing has provided opportunities for young people who would have previously left town because of the lack of housing. They have been able to take up employment within the community and remain with family and friends. The establishment of accommodation specifically for the aged has meant the community has been able to retain some of the older generation who would have been forced, upon retirement, to leave the area to find suitable accommodation. The positive benefits brought about having both older and younger generations remain has really added to the stability and normality of these communities. The availability of housing has also facilitated a higher level of population growth, which is currently standing in excess of 6% per annum. This extra population has filled an existing need for employees both in Council and private enterprise. Population growth has also made it viable for existing businesses to expand and provide a better or a wider range of services. There have also been a number of new small businesses established.

According to the Council's Chief Executive Officer, the community housing projects have been the catalyst for a dramatic turnaround in the outlook of the residents as well as in the

¹⁰ The Diamantina example is based on telephone interviews. All the other examples were derived from material provided during the focus groups.

vitality of the communities. The investment in community housing has been a major factor in securing the future of and continued growth of these communities.

St Kilda Housing Association

At the opposite end of the spectrum of locational needs, St Kilda Housing Association (SKHA) operates in one of the most cosmopolitan inner city areas of Melbourne experiencing acute pressures of gentrification. However, it too has been established as part of a deliberate local government response to the pressures on the social fabric of the community. While established as an independent association 15 years ago, SKHA has a very close relationship with City of Port Phillip Council who is represented on the Board. The Association's constitution, which requires them to house tenants with an existing connection to the local area, cannot be changed without Council consent. In the past, housing has been funded through a Council developer levy and Council continues to make significant contributions through joint venture development.

One of the main objectives of this collaboration has been to maintain social mix — particularly to sustain a place for the large number of single people who have traditionally lived in the areas' boarding houses. One effect of the area's gentrification has been the loss of traditional boarding house stock to redevelopment. The association manages over 250 units of housing — a mixture of long term accommodation and rooming house stock. Many of the association's tenants are low income families and a large proportion of older residents whose continued presence in the community has maintained a range of businesses and services, which are not present in other predominantly young high income inner city areas. In addition, the association's responsive management of boarding house residents provides a base for the re-integration of many marginalised individuals into social networks.

Argyle Community Housing

Argyle Community Housing is perhaps the leading example in Australia of the use of community management to achieve qualitatively different outcomes in public housing estate renewal. While there are a small, but growing number of transfers of stock in housing estates to community managers with the objective of diversifying management, the Argyle experience was the most explicit case of an explicit attempt at holistic community redevelopment led by a community manager.

The Claymore housing estate was one of the most extreme examples of social housing with concentrations of unemployment, crime and tenant dissatisfaction coupled with low levels of social infrastructure and support. By 1995 it had reached crisis point. Proctor Way, in Claymore, was being called the worst street in the worst suburb in NSW. There was an average of two police incidents every day (that is, 60 per month), 25 of the 86 properties were vacant and there was a series of house fires. In 1995, five people died in one of the house fires and focussed public and media attention on the area.

Argyle Community Housing were approached by the NSW Department of Housing in 1996 and asked to manage 25 properties in Proctor Way for 6 months. They are still there. Argyle now manage 333 properties on the estate and have just started a new project in the Airds estate.

Argyle's first step was to move their office into the street and to establish a relationship with the residents. "We wanted to go into the street and be seen, we felt that why the government had failed there was because there were never any staff to be seen around, they were not approachable. It took 12 months for the house Argyle selected as an office to be ready (they wanted it to be made secure and for the wiring to be fixed) and that was the whole history of that area." They first planned a morning tea to discuss ideas for the community. Two people came to the meeting. Argyle's next approach was to put a BBQ in the middle of the street — unannounced — and start cooking sausages and onions. Eventually a crowd of 30 or 40 people gathered. These residents were clear what they wanted to do on the street: fix the street lights, get rid of graffiti, clean up the rubbish. The first 'community building' activity was another BBQ and street clean-up. Seventeen and a half tonnes of rubbish was removed that day.

While all but the most desperate DoH applicants had avoided Proctor way, Argyle deliberately sought out communities of interest who would want to live on the estate — most notably a large Tongan community. Argyle's strategies are based on building partnerships, particularly with the tenants. Tenants play a role in decision-making and participate on the Association's board. Tenants undertake street patrols and have developed the public reserve (which had previously been a dumping ground) into a community garden. There has been an increase in community co-operation, integrated services are now available, tenants have also successfully lobbied the local bus company to change its route and they set up a loan scheme for purchase of white goods. Nuns have been helping with literacy skills. Argyle is currently setting up a service centre on the estate. There have been no police incidents in two years, there are no arrears and a two year waiting list.

Argyle have just started a new project on the Airds estate which will explore new partnerships. They are in the process of setting up a joint office with a DoH worker, an Argyle worker and a service officer. The service officer puts people in touch with support services (like the children's charity, Burnside) and negotiates with tenants over issues such as rent arrears.

Combined Housing Organisation

The Combined Housing Organisation (CHO) is a group of four Indigenous housing co-operatives who service the south east corner of Brisbane. They meet on a regular basis to exchange information and to support the community development focus of their organisations. CHO was established in part to ensure that a stronger community development focus was retained in the face of the current ATSIIC push for the establishment of regional housing organisations as umbrella organisations for existing housing providers. The new regional organisations have an explicit focus on core housing management functions, with the result that existing providers have lost community workers and housing workers are now doing that work voluntarily. The four organisations that make up CHO manage ATSIIC funded housing (which they purchase, tenant and run) and also access mainstream community housing funding.

As well as employing a community development worker, the organisations within the CHO network each take on different services, ranging from support services to related enterprises. For instance Wynnum housing (which is part of CHO) also run a nursing home and a sports program. One runs an employment program, another a caravan park. Most run HACCC programs.

In addition to these programs, organisations take an explicit responsibility for supporting their community through large scale community activities — not only for tenants — and through establishing links with wider community bodies such as the local chamber of commerce. CHO is currently exploring a project to bring young indigenous professionals back into the community. They have also identified a need for dedicated positions to advocate on behalf of clients in mainstream housing.

Multi Agency Community Housing Association (MACHA)

MACHA provide housing to low income and homeless adults in the Adelaide CBD (120 houses) and are gradually expanding outside that area due to unmet need. MACHA was established through the cooperation of a group of welfare agencies and take all their tenant referrals from member agencies (including Aboriginal services, SAAP women's services, and St Vincent de Paul night shelter). Like St Kilda, the tenants of MACHA are subject to the pressures and conflicts of gentrification. As well as working closely with the most vulnerable members of the community, — such as frail aged homeless people, — to support their tenancies, broker other support services from their member agencies, and re-establish tenants integration into the wider community, MACHA has also adopted an approach to build community support. Local government has been a key partner and are represented on the Board. However, with the recent election of a new Council, this relationship is changing. It seems that the new Council is less aware or supportive of the role of human services in the city than the previous administration. Council has recently rejected their own affordable housing strategy because the focus was too much on low income residents. MACHA is now exploring the need to employ a Tenancy Services Officer to take a more proactive role to

lobby the Council and business (including a communication strategy) and to focus on community development issues on behalf of the collective of inner-city agencies represented by MACHA.

Van Lang Co-op

The Van Lang Co-op was established with the support of local community workers to respond to the needs of the Vietnamese community in the in the Fairfield area of Sydney. The older members of that community are now aging in a country in which the family support for older people that they would have traditionally relied on is less readily accepted by the younger members of the community. Many older members of the community have very little English and services are frequently not culturally appropriate. Through the co-op (self-managed housing), the residents are able to provide mutual support and retain independence, control and connection to their community. One outcome reported is that the consumption of HACC services by co-op members has declined. Van Lang is typical of a considerable number of ethnic specific co-ops that provide culturally appropriate mutual support for community members (including new arrivals and family visits) and which also act as a base for active participation in the wider community.

DASH

DASH is a mixed service for young people in Adelaide. While DASH provides long term housing with support linkages, it is also provides SAAP funded crisis services. Like many crisis and medium term services, DASH specifically seeks to support young people into independent living, through the development of social and living skills. Unlike many others however, DASH also integrates this assistance with future employment development. It runs a Work for the Dole project, a landscaping and painting project, with an emphasis on transferable skill development. This additional business improves the organisation's financial viability, supports tenants (who have the opportunity to participate), helps maintain the Association's properties (painting and landscaping) and contributes to the amenity of the local area. Young people play a very active role in the organisation, going on to support and mentor other young people in an explicit effort to give back to the community.

Havelock Housing Association

Havelock covers a wide area in the ACT. It manages 270 tenancies and is still growing. A significant part of this stock is in the form of shared accommodation targeted to young people. They also run nine projects, which are all quite separate (including a young mothers project, private rental scheme, psychiatric support). Havelock places specific emphasis on building mutual support and cooperation between tenants. In particular, they have a very active approach to tenant participation. Seven tenants are members of the management committee (of twelve positions), including the Chairperson. They are currently seeking funding for a tenant participation coordinator.

AIDS Housing Action Group

The AIDS Housing Action Group (AHAG) has been running for ten years. They have a mix of SAAP funded medium term properties and long term properties across the state. The group of people with HIV/AIDS in Victoria is diverse, mainly gay and bisexual men, but also include women and families, people from Asia and Africa and other communities as well, an eclectic mix of people with very different needs. Access to secure housing is often one of the main barriers for people living with HIV/AIDS some of whom have lost previous employment and some have recently arrived in the country which in turn threatens access to community supports and to appropriate health care. But as well as providing housing, AHAG has an important advocacy function as clients are often dealing with discrimination.

Parkes Forbes Community Tenancy Scheme

This service covers a significant area in rural NSW — particularly the towns of Parkes and Forbes. It is strongly integrated into the network of community resources, with strong support from local churches, schools and service clubs. In particular it has strong links to local government, with the Deputy Mayor a member of the management committee. The

organisation is based in Parkes, but provides outreach services to Forbes through a part-time office based in the local community centre.

Jubilee Housing

Jubilee Housing operate in the outer east of Melbourne. They have 20 long term units for people who would otherwise be housed in public housing — families, singles, people with physical and psychiatric disabilities. One tenant has been with the group since the organisation was established 13 years ago. The distinctive feature of this small housing provider is that it has been explicitly established through a local church as a result of the community development emphasis of its mission. Under the church auspice, the organisation provides the kind of informal support for tenants best described as pastoral care.

Shoalhaven Community Housing

Shoalhaven community housing is located in Nowra and covers three towns in the area and manages 330 properties. Shoalhaven links its housing provision into the wider community in three ways. It works closely with the support agencies in the area in order to broker support services for its tenants — ranging from family support to health. They have recently completed the process of becoming accredited in NSW which includes structured feedback from other local agencies. Shoalhaven was encouraged by the level of response from the agencies. Secondly, a substantial amount of public housing stock has been transferred to their management as a part of a diversification of social housing management in the community. As part of this process, Shoalhaven directly contacted public tenants to explain the differences. Like most all NSW housing associations, Shoalhaven manages a large number of properties head-leased from the private rental market, providing greater access than would otherwise be the case. They also work with local government to negotiate benefits such as rates exemptions.

3.2.4 *Are these contributions relevant to policy makers?*

It was clear from section 3.1 that policy makers working in the area of community building policies to date have not been aware of the potential contribution by community housing organisations. Despite this, participants in the policy makers focus group identified a number of characteristics of community housing that they felt made a significant contribution to strengthening communities.

These participants felt that there is good evidence that community housing can contribute significantly to strengthening communities in rural areas. It was also suggested that there is evidence that there is a role for community housing to influence and moderate exclusion through targeted interventions in the housing market and, in particular, the development of community housing into a provider of a new Affordable Housing option. It was also agreed that community housing has clear strength in facilitating the integration and participation of disadvantaged groups within communities.

Even in these areas, the participants felt that the *prima facie* evidence needs to be better articulated and documented¹¹. At the same time, there are other areas where there appears to be potential, but considerable work needs to be done to be confident that community housing could have a core role. The regeneration of public housing estates is clear example.

The following summarises the perceptions of participants in the policy makers focus group of the strengths of community housing in different areas of community building.

3.2.5 *Assessment of capacity to contribute in specific areas of policy interest*

Rural communities

Participants agreed that community housing can have a significant impact on strengthening communities in rural areas. Interestingly however, this role had not been recognised by the one participant specifically responsible for implementing a Stronger Rural Communities strategy. The following strengths and advantages were identified:

¹¹ And as a result were looking forward to reading the final report of this project

- Community providers are more visible and engaged in rural communities. One of the possible barriers to a significant community building role for community housing providers is the limited impact their services can have on a community unless they are responsible for a major part of the housing market. In rural communities community housing providers are relatively larger providers and prominent among community agencies.
- Rural communities have already shown greater proportional interest in attracting community housing models as a response to community members with complex needs.
- The impact of community housing is also greater in rural communities in supporting the retention of social mix — particularly young people and older people.
- Such communities frequently have substantial unmet aged care needs and are attracted to community housing models as a response.
- They provide well-demonstrated opportunities for partnerships — particularly with local government.
- However, in a smaller community they also have greater capacity to lever private investment.
- One of the frequently reported outcomes in smaller communities of a community housing presence is an increase in community pride.

Affordable Housing and social cohesion

Housing policy makers in particular agreed that the development of affordable housing options is of major importance in building communities that are inclusive — particularly in the face of growth pressures and gentrification. Moreover, it was agreed that community housing providers are appropriate managers of affordable housing. Participants agreed that:

- Affordable housing is a key to sustaining social mix.
- It is capable of influencing the wider market.
- Community managed affordable housing provides a capacity for local responsiveness.
- Community housing is also an important means of building local ownership of the challenges to community cohesion posed by exclusion and of the solutions.
- Community management of affordable housing also provides a vehicle to mix, community, private and government investment.

Community renewal

Community renewal was a major area of concern among housing policy makers. Despite this, the policy makers were less clear about whether community housing should be a major part of the solution.

- It was agreed that housing managers are key players in community renewal.
- It was also agreed that community housing may have some advantages over other providers. These include a capacity for more flexible allocation policy and greater rapport with tenants.
- It was accepted that some tenants report increased self-esteem when transferring from government managed housing.
- However, Queensland participants particularly noted that in that state there is an active debate about whether the community renewal successes of Argyle Community Housing were largely due to it being a community manager, or whether similar results could be achieved through whole of government strategies and more intensive management by public housing managers.
- It was noted that Argyle managed a concentration of stock within the estate. Other housing associations managing public housing manage dispersed units, making a coordinated community building strategy far more difficult.

- A number of participants felt that there is still considerable debate about relative advantages of community housing in this area; and a need for more evidence and research to more clearly identify what it is that community housing brings to community renewal and its relative advantages.

The value of the community housing approach/services

As well as identifying areas of current policy interest in stronger communities in which it was felt community housing might play a role, policy makers also explored aspects of community housing service provision that could provide strengths in community building.

Individual Capacity building

- There was some debate over whether building the capacity of individuals is integral to strengthening communities. Some participants argued that self-esteem can be built in ways that don't contribute to strengthening communities — the example of gangs was cited.
- Moreover, explicit work with clients to build capacity is not usually the core business of community housing providers. Nonetheless, it was agreed that the range of services that are core business — from secure housing to participation in the organisation — are likely to have the effect of building the capacity to participate more widely.
- Some participants argued that work needs to be undertaken to document the links between aspects of being housed in community housing, the development of individual capacity and outcomes in terms of community participation.
- Other participants felt that there is more need to make explicit reference to supporting individual functioning as an objective of community housing management, promoting it and building the management practice that can meet it.

Linking vulnerable people to communities — 'Communities in communities'

Interestingly, policy makers agreed that the mediating role played by community housing organisations between vulnerable members of community and the wider community — creating communities within communities — is a contribution to community building. They noted that:

- Community housing is particularly strong at building relationships between people with complex needs — an important lead agent in brokering partnerships with other agencies which respond to complex needs.
- It creates pathways for people at risk to be able to maintain themselves within communities.

Facilitating participation

- Participants noted that participation in community housing goes beyond the organisation itself. They agreed that there is evidence of 'giving back to the community' (This was particularly noted in a number of ethnic co-ops where members are particularly active in the community — the recent example of Olympic volunteering by members of such co-ops was cited.)
- It was also noted that secure tenancy is fundamental to individual participation. Some participants noted that, while this was recognised as fundamental in the McClure report, so far it has not been taken up in either welfare reform policy or stronger communities policies.
- It was also accepted that participation in community housing organisations also has the capacity to build community leaders.

3.2.6 Conclusion

This section answers one of the main research questions: how do community housing management support community building as a policy objective?

Community housing organisations described a range of services or activities that can clearly be seen as assisting in building communities. The comprehensive nature of these services and their implications for community strengthening are both significant and poorly recognised by policy makers involved in wider community building activities. An attempt was made to organise these activities into a matrix of activities.

Taken together, this is a considerable range of activities that contribute to community building to be found within any one community service agency and which appear to be untapped by policy makers involved in community building. It is true that only a minority of organisation could be seen to deliver the full range described above. However, the fact that each type of activity is delivered by some community housing organisations strongly suggests that there is a far wider potential to build this capacity systematically.

Many of these strengths were recognised by policy makers. However, there appeared to be to noteworthy aspects of their responses. First, those most involved in formal state or Commonwealth stronger communities strategies (as opposed to housing policy makers) were not *aware* of the potential contribution that could be made by community housing organisations to the community building initiatives they were responsible for. In the previous section we also saw that the goal of inclusiveness (so important to the other participants) had something of the character of a desirable add on. Second, there was still considerable hesitation to accept that the features of community housing that superficially might support wider community building were significant without further evidence.

The exceptions to this were in rural communities, and in sustaining social mix through managing affordable housing. The former pointed to both the policy priority of strengthening rural communities and the threshold issue of whether community housing can have a significant impact in regions where it does not have a relatively large presence. The latter may point to a greater willingness to accept structural policy conclusions (access to housing is central to social inclusion) than strategies that relate to the dynamics of community functioning. Participants in the policy focus group did not include indigenous policy makers, which may explain why the group did not identify strengthening indigenous communities as an area to which community housing can contribute, despite identifying it as one of the priority areas of community strengthening policies.

Despite the caution or unfamiliarity, policy makers acknowledged the contributions to community building that can be made by the style of management of community housing organisations, particularly identifying:

- providing pathways for people at risk to be able to maintain themselves within communities;
- mediating between vulnerable members of community and the wider community;
- individual capacity building as a basis for wider community involvement;
- facilitating partnerships;
- building participation and potentially community leaders, and
- building local ownership.

Policy makers suggested three broad approaches to build greater awareness of some of these strengths;

- making some approaches (specifically supporting individual functioning) explicit as an objective of community housing management,
- promoting it and building the management practice that can meet it; and
- developing further evidence.

Two areas for further research were specifically identified:

- research to more clearly identify what it is that community housing brings to community renewal and its relative advantages.
- research to document the links between aspects of being housed in community housing, the development of individual capacity and outcomes in terms of community participation.

3.3 Do community housing organisations make a *significant* contribution to strengthening communities? — Tenants' and community housing stakeholders views

The value to community building of the activities that are undertaken by at least some community housing providers can be evaluated in two ways. In the previous section, policy makers reflected their perceptions of where community housing services can be valuable to community building. However, the most significant evidence will be the views of tenants and other community stakeholders of whether community housing has strengthened tenants social or economic participation or indeed strengthened the wider community. This is considered in this section, which reports the findings of the tenants and other stakeholders focus group.

3.3.1 *What benefits do tenants and community housing stakeholders see from these activities?*

It should be noted that all the community stakeholders and tenants in the focus groups were selected because of their knowledge of community housing. In effect, this meant an involvement with provider organisations, and so most came with a degree of support for the outcomes achieved by those organisations.

Nonetheless, there is little doubt that the tenants and other community member participants felt that community housing went far beyond providing affordable shelter. The responses fall largely into four broad categories:

- Restoring individual capacities
- Brokering access to the community
- Supporting participation in the community; and
- Playing a lead role in the community.

Restores individual capacities

- ◆ ***Security of tenure*** — The ability to sustain a tenancy, to be secure in the medium term future, is highly valued by tenants. By offering security of tenure and actively supporting tenants to sustain tenancies, community housing is seen to give tenants an essential basis on which to build the capacities needed for participation.
- ◆ ***Personal security within the household.*** — For a number of tenants personal security, in particular the sense that one is safe to make one's own decisions and avoid risks ranging from the unknown to harassment to drugs, is the next step to being able to look outward. The unique emphasis on a very flexible and active allocations strategy means that community housing can provide this security.

“You have no credibility without an address.” [ACT Tenant]

“It gives you confidence and security and direction ... I could go on for hours!” [Young Tenant]

“It reinforces your own self-worth.” [Tenant]

“For the first time in my life I’ve got out of depression!” [Young Tenant]

It gives me “a sense of control to experiment in what makes me happy and not happy. A sense of being able to seek help and make choices about whom I seek that from, and the ability to say no I don’t agree or whatever. All these things I’ve never accessed in the past and it makes me feel so much more capable, available to people, I don’t want to shut myself off from the world.” [Young Tenant]

- **Control — in personal space** — For many tenants control over personal space is the first experience of the ability to make decisions about one’s life and leads to a sense of personal worth and achievement.

Brokers access to the community

- **Access to community networks** — Participants reported that the combination of appropriate allocations with access to services, integration into an established community of tenants through tenant participation and key people who are willing to deal with issues such as discrimination provided a an important first step towards community integration.

“I’ve got information. It has benefited so much. Just to think I can do this for my self. I don’t have to rely on every Tom, Dick and Harry that walks past to help me and they don’t have to see me as a dependent... it is fantastic. I hope the same thing can be done for other people.” [Tenant]

“One of the things we have noticed with our tenants is there is a reduction in the use of crisis services after they move into our accommodation. And that has a ripple out into the community in terms of the demands on the day services etc... there is a progressive reduction.” [Provider]

“Community housing is a different safety net, it is a family of another kind.” [Local Councillor]

“Through getting that sense of stability by having safe, affordable and secure housing, people are starting to come together.” [Community Development Worker]

- **Information and brokerage to access facilities** — Some participants placed great emphasis on the access to information brokered by community housing providers, but also then sometimes taken on by tenants themselves. Community housing providers also actively broker access to services. Both for tenants with special needs and for tenants needing to access ordinary community services. But equally important providers report a reduction in use of services flows from greater self-sufficiency.
- ◆ **Interaction with neighbours and neighbourhood** — Participants also stressed that community housing, both through its security and active pursuit of a sense of community among tenants, leads to increased identification with a neighbourhood. Participants reported that having people who can act as channels for information — they might be mentors, service providers, co-tenants or a worker — assists with building familiarity with the neighbourhood, establishing networks and taking part.

Supports participation in the community

- **Participation** — Participants reported that tenant participation in the housing organisation develops responsibility and skills that are then transferred to wider community activities (eg: as tenant chair, doing grounds work, office administration, graphic works for the

annual report, translating, developing policies, writing a tenant handbook, participating on organisational or Council and even state level advisory groups).

- **Self-help, taking an initiative** — Tenants report that participation in community housing leads to a sense of ownership that, in turn leads to establishing an ethos of self-reliance. Often this means beginning with immediate challenges. However, it can lead on to wider community action such as attending public meetings or lobbying for the reintroduction of a local family support service.
- **Creating a community within a community** — Participants described many community housing organisations as ‘a small community within a larger community’, a first step linked to the wider community. Importantly, they noted that it is a part of the wider community, not separate from it.
- **Role model** — Participants noted that within a small community, other tenants (or providers) can be found who provide a role model.

“It teaches you participation and control in your own housing arrangements basically and from that you learn skills which you then use in participating in the larger community.” [Tenant]

“We are the Association, we are the people that make up what they are... it is up to us to help ourselves through a medium like community housing.” [Tenant]

“It can be a real thrill for people to overcome simple things.” [Tenant]

- **External involvements** — Participants reported that being housed in community housing ‘makes a huge difference’ and that can lead to all sorts of external involvements (including working for the community housing organisation and/or local community, finishing university, looking for work, improving health, dealing with D&A issues) and the capacity to give back.

Plays a lead role in the community

- ◆ **Envisaging alternatives for the community** — Some participants, such as the NSW Department of Housing working with Argyle Community Housing, particularly commented on the fact that community housing had a *vision* about the type of community that could exist on the Claymore estate. The capacity of community housing to articulate a vision for a community was also raised by some community participants.
- ◆ **Creates partnerships with other agencies** — Throughout the focus groups, participants referred to partnerships with other agencies, with local government, with tenants and with the community. In some cases, the agencies were instrumental in establishing novel partnerships with police or local businesses.

“Some of the communities I work in and community housing has come into, the changes have been pretty miraculous.” [NSW DoH]

“The things we get out of our community housing organisations are the values we hold dear about our community. ...It gets me over my pessimism about the lack of political leadership, it gets me over my pessimism about political rhetoric... and actually allows me to see things delivered on the ground.” [Local Councillor]

“One of the major ways of achieving the diversity in the community is the mix in tenure, the mix in housing arrangements, as well as the groups of people it allows to stay in areas that are really pressured to move to somewhere else and keeping

- **Sustains community diversity and reduces exclusion** — While providers had earlier articulated community mix as an objective, local government participants reflected the same sense that this is an outcome of community housing.

- *Innovator and leader on environmental issues and amenity* — It was also suggested by a local government participant that community housing is able to play a role as an innovator and leader on environmental issues — a point that was reinforced by the priority given to restoring and developing environmental amenity by Argyle and their tenants or to the environmentally appropriate design of community housing in the Diamantina Shire program.

3.3.2 Conclusions

The most important test of whether community housing activities significantly contribute to community building is how they are seen by its community stakeholders and its tenants.

The focus group participants were eloquent in their descriptions of the changes brought about — both to communities and the individual lives of tenants — by the community housing providers with whom they were associated.

Participants reported four important ways that community housing has impacted on their lives and communities.

- The first was that it *restored individual capacities* to live independently and to participate more widely. This confirmed the earlier importance of this aspect of community housing work, and may also begin to answer the question asked by policy makers about how this is achieved and how it leads to wider participation. Significantly, security — of tenure and personal security within the household — were preconditions for most other social interactions. But equally, personal control over a living situation was seen as a precondition for making choices and not shutting oneself off from the world.
- From this personal platform, community housing organisations *brokered access to the wider community*. This included negotiating neighbourhood issues such as racism or other discrimination and building links with other key people within the community. It supported increased interaction with neighbours and the neighbourhood. It also involved information provision, but more important, building a capacity for tenants to gather and provide information — crucially reducing dependence. And with greater self-sufficiency came reduced dependence on services.
- Crucially, it also provided the skills and supports that actually led to *social participation*. Responsibilities and skills learned through tenant participation were transferred into broader community activities. While this begins as a community within a community, tenants reported that this is perceived as part of, not separate from, the wider community. Often it provided role models. This participation was described in terms of self-help, taking the initiative, and led from mutual support to lobbying for family support services. Tenants spoke of giving back to the community.
- Tenants and community stakeholders also saw the organisation as *playing lead role in the community*. One of the crucial reasons for this is that community partners saw the housing agency as having a vision for the community. Again the partnerships brokered with a range of agencies, from the police to local businesses, were stressed. Community partners like local government stressed the impact of community housing in sustaining social mix and ties within a community threatened by rapid change. Interestingly, local government also suggested that community housing agencies are frequent innovators and leaders on environmental issues and amenity.

3.4 What are the key success factors for community housing providers?

This section explores what it takes for community housing providers to become involved in wider community strengthening activities.

From earlier sections it would appear that some community housing providers currently have explicit community building objectives for the work that they undertake. It also appears that while this may commence with individual capacity building, it also creates pathways and conditions for individuals to subsequently participate more widely in the social and economic life of the community and/or adds wider objectives of stabilising the community, facilitating

inclusion and building economic capacity. From this we may conclude that the potential exists for this to occur more widely.

It is also clear that community housing providers provide a wider range of services than basic housing services; and that, taken together, these comprise a framework of community building activities. Again, this suggests that the potential may exist for more organisations to undertake a more comprehensive range of the services from this framework. Tenants and other community stakeholders describe impressive outcomes for both tenants and communities — including community leadership.

While policy makers are more cautious about the extent to which community housing can provide a lead agency role in community building, they agree that there are good *prima facie* grounds to think that it might play this role in partnership with other key agencies and believe that this should be explored further. They also agree that community housing has significant potential to play a community building role in some key areas of community building policy — rural communities, social inclusion in gentrified inner cities, in indigenous communities and perhaps in community renewal.

In the next section (5.5) we consider the policy options and opportunities to utilise and focus on the potential contribution just described. However, before doing so, in this section we will briefly consider what the providers in the study considered were the necessary conditions for adopting the approach they took — one that includes an element of wider community building. An important related consideration is whether these come from the organisations' core housing business (and so may well be replicated in a range of other organisations that share this business) or whether they are unique activities, undertaken by a handful of organisations for external reasons.

Participants were asked to describe:

- What the key success factors were; and
- What partnerships made this work possible.

In doing this we might also reflect, as we have done at each step so far, on whether the success factors are similar to those that are recognised by policy makers in developing community building strategies and whether the measures required to achieve and extend access to such success factors are likely to be supported by policy makers. This will help clarify what policy responses could be designed.

3.4.1 Key factors for success identified by providers

Participants were fairly succinct about the factors needed for success. They identified:

- Money and resources
- Board expertise
- Flexibility
- Community awareness; and
- Partnerships.

Each of these factors is described in more detail below:

Resources

To most participants, the need for resources was self-evident and did not require any further discussion. The discussion occurred towards the end of the session making it difficult to explore the ways that participants would prefer to see the resources needed for community building provided.

Board expertise

The identification of board expertise as a key success factor is interesting in two ways. First, it reflects the role of the board as the vehicle for community ownership of the vision driving the interest in community building by the organisation. Secondly, it reflects an awareness of the

“The creativity that was on Council, and galvanising community organisations, you could see the [community housing] program going ahead in leaps and bounds. It was a combined effort.” [Provider]

need to manage risks through a more skilled business like approach than is usual for many community organisations. This may suggest that such an awareness is a characteristic of the kind of ‘entrepreneurial’ organisations associated with community building.

“I also think there is a bit of visioning... if you are doing something well and feel a bit of pride in the organisation then you do start to look for other opportunities to expand and that will benefit the community you are working for. I certainly feel my Board and staff have that sort of a focus.” [Provider]

Flexibility

The concern with flexibility emphasises a theme that is now common to most community strengthening policy — locally driven solutions.

“Community housing works because we give the flexibility and the power for self-determination to the players themselves.” [Provider]

Community awareness

The emphasis on community awareness (and community education) reflects two concerns. The first is the need to overcome community division and stereotypes. Throughout the discussion providers and tenants described the work undertaken to build community acceptance of stigmatised groups as a precondition for sustaining tenancies and social inclusion.

The second is the need to build strong linkages between housing provision and the other agencies and opportunities within the community, based on shared objectives. While the board structure is one tool for such relationship building and wider community ownership, so too is involvement in inter-agency networks and formal arrangements between key community agencies.

Partnerships

“Having the right partners (especially local government) and the agreements that you enter into with them that are sustainable and provide the organisation with the potential to develop in their own right.” [Provider]

This is particularly reflected in the final precondition — partnerships. Community housing is an activity that places a particular priority on partnerships with key community agencies. These may often include explicit partnerships with local government. They will usually include a wide range of community agencies — some of which are part of joint ventures, some of which provide services to tenants. And fundamentally, community housing — particularly when working in challenging neighbourhoods like Claymore — is a partnership with tenants, whose priorities and needs drive the operation of the housing provider. Participants were asked to identify which partners they worked with.

What partners do they work with?

Local government

Local government is the forum in which many of the tensions and initiatives within a community are played out. Some councils have been the initiators of community housing programs in their community. But even where this is not the case, a number of participants have local government on their Management Committees.

Increasingly council's planning powers and new instruments like social impact assessments, are driving such partnerships with the recognition that these may be used to create new opportunities or to block them.

Negotiating arrangements around core council activities — from rates to rubbish collection — have a major impact on the sustainability of organisations and neighbourhoods.

“The confidence our residents have, as well as the broader municipality, in the thrust and direction of the City Council... in some ways fosters an understanding or a belief that there are lots of shared interests between the local governing authority and those that live within its boundaries.” [Provider]

However...

“It is also [becoming] much more difficult to get local government on side because of the interests you are up against which are property developments and those that are competing with you for land and housing stock and have no commitment to a truly mixed community.” [Provider]

State government departments

Partnerships with a range of departments are also important. Increasingly, public housing and community housing providers are developing complementary responses at a local level. Many organisations are involved in programs managed by human service departments, but increasingly formal co-ordination and protocols between human services and housing providers are being sought and established.

The association supports potential DoH tenants (fill in forms etc) and, conversely, the DoH will call the Association if they have an empty house they cannot fill. There is no DoH office in Ingham - so this was described as a “*fair relationship*” between the two organisations. The Association has also lobbied the Department on behalf of clients they could not house appropriately (one family with 8 kids and another with a severely disabled adult living at home). “DoH is in the process of purpose building houses for these clients in the local area, so that was a good pay off for us.” [Provider]

“Partnerships with other community housing organisations (sharing knowledge) and the Departments so that organisations are viable and there is infrastructure (that has

Support services

Some of the key relationships are with referral and support services. In some cases support services have established the housing provider. Generally, there is a recognition that from the point of view of tenants rights and effective service provision, both kinds of organisations should focus on their core business, while establishing strong formal partnerships.

Others

The list of other partners identified is perhaps most interesting, since it indicates the scope of the community interests of the providers in wider community building and includes:

- Schools
- Service Clubs
- Church groups — like the nuns who work in Claymore or the local church who provide a lending fund for white goods in the same area.
- Chamber of Commerce — CHO encourage all their organisations to maintain contact with the local Chambers to keep up to date with business interests, new developments and potential employment opportunities (for instance with new tourism ventures, CHO will encourage a cultural perspective).
- Developers — there is growing potential to work with developers through Councils by offering development bonuses for affordable housing.

- Employers — one organisation intends to negotiate with a major new regional employer about housing provision.

3.4.2 *Conclusions*

The success factors identified by community housing providers correspond with those identified through other community building investigations (see, for example, NSW Premier's Department, 2000) suggesting that community housing organisations, — although not usually recognised as such, — are a potential site for community building strategies.

When successful, such organisations are likely to be driven by boards with expertise and strong networks that can build partnerships across the community. Not surprisingly the availability of adequate resources was also seen as crucial.

3.5 Policy options

The findings in this section are drawn from the focus group with policy makers. Its aim is to provide answers to two questions:

- How are community strengthening objectives reflected in current housing policy development and what opportunities does community strengthening programs or policies present for housing policy makers
- What opportunities do these positions present for community housing to further develop the community strengthening elements of the management style identified through this research; to support a wider or more central role for community housing in this policy context; and where might further initiatives be needed to pursue these opportunities?

It is important to stress that the observations reflected in this section are the perceptions of individual officers rather than a description of the relevant government policies. They may, however, provide a perspective on how those who will implement such policies understand the opportunities and drivers presented by them.

In exploring the government policy environment and policy development directions, three central agency or broad human service agency perspectives were discussed — that of the NSW and Queensland Premier's Departments and the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services. Three line departments administering community housing discussed how central agency — particularly whole of government — approaches are influencing the way that policy is positioned.

In assessing the opportunities and further initiatives within this context, the perspectives of the non-government policy community were represented by participants reflecting the interests of low income people generally (ACOSS), housing and social justice generally (National Shelter) and community housing (the Community Housing Federation of Australia).

3.5.1 *Policy context*

Housing specific emphases

Despite the presence of Housing within human service departments or human services CEOs committees, with the important exceptions of public housing estates and indigenous housing, housing has not been a significant part of the community building initiatives.

This is a little surprising, since housing is consistently reported as an important aspect of individual and community well-being. Some participants also noted that the McClure report had identified housing as a significant barrier to social and economic participation.

There is no particular focus on community housing (or housing) in the Stronger Families and Communities strategy. Despite this, participants suggested that a case might be built for supporting further community housing initiatives as part of the program's focus on social disadvantage and on rural/regional Australia. Specific community projects may also provide an opportunity. In NSW, for example, a targeting framework has been developed around locations that include large housing estates. Similarly, the locally initiated projects available under the NSW community building strategies could include community housing initiatives.

Influence on government community housing policy development

In jurisdictions where these whole of government approaches to building communities in specific localities are strong, government administrators of community housing are asking what their place is, as a service provider, in that broader framework set by central agencies. Participants noted that this is a new environment to operate in.

This has meant that the key policy question is what role can or does community housing play in the broader social housing response? Is this different from the role of public housing?

Government administrators from NSW, Queensland and Victoria all reported that the policy drivers have become:

- Identifying community housing's potential contribution to community renewal objectives mainly on public housing estates.
- Understanding community housing's contribution to objectives of building sustainable rural communities — particularly for low-income earners.
- Exploring interconnections between community housing and indigenous housing in creating sustainable housing for Aboriginal people & Torres Strait Islanders.

The range of policy drivers described by participants from NSW, Victoria and Queensland, was not reported for community housing administrators in South Australia. In South Australia the immediate policy driver flows from a recent Statutory Authority Review Committee report on community housing. The report highlighted a lack of empirical data on the claims and assertions made in the setting up of the Act in 1991 on the outcomes that can be provided by community housing (at that time, predominantly co-ops). As a result, there is a need or push to undertake research or hook into AHURI research agendas that look at those outcomes.

3.5.2 Possible policy initiatives to build on identified community housing strengths

The discussion among participants in the policy makers focus group of the contributions to community building identified by the previous focus groups, and an assessment of the generalisability of these contributions or of the potential to play a lead role has been reported previously (see Sections 3.1.; 3.1.; 3.2. and 3.3).

While there were some reservations and calls for further research, and a recognition that housing is not yet well enough understood as an important element of community building, participants agreed that the contribution of community housing to community building is significant enough to warrant the development of more specific policy initiatives.

As a result, the focus group sought to enunciate a rationale, principles and a limited number of initiatives that could support a more explicit role for community housing in the current suite of community building policies and programs.

Rationale

Community housing is closely linked to community/locally-based decision-making. Additionally it has a capacity for 'entrepreneurialism'. That is, to be flexible, innovative, proactive and responsive.

Principles for future policy development

The following policy principles and measures to enhance community housing capacity were identified and agreed to by all participants:

1. Community housing should have an explicit place in the suite of community strengthening options. To assist in achieving this the following processes could be undertaken:
 - identifying existing providers engaged in community building activities and explicitly identifying the value of such contributions in each case;
 - considering a development strategy for providers not currently engaged in community building; and
 - actively promoting engagement with existing Commonwealth and State community strengthening programs to community housing providers.

2. Consideration should be given to making community strengthening an explicit objective in the further development of community housing programs.
4. Options for making additional resources for community building work available to community housing providers through a program like the UK 'Housing Plus' program should be explored.
5. Explicit strategies for leadership development (eg. leadership in rural communities) should be put in place as part of general community services strategies. These strategies may have implications for agencies such as community housing, among others.
6. Options to encourage the expansion of community building initiatives to wider social/economic development activities should be explored.

3.5.3 Conclusion

This study has used a focus group method to explore the relationship between community strengthening and community housing. Three focus groups were held — with providers, with tenants and community members, and with government and non-government policy makers.

The main conclusions of the study include:-

- While there is often a whole of government or cross-portfolio commitment to community building, the drivers and policy focus for community building are varied and often vague.
- There is little understanding in current community building programs of the contribution of effective housing provision to sustaining communities (with the exception of estate renewal or indigenous community renewal).
- Community housing providers, the community stakeholders and tenants explicitly identify community building objectives as being an important element of their activities. Collectively, community housing providers undertake a range of activities from improving housing access, personal development, brokering more effective access to community services, supporting social and economic engagement by tenants and supporting economic initiatives. The focus of their activities is on strengthening communities in ways that support greater social inclusion for their tenants or target groups.
- There is considerable scope for better linkages between community building initiatives and community housing agencies
- Policy makers, – both housing administrators and those focusing on community building, – accepted the potential role of community housing, in supporting key aspects of community building. However, this was qualified in a number of ways. A key issue was how significant their impact could be if they manage only a small amount of the surrounding housing stock in a community. There was agreement that they can be particularly effective in rural communities and in providing affordable housing to mitigate social exclusion in high cost city communities, but more evidence was sought for their impact in other areas and any special advantage in estate renewal.
- Participants identified five key success factors in ensuring effective community strengthening:-
 - 1) awareness of and by the local community;
 - 2) effective partnerships/ community linkages;
 - 3) committed boards with a capacity for vision,
 - 4) flexibility in responses, and
 - 5) additional resources to enable them to engage in more than core housing activities
- To achieve this, it was proposed that community building be more explicitly recognised in community housing programs and, conversely, community housing organisations be encouraged to take up opportunities through community building strategies.

- Policy makers suggested three broad approaches that need to be adopted:
 - (a) building greater awareness of some of the community building strengths of community housing;
 - (b) making some approaches (specifically supporting individual functioning as a basis for community participation) explicit as an objective of community housing management, promoting it and building the management practice that can meet it; and
 - (c) developing further evidence.
- Expanding the point about further evidence, the policy makers suggested that additional research be undertaken in the following areas:
 - Research **in detail** the practices of a number of community housing organisations currently successfully undertaking community renewal activities (in public housing estates) with the objective of unpacking the critical success factors and contributions of these organisations.
 - Investigation of the extent to which strengthening the capacity of disadvantaged individuals impacts on the wider sustainability of communities. The research should document the links and outcomes.
 - Identify community housing's contribution to meeting objectives of sustainable rural communities - particularly for low-income earners;
 - Explore the contribution of community housing to assisting people to make the transition from homelessness to long-term housing

APPENDIX A FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

Focus group 1 service providers

Organisation	State
St Kilda Housing Association	Vic
Jubilee Housing	Vic
Shoalhaven Community Housing	NSW
Sunshine Coast Regional Housing Council	Qld
Community Housing Lower North Shore	NSW
Havelock Housing Association	ACT
Combined Housing Organisation	Qld
Hinchinbrook Community Support Centre	Qld
AIDS Housing Action Group	Vic
Parkes Forbes CTS	NSW
Argyle Community Housing	NSW
Multi-Agency Community Housing Association	SA
National Community Housing Forum	
National Community Housing Forum	
Sydney University	

Focus group 2 — tenants and community stakeholders

Organisation	State	Comments
DASH	SA	Tenant
DASH	SA	Tenant
Combined Housing Organisation	Qld	Tenant
Havelock Housing Association	ACT	Tenant and Chair of Havelock
Jubilee Housing	VIC	Tenant
City of Port Phillip	VIC	Councillor
North Sydney Council	NSW	Council housing worker
Combined Housing Organisation	Qld	Community development
Hutt Street Centre	SA	Social Worker
Fairfield Mental Health	NSW	Mental health and community liaison
YWCA	ACT	Youth and health promotion worker
Airds Dept. of Housing	NSW	Community renewal officer
DASH	SA	Staff observer with Anna and Celine

Focus group 3 — policy makers

Organisation	State	Comments
Manager, Community Development & Research, FaCS	NSW	C'wealth Govt.
Manager, Community Housing, Dept Housing	Qld	State Govt – CH
A/Manager, Office of Community Housing	NSW	State Govt – CH
Manager, Policy & Planning, OCH	NSW	State Govt – CH
Manager, Program Management, Community Housing Group, Dept. Human Services	VIC	State Govt – CH
A/Manager Policy, SACHA	SA	State Govt – CH
NSW Local Government & Shires Association	NSW	Local Govt.
Senior Project Officer, Strengthening Communities Unit, NSW Premiers Dept.	NSW	Central Agencies
Executive Officer, CHFA	National	National Peak
Housing Policy Officer, ACOSS	National	Non-govt
National Shelter	National	Non-govt
Dept. of Premier & Cabinet	Qld	Central Agency

APPENDIX B FOCUS GROUP RUNNING SHEETS

Focus group 1 — Providers

Running Sheet

Introduction, Claire		
9:30–9:45	Coffee and settling in	
9:45–9:50	Names and organisation	<i>quick round-up</i>
9:50–10:05	Research background	<i>what? how? why?</i>
10:05–11:00	Your communities	<i>brief description of community where organisations work</i>
11:00–11:15	Two stories	<i>Diamantina Shire (Qld) Coastal CTS (NSW)</i>
<i>Morning Tea 11:15–11:35</i>		
Exploring approaches, Adam		
11:35–11:55	Thinking about the work you do in your communities (beyond tenancy/asset management) What is it you are trying to achieve? What are some of your successes so far? What surprised you?	<i>in a few words... eliciting stories/approaches eliciting stories/approaches</i>
11:55–12:30	What steps did you take/go through? What things really made a difference? What one thing stands out as important?	<i>emphasising that there will be different approaches eliciting elements of the approach</i>
12:30–1:00	How did you work with other parts of the community? Which parts or who? How did the relationship help you? How did it help them?	<i>mobilising community strengths and resources identifying community priorities lead agency</i>
<i>Lunch 1:00–1:45</i>		
Exploring approaches (continued)		
1:45–1:48	Quick post-lunch exercise	
1:48–2:00	In your experience, how do you work in communities that are falling apart/have tensions? Are they able to come back together? What in your work has assisted this? What has been your organisation's contribution?	<i>stabilising community fragmentation preventing exclusion/facilitating participation incubators?</i>
2:00–2:15	'Social mix' — they say it is important — is it to you? How, or what does it mean for your tenants and local community?	<i>Building social mix</i>
Exploring impetus, requirements and barriers, Adam		
2:15–2:40	What led you to do the kind of work we've been talking about? How did it happen or come about	<i>Argyle tenants? philosophy?</i>
2:40–3:05	What did you need to make it work? Was there one thing that was crucial? What is it about being a CHO that mean you are able to work with the community?	<i>is it the background of key players/links with local govt or other services/tenant support/\$ lead agency, other lead agencies facilitating linkages social capital</i>

3:05–3:20	Were there particular problems or barriers in doing this kind of work? Did you see that you were taking risks? What were they?	<i>eliciting more about the approach risk taking</i>
3:20–3:35	How do you know you are making a difference?	<i>micro and/or macro measures social capital?</i>
<i>Afternoon Tea 3:35–4:00</i>		
Testing Framework, Adam		
4:00–4:25	Testing framework How adaptable is this to a range of CHO's? What are the keys to adaptability? Are there models that can be shared?	<i>develop at lunch How much is this work that organisations are doing as a one-off? Can it be replicated?</i>
4:25–4:30	Next steps we will be taking. Thank you!	<i>Reminder about contacts for 2nd workshop Feel free to contact secretariat</i>

Focus group 2 — Tenants & Community Partners

Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS)

Running Sheet

Introduction		
9:15–9:45	Coffee and settling in	
9:45–9:50	Name, organisation and state	<i>quick round-up</i>
9:50–10:05	Research background	<i>what? how? why?</i>
10:05–11:15	Introduce yourself to your neighbour and someone you don't know. Introduce the person you were talking with to the group.	<i>Settling in exercise all involved including researchers!</i>
<i>Morning Tea 11:15–11:35</i>		
What are important characteristics of community and home?		
11:35–12:00	Thinking about the community where you live or work, what you value about it? What do you like most? What things do you wish it had? What things make it hard?	<i>Painting a picture of the elements of a sustainable community and what might compromise it?</i>
12:00–1:00	Thinking about all the places you've lived, where have you been most and least happy? What made the difference? What impact did it have on your life?	<i>Break into two groups Workshop question for tenants Workshop, 40 minutes Report back, 10 minutes</i>
12:00–1:00	Thinking about the housing options available in the community you work in, what difference is there between them?	<i>Break into two groups Workshop question for workers Workshop, 40 minutes Report back, 10 minutes</i>
<i>Lunch 1:00–1:45</i>		
What difference does community housing make?		
1:45–2:00	People in your community	<i>Quick post-lunch exercise</i>

2:00–2:40	What is your experience of community housing organisations? What makes it different to other landlords? What ways do you see community housing getting involved in the community where you live or work?	<i>What are the characteristics of community housing? What difference does it make and how? Teasing out approaches before testing them below</i>
2:40–3:40	Talking to community housing organisations themselves, there are a number of different ways they take part in the communities they work in? Have you seen or been involved in any of these? Are there other ways you know of that community housing organisations get involved? What is distinctive about it?	<i>Approaches to test (write up in simpler language with examples from paper). establishing or developing new enterprises/programs or services community development improving the environment dealing with social issues making use of community resources</i>
<i>Afternoon Tea 3:40–4:00</i>		
Testing Framework		
4:00–4:25	Testing framework	<i>develop at lunch</i>
4:25–4:30	Next steps we will be taking. Thank you!	<i>Workshop 3 Feel free to contact secretariat</i>

Focus group 3 — Policy Makers

NSW Federation of Housing Associations

Running Sheet

Introduction, Adam		
9:15–9:30	Coffee and settling in	
9:30–9:40	Names and organisation	<i>quick round-up</i>
9:40–9:50	Research background	<i>what? how? why?</i>
Stronger Communities — Policy		
9:50–10:25	What do we mean by strengthening communities? What makes a stronger community? Are we all talking about the same thing?	<i>Participant discussion</i>
<i>Morning Tea 10:25–10:45</i>		
Stronger Communities — Policy... (continued)		
10:45–11:30	Strengthening Communities – identifying current policy objectives/ strategies/outcomes What are the outcomes of community strengthening? What policy initiatives/objectives/strategies are being implemented to achieve these outcomes?	<i>Participant discussion state by state/national</i>
Community housing initiatives and impacts — Summary, Adam		
11:30–12:00	What outcomes did providers, tenants and community stakeholders identify? Summary — the kinds of initiatives being undertaken by community housing providers	<i>Refer to section 3 of background paper Refer to sections 4 & 5 of background paper</i>

	Typology of community action	
Assess community housing capacity to build stronger communities		
12:00–12:30	Can the core business of community housing be seen as a key strategy to strengthen communities? Or is it a relatively unrelated social objective? (continued after lunch)	<i>Participant discussion</i> <i>Scale or organisations</i> <i>Inward versus outward</i> <i>Sector wide or a few agencies — are eggs of community strengthening derived from core business or unique activities undertaken for external reasons?</i> <i>Why does CHO do what it does?</i>
Lunch 12:30–1.15		
Assess community housing capacity... (continued)		
1:15–1:45	Are community housing organisations lead agencies (or social entrepreneurs) in community strengthening? What is meant by the term social entrepreneurs?	<i>Participant discussion</i> <i>See points above</i>
Mapping community housing initiatives with policy outcomes		
1:45–2:15	In what ways do current community housing initiatives reflect policy objectives and outcomes? What is the place of housing in current policy thinking about measures to build stronger communities? Where are the gaps and opportunities?	<i>Participant discussion</i> <i>Have policy makers recognised the role of community housing in community building? Or is it perceived simply as a service to particular tenants? Is there a place for community housing in the stronger families and communities strategy — FaCS? In strengthening communities strategy — Ursula?</i> <i>Welfare reform</i>
Exploring policy approaches		
2:15–3:15	Are the potential contributions to these outcomes by community providers sufficient to warrant policy attention? What policy measures could enhance community housing capacity or overcome some current barriers? (eg. housing plus) Could/would government's resource initiatives like housing plus? Would focusing on the strengthening communities aspects of community housing assist in getting your policy objectives up?	<i>Participant discussion</i> <i>Actual versus potential</i> <i>Additional special funds</i> <i>Targeted access to existing funds</i> <i>Incorporate principles within existing community housing programs</i> <i>Broader investment in initiatives/ development tools.</i> <i>Develop key agencies</i>
Afternoon Tea 3:15–3:35		
Summing up & closing, Adam		
3:35–3:45	Sum up discussions	
3:45–4:00	Next steps we will be taking. Thank you!	<i>Feel free to contact secretariat</i>

APPENDIX C BACKGROUND PAPERS: HOW DOES COMMUNITY HOUSING HELP STRENGTHEN COMMUNITIES?

3.6 Workshop 1 — Providers

Focus Group 2 — Tenants and Community Members

The following documents, produced by the research team, provided background information and a context for the workshop discussions for this project.

HOW DOES COMMUNITY HOUSING HELP STRENGTHEN COMMUNITIES?

AHURI research project background paper

Workshop 1 — Providers

National Community Housing Forum
For the University of Sydney AHURI Research Centre

November 2000



National Community Housing Forum
Room 626, 3 Smail Street
Ultimo NSW 2007
Ph: (02) 9211 0422 Fx: (02) 9211 3735
email: nchf@nchf.org.au web: www.nchf.org.au

INTRODUCTION

The research project

This workshop is the first in a series of three being undertaken by the National Community Housing Forum (NCHF) in association with the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) Sydney University Centre.

The project as a whole is intended to understand what specific contribution community housing management can make to building more sustainable communities, and whether government can usefully support and build on these strengths.

This first workshop is made up of providers. It is to try to understand in some detail, precisely what providers can do to play a role in strengthening their communities, what are the conditions under which this takes place most effectively, what are the differences in approaches between providers and why, and what opportunities or barriers there are to working in this way.

The second workshop is largely aimed at finding out what difference working in this way really makes to tenants and communities. The second workshop will ask tenants and other community stakeholders to consider the approaches that have been identified through the first workshop. Finally, the third workshop will ask mainly government policy makers what the findings of the first two workshops suggests about whether specific policies should be developed to build on the role of community managers in strengthening communities and to support them.

This paper has been prepared to provide participants in the first workshop with some background information about two things:

- what problems governments are trying to solve when they talk about ‘strengthening communities’ — sometimes these will be the same things providers are trying to tackle, but sometimes not; either way we need to know what we are talking about;
- some preliminary ideas about the kinds of things that providers might be doing that help build stronger communities — we hope this will simply be something to prompt ideas about what you actually do in your organisations and communities.

The ideas in this paper are drawn from a seminar held by the NCHF in March with representatives of community housing peaks government administrators and researchers. It was to explore what is going on with the recent public policy focus on strengthening communities and, particularly, what sort of opportunity this provided to community housing.

Argyle — One example of community housing strengthening communities

In the 1970s Campbelltown (south west Sydney) was being developed as a satellite city. Five housing estates were built with between 1,000 and 2,000 properties in each. Claymore was the last to be built in 1977. Ultimately industry and transport did not come to the area and it became social housing with concentrations of unemployment, crime and tenant dissatisfaction coupled with low levels of social infrastructure and support. By 1995 it had reached crisis point. Proctor Way, in Claymore, was being called the worst street in the worst suburb in NSW. There was an average of 2 police incidents every day (that is, 60 per month), 25 of the 86 properties were vacant and there was a series of house fires. In 1995, five people died in one of the house fires and focussed public and media attention on the area.

Argyle Community Housing were approached by the NSW Department of Housing and asked to manage 25 properties in Proctor Way for 6 months. They are still there. After the first step of moving their office into the street, Argyle planned a morning tea to discuss ideas for the community. Two people came to the meeting. Argyle's next approach was to put a BBQ in the middle of the street — unannounced — and start cooking sausages and onions. Eventually a crowd of 30 or 40 people gathered and they knew what they wanted to do on the street: fix the street lights, get rid of graffiti, clean up the rubbish. The first 'community building' activity was another BBQ and street clean-up. Seventeen and a half tonnes of rubbish was removed that day.

Argyle's strategies are based on building partnerships, particularly with the tenants. Tenants play a role in decision-making and participate on the Association's board. Tenants undertake street patrols and have developed the public reserve (which had previously been a dumping ground) into a community garden. There has been an increase in community co-operation, integrated services are now available, tenants have also successfully lobbied the local bus company to change its route and they set up a loan scheme for purchase of white goods. There have been no police incidents in two years, there are no arrears and a 2-year waiting list.

— Brian Murnane, Executive Director of Argyle Community Housing, opening the seminar discussion in March (Melbourne) with an overview of the association's work in Claymore, South West Sydney.

What do we mean by 'sustainable communities'?

This project is responding to a new focus on community in public policy today on stronger or sustainable communities. For instance, the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services has developed a 'stronger communities' strategy, state housing departments aim for 'community renewal', research is identifying 'communities of opportunity and vulnerability', the Blair government in the UK is tackling 'social exclusion' and Prime Minister John Howard advocates a 'social coalition'.

On the face of it, this could lead to increased support for models of service delivery that also focus on community — and potentially for community housing. At the same time, we should accept that this won't cover all the ways that community housing providers talk about 'community'. But for the moment, our interest is in the problems and challenges that government and providers might share.

What is behind the new policy focus on communities?

The starting point is the recognition that the growing polarisation of our society — both geographic and in terms of social exclusion — is not sustainable. Partly this is because of the political backlash it is creating. But there is also a renewed recognition that in the medium term social cohesion underpins economic growth.

At the same time governments are beginning to accept that we must find solutions for sharply increasing number of people who find themselves excluded from their communities. This has led to recognition that, at the local level, engaging individuals and communities to drive solutions is better than just relying on a government solution. But it also seems to recognise that government must help achieve individual and community responsibility by supporting social capital and other social infrastructure.

The new public policies seem to be about two or three different issues, which may lead to different priorities or emphases. It will be useful to see whether community housing fits with all or some of them.

The first is primarily concerned to build 'stronger communities' — communities or regions that can withstand the impacts of economic or demographic change. The second is mainly concerned with creating the kinds of communities that make it possible for individuals to participate in economic or community life. In fact, any successful approach to community building will involve both, but will have a significantly different emphasis depending on which issue is seen as most important. One current policy focus brings these two concerns together strongly. This is what is usually described as 'community renewal' or more pointedly, 'estate renewal or regeneration'. It may be useful to briefly consider each one.

Stronger communities

Three things seem to have driven geographical polarisation — rapid technological change in production and products, far more openness to a globalised market/economy and less localised decision making through new corporate structures. An interest in building stronger communities is likely to be concerned about building the capacity of a community to respond to such external economic shocks. The aim is to avoid the kind of decline experienced in many rural towns or in specific regions.

The kind of issues that are seen as important are likely to focus on three main areas: economic development, the retention or replacement of services and infrastructure, the maintenance of opportunities for individuals — particularly younger people and families — to fulfil their aspirations within the community.

Strategies then are likely to be focused on identifying new enterprises; creating new partnerships with investors, entrepreneurs, spheres of government or sections of the community that had not previously combined efforts; building the local skills base to respond to new opportunities; and finding new ways to maintain necessary services and amenities — such as community banks. These approaches can range from 'traditional' economic development approaches, to 'local economic development', to 'integrated community and economic development'.

Sustaining social and economic participation

Not all communities will be identified as communities (or regions) of vulnerability or excluded communities. Despite this, many people may be excluded from social and economic participation. So what is needed in communities to create the conditions for such participation, beyond building a stronger economy described above? This is the sort of question raised by the recent Commonwealth Government Welfare Review.

The strategies here tend to be more complex. They include:

- removing individual or family barriers to participation by meeting participation costs, removing 'poverty traps' and ensuring that other family priorities are met;
- providing access to services that support participation, such as child care, transport, or alternate care;
- the continual development of relevant skills — this includes formal education, further training, work experience, and re-training as well as informal training in family and community activities;

- building community networks, which provide information about job opportunities, opportunities for voluntary activity or knowledge of where various forms of support can be found;
- facilitating the capacity to participate — trust that involvement will not be rejected or exploited, understanding of what is involved, confidence, and wide range of informal skills — largely developed within community and family networks.
- Ensuring a secure community that is not overwhelmed by physical risks, health risks, social risks such as drugs and crime. Ultimately this will mean building community responsibility, new partnerships with other agencies ultimately leading to more formal citizen participation.

In many communities, these elements are being lost or some groups are excluded from them because of specific barriers. But some communities lack almost all of these elements. These are special kinds of 'vulnerable communities' — what we might call 'excluded communities'. This is what has given rise to specific policies of 'community renewal' .

Community renewal in excluded communities

Quite apart from the disadvantages experienced by economically vulnerable regions, the kind of social exclusion that is characterised by multiple disadvantage is now very often concentrated geographically — actual spatial exclusion, or the creation of so-called 'ghettos'.

Sometimes the patterns of disadvantage can be sufficient to become self-perpetuating creating a spiral of exclusion — often linked to access to affordable housing. In the other cases, specific trends, such as in-migration of a vulnerable group — retired caravan park dwellers on the north coast, with declining incomes and increased support needs — might create new demand on social and infrastructure that are not planned for. A more extreme example is the effect of the displacement of Aboriginal people, including the creation of town camps. Here cultural dislocation plays a major part. This is also true of other cultures where refugee or migrant communities may be cut off from their cultural supports. Finally, there is the deliberate policy of congregating multiply disadvantaged households in a neighbourhood through tightly targeting public housing. The history of public housing estates often combines both the story of economic decline and the policy of creating concentrations of disadvantage.

However, it is important to note that disadvantage alone is not a recipe for exclusion. Many working class communities or pre-war urban slums experienced severe economic disadvantage but maintained strong social capital, which sustained and strengthened the community. It is also important to resist the temptation to assume that the issues of social exclusion are only identified with public housing estates or declining rural towns and regions or population groups like sole parents.

Where does social capital fit in?

Increasingly two less tangible elements are also being seen as essential. These are leadership and trust — elements of what is now being called social capital.

The first of these is essential to replace patterns of decision making which have been entrenched under previous economic and social conditions — to form new alliances and to involve the generations that might be most at risk of being lost in a declining community.

Trust is even less tangible, even though it is clear why it is needed. Why would families stay in apparently declining communities unless they can trust that decision makers and the institutions through which they work will be able to create new opportunities? Why would new partnerships be formed if the community itself has no faith in the capacity of the entrepreneurs to make ventures work? Why would families invest in homes or small service business if they can have little confidence in the future value of these investments. Why would people work together to create new community services unless they have confidence in each other? The recent Tasmanian Health Communities Survey shows a strong relationship between the level of trust people have in other people and institutions and their sense of well-being and quality of life. (DHHS 1999)

Community development

Traditional community development is often closely linked to building social capital. At its best it works on two fronts. It builds active citizenship by engaging with the community to identify both community needs and the community resources to meet them. In doing this, it may work to build specific forms of what social capital theorists call 'the commons' a pooled community resource owned by no-one, used by all. Community gardens are an example of this kind of resource. But most community development also acts to involve the community in advocacy to seek external resources to provide needed services and government responses. It also aims to give them some role in or control over the service delivery.

Both social capital building and community development can be important to building stronger communities, community renewal in excluded communities, and building the conditions for social and economic participation.

From a social housing provider's point of view, the questions of strengthening or sustaining communities may not be the main concern. Rather they are concerned to find out what works to help their tenants sustain their tenancies. But this can quickly lead to a fully blown community development approach.

So which of these three public policy priorities — strengthening communities to withstand economic change, supporting those aspects of communities that sustain social and economic participation or renewing excluded communities — might involve housing providers in a significant way?

WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES AND HOUSING?

What does housing mean to individuals and communities?

Affordable, adequate and secure housing is fundamental to the ability to invest part of your self — both your time and effort — in a local community.

This is one reason why appropriate housing is an effective social investment. If housing bridges both immediate personal needs and the need for community identity, people will often start to look beyond the house, to the street and the neighbourhood. This trend was observed in Claymore where for instance the community has taken the initiative to lobby the local bus company to change its bus route to include their streets. Three years before, none would have felt confident about doing so.

Of course, not everyone will have the same vision for a community. In the City of Port Phillip, it has taken the ongoing and active commitment of Council to resist the pressures associated with gentrification and to maintain a social mix through the provision of affordable housing.

But, whether it is in these contests over the shape of a community, or the most basic attempts for isolated individuals to re-establish social ties, or excluded communities attempts to get access to basic services, or a young person or older person planning their next steps, housing is at the heart of the way we participate in our community.

Does community housing make a particular difference to strengthening communities?

The starting point for considering what community managed housing contributes to building stronger communities is to recognise that the core business of community housing is housing management per se. Community housing managers do not usually manage housing in order to strengthen the communities. Rather, they may add community development activities if it helps support their tenants or sustain their tenancies.

However, community housing management may seek to achieve a number of layers of additional outcomes as part of their housing management. They may respond to their tenant's housing needs by providing a more responsive and flexible approach to appropriate allocations (especially location and dwelling type), rent management, design and maintenance. They may also ensure that external supports are available to ensure that tenancies and independence are sustained. Both of these are what Jeff Lyons has identified as 'housing service delivery' ('Community making — what it is we do', CHFV News September 1999).

Then there is also what he calls 'community making'. This focuses on the communities that form between tenants, and workers, support workers and interest groups. As much as anything, it is the outcome of a way of working as a housing manager. This is particularly important where tenants live or work together — eg. in rooming houses, in coops, and is especially important for people who would otherwise be isolated. More broadly, it may be a characteristic of community management.

But community housing also explicitly engages with a wider, usually local, community. Some organisations arise as a result of community development work, where a need for a housing — say for older people — is identified and responded to by a local community. In some cases the housing response is driven by a general community desire — perhaps expressed through local government — to maintain diversity. This commitment to social mix as can be seen clearly in the City of Port Phillip. The Council, in partnership with St Kilda Housing Association is developing social housing and maintaining the diversity of that area of Melbourne.

A key strength of community housing is that it is part and parcel of the community where it works which means that providers can tap into the local social capital. Community housing can also facilitate links to support services. For instance, in the square mile of Adelaide City, 20% of housing is social housing. The impacts of targeting community housing mean that the

need for other support services is increasing and providers are having to develop more sophisticated links.

Less frequently, community managers have to face the wider disadvantage of the communities in which they work, in order to sustain their tenants or indeed their business. This could be true of small rural communities or in large housing estates. Often, the starting point for building more effective citizenship generally, occurs within the housing organisation itself, particularly building on the experiences of tenant participation and tenant initiatives. Community housing can be an incubator for sustainable communities.

In some communities housing managers can be the lead agency for identifying and brokering responses to very wide community needs. This is probably clearest in many indigenous communities. Infrastructure, health, CDEP and many others services may focus on the housing organisation.

Another advantage of community housing is that, being small, it can trial new approaches to housing management. In NSW a number of these are being picked up the local Department of Housing office which is in turn asking the Association to trial their ideas. For instance the Department has established three intensive management models based on community housing.

In summary, the key contributions of community housing to sustainable communities can be: responsiveness to local needs and conditions, it can also deal with local complexities; community housing has the commitment to local communities which enables it to tap into the social capital and maintain social mix and diversity; and community housing is based on tenant participation and control.

What does community housing contribute to social and economic participation?

Feedback from community housing tenants suggests that once you have stability and security of tenure, confidence increases, as does the scope to develop skills and incentive to participate in the community. For instance, a Filipino co-operative in NSW has started cleaning the local park. Another example, from SA, is a group of young community housing tenants who have started a clothing co-op and are now seeking grants on behalf of the community housing organisation.

This aspect of community housing is an important link into another key government policy agenda — the reform of our welfare system. The final report of the independent Reference Group on Welfare Reform chaired by Patrick McClure, Participation Support for a More Equitable Society, mentions a number of the roles for housing referred to here.

Firstly, it recognises that housing affordability has a profound impact on whether low income households have ready access to labour markets. Overcoming this barrier is a significant precondition to accessing a welfare system that is focused on increasing participation. It also recognises that social housing rent structures create a poverty trap for households re-entering the labour market. It recognises that social housing can play a role in establishing the social partnerships that help build socially and economically viable communities and regions. Finally, it recognises in passing, the individual capacity building that participatory social housing management can provide.

HOW DO COMMUNITY HOUSING MANAGERS HELP BUILD SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES?

Ways of working

The following is a preliminary list of some ways of working used by community housing managers (and possibly particular strengths of community managers) that seem to be successful in strengthening communities. A list of the main kinds of activities funded in the UK under the Housing Plus program is also included as a check to see whether Australian approaches are similar to those in the UK.

Facilitating individual participation

- Individual tenants form collective activities — eg neighbourhood watch
- Participation in housing organisations provide a pathway to other participation — eg co-ops
- The organisation supports over a long time period — ie stays with people as they become more empowered — refugee members formed a clothing co-op — UK investment in youth leadership.

Identify the priorities for the community itself

- The starting point is to ask people and communities what they want.
- Have the capacity to deliver — it is important to be mindful of the intensity of effort, infrastructure and resources required to deliver. The resources need to be there when the community is asked what they want?
- Further, these sorts of community development processes need to be supported by broader government infrastructure.

Mobilising community resources

- Can be a lead agent
- Capacity to mobilise community attitudes
- Capacity to facilitate community linkages
- Length of connection to community enables tapping into social capital history.

Stabilising community fragmentation

- Can be the 'incubator' for sustainable communities
- Individual projects — Claymore — can form sustainable micro communities — but how to lead onto macro-communities
- Prevention of excluded communities — or lack of social mix — by partnerships with local government planning.

Building social mix

- This is often presented as a requirement for stronger communities. However, this needs to be unpacked.
- Allocations policies that do not exacerbate disadvantage and which select for groups who chose to live in the same community are important.
- However, some asset solutions, ie mix of home owners and social housing, may simply mean shifting the problem on. An asset solution to urban regeneration is not sufficient.

What systematic strengths can be built on and how?

Using housing providers as a lead agent

- Social housing managers have an impact on all the aspects of a tenant's life linked to their home. As a result, they are often the first point of call for tenants as needs arise. This is more likely the more responsive and locally managed an organisation is.
- The effectiveness within which tenants manage their social and economic participation directly impacts on the viability of the housing organisation. Managers, therefore have a direct interest in improving participation and social cohesion.
- Localised housing management — particularly in a community organisation — is already engaged with the local issues.
- Because of all these, it is also a cost effective lead agency.

Risk taking

- Many local community organisations are 'social entrepreneurs'. That is, they are innovative and willing to take risks to achieve outcomes for their communities. This is true of many community housing organisations — something that is hard for public housing or private investors or landlords to do
- Then be willing to learn from mistakes
- Capacity to learn from failure — public housing failures or CH failures — as they don't have the lasting consequences of public housing failures.

Spreading models

- Further development can benefit from the fact that in specific ways much is already being done by community housing organisations.
- There is an opportunity to build on this by identifying, researching and measuring outcomes being achieved in these organisations.
- At the same time, there are already a number of sector structures for identifying and sharing best practice.

Community management does not only mean NGO management (community housing)

- Community housing is providing models that can be taken on by public housing managers — though tenant estate management, though new local allocations policies and the like.
- Moreover, through examples like the Claymore, it is now clear that partnerships with public estate managers are crucial for NGO management to succeed in estates (or in most communities where both forms of management exist) and spread benefits.

Housing Plus — paying for community development

- However, it is clear that while community building is essential for the viability of most social housing organisations, it can be undercut by the demands of financial viability.
- In the UK, the establishment of Housing Plus drove a community development focus for housing associations because it provided funding for additional activities
- Rather than picking winners, it had broad objectives and an open application — however, the effectiveness of the activities funded have been evaluated.
- Importantly, one initiative led to another.
- Judging from the available literature on Housing Plus, the types of activities Registered Social Landlords are undertaking under this banner can be broadly grouped as:

- increased tenant participation;
- building community cohesiveness;
- crime prevention;
- developing community facilities/social infrastructure;
- training and employment;
- economic development.

(Further discussion of Housing Plus and the Value-Added program in the UK is provided as an appendix).

Conclusions and future work

The new policy interest in focusing on communities has a broad sweep — building more resilient communities (both economically and socially), renewing excluded communities, and creating the community supports needed for participation. Many community housing organisations have a strong investment in these outcomes and some are key players in communities seeking to achieve them.

It would be a mistake to imagine that all community housing organisations should try to take on community development in this way — although most will have laid a foundation by reducing isolation and increasing participation within their own organisations. But some may find the need or the opportunity to go further. In this case, it will be helpful if we can build a better understanding of strengths they can build on or strategies they can try.

If governments are trying to assist in strengthening communities and participation, they too should be looking at ways that they can support housing associations to work as partners or lead agents in sustaining communities. A first step may be to understand in more detail the ways of working discussed above, what opportunities and barriers there are, and what governments can do to help community organisations to achieve them.

The changes needed may go well beyond local activities by organisations and include changes to the way that resources are currently delivered to communities. Breaking the current ‘silos’ is a priority to allow resources to be more effectively directed.

The work of indigenous organisations may provide a guide. The key lesson is that health, housing and infrastructure must be linked— especially in remote communities. This particularly applies to integrating programs from different spheres of government to meet the community’s economic and social needs as is the case with CDEP. It also suggests that ATSIC should be involved in any research agenda in this area.

While it is clear that community housing plays a crucial role in stabilising and reintegrating often vulnerable households, and it may act to build citizenship and wider participation, there is much more to explore. How likely is it that housing managers will play a role in economic sustainability — or employment creation? Given the current policy concerns, it may be timely to explore all these questions.

HOW DOES COMMUNITY HOUSING HELP STRENGTHEN COMMUNITIES?

AHURI research project background paper

Focus group 2 — Tenants and community members

National Community Housing Forum
For the University of Sydney AHURI Research Centre

December 2000



National Community Housing Forum
Room 626, 3 Smail Street
Ultimo NSW 2007
Ph: (02) 9211 0422 Fx: (02) 9211 3735
email: nchf@nchf.org.au web: www.nchf.org.au

INTRODUCTION

There has been considerable recent interest in 'strengthening communities' from government, including the Commonwealth, state and local government. We also know that community housing organisations have a keen interest in the communities they work in. This raises the question of how the work of community housing organisations fits in with current policy interests. There is also an opportunity to look at what drives community housing organisations, what approaches they take and who they work with.

The project

The National Community Housing Forum and Sydney University are jointly undertaking a research project on the role community housing organisations play in sustainable communities. The project is funded by the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute.

The research approach is to conduct a series of three linked workshops with community housing providers, tenants, community partners and policy makers to:

- build a framework of the ways community management can strengthen communities;
- describe initiatives, the successes and barriers experienced by providers;
- evaluate the impacts on tenants and community partners; and
- examine how this work applies to current policy developments.

The workshops

The first of the three workshops was held in Sydney on Tuesday, 21st November and attended by community housing providers from five states and territories. They work in a range of communities. Some were geographically defined (a town in rural NSW, an inner-city suburb of Melbourne or a public housing estate) or were a community with shared interests or concerns (like the community of people living with HIV/AIDS in Victoria or Indigenous peoples in Brisbane). The communities were also encapsulated by the pastoral interests of a church or the services offered by a local neighbourhood centre.

Workshop two brings together tenants and community partners of the community housing organisations involved in the first workshop. The workshop is being held in Sydney on Friday, 15th December.

Why we want to talk with tenants and community partners

It is crucial that the research get the views of tenants as they have first-hand experience of the work community housing organisations do in their local communities, and the impact it has both on them personally and the local area.

Community housing organisations have commented on how important other community and government organisations are to achieving their goals. This includes local Councils, support services, community development workers and, less directly but equally important, police, schools and service clubs. These organisations have a shared interest in the strength of the communities in which community housing organisations operate and often work in partnership with them.

What's in this paper?

This background paper for Workshop Two describes the:

- objectives of community housing organisations that are active in their local communities (section 2);
- the varying approaches they take to their work (section 3);
- the key partners in the community (section 4).

The workshop on Friday, 15th December will be a chance to discuss your views on community housing, the kind of work it does in local communities, what impact it might have on you as a tenant or an organisation working with community housing.

Some questions to think about:

- What is the local community that you live or work in like?

**Case study — What community housing has meant in one community:
Diamantina Shire Community Housing Program**

Diamantina Shire covers 95,000 square kilometres in western Queensland. The two main towns are Birdsville and Bedourie. In the early 1990s they had respective populations of 60 and 80 people and were suffering chronic housing shortages. Generally, housing was only available to people employed by the Council or state government. Other residents lived in overcrowded conditions in caravans and various demountable structures.

The housing shortage created a number of problems. Even though there were employment opportunities available in the area, Council and businesses could not employ new staff as there was nowhere for them to live. The high cost of construction and the absence of a property market made it virtually impossible for any private individual to get finance to construct their own dwelling.

Council was successful in getting funding through the Queensland community housing program for three projects over three years. These projects have provided good quality, low maintenance housing, which has been designed to cope with the harsh climate. It has had a positive effect on communities in a number of ways.

The government investment was heartening and improved the morale of the community significantly.

Community housing has provided opportunities for young people who would have previously left town because of the lack of housing. They have been able to take up employment within the community and remain with family and friends.

The establishment of accommodation specifically for the aged has meant the community has been able to retain some of the older generation who would have been forced, upon retirement, to leave the area to find suitable accommodation.

The positive benefits brought about having both older and younger generations remain has really added to the stability and normality of these communities.

The availability of housing has also facilitated a higher level of population growth, which is currently standing in excess of 6% per annum. This extra population has filled an existing need for employees both in Council and private enterprise. Population growth has also made it viable for existing businesses to expand and provide a better or a wider range of services. There have also been a number of new small businesses established.

These few points are examples of the positive effects of community housing projects in the Diamantina Shire. They have been the catalyst for a dramatic turnaround in the outlook of the residents as well as in the vitality of the communities.

The investment in community housing has been a major factor in securing the future of and continued growth of these communities.

— Scott Mead, Chief Executive Officer, Diamantina Shire Council, Bedourie, Queensland

WHAT ARE THE OBJECTIVES OF COMMUNITY HOUSING ORGANISATIONS THAT ARE ACTIVE IN THEIR LOCAL COMMUNITIES?

The task of providing secure, affordable and appropriate accommodation often means that community housing organisations are dealing with a whole range of social and community issues, not just bricks and mortar. Some organisations take up this challenge quite deliberately and directly. For others, community issues get picked up through their housing work.

This section describes some of the reasons community housing organisations are active in their local communities. They can be summarised as:

- meeting unmet housing need with secure, affordable and appropriate housing
- sustaining tenancies
- supporting participation
- creating and maintaining communities
- assisting people to settle in an area (to address community decline)
- building trust and respect so that communities are safe and liveable.

Meeting unmet housing need

Addressing unmet housing need is a central concern of community housing organisations. Often this involves being aware of emerging trends in the community and developing responses that are proactive and in many cases, preventative. Some organisations use formal processes like community consultation to stay on top of what is happening locally, others use their networks or are able to identify need simply by virtue of having a long history in an area.

For instance, the Sunshine Coast of Queensland is the fifth fastest growing area in Australia. This has created something of a population boom that is putting pressure on limited community services and a tightening housing market. Much of the work being created is low paid and casual, often in the tourism industry. As a result, poorer people are moving inland from the coast, into areas with fewer services and job opportunities. The Sunshine Coast Regional Housing Council has a keen interest in the way the new developments are effecting the local housing market, community services, the jobs market and the people being forced to move on by rising costs.

Sustaining tenancies and supporting tenants

Another objective of community housing organisations is sustaining tenancies. While this is a core part of their business it has positive effects for both the tenants and the local community. Community management is characterised by a local and responsive approach, which promotes a rapport with tenants. Community housing organisations can also facilitate links to support and other services necessary for tenants maintain their housing (for example, other social services or a young mothers' group within the tenant community).

Supporting participation

The focus of community housing on tenant participation means tenants can have a say about how their housing is managed. For some tenants this may mean sitting on committees or the Board, or working together to achieve a common goal (for instance, to put a security gate on a yard so children can play or lobbying the local bus company to include their street on a route to the shopping centre).

Secure housing can also help facilitate participation in the community. For instance, a parent may be able to have visits from their children once they have secured housing, or it

may mean they have a base from which to look for work. A number of organisations have had their tenants run for local Council. Though, housing managers also point out that even if a tenant chooses not to be involved in the running of organisation, the feeling of ownership is still very important as is the social contact it might provide (particularly in Rooming Houses).

Creating and maintaining communities

Some community housing organisations arose from the desire to create or maintain a community in a particular place. In St Kilda (inner-city Melbourne) gentrification was putting increasing pressure on the housing market. A 'consortium' of community organisations mobilised the community (using door-knocks) and lobbied Council to make sure people who had a long history in the community were not forced to move because of rising costs. Twenty years later, this grass-roots action has resulted in a strong Council commitment to community housing and a close working relationship with the St Kilda Housing Association.

Community housing organisations can also have an influence on community cohesion. One of their main tools is allocations. For instance, community housing organisations have the flexibility to house people with children near a school or allow them to say no to a property that is near a violent ex-partner.

Assisting people to settle in an area (to address community decline)

The case study from Diamantina Shire illustrates how community housing can assist people to settle in an area that they may have been otherwise forced to leave. The experience in Birdsville and Beadourie shows that meeting housing need can mean new businesses are established, an increase in the number of jobs available, with people, particularly young people, available to take up these opportunities which has a positive effect on the local community and its economic prospects.

Building mutual trust and respect

Community housing organisations also have an interest in building mutual trust and respect in the communities where they work. Often this can be done simply through morning teas at the local school, street BBQ's and car-pooling. Some organisations attend body corporate meetings in buildings where their tenants are housed to help build understanding about social housing. Other organisations have an explicit advocacy function, like the AIDS Housing Action Group in Victoria which also works to challenge the stigma and discrimination experienced by people living with HIV/AIDS.

Some questions to think about:

- How are you involved with the local community you live or work in, if you are involved at all?
- Is the community housing organisation you are involved with active in the local community?
- What are some of the reasons you think the community housing organisation gets involved in the local community, if it does?

WHAT ARE THE APPROACHES COMMUNITY HOUSING ORGANISATIONS TAKE TO SUSTAINING COMMUNITIES?

Community housing providers take varied approaches to working in their communities, often due to the diversity of the communities themselves however, they can be grouped as follows:

- establishing new enterprises/programs
- developing and maintaining services
- community development
- improving the environment
- dealing with social issues
- making use of community resources
- provision of secure, affordable and appropriate housing.

Establishing new enterprises/programs

Some community housing organisations have taken the approach of contributing to their communities by establishing new enterprises and programs. The Combined Housing Organisation (CHO) is a clear example. CHO is a network of Indigenous housing co-operatives in the south-east corner of Brisbane. As well as providing housing, the network is involved in developing employment, education, training and juvenile justice programs. CHO also manages nursing homes, caravan parks and a sports centre. They are also exploring ways of promoting home ownership. CHO describe it as 'giving tools to the community.'

Developing and maintaining services

Social services are a crucial part of any community. Some community housing organisations are actively involved in making sure there is an adequate level of services available. For instance, Argyle Community Housing Association is developing a service centre on the Claymore public housing estate which will include Centrelink, the police and a JP.

St Kilda Housing Association, through their close association with the community and the City of Port Phillip Council, have been able to collectively ensure that there is diversity in the small businesses in the area. That is so people can have the choice of shoe repair or purchase for instance, depending on their priorities and level of income.

Community development

Other organisations facilitate initiatives identified by the local community. Examples include street clean-ups, garden competitions (sponsored by the local nursery), setting up a neighbourhood watch program or a fruit and vegetable co-op.

Community housing organisations can also support a community around common interests. For instance, the Hinchinbrook community in far north Queensland lobbied its local politicians when threatened with the loss of its Family Support Service. In the end they were successful in getting the Attorney General to come along to a community meeting to discuss the decision. The local community housing organisation, along with the neighbourhood centre where it is based, supported this campaign.

Improving the environment

Community housing organisations are concerned with the safety and amenity of the environment where their tenants live (and indeed where they work). As a consequence, they are often involved in finding ways of dealing with the effects of gambling, violence and drugs. Havelock Housing Association (Turner, ACT) is working with the community police to develop a security strategy that can deal with the local drug trade which moves to the some of its premises following any sweep through the city centre. Havelock is also looking to involve local businesses in this initiative to ensure a co-operative approach.

When Argyle Community Housing first took over the management of Proctor Way in the Claymore housing estate one of the most immediate issues confronting them was the two to three police call-outs a day and the almost paralysing levels of community fear.

Dealing with social issues

Related to improving the environment is the inextricable relationship community housing organisations have with social issues such as drugs and violence. Organisations find they are also dealing more and more with the effects of gambling both with their tenants (who may need an arrears plan for their rent) and in the local community (through discussions with service clubs and schools). Other organisations take an advocacy approach. It has already been mentioned that the AIDS Housing Action Group works to challenge the stigma surrounding people living with HIV/AIDS. The Combined Housing Organisation is delivering self-determination for Indigenous peoples. Other organisations do their work as part of a broader church mission.

This interest in social issues comes not just from direct involvement in communities but also a strong social justice ethos that includes a commitment to a 'tolerant, broad-minded and representative community.'

Making use of community resources

As described in Section Two above, community housing organisations are often very aware of the emerging trends in their communities as they work to address unmet housing need. They are equally aware of the opportunities and resources that are available in the community. For instance, in Parkes-Forbes (inland NSW) the local community housing organisation is seeking to take over management of disused military accommodation to address a growing youth homelessness problem in the area.

Provision of secure, affordable and appropriate housing

Through their core housing business, organisations are contributing to sustainable communities. This is often a result of sustaining tenancies through responsive and localised management. For instance, community housing managers can negotiate catch-up plans on rent for tenants who are having difficulties managing their money. They can manage housing allocations to best suit the needs of a young person, or organise to have a house adapted for an older person or someone with a disability. Providing links to support services is another common way of assisting tenant within the community and thereby contributing to it.

Some questions to think about:

- What activities or projects have you been involved with, with your community housing organisation?
- Why did you get involved?
- Did it make any difference to the way you live your life?
- Do you think it made any difference in the community where you live or work?

WHO ARE THE COMMUNITY PARTNERS?

There are quite a number of community and government organisations who have a shared interest in the areas where community housing organisations work. It is often the partnerships with these organisations that mean community housing can be so effective.

One of the most important partners is local government, described by some community housing organisations as an 'absolute must'. For instance, the City of Port Phillip is instrumental in the work of the St Kilda Housing Association in Melbourne. For some community housing organisations Council members or officers are involved at the Board level (for instance, Parkes Forbes Community Tenancy Scheme in rural NSW and the Multi-Agency Community Housing Association in inner-city Adelaide).

Councils can also assist community housing organisations by waiving rates on their properties. For other organisations the importance of Council is in the role they play in the shared community. This can be as simple as providing services like hard rubbish collection bearing in mind that Argyle Community Housing collected 17.5 tonnes of rubbish in its first street clean-up day in the Claymore public housing estate.

Councils also have a crucial role in managing competing pressures and interests within a community. The instruments of local government, like its planning processes, are central to resolving issues like land use, housing density and location of services.

Other community services are also crucial as the providers of support to tenants. In some cases, these agencies are very involved with the community housing organisation. For instance, the Multi-Agency Community Housing Association (MACHA) in Adelaide was established following the collaboration of inner-city support services. In other cases, community housing might be managed through a local neighbourhood centres (as in Hichinbrook in far north Queensland) which enables a close working relationship with support services.

There are other groups or institutions within a local area that will share a community housing organisation's interest in sustainability including churches, schools and service clubs. The police are also an important player.

The work of other state government departments also influences the work of community housing organisations (especially housing and community services). Argyle Community Housing are setting up a joint office in Airds to work on developing a community on that public housing estate.

Organisations are also aware that partnerships with private bodies — like developers or the local Chamber of Commerce — are increasingly critical to their work.

APPENDIX D HOUSING PLUS. SUMMARY

What is Housing Plus?

The Housing Plus approach to managing and developing social housing has been promoted by the UK Housing Corporation since 1995. It is based on the objective of 'creating sustainable social housing by ensuring that it contributes positively to the community in which it is located and is developed and managed in partnership with residents and service providers.' (URBED 1998)

The Housing Corporation has described the 'philosophical basis' of the program as 'the fundamental importance of establishing effective partnerships between service providers, tenants and residents in the drive to make communities sustainable.' (cited in Lawson 1998)

What was the impetus for Housing Plus?

Housing Plus: An agenda for social landlords (1996) says there are three reasons why Housing Plus is an important component of the Housing Corporation's agenda. In summary they are:

- managing the impact of social housing development that has, in some cases, created serious social and financial problems for providers, their residents, partners, funders, support services and neighbourhoods;
- the inherent focus of social housing on 'people problems' not just bricks and mortar;
- growing social and economic polarisation and the capacity for social housing providers to be involved in responses to the resultant 'extreme need'.

On this analysis, Housing Plus was initiated both as a response to the problems created by housing development that took place without due consideration to the impact on the local area and in recognition that social housing deals with people in need and the communities in which they are located. This implies a capacity to contribute positively — the value added — to a community through the provision of sustainable social housing.

How does Housing Plus operate?

As part of its commitment to Housing Plus, the Housing Corporation decided that value added activity should have an influence on the allocation of capital resources. (URBED 1998) The 1997/98 bidding round was the first to formally consider Housing Plus as one of a number of tie break issues to decide between Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) that are equal in all other respects.

This did raise a number of issues (what is the level of commitment from organisations? how should various initiatives be compared? how can value for money be assessed?) and URBED have noted that if Housing Plus 'really is an activity over and above core housing functions, what role does it have at all in the capital allocation process'. (1998)

Despite these initial difficulties however, Housing Plus is an important attempt to recognise the contribution that social housing can make to local communities and building that value added into program funding arrangements.

The Housing Corporation has provided guidance about the way RSLs implement Housing Plus. RSLs are encouraged to apply Housing Plus principles via:

- community action plans and community based strategies
- management information systems
- social audits
- consideration of factors which affect sustainability of housing developments and communities; and
- strategic partnerships with local government and community agencies. (cited in Lawson, 1998)

What types of activities are being undertaken?

A number of evaluations (URBED 1998; Evans 1997) have attempted to categorise the range of Housing Plus activities being undertaken by RSLs.

In the 1997–98 capital bidding round, 18% of units were in bids including a Housing Plus component. In their assessment of these bids, URBED found that: 28% related to community cohesiveness, 25% to training and employment and 20% to crime. In addition, 9% of schemes indicated that additional finance was being levered in by Housing Plus. (1998)

URBED also undertook a survey of leading RSLs to gauge the most popular Housing Plus activities. The survey illustrated the definition of Housing Plus is very wide and interpreted in different ways by different RSLs. However, the main activities were grouped as:

- increased tenant participation;
- employment creation and training; and
- economic development.

While most RSLs considered their Housing Plus work to be successful, the main successes tended to be in areas that did not involve non-housing funding or venture into areas where the RSL did not have experience. Often Housing Plus activity involved investment in facilities such as shops or community centres rather than measures to address the economic and social issues. (URBED 1998)

Judging from the available literature on Housing Plus, the types of activities RSLs are doing under this banner can be broadly grouped as:

- community cohesiveness
- increased tenant participation
- community facilities/social infrastructure
- training and employment
- crime; and
- economic development.

What is the assessment of Housing Plus?

Along with trying to understand the type of Housing Plus activities RSLs are undertaking, various projects have tried to assess how successful they have been in their contribution to the sustainability of local communities.

For instance, a survey of 1,500 residents in six case study areas asked tenants to evaluate the personal and community impact of Housing Plus in the following areas: economic infrastructure, social infrastructure, crime, transport, environment and housing related improvements. The evaluation report developed some criteria for assessing the success of Housing Plus projects but concluded that they are difficult to measure. Cuts to public services and extensive social and economic problems faced by residents (and local areas) also undermined Housing Plus achievements and made it more difficult to compare the successes of different projects. (cited in Lawson, 1998)

URBED have summarised that to be effective Housing Plus activities must be based on an analysis of a wide range of issues that go into creating sustainable communities rather than a loose assortment of 'good works' bolted onto a traditional housing scheme. (1998). Achieving a strategic and systematic approach of this type is perhaps the biggest challenge, particularly for small organisations or where future funding arrangements are uncertain.

URBED summarised that if the aim of the Housing Plus approach is to create sustainable communities, then it must include a definition of what is meant by this term (and this work has taken place subsequently — see below). They concluded that the best way forward would be a benchmarking system by which Housing Plus is linked to a set of standards for creating sustainable communities set out by the Housing Corporation. (URBED 1998)

How does Housing Plus link with other policies and programs?

There has been considerable work on sustainable communities, at a whole-of-government level and by the Housing Corporation, since the introduction of Housing Plus. For instance, the recently released Neighbourhood Strategy is a whole-of-government agenda for renewing neighbourhoods and housing is one of the main vehicles for achieving the goals of the Strategy.

The Housing Corporation has also commissioned further work on sustainable communities including:

- a paper titled *Key issues for sustainable communities* (by Derek Long of the European Institute of Urban Affairs at Liverpool John Moore University)
- the development of a Sustainability Toolkit, designed for RSL staff on how to assess the sustainability of communities where social housing exists or might be developed; and
- the *Big Picture* title, which is a series of papers designed to promote and disseminate the outputs of the Corporation's Innovation and Good Practice program (including a number of papers on sustainable communities).

Building on the Housing Plus approach, RSLs and the Housing Corporation appear to be spear heading a broader commitment to understanding and promoting sustainable communities. A program like Housing Plus, which focussed on the value-added by housing providers in a local area, is inextricably tied up with larger questions of how to define and promote sustainable communities that need to be taken up across government.

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APPENDIX E WHAT DOES THE LITERATURE SAY ABOUT COMMUNITY STRENGTHENING

The term community strengthening has a long and rich history in a variety of disciplines. However, in order to address the issue of community strengthening, it is necessary to first examine the literature about community in general, in particular addressing the question, what is community. The literature review will also examine the related areas of community development, social capital and social economy/entrepreneurship.

What is community?

While concern about the quality of social structures and relationships is at least as old as recorded history, the concept of community, and sociological and economic discussions about this concept, developed in response to the industrial revolution in Europe. Numerous social and economic commentators¹² wrote about perceived shortfalls in the social structures of industrialised towns and their consequences in regard to the health and wellbeing of citizens. One commentator, Ferdinand Tönnies, (1877)¹³ developed two concepts, *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, to differentiate pre-industrial, agriculture based settlements from larger, urbanised and industrialised towns and cities.

According to Tönnies, *Gemeinschaft* refers to local areas where people know each other and where relationships are based on mutual aid and trust; *Gesellschaft* refers to urban societies where individuals experience relative anonymity and can pursue their own interests, without, however, high levels of mutual support and trust from their neighbours. In English, *Gemeinschaft* is often equated with the English concept community while *Gesellschaft* is equated with the English word society.

The English concept had a slightly different focus:

This tradition of talking about community in such a way as to restate of values of the old rule ethos has a history which goes back to Goldsmith, Crabbe and Sturt. Whereas the German communitarians tended to look a long way back to the Greek polis for their image of community, British communitarians have more often than not looked back to the village community which was beginning to be destroyed in the second half of the 18th-century, if they did not go further with William Morris and see in feudal society the appropriate image of community.¹⁴

Overtime these subtleties of meaning have merged but the term community still carries with it the overtones of the *Gemeinschaft* definition and the British yearning for assumed virtues of village life. These meanings can be seen in the liberal use of the word community in all kinds of political policy statements and public sector strategies. Partly perhaps because society is so large and partly because the word society does not carry overtones of harmony, trust, and mutuality, the preferred term is usually community and it is used ubiquitously without most people noticing that while all the values implicit in *Gemeinschaft*/village life are being evoked, what is actually being discussed is aspects of post industrial society.

Thus it has become the norm to find all kinds of public documents referring to local communities, estate communities, low income communities, ethnic communities, middle class communities and to things which, it is implied, belong to these communities: community needs, community expectations, community issues, community wishes and so on. Community building, community development and community strengthening are terms which fall well within this usage.

¹² For example: Durkheim, Emile (1964) *The Division of Labor in Society*, Free Press, NY. Mill, John Stuart, *Considerations on representative government*, Edited with an introduction Currin V. Shields, Liberal Arts Press, NY [1958].

¹³ Tönnies, Ferdinand (1877) *Community and Society (Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft)*, Charles P Loomis (trans & ed), Michigan State University Press, 1957.

¹⁴ Plant, Raymond (1974) *Community and Ideology: An essay in applied sociology*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, p27.

During the twentieth century, the meaning of the word community was debated extensively in a number of disciplines and with different emphases. ¹⁵ One writer ¹⁶ identified 94 meanings. Perhaps the most useful recent sociological definition of community was provided by Willmott ¹⁷ (1989) who noted ‘the essence of the word, as all etymological explanations show, is the idea of “having something in common”. ‘What is in common may be ‘a sense of common purpose, a capacity to come together to meet common ends or the existence of local networks available to provide help and support.

People can have a territory in common, an interest in common and/or sentiments or feelings in common. It is sentiments or feelings in common which lead to a sense of identity or common membership of an ‘attachment community’. Whereas members of interest communities may have little actual interaction, ‘attachment communities’ are based on personal social relationships and on people’s perceptions of a sense of identity, solidarity or belonging.

According to Willmott, ‘Places are more likely to be ‘attachment communities’ when the following conditions apply:

- When there has been relative population stability, and thus large proportions of people have had lengthy continuous residence in the area.
- When kin live in the area.
- When many people work in a local industry.
- When people are alike in social class and income, or share membership of a particular minority.
- When a large proportion of local people have the specific social skills, and the appropriate values, to get to know others quickly.
- When there are many locally-based organisations.
- When a place or its residents are under an external threat, particularly when this results in the creation of local campaigning organisations (though this may be a more temporary effect than the others).
- When physical layout and design encourage rather than discourage casual neighbourly meetings and a sense of separate physical identity.
- When a place is particularly isolated.’

Discussion in the social psychological literature has tended also to focus on attachments associated with place, particularly neighbourhoods. ¹⁸ An often cited article by McMillan and Chavis (1986) reviewed literature attempting to define and measure the sense of community and found ‘the recurring emphasis on neighbouring, length of residency, planned or anticipated length of residency, home ownership, and satisfaction with the community’. ¹⁹ They described a sense of community by defining four elements, namely membership or a feeling of belonging, influence or a sense of mattering, integration and fulfilment of needs and shared emotional connection — ‘the commitment and belief that members have shared and will share history common places, time together, and similar experiences’.

¹⁵ For example: Gusfield, Joseph R, (1975) *Community: A critical response*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford. Bell, Colin & Howard Newby, (1971) *Community Studies: An introduction to the sociology of the local community*, George Allen & Unwin, London. Bott, Elizabeth, (1957) *Family and Social Network*, Tavistock, London.

¹⁶ Hillery J. GA, (1955) ‘Definitions of Community: Areas of Agreement’, *Rural Sociology*, Vol. 19

¹⁷ Willmott, Peter (1989) ‘Community Initiatives: patterns and prospects’, Policy Studies Institute London.

¹⁸ Buckner, JC (1988) ‘The development of an instrument to measure neighborhood cohesion’, *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 14, 24–40. Hughey, JB & Bardo, JW (1984) The structure of community satisfaction in a southeastern American city, *Journal of Social Psychology*, 123, 91–99. Puddifoot, JE (1994) Community identity and sense of belonging in North-east England, *Journal of Social Psychology*, 134, 5, 601–608.

¹⁹ McMillan, David W & Chavis, David M (1986) Sense of Community: A definition and theory, *Journal of Community Psychology*, 14.1[6–23].

In Australia, most public sector usage of the word community reflects the idea of place-related attachments, or place related identity, sense of belonging and sense of connection. Frequently there is an implicit reference to neighbourhoods (a few streets) or at most to local suburbs or local authority area.

What is interesting is that while this usage is so pervasive, the evidence for place related attachments is dwindling. As early as 1964, Webber²⁰ noted that 'community without propinquity' was becoming increasingly common. In 1989 Wilmott wrote that:

The rise of dispersed social networks and dispersed communities of interest has meant that, to a greater extent than in the past, local attachments now constitute only one part of social life among others. Most residents look beyond their local community for many of their social relationships, often including some of those most important to them. Local ties are weaker than historically they have been, because they overlap much less often than they used to with other ties, of kinship, friendship, work, leisure and other interests.

More recently, writers exploring the impacts of the internet have questioned whether community in the *Gemeinschaft* or place related attachment sense exists much at all. There is the optimistic point of view:

In an era of interlinked digital networks, you can live in a small community while maintaining effective connections to a far wider and more diverse world — virtual *Gesellschaft*, as we might term it, without tongue too far in cheek. Conversely, you can emigrate to a far city, or be continually on the road, yet maintain close contact with your hometown and your family — electronically sustained *Gemeinschaft*.²¹

There is the idea that 'community' is being evoked as a means of exclusion. This idea is graphically represented on the ground by walled and gated new urban developments,²² but is also present at a conceptual level:

The desire for a more communitarian approach to life among residents of affluent, polite and comfortable suburbs coexists with steady rise in the number of alienated, poor and homeless elsewhere. But the very cosiness of the communities we are creating in our chosen streets, suburbs or "villages" (a favourite word) insulates us from the rather less appealing scenes unfolding just around the corner.²³

And there is the view that the old idea of community is simply a myth.

Pundits worry that virtual community may not truly be community. These worriers are confusing the pastoral myth of community for the reality. Community ties are already geographically dispersed, sparsely-knit, connected heavily by telecommunications (phone and fax), and specialised in content. There is so little community life in most neighbourhoods in western cities that it is more useful to think of each person as having a personal community : an individual's social network of informal interpersonal ties, ranging from a half-dozen intimates to hundreds of weaker ties.²⁴

²⁰ Webber, M M (1964) 'Order and diversity: community without propinquity', in Lowdon Wingo Jnr (ed), *Cities and Space*, John Hopkins, Baltimore.

²¹ Mitchell, William J, (1999) *e-topia, URBAN LIFE JIM BUT NOT AS WE KNOW IT*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Ma

²² Land, RE & Danielsen, KA (1997) 'Gated Communities in America: Walling Out the World?', *Housing Policy Debate*, Vol 8, Issue 4, Fannie Mae Foundation, Washington DC.

²³ Mackay, Hugh (2001) 'The big picture show', *Sydney Morning Herald*, Spectrum, April 21–22, p16.

²⁴ Wellman. Barry & Milena Gulia (1997) 'Net Surfers Don't Ride alone: Virtual communities as communities', in Peter Kollock & Marc Smith (eds) *Communities and Cyberspace*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, NY.

Scanning the breadth of literature on the word community one can conclude that it is a word in frequent use, it has diverse meanings and frequently layers of meaning but these are all positive — ‘Community’ is a ‘warmly persuasive word’ which ‘never seems to be used unfavourably.’²⁵

As a descriptor in public documents ‘community’ is a safe word because it can be assumed that everyone wants it even if they don’t know what it is. As Raymond Plant has noted, “some words have a very strong value meaning and...when they do the descriptive meaning may well become contested or at least they are open to many interpretations.”²⁶

In the case of ‘community’ the value meaning is the one meaning that is reasonably clear, consistent and relatively uncontested.

What is community strengthening?

The use of this concept is relatively recent but becoming almost as ubiquitous as ‘community’.

At one level, virtually anything which any society, tribe or group of village elders has ever done to make things better for the people with whom they live and are connected could be construed as community strengthening. Certainly the establishment of a police force, laws, civic places and democratic institutions would fall within this descriptor. Most of most public sectors could be said to be dedicated to strengthening the communities they serve, whether or not they are perceived to be being successful or wise in their efforts. Perhaps the only major areas of social and civic activity which do not fall within this term are anarchy and self annihilation (and no doubt some theorists would disagree with this).

While community strengthening, and the related term community building, are not being in these contexts, they are being used as if they refer to something real and recognisable. This leads to the question — what is the ‘community strengthening’ to which current public policy and strategy documents refer?

There seem to be two ways to answer this question. One way is to identify the particular form and scope of the policies and programs which come under this heading. A second way is to examine current literature for the issues and themes which seem to be informing these public policies. Following is an overview of both approaches to the question.

Community strengthening policies and programs in Australia in the last five years

To examine these fully is beyond the scope of this overview, however, what we can say is that this term is not being used to describe or refer to permanent mainstream public sector services and facilities. For example, no one is referring to hospitals, police forces, advanced education institutions, anti-discrimination and fair trading agencies as ‘community strengthening’ — even though it could be argued that that is what these institutions do. In fact when the word community is applied to these it denotes ‘lesser’ entities as in community hospitals, community policing, community libraries, community museums and so on.

By contrast the term community has extensive currency with reference to limited term, funded programs which are out-sourced to the third sector. For example, in his address to the People, Places and Partnerships Conference, Sydney March 2001, the Director General of the NSW Department of State and Regional Development stated:

The Department of State and Regional Development delivers a number of programs and services which provide tools for communities to develop local capacity and professionalism in dealing with business. These programs include: the Business Retention and Expansion Program,... the Main Street/Small Towns Program,... the Townlife Development Program...’ and the provision of Resources materials, including an annual Community Economic Development Conference and Guide.

²⁵ Williams, Raymond (1976) *Keywords*, Fontana/Croom Helm, London

²⁶ Plant, Raymond, 1974, *Community and Ideology: An essay in applied sociology*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, p12.

The Department of Urban Affairs and Planning (DUAP) runs the Area Assistance Scheme which aims to assist 'communities' [up to and including whole local government areas] to develop locally sustainable social services, programs and facilities. The Scheme funds the start of these through 2-, 3- or 4-year funding programs. Very few such programs are 'picked up' on a permanent basis by NSW Government Departments or by their local council.

As another example, DUAP's 'regional Living Centres Program has set aside \$1.9 million in 2001 to fund projects that will improve the physical environment of towns and villages in the local government areas of Lismore, Wollongong, Bega, Bombala, Leeton, Griffith, Narrandera, Carathool and Murrumbidgee. The Living Centres teams are working with these local communities and councils to find ways to manage growth, create employment, enhance the environment and create vibrant places. This is a great opportunity to build a better community'.²⁷

The NSW Government announced a Strengthening Local Communities (SLC) Strategy in 2000. The aims of this Strategy are to:

- To support SLC Demonstration Projects in severely disadvantaged communities. Between 8 and 12 communities are selected. The Strategy works with them to organise local community renewal activities.
- To produce a Methods Paper with practical advice for people engaged in community renewal projects. The Paper covers issues such as funding and staffing, involving the community, evaluation, and helpful links.
- To work as a Clearing House (i.e. an information centre) for community renewal activities. Specifically, it supports workers, enhances the Community builders website, and hosts workshops and conferences'.²⁸

The NSW Premier's Department's Strengthening Communities Unit runs the community builders online website whose purpose is 'working together to strengthen communities'. It states:

Community building is about people from the community, government and business, taking the steps to find solutions to issues within their communities. Coming up with their own solutions to problems that affect them, adapting what has worked elsewhere and enlisting support from government or other partners, gives people a sense of achievement and empowerment. Community building is based on collective participation of people, individually and as a community, who act together to create change. It incorporates many other concepts eg. community renewal, place management, social capital, sustainable communities.²⁹

Similarly the Commonwealth Government's 'Stronger Families and Communities Strategy' which provides 'much needed assistance to support families and community development'³⁰ refers to a series of funded programs providing such things as assistance to families, youth cadetships, leadership development programs and a subsidy for in-home care. The program, however, runs for 4 years.

The rationale for this strategy is explained in its publicity material (Department of Family and Community Services, nd, p.3):

National and international research shows that strong communities have networks that protect vulnerable people and create opportunities for people to participate more fully in work and community life. In Australia, the experiences of strong communities reinforce this evidence and demonstrate that government family programs work better in strong communities...

²⁷ see DUAP website: www.DUAP.nsw.gov.au

²⁸ See NSW Premiers Department 'community builders' website: www.communitybuilders.nsw.gov.au

²⁹ www.communitybuilders.nsw.gov.au

³⁰ Media release by John Anderson, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Transport and Regional Services, 16 April 2000.

Taken together, the evidence provides the basis for this Strategy's development. Recognising the important interrelationships between families and communities, this strategy pursues the dual objective of strengthening families and the communities in which they live.

The Australian public sector approach is also reflected in third sector literature. For example, The Community Foundation Service, Richmond and Central Virginia, in the US, a grant giving body, notes:

...we believe that the Foundation can improve life for generations of children in our resources are used to help strengthen families and to help build sustainable communities. In a sustainable community, families exercise responsibility for themselves, neighbours share a vested commitment to their common home; citizens influence events affecting the quality of their lives and the community as a whole values and cares for its children. ³¹

A similar linking between individual and family capacities and community well being is also reflected in a recent Australian Council of Social Service discussion paper. ³² Numerous 'community building' websites ³³ reflects similar capacity building themes as well as providing information about funding opportunities and access to resources.

Developing the capacity of individuals and not-for-profit organisations in geographically based places [usually towns and villages] to raise and invest money in local services and social enterprises and to develop social, civic and economic networks within and externally is a common thread in strengthening communities literature. This thread has its basis in the community development literature [including tenants associations and community development initiatives in housing estates], social capital literature, and social economy, social enterprise and social entrepreneurship literature. These contributing sources of theory are outlined briefly below.

Community development and community self help

The theme of developing community capacity and community self help has its roots in an extensive literature on community development theory which developed from nineteenth century concerns about the impacts of industrial societies. ³⁴ Susan Kenny, in reviewing community development in Australia notes:

Community development differs from traditional service professions in its commitment to develop lasting structures which help people collectively to identify and meet their own needs. Thus, in everyday work, a community development worker's goal is to empower the ordinary people, to overcome isolation, and to ensure that real choices are available. Workers maintain profound respect for the legitimacy of the view points of ordinary people. They identify with the interests of the people they are working with, and learn from them. They approach issues in a collaborative way, and refuse to take on the role of an expert who provides solutions. ³⁵

This approach is echoed in many other sources. For example the UK based Community Development Foundation has a very similar definition;

³¹ http://www.tcfrichmond.org/grants/strenfam_strencomm.html. Home page of The Community Foundation.

³² Australian Council of Social Services, 1999, Supporting Families and Strengthening Communities, ACROSS Discussion Paper, ACROSS INFO 215> www.acoss.org.au

³³ eg www.communitychannel.org; www.sustainable.org; www.cdf.org.uk; www.communities.org.uk

³⁴ For an overview see Raymond Plant, op cit.

³⁵ Kenny, Susan (1994) *Developing Communities for the Future: Community Development in Australia*, Thomas Nelson, Australia

Community development is a range of practices dedicated to increasing the strength and effectiveness of community life, improving local conditions, especially for people in disadvantaged situations, and enabling people to participate in public decision-making and to achieve greater long-term control over their circumstances.³⁶

If this sounds just like community strengthening, it needs to be remembered that many community development workers do not see themselves as working within 'the system':

Community development aims to transform unequal, coercive and oppressive structures in society. To fulfil this aim it challenges, provokes, presents unpalatable information, and even disturbs...community development challenges the presumed inevitability or naturalness of existing power structures and social systems.³⁷

Thus it may be that the language but not the full intention of community development has been adopted in community strengthening policy statements emanating from the public sector.

Social capital

A discussion on community strengthening would not be complete without reference to the concept of social capital. Lang provides a useful definition of social capital:

Social capital commonly refers to the stocks of social trust, norms, and networks that people can draw upon in order to solve common problems. Social scientists emphasise two main dimensions of social capital: social glue and social bridges.

Social glue refers to the degree to which people take part in group life. It also concerns the amount of trust or the comfort level that people feel when participating in these groups. Social trust and group participation form a recursive relationship. The level of trust influences one's willingness to join a group. Likewise, group participation helps build trust.

Social bridges are the links between groups. These links are vital because they not only connect groups to one another but also give members in any one group access to the larger world outside their social circle through a chain of affiliations.

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³⁶ www.cdf.org.uk

³⁷ Kenny, Susan, p21, op cit (see also Rosamund Thorpe & Judy Petruchenia eds. (1985) *Community work or social change? An Australian perspective*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, Melbourne).

³⁸ Lang, Robert E & Steven P Hornburg (1997) What Is Social Capital and Why Is It Important to Public Policy, *Housing Policy Debate*, Vol 9, Issue 1, Fannie Mae Foundation, Washington DC.

There is extensive literature examining the relationship between social capital³⁹ and employment and economic development,⁴⁰ crime,⁴¹ housing⁴² and mortality,⁴³ and suggesting that social capital has positive benefits in these and other areas such as education outcomes.⁴⁴

Many limited term, out-sourced programs funding projects in the third sector list social capital development among their objectives. Many are also termed community strengthening initiatives.

Social economy, enterprise and entrepreneurship

A related set of concepts is concerned with social enterprise and initiative and the social economy.

'Social Enterprises' are businesses that trade in the market in order to fulfil social aims. They bring people and communities together for economic development and social gain. They have three common characteristics:

Enterprise Oriented — they are directly involved in the production of goods and the provision of services to a market. They seek to be viable trading concerns making a surplus from trading.

Social Aims — they have explicit social aims such as job creation, training and provision of local services. They have ethical values including a commitment of local capacity building. They are accountable to their members and the wider community for their social, environmental and economic impact.

Social Ownership — they are autonomous organisations with governance and ownership structure based on participation by stakeholder groups (users or clients, local community groups etc.) or by trustees. Profits are distributed as profit sharing to stakeholders or used for the benefit of the community.

Social enterprises are part of the growing 'social economy'. The social economy is a thriving and growing collection of organisations that exist between the traditional private sector on the one hand, and the public sector on the other. Sometimes referred to as the 'third sector', it includes voluntary and community organisations, foundations and associations of many types. Social enterprises stand out from the rest of the social economy as organisations that use trading activities to achieve their goals and financial self-sufficiency. They are businesses

³⁹ An excellent review of the relevance of social capital in the Australian context is contained in Winter, Ian (ed) (2000) *Social capital and public policy in Australia*, Australian Institute of Family Studies.

⁴⁰ Putnam, Robert D. (1993) *Making Democracy Work: Civic traditions in modern Italy*, Princeton, University Press. Knack, Stephen & Philip Keefer. (1997) Does Social Capital Have and Economic Payoff? A Cross-Country Investigation, *Journal of Economics* 112(4):1251–88. Johnson, James H. Jr & Walter C Farrell Jr (1997) Growing Income Inequality in American Society: A political economy perspective. Paper presented at the National Policy Association Conference 'The Growth of Income Disparity' April 10, Washington DC. Briggs, Xavier de Souza (1998) Brown Kids in White Suburbs: Housing mobility and the many faces of social capital, *Housing Policy Debate* Vol 9, Issue 1, Fannie Mae Foundation, Washington DC.

⁴¹ Hirschfield A & Bowers KJ (1997) The Effect of Social Cohesion on Levels of Recorded Crime in Disadvantaged Areas, *Urban Studies*, 34, 8, 1275–95. Kawachi, Ichiro, Bruce P Kennedy & Richard G Wilkinson (1999) Crime: social disorganization and relative deprivation, *Social Science and Medicine*, 48, 6 (March). Kennedy, BP, Kawachi, I, Prothrow-Stith, D, Lochner, K, Gupta, V (1998) Social capital, income inequality and firearm violent crime, *Social Science and Medicine*, 47(1): 7–17.

⁴² Saegert, Susan & Gary Winkel (1998) Social Capital and the Revitalization of New York City's Distressed Inner-City Housing, *Housing Policy Debate*, Vol 9, Issue 1, Fannie Mae Foundation, Washington DC. Temkin, K & Rohe, WM (1998) Social Capital and Neighborhood Stability: An Empirical Investigation, *Housing Policy Debate*, Vol 9, Issue 1, Fannie Mae Foundation, Washington DC.

⁴³ Wilkinson, RG. (1996) *Unhealthy Societies, The Afflictions of Inequality*, Routledge & Kegan Paul. Kennedy, BP, Kawachi, I, Lochner, K, Jones, C & Prothrow-Stith, D (1997) (Dis)respect and Black Mortality, *Ethnicity and Disease*, 7 (3):207–14. Kennedy, B.P., Kawachi, I., Prothrow-Stith, D, (1996) Income distribution and mortality: Cross-sectional ecological study of the Robin Hood Index in the United States, *British Medical Journal*, ^{312:1004–1007}. Lomas Jonathon, (1998) Social Capital and Health, *Public Health and Epidemiology*, 47, 9 (Nov).

⁴⁴ Wann, M. (1995) Building Social Capital, Self-help in a twenty-first century welfare state, Institute for Public Policy Research, London.

that combine the entrepreneurial skills of the private sector with a strong social mission that is characteristic of the social economy as a whole.’⁴⁵

Social enterprises include employee owned businesses, credit unions, cooperatives, development trusts, community businesses, social firms, intermediate labour market projects and the trading arms of charities. Social entrepreneurs are the people who exercise leadership and initiative to establish social enterprises and/or to assist voluntary associations to operate in the social economy.

Social enterprise and entrepreneurship has received increasing attention since the mid 1990s driven in part by a concern at the deadening effects of ‘handout’ welfare funding, and in part by the idea that economic activity and initiative have positive social benefits by enabling people to ‘trade’ for common purposes and outside the usual structures of the market economy. The intention of social enterprise and social entrepreneurship is to reduce third sector dependency on funding programs and thereby gain a measure of independence and security of continuity.

The social economy literature points to another way in which the idea of community is used, namely to refer to the third sector. The Community Development Foundation notes:

Community activity nurtures human bonds and forms of mutual aid and social capital which neither the state nor the market can provide. One of the main outcomes of effective community life is a rich landscape of community and voluntary organisations.

Some groups, such as tenants’ organisations, may include everyone living in a certain estate or housing association. Others, such as a women’s health group, a pensioners’ club, a youth club, an ethnic organisation, are for particular sections of the population. The ‘third sector’ as a whole (which is also called the NGO sector, the voluntary sector or civil society) includes autonomous organisations at a regional, national and international level as well.⁴⁶

This quotation shows the interweaving of several of the concepts identified above including the idea of social capital as a means to community empowerment. It also demonstrates a major use of the word ‘community’. When applied to organisations, ‘community’ usually denotes the third or voluntary and not-for-profit sector.⁴⁷

Thus the public sector use of community strengthening as an idea seems mainly to be applied to things which the public sector wants done but which are to be done by the not-for-profit sector using public sector funds. The funding mechanism sets limits on what is to be done, both through the term of the funding and its accountability mechanisms. It is noteworthy that in this context, the third, or not-for-profit, sector is frequently referred to as ‘community organisations’ implying at one and the same time that they are ‘lesser’ public sector agencies (as in community hospitals, community policing) and that they are in the ownership of energetic citizens banded together in incorporated associations.

Putting these themes in another perspective

Today’s term ‘community strengthening’ has grown out of decades of community development literature which itself has a base in the sociology and social philosophy of the nineteenth century.

Community strengthening is used to focus on what people can do for themselves in the places where they live — with perhaps a little help from central government agencies. Community strengthening, is an outcome desired by governments, but as a process belongs to the third sector or to the citizenry. Governments foster social and economic entrepreneurial activity to achieve better social, economic and health outcomes, usually as demonstrated in

⁴⁵ Social Enterprise London (2001) Understanding Social Enterprise, 1a Aberdeen Studios, 22–24 Highbury Grove, London N5 2EA (info@sel.org.uk)

⁴⁶ Community Development Foundation, www.cdf.org.uk, op cit.

⁴⁷ for a discussion of these issues see the website of Social Enterprise London: www.sel.org.uk and of the New Economics Foundation: www.meweconomics.org

indicators such as level of education achieved, labour force participation rates and mortality.⁴⁸

However, there is another strand of thinking which constitutes a challenge to this approach to improving these indicators. This thinking is that while small scale and local initiatives can make a contribution, their effectiveness is limited and highly dependent on the level of social infrastructure in a place (the provision of schools, public transport, health services and so on), and the presence of an adequate social infrastructure is particularly important in places where a large number of people are living in poverty.

Recent UK studies into social exclusion found that those estates and neighbourhoods which are most excluded are not only characterised by poor rating on all indicators and low levels of self help activity, they are also areas where basic social infrastructure is way below the norm.

While social exclusion is defined and located by looking at the characteristics of populations (worklessness, homelessness, truancy, teenage pregnancy etc) research showed that the places where these problems were greatest were those where 'many basic services (in both the public and private sectors) were weakest where they were most needed, with deprived areas having fewer GPs, poorer shopping facilities, and more failing schools'.⁴⁹

The UK Government's National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal, which is targeted at the 88 most deprived and socially excluded neighbourhoods contains strategies directed at community involvement and self help but these are contained within a framework of actions which require the social and other infrastructure Government departments to coordinate and improve the level of service and (social, health and other) infrastructure delivery to these areas.⁵⁰ Among the latter strategies, government departments are required to make concerted efforts at 'joined up' public sector management. The two main planks to achieve this are:

- **'local strategic partnerships'** 'a single body that brings together at a local level the different parts of the public sector as well as private, voluntary and community sectors so that different initiatives and services support rather than contradict each other'; and
- **neighbourhood management** 'with someone visibly taking responsibility at the sharp end'.⁵¹

The national Strategy contains 105 major actions all of which are the responsibility of a range of **central** government agencies.

In a similar but vastly smaller way, the NSW Premiers Department has initiated place management strategies in NSW. These have two strands, the first is a series of regional management coordination groups comprising the regional managers of the NSW Government's human service agencies. Their aim is to coordinate their service delivery and the new initiatives of their respective departments. The second strand is the use of place managers in some locations identified by the Department as requiring a specific intervention. For example, place managers have been appointed to Cabramatta and Kings Cross. Their role is much the same as that proposed for UK neighbourhood managers. While we are not aware of any evaluation of the effectiveness of regional management coordination groups, it has been suggested⁵² that individual place managers are far too under-resourced to achieve much.

In DUAP, 'place based management' refers to 'place based' urban and regional planning, a mechanism to assist in the management of 'environmental, social and economic issues in a

⁴⁸ Vinson, Tony (1999) *Unequal in Life: The distribution of social disadvantage in Victoria and New South Wales*, the Ignatius Centre for Social Policy and Research, Richmond, Victoria.

⁴⁹ Social Exclusion Unit (2001) *Preventing Social Exclusion*, Cabinet Office, UK p6.

⁵⁰ Social Exclusion Unit (2001) *A New Commitment to Neighbourhood Renewal*, National Strategy Action Plan, Cabinet Office, UK.

⁵¹ *Ibid* p10.

⁵² Personal communication from a former place manager.

comprehensive and integrated way'.⁵³ In this usage, the Department is referring to local and regional strategic planning processes which endeavour to bring together all the plans, planning instruments, goals, policies and implementation activities which affect a place into one strategic plan. However, DUAP is only at White Paper stage and a long way from addressing implementation issues in the comprehensive, across government way that the UK National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal does.

The report of the UK Policy Action Team on Community Self Help, prepared as part of the research for this Strategy supports this approach. It noted that while community self help is important:

...in terms of provision of services, the encouragement of communities' self confidence and self sufficiency, and the development of the notion of citizenship within communities...that self-help is something that must be 'grown' organically from within, rather than imposed from outside;...it is not a cure-all — it is a necessary complement of, not a substitute for, high quality public services.⁵⁴

The need for state or national intervention in the living conditions of people is not a new idea.⁵⁵ However, during the eighties and nineties in English speaking countries, the role of community self help has tended to receive more support from national or state governments than the idea that social well being is a function of the level government investment in core services and facilities.⁵⁶

Community Housing and Community strengthening

There is little literature that examines this issue in much detail. There is a number of claims about the ability of community housing to strengthen communities, largely in comparison to the role of public housing.⁵⁷ Some work has been undertaken in the UK,⁵⁸ however it must be acknowledged that the scale and context of community housing is very different which reduces the utility of this research. A major study has been undertaken in Australia,⁵⁹ but this has essentially focussed on the one case — community housing in the Argyle estate in Western Sydney.

The recent report of the Reference Group on Welfare Reform,⁶⁰ suggested that housing could be an issue that affects social and economic participation. They suggest that more should be done to encourage community development within public housing estates. They go on to claim that 'This could be achieved through provision of public and community housing in areas of high employment'.⁶¹ In their section on Strengthening Communities, the main example is from the Argyle Community Housing Case Study.

⁵³ Department of Urban Affairs and Planning (2001) Plan First, Review of plan making in NSW, White Paper, NSW Government, p5.

⁵⁴ Active Communities Unit (1999) Report of the Policy Action Team on Community Self-Help, Home Office, p.v.

⁵⁵ For example, the history of town planning — garden suburbs, model villages, new urbanism — all reflect an idea that infrastructure is important, even if in the case of town planning the focus has been on physical infrastructure. For a review of how town planning has tended towards physical determinism see Gans, Herbert J (1991) *People and Plans: Essays on Poverty, Racism and Other Nation Urban Problems*, Columbia University Press, NY, and more recently, Bohl, Charles C (2000) New Urbanisms and the City: Potential Applications and Implications for Distressed Inner-City Neighborhoods, *Housing Policy Debate*, 11:4. For an example of the way in which the Public Housing NSW continues this focus on the physical, see its 2001 leaflet on Community Renewal. The establishment of the National Health Service in the UK and Medicare in Australia are examples of the government provided infrastructure approach in health. The history of public education provides a third example.

⁵⁶ This shift of emphasis has been justified by the rising cost of maintaining and update the public service infrastructure along with such economic 'imperatives' as globalisation and the need to keep direct taxes at a low level.

⁵⁷ See, for example, websites of the NSW Federation of Housing Associations at <http://www.communityhousing.org.au/nswfha/>

⁵⁸ See for example, Ekins P & Newby L (2000) *The Big Picture: Sustainable Communities*, The Housing Corporation.

⁵⁹ NSW Office of Community Housing (1998) *Home and Housed*, Sydney.

⁶⁰ Reference Group on Welfare Reform (2000) *Participation Support for a More Equitable Society*, Final Report, Canberra.

⁶¹ Ibid p25.

The main aim of this project is to fill this gap in the literature by exploring the role played by community housing in community strengthening, and in examining the role that it could play.

Summary

The term community has a long history. It is a concept that is fairly ill defined but suggests something warm and fuzzy. It is very popular part of Government and politicians 'speak'. However, there can be various types of community that include communities of interest, communities of attachment or place based communities. Hence, when referring to the notion of community it is important to be identify what community is being described.

Community strengthening also has a long tradition — initially in the area of community development. It often refers to economic development of communities and more recent emphasis has been in the field of social entrepreneurship. The area received a boost with the emergence of the social capital debate in the eighties. However, the popularity of the term has been associated government in the last fifteen years as governments have sought to withdraw from direct provision and outsource it to the third sector. In a political context of Governments withdrawing from the direct provision of assistance and services, the notion of communities helping themselves is very convenient.⁶² However, recent research from the UK indicates that community strengthening is most effective in a context of high quality public services.

⁶² This is also likely to be a factor in the popularity of social capital concepts among governments.

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GLOSSARY

Affordable housing

Affordable housing refers to a specific model of housing provision. It does *not* simply mean that a tenant can afford the rent. The characteristics are:

- It is available to a wider range of household incomes — usually up to at least 40% of incomes — and priority is not given to those on the lowest incomes.
- It is provided in locations where rents are too high for most moderate-income households to pay and retain sufficient after-housing income.
- It may be provided by developers (in kind or as a levy) as apart of an inclusionary zoning provision.
- Rents might not be determined as a fixed proportion of income.

Community development

This refers to the process of a lead agency or leader(s) within the community working with community members to assist them to identify their needs and ways in which they can work towards achieving these. There is, therefore, an emphasis on facilitating involvement and building the capacity of the disenfranchised.

Community or estate renewal

Strategies to overcome the social dysfunction and reduced life opportunities in areas with high concentrations of social disadvantage — particularly public housing estates and Indigenous communities. It might also be areas (such as inner city US cities) where all services have been lost. Strategies often focus on *social mix* to break up concentrations of disadvantage; and this is often seen as requiring a physical fix. It may also seek to build the economic opportunities and services available in a community, including enhancing local job opportunities.

Community housing

Rental housing in which tenancy management is provided by non-government, not-for-profit organisations. This is a broad definition. It includes many forms of housing not administered by housing departments or even government (e.g. student accommodation). However, the sector has adopted a range of principles about what comprises good practice. These are expressed as aims in the National Standards. They include: affordability, responsiveness, sustainable tenancies, participation, partnerships, and accountability to the community.

Economic Development

Strategies undertaken, usually at a regional or local level, to increase or sustain the rate of economic growth in the region. While economic growth has the same broad meaning as growth in GDP, more appropriate indicators that reflect social and environmental sustainability and progress might also be included.

Housing Plus

As the core business of community housing is housing management — albeit management that seeks to sustain tenancies — to achieve many of the wider community building outcomes, particularly *economic development*, community organisations would need to take on roles outside their core business and their normal financial structures. In the UK this has been recognised by a specific funding program to fund community building work beyond the core business of providers. It is called Housing Plus

Social capital

The social linkages between individuals within a community that provides the capacity for communities to be effective. Some measures of social capital developed by Paul Bullen & Jenny Onyx include: Participation in networks; actions of reciprocity between people (rather than a reliance on contractual arrangements); trust — willingness to take risks in a social context; social norms (reducing the need for legal sanctions); and ‘The Commons’ — the creation of a pooled community resource.

Social and economic participation

Refers to strategies to enable disadvantaged individuals within the community to access paid employment or unpaid work or training. It might also refer to participation in social networks and community activities. When extended in this way, the term *social capital* might be used.

Social exclusion

A term imported from the UK (where it was imported from the continent). It usually means a section of the community excluded from normal *economic* or *social participation* and from normal life chances and well being, because of multiple disadvantage. It refers, therefore, to systemic rather than individual disadvantage.

Social mix

Recognition of the complex layering or intersection of social, cultural and economic differences in particular areas — for example, different ethnicities, different income brackets, different kinds of families. Within a policy context it may refer to one of two things:

- bringing together households with a range of incomes and employment status in a community. This is usually a strategy to break up concentrations of social disadvantage, which are seen to perpetuate unemployment and increase anti-social activities. It is often a response to *social exclusion*.
- Maintaining or increasing diversity in communities — usually where disadvantaged members of the community are being forced out by a growing dominant group as in inner city gentrification) or are being discriminated against.

Sustainable communities

This focuses on the ability of communities to continue to exist in the face of current trends or external threats. Sustainability relies on a mix of social, economic and environmental factors. It usually refers to four aspects of a community: demographics; the economic, the social; and the environmental.

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Level 7 20 Queen Street, Melbourne Victoria 3000

Phone +61 3 9613 5400 Fax +61 3 9629 8536

Email information@ahuri.edu.au Web www.ahuri.edu.au