

Waitakere Community Wellbeing Review - 2004

Historical Framework:

(taken from a summary of the meetings held in March/May 2001 which led to the establishment of the Wellbeing Network)

At this time the network was generally known as the Waitakere City Wellbeing Network.

Its purpose was defined as:

- To promote a holistic and intersectoral approach to city wellbeing issues, needs and planning
- To provide a citywide voice on wellbeing issues to both local and central government ie. Joint advocacy
- Monitor the implementation of the Wellbeing Strategy
- Improve information flows about key issues, concerns and initiatives within each sector
- Progressing local solutions to local problems as a result of information gathering and presentation of issues/ideas. E.g. form alliances to undertake a particular action
- Provide an opportunity for ongoing networking, support and communication between the sectors. Ie. Collate information on the 'bigger picture' and get information on the 'bigger picture' to go back out to the wider community
- Support the leadership role of umbrella networks within the community.

The networks catchphrase was:

"what ever happens, at least everyone will know about it".

The networks that were originally identified, we seen to be the key identified umbrella -type network agencies of a specific sector.

These were:

- Disability Information Waitakere Network – DIWN (disability)
- Pacific Island Advisory Board – PIAB (Pacific People)
- Waitakere Safer Community Council Trust (community Safety)
- Safe Waitakere Injury Prevention – SWIP (Injury prevention)
- Safe Waitakere (Alcohol Safety)
- Te Taumata Runanga (Maori community)
- Waitakere Care and Protection Resource Panel (Care and Protection)
- Waitakere Health Link (health)
- Shared Vision (Mental health)
- Waitakere Local Employment Coordinating Group – LEC (employment)
- Waitakere Secondary Schools Youth Council (youth)
- West Auckland District Council of Social Services –WADCOSS

- (general social services and housing)
- Waitakere City Council

Later additions included:

- Waitakere Education Sector Trust (WEST) – replacing West Auckland Principals Association as the umbrella network for education)
- Age Concern – older adults
- New Out West – new migrants/refugees

It was originally agreed that any additions/subtractions to the sectors represented around the table would be the collective decision of the network. These alterations would be preceded by a request from a community network to be included round the table.

There was also an assumption that representatives of their sector carried a general mandate from those they were purporting to speak on behalf of.

Intention:

The establishment of the network was to have representation by one or two key members of all the recognised major community networks and/or umbrella groups in Waitakere City.

“It is to be a forum of ‘equals”, with all sectors having equal value and opportunities for input”

-taken from minutes April 2002

In February 2002 the Waitakere Government Intersector Group and the Community Wellbeing Network (as its name became over time – but with no directed alteration being made) jointly hosted a Collaboration Forum attended by representatives drawn from central government, Council and the Community sector. The forum’s outcomes included a number of key actions that in total reflected a desire to work in a genuine three-way partnership – central and local government and community.

Thus formed the Waitakere Collaboration Strategy Group in July 2002.

The composition of this group included senior central government managers, and representatives from the Community Wellbeing Network and Waitakere City Council.

The Community Wellbeing Network representatives were selected by the network to be their representatives at this interagency level. These representatives were to:

- feed in any grassroots issues that had been raised at the network meetings (which were held bi-monthly)
- provide a feedback loop for information dissemination from the Collaboration Strategy Group table

- Have the mandate to speak on behalf of the Community Wellbeing Network.
- To participate actively in the upper levels of decision making relating to the Wellbeing processes.
- To be an active participant in the three-way collaborative towards better wellbeing outcomes in Waitakere City.

The Review:

It was agreed by those regularly attending the Community Wellbeing Network that there was a need to review the process.

This was reflected by:

- Drop off in attendance
- Lack of common understanding
- Benefits of participation unclear to some attendees
- Fracturing of 'bigger picture' understanding between those that represented the network on the Collaboration Strategy Group and those that did not.
- Lack of clarity as to the networks current purpose
- A change in the working environment – devolvement of silo's and increases in collaborative outcomes.

Methodology:

The opportunity to undertake a review of the Community Wellbeing Network was broached at a network meeting in October 2003. From those that were in attendance, there was unanimous agreement that it was both necessary and timely. Therefore, it was agreed that a review would be undertaken. The Networks primary objectives were identified as being:

- To ascertain if there was still a need for a Community Wellbeing Network.
- To identify factors impinging on its ability to engage all sectors.
- To utilise the review as a tool for creating a new process if necessary

All current members of the Community Wellbeing Network were approached for an interview, plus those within Waitakere City Council who had been pivotal in the development of the Network.

Common Themes:

"Community networking" is as varied as the communities themselves are,

and challenges one to provide a strict "definition". Most community networks however do have the following aspects in common:

The major factor impinging on the Community Wellbeing Networks ability to meet its attendee's needs was community capacity.

There are a number of definitions of community capacity in the literature, and community capacity may have many different meanings for differing contexts.

Chaskin (2001) defined community capacity as:

...the interaction of human capital, organizational resources, and social capital existing within a given community that can be leveraged to solve collective problems and improve or maintain the well-being of a given community. It may operate through informal social processes and/or organised effort”

Whilst definitions may differ there are commonalities in the dimensions of community capacity. The dimensions are as follows:

- participation and leadership
- skills (such as planning, coordination, advocacy, management, problem solving, and conflict resolution, resources (both access to resources, such as financial capital, social capital and technology – and the ability to use them prudently
- social and inter-organisational networks
- sense of community (belonging, influence, fulfilment of needs, and emotional connection
- understanding of community history
- community power (amalgamation of sense of community, leadership, resources and a shared concern)
- community values (ability to define a shared value orientation, and how consensus of these values is achieved)
- critical reflection

These dimensions may relate to or impact on each other in varying ways. During the interview process, the common themes identified corresponded with these dimensions, which provide a useful template for analysis.

Participation and Leadership:

Leadership was one of the originally identified purposes for the Community Wellbeing Network.

The interviews highlighted this desire from the Network to utilise the meetings as an opportunity to develop their leadership opportunities. It also identified that for many, this need was not being met effectively.

"...The CWN could be used as a learning tool. We can come together and share our learnings from our specific perspective. We could have member presentations at each meeting - and focus on each one in depth.

It could be a knowledge bank. A learning tool - knowledge through learning, and learning together so we are all talking the same talk. This kind of thing would really develop the leaders of the sectors....we need to grow our leaders so that they can impart what they learn to build the capacity of their members in their sector..."

It should also be noted that those members of the Network that had been mandated to represent the Network on the Collaboration Strategy Group felt that this need had been fulfilled to some extent.

"..the collaboration strategy group reps have grasped the big picture and the others were desperately trying to translate what we were reporting back to them. We were racing ahead with the others feeling left behind. They just didn't know the shorthand.."

Participation was one of the key issues identified by the Network as reason for a review.

The most reported reason for lack of participation was cited as a lack of individual understanding of the process. It was felt that people did not attend when they felt there was nothing of value for themselves or their organisations.

"..It absolutely bores me. I get nothing out of the meetings. It all seems a great big talk fest with no actions. I have been told by my executive that I have to attend so I do. But I really see no point in it. What do we achieve?"

Individual participation has dropped dramatically over the last 18 months. It was acknowledged that for many this meeting does not have a high priority within their work programme. They felt that other meetings were achieving their networking needs. This also highlighted the fact that for many, the Community Wellbeing Network was seen purely within the parameters of networking, and not meeting any other of the original purposes.

The development of the Collaboration Strategy Group has also impacted on participation. For some, their engagement in various "Calls to Action" projects had impacted on their time resources. More importantly, some felt that working within the Calls to Action collaboratively with other sectors had fulfilled their need for shared learnings across sectors. It also meet the need for developing shared learnings, and access to knowledge that had originally been met to some extent by the Wellbeing Network.

Gaps in representation of different sectors was highlighted.

"...there has always been gaps in representation from the beginning, especially in Maori and Pacific sectors."

"...it has been difficult to get and retain the right representation.."

".. we need to focus on why people aren't attending and address any issues that are inhibiting them. Need to look at resourcing and supporting the capacity of Pacific Island peoples to be active citizens in

city development..."

Most people felt that not all the right people were currently sitting around the table. The question of mandating was raised, and how to get that "right" person.

"..everyone was supposed to be mandated by their sector. I don't think that has really been happening of late. If someone was mandated back near the start...then do they need to be remanded on a regular basis?"

"..I don't think it has to be a key leader of their sector at the table...its more important to get someone committed to representing their sector, and who will attend, and feed back information.."

"..we should have an annual forum or Summit to formally elect the representatives....a formal election linked to wider mandate...those elected would be made far more accountable, and the value of the network better understood.."

"...there is noone to speak and represent the gaps in the sector representation. We are not being fully informed. Informed organisations will go ahead. It is a critical part of community development.."

Other factor cited as affecting participation were:

- other commitments
- lack of perceived outcomes - not action oriented
- no common understanding and vision
- need to engage at a different level - we had moved to a new paradigm
- was not meeting relevant needs

Skills:

The individual desire for skills that would enable the individual to achieve greater outcomes was high. There was also a deep sense that at present the Community Wellbeing Network was not achieving any skill development. This was an area that was identified as a potential success factor - a key purpose

These desired skills included:

- shared learnings for common understandings - being able to speak the same language
- knowledge base
- advocacay
- lobbying
- common understanding of civil society
- peer support
- to be strategic brokers
- political activism
- development of community templates

"..we just sit around and talk, or get talked too. Sometimes we have presentations...but then run out of time to discuss them. What's the point in that? For me to feel like it's worthwhile, I need to get new things out of it. I want to discuss things with my peers, and share things I think are of value. My whole job is about achieving outcomes,..its action oriented. Where's the action here...although I supposed mandating things is action...but are we mandating? We don't have everyone round the table..its token mandating really.."

"...the network is just not doing what it could. We have hit a new paradigm. It needs to move up a level and be far more than just a networking meeting. That need is being met elsewhere. The Community Wellbeing Network is perfectly place to be a flowerbed for growing organisations skill "flowers". I think it needs to look at reshaping itself into something that can meet that need..."

"..we have got a handle on networking. As community we invented networking. What we really need is to develop common understandings of how to most effectively engage with government and council, and make it count...."

"..if you look at it...we have key people from most sectors sitting around the table...what better place to raise awareness of issues, and to collectively act upon them?.."

"...I want to come along and find out what works for other organisations. I want to learn about what they did, how they did it, so that I can use the good bits and not repeat the bad..."

"...our power is in our ability to speak out without being hamstrung by government beauracracy..we need to be looking towards making our voice count. I think the CWN could assist that..."

Social and inter-organisational networks:

"...knowing and learning are deeply social acts. The boundaries between personal knowledge and organizational memory are fading away as professional competence demands access to quantities of information that the individual cannot process alone..."

Collaboration and Community by Denham Grey September 7, 1998

"I achieve more networking in the carpark afterwards..."

There are many different network meetings currently occurring in Waitakere. The most similar in perceived purpose was the WADCOSS network meeting, of whom the majority of participants also attended. People also cited their own sector-specific meetings. Networking was deemed important for all sectors. The need to know what was going on in other sectors was also important. However, this need was not seen as

being met specifically by the Community Wellbeing Network. Other networks were seen to be adequately meeting that specific need.

Utilisation of the Network to meet and share learnings was seen as superceding its networking capacity. It was deemed important to have some form of network to meet the needs of community first. There was common agreement that there was a great need for the sectors to meet on an ongoing basis. Some other options of engagement were:

- news groups via internet
- website development
- quarterly forum
- to meet on specific topics
- regular shared learning 'lunchtime' meetings

There was general consensus that the Network needed to sit within the community. It was felt that Waitakere City Council had a social responsibility to resource the administrators of the Community Wellbeing Network. The administration was seen to sit well within the core services provided by WADCOSS, as they were the key "general" social service agency in Waitakere.

"...it needs to sit with WADCOSS...must be non-politically aligned in all ways. If it sat with council there is too many other things that could influence it..."

"...Council should just be an equal partner round the table...if it sat with Council then they would not be that...there would always be a perceived imbalance of power round the table..."

Sense of community:

"...we are community....we have worked collaboratively all along the way. We had to due to the funding (lack of). It is only new for the government agencies. We may have been split asunder during the 80's, but we have always worked together..."

"...As far as the Network goes...there are no new faces...I see most of them at other meetings I attend. What we don't seem to have right now is a common understanding of what we are here for...we have lost that common bond. The ones that attend the other meetings (collaboration strategy group) seem like a bit of a clique to me...they are the one's always chosen for things, and we are left just to hear what is going on.."

There was a strong sense that the initial sense of belonging had been diluted as the original members moved on. All participants felt a strong

connectedness to being part of the 'community sector', but this did not follow through to the table. Some current participants did not feel that sense of connectivity around the table. They felt that the process did not fully encompass everyone in equal value. This is in conflict with one of the original purposes, which was that everyone's input was of equal value.

It was clear however, that all participants had shared, collective desire to promote and enhance wellbeing in Waitakere.

Understanding of community history

" When the CWN was first set up, its participants were first generational. We gathered the original threads together. They had a collective understanding and vision. Now we don't have that and I think it is important that everyone that sits round the table has a common understanding. It was a consolidation of the document (Wellbeing Report) and we had clearly identified leaders who had signed their name to the document. They had collective ownership of the process, and had been part of that process from the beginning..."

" the one thing for me that was so good was the collective power, and the snapshots of each sector. It was action oriented around the reporting and accountability to the MP's and vice versa..."

"...in community we have common understandings on a lot of things...funding, lack of time, resources, and volunteerism...the culture of community. What we need now is to share our understanding with others..especially government. This is the only way we can move forward.."

Many representatives that currently sit at the table do not have the collective historical understanding of what they are there for. This lack of 'history', and a reliance on the individual were deemed to be key risk factors inhibiting the network to grow and develop.

It was mooted that this could be resolved by the creation of a collective understanding. An induction to the Network could assist in establishing a common understanding of roles and responsibilities.

Community power:

It was generally felt that the Community Wellbeing Network was not achieving its potential for both lobbying and advocacy.

Both these roles were deemed as being the intrinsic and special 'power' of the network.

" we need to move up to the plate. We need to understand more about our collective power to make things happen. We have all these supposed leaders of sectors sitting round the table...why don't we use that? We could do combined submissions on local, or regional or even national issues of concern to us. Imagine what a big voice we could have.."

"...why aren't we using these meetings to develop our power base?.."

"...I think we could really do some good stuff around joint submissions...one voice from the community would be far harder to ignore.."

"we are all working together for the same thing really...just in slightly different ways.."

"council and government need to realise that without us they don't have the mandate. We hold the key to collaboration, and just don't seem to be using it to its best advantage right now..."

There was a general consensus that the area of advocacy and lobbying as one voice was certainly something that the Network would like to investigate further. Many felt that this was a missed opportunity in the meetings. Participants wanted to learn more and utilise their intrinsic community voice - collaboratively.

"..I want to see it renamed....Community Caucus maybe. Need to get rid of the network bit...make it more meaningful..debate significant policies that have and impact.."

Community Values:

Community information is critical to community networks and information that supports the core values especially valuable.

Within the Network there was a lack of common understanding of its core values. People spoke of its power, and its ability to speak from a grassroots level. However, when it came to core values there was not a full agreement

Some of the values that were voiced included:

- collaborative actions as opposed to individual organisational gains
- collective understanding
- to not reinvent the wheel
- to learn and share resources with each other.
- To provide mandate at a grassroots level for Council and Government.
- To be an entry point for community engagement

It was felt that in order to ascertain just what the Networks core values were, that a wider community forum was required. Due to the lack of representation currently around the table, this aspect needed fuller input and mandation from a much larger group.

As has been highlighted, a lack of common understanding around the table as to the role of the network is a serious risk factor in its ability to achieve good outcomes.

"...if you are going to get buy-in you have to have the input from the very beginning..."

"...information is great...as long as it is relevant.."

Critical reflection:

"..if it is to continue, then somebody needs to be actively shaping it all the time. They should be meeting with networks, and the representatives...promoting it....it should be part of someones job description.. Todays needs are not tomorrows. We can learn, move on, and work on something new...."

"...Its time has passed on balance.."

"...the strategy (collaboration wellbeing) intersector and the wellbeing network are now a block instead of assisting. The Community Wellbeing Network is just another layer through which things pass...."

There was general consensus that the shape and form of the Community Wellbeing Network was not currently achieving its original purposes. It was also agreed that these purposes need to be reviewed. Agreement was given that what representatives wanted now was a more 'high level' network in order to engage more effectively with other sectors. Some felt it was essential to be outwardly focused and not reliant on individuals, but rather to create a collaborative cross-sectoral culture that included both local and central government. However, the key focus of the network was seen to be about developing communities ability to engage on all levels effectively. It was important to keep building the capacity of the community to engage at its core.

"..we are there for us. Not for council or government. It should be all about us - community, and what we want.."

"...if there wasn't a Community Wellbeing Network, then how would community mandate the calls to action, or feed into other processes?.."

"...I know its got to change. I'm not sure how but I do know that only a few people get anything out of it right now..."

"..we need to link into the international perspective. There have been major changes which we could put in place...link to international civil society....become a basis of best practice, governance and capacity building.."

"..it all fell over when you had no content and only process...people leave.."

The Way Forward

A recommendation is that a Community Wellbeing Forum occur to collectively decide on the role of the Community Wellbeing Network.

This forum would

- **shape the future direction of the Network,**
- **how it would better meet the needs of its participants,**
- **selection processes**
- **define core values**

- **create a collective understanding of the role of the Community Wellbeing Network**
- **possible development of a constitution**
- **election or similar process to get representatives**
- **formalise roles and responsibilities.**
- **review the purpose**

It is believed that this document could be utilised as a tool to elicit that discussion.

For the most part, representatives were in agreement that they did want the network to continue. The original purposes for the most part still held true. The major barriers to achieving these goals were the network's structure at present, especially the lack of representation from some sectors.

Participants clearly felt that the community sector's needs had changed and showed commitment to developing a new model that would best meet these needs.

Networking amongst sectors was no longer of primary concern. This need was being met adequately on other levels.

Developing tools collectively to build their capacity had now superseded that need.