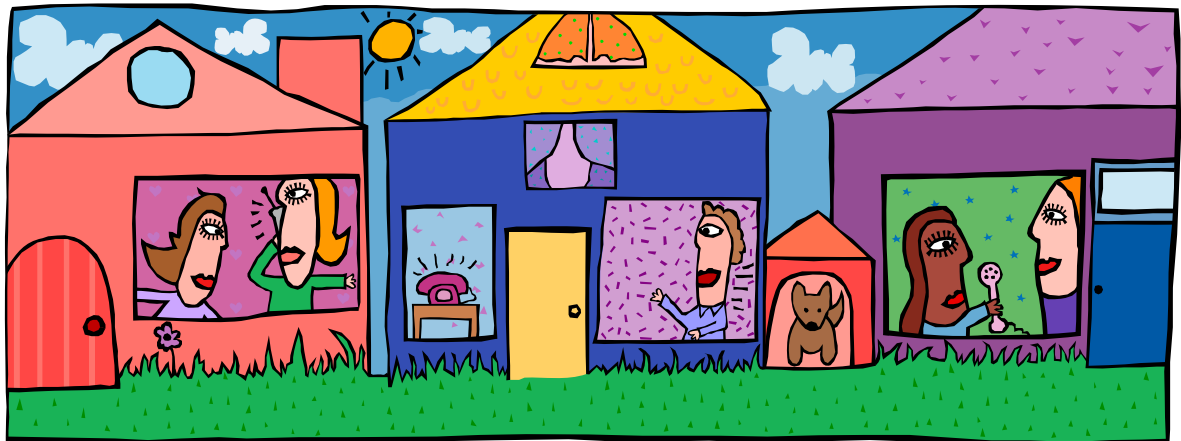


Evidence Based Practice Resource Series



“Supporting Best Practice in Western Sydney”

Literature Review: Key Evidence Messages for Building Social Capital and Strengthening Communities



Also available from: www.fwtdp.org.au

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FWTDP Core Goals:

- > Achieving learning outcomes
- > Increasing strength based practice
- > Increasing knowledge of evidence base
- > Increasing confidence to apply knowledge
- > Increasing conscious work practice



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Literature Review: Key Messages from Literature and Research: Building Social Capital and Strengthening Communities

Elements and types of social capital:

Social capital refers to the networks and norms that enable collective action, and is characterised by trust, cooperation, voluntarism, community and democracy (Gauntlett et al, 2000).

Types include:

- *Bonding social capital* (connections within group)– strong ties within a horizontal network, including family, close friends, neighbours, colleagues etc
- *Bridging social capital* (connections to other groups)– weaker ties with individuals who differ in terms of location, occupation, or ethnic group
- *Linking social capital* (groups to institutions/decision structures) – vertical ties with formal institutions and organisations.

For strong communities, a balance of all three types are needed. (Woolcock, 2000 in ABS, 2002)

Indicators / Features of Communities with High Social Capital

- High levels of community involvement and participation – e.g. local leadership, volunteering, civic trust, networks and partnerships between people and institutions (Gauntlett et al, 2000).
- Various sectors (government, business, non-government welfare, community groups and individuals) work together towards positive social outcomes (Gauntlett et al, 2000).
- Having shared norms, ideals and purposes and a desire to pursue cooperative and community ideals and purposes (Black & Hughes, 2001).
- Attitudes of self-reliance and the ability to develop local solutions to local problems (Black & Hughes, 2001).
- A sustainable mix of assets (economic, human, natural, cultural) and strong governance that maximises the equitable use of those assets (Pope, 2006).

Types of Networks Needed for Community Strength

There are three types of networks that are important and beneficial in communities. Communities need a balance between the three types of network (Szreter 2002).

These are:

- Close personal networks (families, close friendship groups)
- Broader associational and community networks (wider networks made through work, interest groups, school etc)
- Governance networks (broad and inclusive networks with decision-makers and service institutions) (Szreter 2002, cited in Pope 2006)

The different network types generate different benefits for individuals and communities and each provides a foundation for building the other. For example, strong and positive close networks can give people the skills and confidence needed to participate in broader associational and community networks, and broader participation has been shown to lead some people to become involved in governance (Pope & Warr 2005).

A Closer Look at Networks: evidence for them as essential for strong communities:

Close Personal Networks: family, close friends & neighbours	
Benefits of Close Personal Networks	Support; Practical help; Contacts; Resources Better individual health and well-being
Research messages¹ supporting – Close Personal Networks	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Close personal ties (actual or perceived) are associated with better physical and mental health (Young & Glasgow 1998; Berkman & Glass 2000;Giles et al. 2005). ○ Social isolation is associated with increased death rates (Berkman & Syme 1979; Rosenfeld 1997), particularly from heart disease (National Heart Foundation 2003) and suicide (Durkheim in Haralambos & Holburn 1995). ○ In disadvantaged families, strong positive close personal ties reduce the impact of disadvantage on the psychological wellbeing of children by giving them a sense of personal security (Attree 2004). ○ Shown to be important for young people’s success at school and decrease the likelihood of them leaving early (Coleman 1988; Wolfe & Haverman 2001; Vinson 2004; Attree 2004). ○ Low socio-economic status groups greater tendency to be socially isolated (Granovetter 1983;Tigges <i>et al.</i> 1998) ○ Reviews of the international literature have concluded that the social interactions related to close personal ties have the potential to have as many costs to individuals as benefits (Lincoln 2000; Attree 2004) so harm reduction strategies (e.g. related to DV, child protection) are an important part of the mix of strategies for community strengthening. 	
Indicators of these in community	Community members: Can get help from friends, family & neighbours when needed. Have someone who lives outside household, to turn to in time of crisis.
Strategies to Build Close Personal Networks	Creating opportunities for individuals in small groups to meet repeatedly around a point of common interest. Facilitating positive relationships. Relationship skill development. Building community attitudes of collective responsibility for support of vulnerable members of community. Strategies to reduce stresses upon family relationships e.g. support & respite for carers and young parents Strategies to reduce harm where close personal networks are negative e.g. early intervention in domestic violence and child protection

¹ Pope 2006

Associational & Community Groups: <i>through clubs, schools, workplaces, interest groups</i>	
Benefits of Associational & Community Networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wider pool of support people. Access to opportunities through network contacts Positive community attitudes & norms. Social integration. Spread of information, innovation & ideas through the community.
Research messages² supporting - Associational & Community Groups	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Associational & community networks have been shown to improve child & adolescent health, increase behavioural & developmental scores, & enhance social emotional development (Runyan et al. 1998; Attree 2004). ○ They reduce parental stress & enhance positive parenting (good supervision, reasonable discipline & a strong parent child bond) which has been shown to decrease involvement in crime as children grow up (Larzelere & Patterson 1990; Harris & Marmer 1996; Weatherburn & Lind 1998). ○ Networks can inspire residents to work together to solve their problems & improve community life (Perkins et al. 1996; Sampson et al. 2002). ○ Integration through networks can encourage positive norms, behaviours which have been shown to reduce crime, violence & community disharmony (Sampson et al. 1997; Hirschfield & Bowers 1997; Vershney 1998; Sampson et al. 2002). ○ In Australia, areas with high levels of participation in community oriented activities have been shown to have lower levels of crime (Carach & Huntley 2002). ○ A US study (Harrison & Narayan 2002) showed that students that participated in sport and other community organisations outside of school had better relationships with parents, teachers and friends; were more likely to enjoy school; and were more likely to do homework. They were less likely to be truant; smoke cigarettes; use marijuana; vandalise property; get into fights; be sexually active; and be sad or have suicidal thoughts (Harrison & Narayan 2002). Students involved in activities such as clubs, bands or volunteer work that connected them to the broader community had the highest rates of healthy behaviours and the lowest rates of risk behaviours (Harrison & Narayan 2002). ○ Reviews of the international literature have shown that the positive effects on health and wellbeing of community participation are not just because healthier people participate, but that participation has an independent positive effect on health & wellbeing (Young & Glasgow 1998). ○ Not all participation has been found to be positive for individuals, even when supplying a community benefit (Ziersch & Baum 2004). Participation benefits are influenced by community organisation/groups features including an organisational culture that promotes a sense of community; highly accessible structure, provides meaningful role opportunities; strong shared leadership that is committed to both the community and organisation members (Maton & Salem 1995). ○ Participation in community networks alleviates some impacts of economic disadvantage. For example, increased networks and levels of volunteering and membership of groups have are related to lower population levels of imprisonment and low birth weight in disadvantaged communities (Vinson 2004). 	
Indicators of these in community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community members: Attend community events. Participate in organised sport. Volunteer. Member of organised group. Parents participate in school. Like their local community. Fell safe on the streets of their community after dark. Feel multi-culturalism / diversity makes life in their area better.
Strategies to Build Associational & Community Networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participatory local activities – arts, education, sport, recreation, volunteering. Strategies to build relationships between families through schools. Strategies connecting schools/preschools with the wider community. Support & capacity building for local interest groups, organisations. Strategies to reduce barriers to vulnerable people joining community groups and activities (e.g. sponsorship for participation for disadvantaged children in organised local sport clubs). Activities that bring people from different groups in community together & interacting repeatedly around something in common. Action to get community spaces where people can meet and mingle, including gaining access to existing community assets for use for wider purposes and groups.

² Pope 2006

Governance Networks: <i>networks with decision-making; connections with institutions</i>	
Benefits of Governance Networks	Things get done for the community. Better and more democratic organisation of assets and services Services designed and delivered in ways that meet local needs
Research messages³ - supporting Governance Networks	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Participation in governance networks is built through more general forms of associational and community participation (Perkins et al.1996; Sampson et al. 1997). Participation in volunteering, recreational and arts activities, sport, and community oriented organisations foster the social interaction, information sharing and feelings of solidarity that make people more likely to want to contribute to the common good and solve their problems collectively (Perkins et al. 1996; Sampson et al. 1997; McQueen-Thomson et al. 2004). ○ Involvement in associational and community networks can increase the likelihood that different types of people will become involved in the policy arena (Davis Smith 2001). This can ensure that policies are adopted that take into account the full range of interests in communities (Milner 2001). ○ A review of the international literature found that the involvement of a diverse range of citizens in governance is affected by how governance networks recruit groups they would like to be involved (Skidmore <i>et al.</i>2005). Inclusive recruitment occurs when organisations have an ‘outwardly’ oriented culture and value a broad range of experience and knowledge (Skidmore <i>et al.</i> 2005). ○ Inclusive governance is also fostered by practical arrangements and rules that are not too difficult for newcomers (Skidmore <i>et al.</i> 2005). Certain practices, such as inappropriate meeting times or a lack of childcare, are ‘institutional filters’ that prevent participation in public processes by marginalised population groups (Skidmore <i>et al.</i> 2005). ○ Benefits for communities in having strong governance networks include: these communities are more effective at attracting and maintaining resources (Wilkinson 1998; Gillies 1998; Szreter 2002; Browning & Cagney 2002); are more likely to generate relevant and effective initiatives and services (Gillies 1998) and are more effective at lobbying in response to proposed cuts in services (Sampson <i>et al.</i> 1997). 	
Indicators of these in community	Community Members: Membership of a group that has taken local action. On a decision-making board or committee. Feel valued by society. Feel there are opportunities to have a real say
Strategies to Build Governance Networks	Community engagement in planning, service delivery and evaluation – that is meaningful and accessible for diverse people. Partnerships between different sectors (government, business, NGOs, service groups, community interest/advocacy groups) Leadership development and mentoring in community. Volunteering designed as a pathway to leadership and participation in governance. Supporting & resourcing local community action, lobbying groups. Local organisation structures and processes that are easy to understand and accessible to diverse people. Linking local organisations/groups with wider community and promoting a focus on community well-being as well as member benefits. Linking local organisations/groups with key decision-makers and building their understanding of how resource and policy decisions are made.

³ Cited in Pope 2006

Summary of Literature & Research Points - Strategies to build social capital and strong communities:

Localised, Responsive Community Building

- Community building is likely to be more effective when it is located in community settings, when it responds to local conditions and when it is addressed in the early stage of identifying community problems (Gauntlett et al, 2000).
- Professionals are more effective in community-building when they respond to local context, work in multi-disciplinary ways and adopt facilitative approaches as much as possible (Gauntlett et al, 2000).
- Self-reliance and protective factors are strengthened by building social networks and empowering communities (Gauntlett et al, 2000).
- Building trust and reciprocity leads to increased social capital and is an important ingredient in healthy communities (Gauntlett et al, 2000).

Provide Opportunities and Facilitate Community Networks

- In order to build social capital, people need to be able to regularly interact with one another in community organisations or around areas of interest, in situations where they can develop trusting relationships with each other, e.g. working as volunteers, or being members of interest groups such as arts crafts, garden, walking groups or book clubs, playgroups, committees, service or sport clubs etc (Murphy, 2000).
- Promoting a balance between bonding, bridging and linking social capital to avoid social fragmentation – for example a dominance of bonding social capital can result in a community that is strongly bonded internally, with trust and cooperative norms, but that has low trust and cooperation with those outside their own group (ABS, 2002).
- Schools can act as effective community resources in building social capital and strengthening communities, as they are often the focal point of communities – and networks develop around focal points, shared interests and opportunities for people to meet (Gauntlett et al, 2000).
 - Schools can act as an important source of social capital as they play a key role in fostering shared norms and networks and can provide a forum for community activity (ABS, 2002).
- Provide local facilities as gathering places for activities (Chau, 2007).
- In local area targeting, establish linkages between deprived areas and adjacent better off areas, especially to take advantage of employment opportunities (Johnson, Heady & Jensen, 2005).

Facilitate Sport, Arts and Cultural Interest Groups to Build Connections

- Community based physical activity interventions can facilitate community strengthening and building social capital by fostering social connections, cooperation, reciprocity, collective identity, and trust in the community (Chau, 2007).
- Recognise different interests and abilities in the community and provide opportunities for different types of involvement in programs, including social, cultural and physical (Chau, 2007).
- A perception of safety in the community is important to encourage people to feel confident in participating in activities in their community such as sport, recreation and cultural activities (ABS, 2002).
- An evaluation of community arts programs across Victoria (The Arts Development for Communities program and the Arts Residencies Program) (Pope, Doyle 2006) supporting partnerships between artists and community organisations/groups showed:
 - that community-based arts activities generate significant benefits for artists, participants and communities.
 - that programs that use community strengthening practices are effective tools for engaging hard-to-reach populations, particularly youth, ethnic and socio-economically disadvantaged populations and can provide an avenue for these groups to explore issues and express them to others.
 - they provide a means of expressing issues of importance and visions for the future.
 - they can also create networks and partnerships that make arts and cultural activities more sustainable in communities.
 - they give participants and artists new career pathways and opportunities, and generate the positive outcomes for communities through greater connectedness and integration.

Quality Local Adult Community Education

Quality adult community education (i.e. organised adult learning in community settings that is built around local need, and is made accessible to the most educationally disadvantaged groups e.g. short courses, personal enrichment courses, and adult basic education on literacy, numeracy, vocational skills, basic employment skills and personal development) is associated with a range of positive outcomes for learners and the community including (Allen Consulting Group 2008):

Benefits for learners:

- improved personal health and wellbeing, such as reduced drinking and smoking, lower rates of obesity, improved mental health, and increased longevity (McMahon 2006; OECD 2001; Wolfe & Haveman 2001);
- enjoyment of the Adult Community Education environment, which participants often report as being informal and supportive (Bowman 2006; Clemans et al. 2003);
- more efficient household management (McMahon 1998; Wolfe & Haveman 2001)

Benefits for the community:

- increased social capital, as Adult Community Education providers are recognised as fostering community wellbeing (Falk et al. 2000; Golding 2006; Townsend 2006);
 - volunteerism and giving, with Adult Community Education participants recording higher rates of volunteerism after completing programs (Walstab et al. 2005);
 - decreased crime, as Adult Community Education builds social capital through promoting volunteerism, civic participation and informal socialising (Graycar 1999; OECD 2001);
 - intergenerational benefits, as an individual's educational attainment is a key determinant of a range of outcomes for their children (McMahon 1998; Wolfe & Haveman 2001);
- Participation in education can build social capital by creating and fostering social networks, and by providing opportunities to practice skills associated with social capital such as participation and reciprocity (ABS, 2002).
 - People who have been well educated demonstrate higher levels of civic participation (Johnson, Heady & Jensen, 2005).

Facilitate Partnerships Across Different Sectors of Community

- Capacity building/skill enhancement to enable partners to work together effectively (Johnson, Heady & Jensen, 2005).
- Engage people from the community, and build partnerships between businesses, councils, government and non-government organisations to collaborate and cooperate (Chau, 2007).
- A linked approach that involves coordination across government portfolios and spheres of government (ie, local, state and federal), and partnerships between government, business, community and philanthropic sectors (Howe and Cleary, 2001 in Hounslow, 2002).
- Community enterprise programs – partnerships between government, community organisations and disadvantaged local groups to develop and implement small local enterprises that build local wealth and benefit the community are showing promising early outcomes for individuals and community (Department for Victorian Communities (2006).
- Five key factors for effective partnerships include (Pope & Lewis 2009):
 - a good broker/facilitator to build relationships
 - the right decision-makers at the table with a commitment to contribute
 - a clear vision and objectives
 - good processes
 - ongoing motivation through evaluation and champions.

Facilitate Community Engagement and Local Participatory Democracy

- An emphasis on local democracy, with bottom-up initiatives taking priority over solutions imposed from the outside, and local identity, leadership, knowledge and management as critical components (Howe and Cleary, 2001 in Hounslow, 2002).
- Empower community members to manage programs to encourage ownership and sustainability (Chau, 2007).

- Consider community engagement as a continuum of practices at various levels which inform, involve and empower citizens and communities. Different levels of engagement are appropriate at different phases in community action to address an issue of need. (International Association for Public Participation 2004, Cited in Fritze et al 2009)

Level of community engagement	Community engagement strategies
Inform	Education through media, written material, internet, spoken word, activities and/or theatre.
Consult	Consulting through community forums, surveys, community panels/juries, focus groups and workshops.
Involve	Include community in all stages of policy development (planning, needs assessment, design, implementation, evaluation, monitoring) to ensure concerns and aspirations are considered and understood.
Collaborate and empower	Action to maximise community ownership, knowledge exchange and capacity building

- Well designed and implemented community engagement - engaging and involving citizens and communities in decisions and actions that impact upon them has been shown to have a range of practical benefits leading to improved policy, program design and implementation. (Garnaut 2007, cited in Fritze et al 2009) These benefits include:
 - decisions informed by a broader range of local information, ideas and input;
 - securing and sustaining local ownership and support;
 - more effective communication of key policy issues and directions;
 - heightened trust, transparency and credibility for decision making processes;
 - improved social networks and connectedness; and
 - improvements in cost effectiveness.
- General principles for engaging specific, ‘hard to reach’ population groups include the following (Fritze et al 2009):
 - acknowledge and understand ‘where different people are at’ along the spectrum of denial, contemplation and action;
 - acknowledge and understand the context and profiles of different communities in the geographic area;
 - devote time, effort, resources to develop trust with diverse communities;
 - use existing networks and trusted sources of information or service provision;
 - train, support and if necessary ‘plant’ multicultural leaders and bicultural workers in relevant communities;
 - identify and work with leaders who are well respected, well networked and in good positions to impart information;
 - go to places where people feel comfortable; and
 - use celebrations to engage and make messages relevant.

Supports for Families

- Families are a primary building block of the social fabric – hence interventions with families (such as prevention and early intervention programs) have a key role to play in initiatives to promote stronger communities (Gauntlett et al, 2000).
- Strengthening families assists in strengthening communities, as families play a key role in modeling and developing social values. Parenting is an important influence on the development of values such as reciprocity, trust and cooperation which characterise social capital (ABS, 2002).
- A strong family life is linked to high levels of civic activity (Johnson, Heady & Jensen, 2005).
- The inheritance of social capital requires that it is actively ‘passed on’ between generations - hence facilitating positive intergenerational relationships promotes strong communities (Gauntlett et al, 2000).

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