

UNSW Community Development Project

History

- The UNSW Community Development Project (CDP) began as the Waterloo/Redfern Community Development Project (WRCDP).
- It was initiated in 1995 through the joint efforts of Professor Tony Vinson, Jennifer Westacott (then Regional Director of the Department of Housing and later Director General of Housing Victoria) and some tenants at Waterloo Housing Estate. Professor Tony Vinson (who at that time was the Head of the School of Social Work) undertook a research project that identified high levels of disadvantage and low social cohesion correlated with social isolation and perceptions of crime.
- Following consultations with the local community, he began negotiations with DoH to establish a unit to make the educational resources of the university available to the disadvantaged Waterloo community to assist in the process of community renewal and provide social work and other students with professional practice experience in a real life community.
- The early success of the CDP led to its extension into the nearby Redfern estate in 1999 and more recently to a number of other estates including Sth Coogee (2002), Menai (2003) and Namatjira Place Chifley (2004) to assist in the social and physical planning of these estates.
- In the latter cases, the CDP initiated a social survey in each estate with the aim of gaining an understanding of life in each local area through the eyes of residents.
- Recently the DOH has also flagged its interest in developing the project further to include community development work on the Northcott estate in Surry Hills.
- The CDP is a unique educational partnership between the UNSW social work and built environment disciplines, the NSW Department of Housing, public housing communities and other social service providers.

- Over the last 13 years staff and students have provided community development, environmental design services and training for tenants on five public housing estates (Waterloo, Redfern, South Coogee, Menai and Chifley)
- It has also provided essential community development training for Dept of Housing (DoH) staff across the metropolitan area.
- The partnership provides a long-term commitment to public and other social housing communities through a combination of community development, training and research.
- It also provides a transferable model for engagement between universities and social housing communities.
- The CDP is jointly funded by the Central Sydney Division of the Department of Housing and a grant from the Vice Chancellor of the University of New South Wales. It employs a full-time qualified social worker as a coordinator based in the CDP office on the Waterloo Estate.
- The CDP also applies for and gains numerous small grants from local government (notably from the City of Sydney), state government departments and other granting bodies for community building projects.
- Academic staff from the School of Social Work and the School of the Built Environment oversees the project which is also guided by a management committee, with tenant representation, and a steering committee of UNSW and DOH staff.
- Over its 13 years duration, the project has involved more than 550 students, over 530 tenants, over 200 Dept of Housing staff and close to 80 other agencies in its programs.
- The CDP has helped initiate and has supported many community initiatives including:
 - Four community gardens (a report on the gardens won the 2004 Australian Institute of Landscape Architects Award for research)
 - SuperV Project (COS/CDP partnership)
 - employment programs
 - educational programs
 - children's and youth programs

- cooking classes
 - community meetings
 - lobbying
 - volunteer and leadership training
- Every session, Social Work students on placement, under the supervision of the CDP coordinator, have worked with tenants across four estates to assist them to build sustainable projects and Built Environment staff and students have provided DOH with many workable design solutions to estate problems that have been implemented.
 - In 2005 Sydney Uni's CDP which started in 2002 and was modelled on the UNSW CDP joined with the CDP for planning and partnership meetings and joint research projects.
 - The CDP remains an independent community based project with shared goals and benefits for tenants, the University and the DOH.
 - Benefits over the past thirteen years include:
 - The community has benefited through the many completed and ongoing projects and community capacity building & social enhancement;
 - The University has benefited through placement of dozens of social work students, hundreds of built environment students, hundreds of other social work and community medicine students visiting the estates and leverage of over \$800,000 worth of research from Australian Research Centre and other sources on aspects of public housing estate regeneration.
 - The DOH has benefited through increased social and built environment developments in the four estates, community development training run through the School of Social Work, seminars and lectures and advisory projects.

- The CDP was also a finalist in the Australian University Teaching Awards in 2003, also a finalist with the DOH in the



NSW Premier's Partnership awards and has been nominated and showcased a number of times by UNSW as a frontline community engagement project for UNSW.

Origin and Background of the CDP

Since its inception, the CDP has provided educational resources and support based on community development principles for a range of initiatives designed to build the capacity of the local community. By emphasising the meaningful participation of tenants, the CDP supports the process of sustainable physical and social change through the development of human and social capital (Chaskin, 2001)¹.

In recognising both the community's strengths as well as increasing levels of disadvantage due to increasing numbers of multiply disadvantaged tenants being housed by DOH (exacerbated by recent changes to the Policy for Allocations of Social Housing), the CDP has taken a two pronged approach :

- One at the grassroots community level
- The other directed at housing policy and service provision. It is important to recognise that the DOH is an integral part of the community with whom the CDP works.

Aims and Objectives

The aims of the CDP are to:

- Establish and maintain long-term service and learning relationships with tenants, agencies in specific public housing estates & the DOH
- Encourage community participation
- Identify and respond to community needs and priorities
- Identify projects, resources and assist in their coordination
- Encourage collaboration with other communities and organisations
- Provide appropriate learning opportunities for students and all partners.

¹ Chaskin, Robert, J. (2001) 'Building community capacity: A definitional framework and case studies from a comprehensive community initiative', *Urban Affairs Review*, Vol 36, No 3: pp??

The UNSW CDP also aims to develop a transferable model for universities to engage and work with social housing communities.

The model can be characterised as:

- Taking a community development approach – ie building capacity and sustainability
- Developing respectful learning partnerships with multiply disadvantaged communities, local agencies and the DOH
- Linking student learning and university staff expertise with community needs
- Providing opportunities for University students to learn from partner communities
- Providing a variety of innovative learning experiences that mutually benefit tenants, students and DOH staff.

Types of Programs

The programs of the CDP are estate specific and multi-faceted and include a mixture of strategies aimed at addressing both the social and physical-environmental concerns of the community. They fall broadly in the following four categories:

Supporting community regeneration (both physical and social) through engaging tenants in a process of identifying issues, developing strategies and participating in planning and implementation;

Providing formal training for social housing communities and housing department officers in community development, leadership and volunteering;

Encouraging community enterprises of various kinds and developing the management skills of tenants to support independence and sustainability of these ventures; and

Undertaking research to assist in identifying community needs and to evaluate the effectiveness of programs.

Key Achievements

The key achievements of the CDP over the 11 years of its operation are:

- Progressive learning and capacity building engagement with five large public housing estate communities

- Development and management of learning and support for community projects and initiatives
- Real-life learning opportunities with social housing communities for undergraduate and postgraduate social work and built environment students
- Development of linkages with TAFE to provide pathways from community based training to more formal technical and higher education
- Community development support, training and professional development for community members and NSW Department of Housing
- Community-grounded research addressing community-identified issues
- Development of Postgraduate programs in community development.