

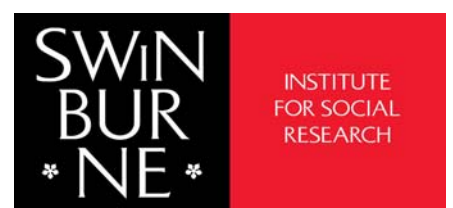
Community Consultation and the 'Hard to Reach'

City of Moreland Case Study Report



Focus on Fawkner Community Group

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The **Hard to Reach Project** is a collaborative research venture with eight Victorian local councils, the Victorian Local Governance Association and researchers from Swinburne University. The three year project is jointly funded by the Australian Research Council and partner organisations.

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Front cover: The newly elected Focus on Fawkner Incorporated committee of management 2007 (Moreland City Council 2007: 2)

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Introduction

This report is one part of a series of case study reports for the *Community Consultation and the Hard to Reach* research project. The project is investigating how community consultation is currently practised by Victorian councils, especially in relation to multiple publics and groups that councils can find hard to reach.

The *Hard to Reach* project is a collaborative research venture, with eight Victorian local councils, the Victorian Local Governance Association, and researchers from Swinburne University. The three year project is jointly funded by the Australian Research Council and the Cities of Boroondara, Darebin, Maribyrnong, Melbourne, Moreland, Nillumbik Shire, Port Phillip and Whittlesea. The eight participating councils comprise inner city as well as city fringe locations, homogenous and highly ethnically and culturally diverse populations, economically advantaged and disadvantaged areas, well established and newly developing areas, municipalities with a long-standing commitment to community consultation as well as those which are still developing their policies and practices. While the councils chosen may not be statistically representative, the range of contexts and socio-demographic characteristics reflect the attitudes and practice of community consultation as it is currently taking place in Victoria.

As part of this research, a detailed case study was conducted with each

partner council. In order to gain a balanced insight into current practice, case studies were matched to provide examples of a range of levels of consultation that includes:

- high level strategic planning
- place-based issues
- service reviews
- issue based consultations
- consultations aimed at involving specific 'hard to reach' groups
- community development.

The matched case studies will assist the greater *Community Consultation and the Hard to Reach* project provide useful insights for each of the partner councils, as well as a broader commentary and analysis of the challenges faced when councils attempt to consult with or engage their communities in decision making.

Why the case study was chosen

...knowledge of place nurtures our sense of belonging yet is rarely reflected in the lines drawn on maps and administered by multiple layers of government in fragmented and competitive departments.

(Garlick 1997:24)

The Focus on Fawkner case study provides an excellent opportunity to investigate the issues facing council officers, councillors and community members when implementing a place-based approach to community

building in a local area that faces a number of challenges. Focus on Fawkner is a three year community building project that is jointly funded by the state government Community Support Fund (CSF) and Moreland City Council from 2005 – 2007. It is facilitated by Moreland City Council.

As such Focus on Fawkner is part of the state government's pilot Community Building Initiatives which are taking place in Victoria under the broad banner of *Growing Victoria Together* (the 10 year strategic framework for the State). These flagship pilots are intended to improve relationships within communities, between communities and government at all levels, and between communities and business. It is expected that this will have a positive effect on the vibrancy and strength of communities.

The goal of the place-based approach is integration of social, economic and environmental planning from the perspective of place rather than government departments (Considine 2004). This differs radically from previous models and requires significant changes to relationships between government departments, as well as to the way government works with communities. The new approach has considerable potential to deepen democratic practices (Salvaris 2004).

The success of place-based initiatives depends on the ability of the many actors (e.g. council staff, councillors, community members, service providers) to form new relationships and reshape existing ones to find fresh and mutually

satisfactory ways of working together. In this instance, the Focus on Fawkner Community Group provided the major forum for discussion throughout the initiative with the community group meeting with community members, project workers, businesses, schools, residents and members of local organisations, and council staff. Hence the community group was central to the process; it actively recruited community members and developed their skills. It also co-ordinated the implementation of the Fawkner Community Action Plan 2003 – 2005, which scoped the range of activities to be undertaken. The community group was also important as the mechanism through which a significant degree of ownership over the process was devolved to the community.

While it remains to be seen what impact Focus on Fawkner will have on council practice in the long-term, and to what extent place-based planning will be integrated into future initiatives, initial indications are encouraging.

Focus on Fawkner Inc., as it exists in 2007, evolved from the hopes, work, energy and commitment of many people from community organisations, agencies, businesses, residents, schools, local and state government, academics, media and churches. Together, they endeavoured to find an agreed way of working together in the interests of the whole Fawkner community.

Focus on Fawkner is a work in progress and important questions are currently on the table for discussion.

The degree to which the community group is representative of the wider Fawkner community is of ongoing concern. Efforts to involve community members who are sometimes considered to be hard to reach continue, as do efforts to ensure sufficient levels of resourcing to continue the community building process beyond the initial three year funded stage.

The research process

The Focus on Fawkner case study contributes insights about how relationships between councillors, council staff and community members need to be formed and reformed and trust built if the community strengthening process is to be successful. The process, structures, skills and expectations of the people involved are examined, as are the potential and limitations of this initiative. As with any staged development, the roles of individuals and organisations changed over the three years of the project. However, the goals of the initiative remained consistent throughout.

As part of the research and to document the process and achievements of the Focus on Fawkner initiative, researchers from Swinburne University attended a number of the Focus on Fawkner Community Group meetings. In addition, face to face and telephone interviews were conducted with the project worker, other participating council staff, community members and councillors.

Initial interviews with council staff and community members were carried out by Ivan Zwart during the first stage of the research. They focused on consultation practices in general and perceptions of council staff. At a later stage, Helen Sheil conducted interviews with elected representatives and Moreland Community Health Centre Staff located in Fawkner. The perspectives of Focus on Fawkner Community Group members are incorporated throughout the report to allow the community focus to be consistently present.

The Council Plan and other relevant policy documents were analysed for background information about the initiative. Research can enable those actively involved in the process to sit down together and take ownership of future action. One way of doing this is through the design of questions which encourage reflection and evaluation of what has taken place so far, before moving on to the future (Kemmis and McTaggart 1996; Wadsworth 1997). The analytical framework used here draws on the work of Mark Considine (2006), which uses a series of critical questions about place-based partnerships. The benefit of this framework is that it helps us to understand that competing imperatives, challenge, conflict and negotiation are important parts of the process of partnership-building. Considine's critical questions have therefore been drawn on to frame the approach taken in this report

Who is 'hard to reach' and why?

In the context of local government, 'hard to reach' is a term sometimes used to describe those sections of the community that have been absent in public participation. It is useful to take a step back and look at the usage of the term in the literature more generally, as many of the issues raised there are also applicable to local councils.

Problems with 'hard to reach' terminology'

There is a lack of clarity about what exactly is meant by 'hard to reach' and the term is employed inconsistently. It can refer to minority groups, such as ethnic, gay and lesbian, or homeless people or at other times it may refer to broader segments of the population, such as old or young people or people with disabilities (Jones and Newburn 2001: vi). In the service context, 'hard to reach' often refers to the 'underserved', namely minority groups, those slipping through the net, and the service resistant (Doherty et al. 2004). An alternative term for 'hard to reach' used in the sampling context is 'hidden populations' (Atkinson and Flint 2001; Duncan, White et al. 2003). That is, these populations are hidden from the point of view of sampling. Hidden populations may also actively seek to conceal their group identity, as for example in the case of illicit drug users, gays and lesbians and sexually active teens (Duncan et al. 2003).

A problem with using the term 'hard to reach' is the implication of homogeneity within these groups which does not necessarily exist. Thereby 'it defines the problem as one within the group itself, not within your approach to them' (Smith 2006). This sentiment is echoed by Murphy (2006).

It is not surprising that 'hard to reach' is a potentially stigmatising terminology and can shape attitudes of decision makers and become internalised in the psyches of those who are labelled (Steinem 1992). Freimuth and Mettger (1990: 323) offer an illustrative summary of prejudices about 'hard to reach':

Hard-to-reach audiences have been called obstinate, recalcitrant, chronically uninformed, disadvantaged, have-not, illiterate, malfunctional, and information poor.

Origins and usage of 'hard to reach'

The label 'hard to reach' is also used in social marketing (Beder 1980). The aim of many social marketing initiatives, especially in the field of health, is to affect change in behaviour using marketing tools and techniques adopted from the private sector (Walsh et al. 1993). Social marketing is a consumer focused approach that believes nobody is impossible to reach; it just depends on the approach taken. Paul Vittles commented that 'no-one is hard to reach, just more expensive to reach.

It is important to put more effort and creativity in reaching these groups' (Wilson 2001:1).

This is borne out in medical and health research, where 'hard to reach' classifications often appear in relation to the ability of health services to reach out to certain difficult to contact (or difficult to influence using existing techniques) segments of the population (Freimuth and Mettger 1990; Walsh et al. 1993; Faugier and Sargeant 1997; Burhansstipanov and Krebs 2005). Here the 'hard to reach' are also equated with the 'underserved', which can mean that either there are no services available for these groups, or more often, that these groups fail to access the services that are available (Earthman et al. 1999; Barlow et al. 2005; Burhansstipanov and Krebs 2005).

Who is identified as 'hard to reach'?

With the renewed emphasis on governance and community engagement, councils are now also focusing on those population segments that do not usually participate. Interviews and focus groups conducted with the partner councils to this research project identified culturally and linguistically diverse communities, Indigenous, young, elderly, disabled and homeless people as hard to reach. Other groups included drug users, sex workers, those on low incomes, high rise apartment dwellers, faith based communities, businesses (traders), single parents, newly arrived residents, gay and lesbian

people, problem gamblers and residents of hostels and boarding houses. Some rural populations were also considered to be 'hard to reach'.

Also identified were unresponsive people, such as the time poor (people who are in full-time work and/or work outside the council area); persons who have a low commitment to the local area or had less interest in local issues (e.g. renters); and disengaged people who are disillusioned with, or feel disconnected from, the political process.

Other factors such as over consultation can lead to reluctance to participate. Persons who would like to have a say in local issues, but do not know how to access council processes, cut across these demographic categories.

It is important to acknowledge that attitudinal aspects are also a contributing factor. For example, people can be hard to reach because of past experiences, legislative stripping of appeal processes (Crooks 1999) or in the case of immigrants there can be fear of authorities. Local government authorities in the UK thought some people simply think council does not care about them and does not listen or even that the council is irrelevant to them (Wilson 2001). It is these attitudes that can be even harder to overcome than demographic aspects.

In addition to demographic and attitudinal characteristics, there are also practical reasons why some people are hard to reach. In the

medical context, the most frequently reported barriers to participation in the US Head Start programme were prior commitments and schedule conflicts (Lamb-Parker et al. 2001 as cited in Barlow et al. 2005). This is of relevance for scheduling public participation processes in councils as well.

The wide connotations associated with and imprecise usage of the term 'hard to reach' calls into question its utility. A number of groups and population segments have traditionally been underrepresented in councils' public participation. But in reality, few of these groups are hard to reach if the right approach is used. It is now recognised that certain groups may be hard to reach in some contexts or locations and not in others. A more fruitful approach is to identify characteristics of 'hard to reach' groups and link these to successful approaches to contact or involve them (Brackertz 2007; Health and Safety Executive 1994; Jones and Newburn 2001).

Common to many writings is the recognition that those wishing to involve 'hard to reach' groups need to overcome their own prejudices about the people they wish to contact, while at the same time having to work to address the preconceptions (often misconceptions) of those with whom they wish to consult (Freimuth and Mettger 1990; Barlow et al. 2005; Burhansstipanov and Krebs 2005).

One such strategy to assist this process involves emphasising connections rather than needs and deficits. Common interests across

difference can become evident when there is the opportunity for people to meet together and engage in dialogue with respect and a willingness to listen to each other. These occasions provide an opportunity to hear first hand accounts of the reality of people's lives, rather than the myths or misinformation of many media portrayals. This is itself a major step in establishing relationships which can result in inclusive practices (Freire 1972; Vella 2002).

Sampling 'hard to reach'

In sampling, the term 'hard to reach' is used frequently in relation to the need to include certain population segments to obtain a representative sample (Messerli et al. 1995; Rhodes et al. 2004). In relation to participatory practice in councils, representativeness is linked to the need to include all those affected by a particular issue to secure democratic legitimacy. The method and tool of public participation used will affect the representativeness of those participating. The degree to which particular groups are hard to reach is context specific and depends on the population targeted, the participation method used and the issue consulted upon.

Van Meter (1990 cited in Faugier and Sargeant 1996) distinguishes between extensive and intensive data collection methodologies. Descending methodologies (quantitative strategies executed at the level of general populations) require highly standardized questionnaires, population samples

and traditional statistical analysis. These quantitative methods rely on 'representative' sampling strategies to make inferences about the whole population. Survey studies in the general population that rely on closed questions are inherently limited by the scope of the data obtained and may yield little understanding of the phenomenon under study, which is particularly limiting when exploring new or sensitive areas (Hendricks & Blanken 1992 as cited in Faugier and Sargeant 1997).

Ascending methodologies on the other hand use qualitative sampling designs and are usually non-generalisable, but provide a high degree of insight into a social process enabling personal experiences to be understood in a wider political context (Steinem 1992). Typical methodologies use snowball sampling, life histories and ethnographic monographs with analysis adapted to suit the specific techniques employed (Faugier and Sargeant 1996). Snowball sampling is an example of a special technique that was developed to attempt to include 'hard to reach' and hidden populations (Atkinson and Flint 2001). It is a link tracing methodology that is used most often for qualitative research. In essence the technique relies on a series of referrals that are made within a circle of people who know each other or who are loosely connected. The respondent is asked

to name other persons who fit the criteria described by the researcher. The newly identified persons are then interviewed and in turn asked to nominate others who fit the researcher's criteria and so on.

Councils are becoming increasingly aware of the need to use a range of strategies to engage with the diverse populations for whom they have responsibility on a range of democratic and planning issues. Therefore involving the 'hard to reach' is usually done through a combination of targeting public participation tools and reaching out to communities in a range of ways. The Moreland City Council case study is of particular interest as a place-based community development initiative with the Fawkner community through the Focus on Fawkner initiative.

Profile of the City of Moreland

Figure 1: City of Moreland Map (<http://www.moreland.vic.gov.au/index.htm>)



Moreland has a population of 142,325¹, which is culturally and linguistically diverse population. High proportions of Moreland residents are overseas-born and, compared to the Melbourne Statistical District, considerably

higher than average proportions speak a language other than English at home. Low levels of proficiency in English amongst residents mean that Moreland has a high level of need for translation and interpreter services. The varying needs and interests of people from a range of cultures and religious faiths also have implications for the services Moreland provides. Many new arrivals in Moreland are

¹ June 2003, <http://www.moreland.vic.gov.au/council/1council-fr.htm>

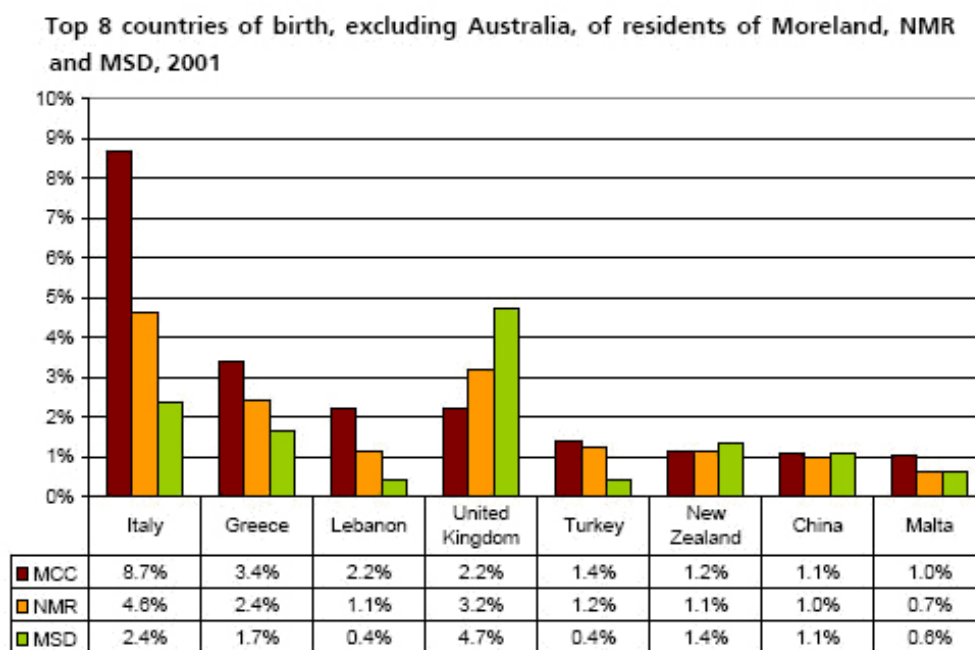
refugees and need support to access health, housing and employment services (Moreland City Council 2006).

In 2001, most (64.1%) Moreland residents reported that they were Christian, 7.2% followed the Islamic faith and 1.8% were Buddhist (Moreland City Council 2006).

The birthplace of residents varies considerably according to age.

Young people are mostly Australian born, while less than half of older adult residents were born in Australia. The birth countries of overseas-born residents also vary according to age. The most common birth countries for younger residents include New Zealand, China, Iraq, Lebanon and India (Moreland City Council 2006).

Figure 2: Cultural profile of Moreland (2001)



Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing 2001

(Moreland City Council 2007)

Social and Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA)

Moreland ranks in the lower third of most of the Social and Economic Indexes for Areas (Table 1). Only the Index of Education and Occupation reflects the average for the Melbourne Statistical District.

In general it holds true that the areas of Moreland which are closer to the CBD have less disadvantage, higher levels of educational attainment and a greater proportion of residents in professional occupations. The reverse is true for the more northerly areas of the municipality. Fawkner has the highest levels of disadvantage within the municipality (Moreland City Council 2002: 6).

Fawkner

...and one of those things is very much the bad publicity that Fawkner gets – being in the top 40 poverty postcodes is something that is difficult for people to take. (Interview 2006)

Fawkner is located in the north east of Moreland and is bounded by Queens Parade in the south, Merri Creek in the east, the Hume Highway in the west and the Western Ring Road in the north. These boundaries contribute to Fawkner having a 'village like' atmosphere but could also be said to have led to some marginalisation (Moreland City Council 2002: 8).

Fawkner has a population of around 12,000 people, many of whom live on very low incomes.

The largest number, nearly 3,000 have modest weekly incomes of between \$160 and \$300 per week, while nearly 600 have no income

Table 1: SEIFA rankings for participating Local Government Authorities

Local Government Authority	Population		Advantage/Disadvantage		Disadvantage		Economic Resources		Education and Occupation	
	N	Rank*	Index	Rank*	Index	Rank*	Index	Rank*	Index	Rank*
Boroondara	150,233	4	1,173	1	1,122	1	1,154	2	1,180	1
Nillumbik	58,161	27	1,104	7	1,108	4	1,104	6	1,079	10
Port Phillip	77,541	25	1,135	5	1,079	7	1,114	5	1,161	4
Melbourne	57,808	29	1,145	3	1,038	13	1,115	4	1,179	2
Moreland	131,359	9	995	21	985	25	981	26	1,015	15
Darebin	123,708	13	989	22	967	26	978	27	1,008	17
Whittlesea	114,082	15	949	29	962	27	977	28	927	28
Maribyrnong	57,907	28	972	27	915	30	968	29	989	21

* Out of 31 Melbourne Local Government Authorities

at all. On the other hand the census figures record that another 830 have weekly incomes of over \$1,500. 51% of Fawkner residents are in the labour force. The unemployment rate in 2001 was 10.3%. Youth unemployment is also 10.3%.

(Moreland City Council 2002: 8)

Half of Fawkner residents were born overseas, with the largest grouping being Italian (2,025) and significant numbers (over 100) from Greece, Lebanon, Turkey, Malta, United Kingdom, New Zealand and the Philippines (Moreland City Council 2002: 9). Over 26 different languages are spoken in the area.

A member of the Focus on Fawkner Community Group noted that

There are rapidly changing demographics in Fawkner, and with the recent arrests of the 13 Muslim terror suspects (4 of whom came from Fawkner), it's vital for the community to have a voice. Focus on Fawkner is a new network, and provides a venue for all of us to discuss these tricky issues.

(Interview 2006).

Fawkner has a range of services and community infrastructure. Located in the central area of Fawkner is the CB Smith Reserve. This Reserve houses the Fawkner Leisure Centre and Occasional Child Care, Senior Citizens Centre, Library, Community House, Maternal and Child Health Centre, Community Hall and Fawkner Branch of Moreland Community Health Service. Adjacent

is the Fawkner Secondary College, Darul Ulum Islamic College and Fawkner Blues Soccer Complex. The main shopping strip, Bonwick Street is two blocks away (Moreland Council 2002: 6).

A comment by a health worker with a long-term relationship with the Fawkner community conveys the high level of tolerance in the area.

Makes me very happy – never hear of incidents of aggression even though high percentage of Islamic population. Not been overt anti-Islamic presence (Interview 2007).

Place-based community development – a framework for analysis

Place-based planning is relatively new in Victoria. The approach invites consideration of how public and private sector policy, subsequent regulation and funding impact on people and the places in which they live. The Victorian government acknowledges the damaging impact on communities of fragmented responsibilities across departments and has introduced policies promoting joined up government and whole of government approaches to local issues. Their social policy statement *A Fairer Victoria* details strategies aimed 'at equipping communities to take greater responsibility over future directions and to have a greater say in local priority setting and decision making' (Department of Premier and Cabinet 2005: 7).

Policies supporting place-based planning are heralded as having the capacity to reduce red tape and foster democratic involvement (Salvaris 2004). By integrating public and private sector services working in the one locality, accountability focuses on the effectiveness of services rather than individual internal departmental targets. To achieve this goal an intermediary structure, such as a community organisation that has the capacity to present united views from within the community, facilitates this process. Community members' local knowledge then becomes integral to planning – citizens are not regarded

as just the passive recipients of services.

This increased emphasis on ownership at a local level has been tentatively welcomed by community members, councillors and council staff who experienced the damaging impact of the sacking of elected councillors, the appointment of commissioners and forced council amalgamations under the Kennett Liberal state government of the early 1990s (Mowbray 2000).

Interest-based groups within place-based planning

Place-based planning involves a geographical reference point that adds context to discussions of community involvement. Within a given area it is possible to appreciate the mix of interests and the impact on particular populations and landscapes, policies, planning and practice. People sharing a common characteristic such as ethnicity, ability, gender, level of income, Aboriginality, or particular interest in a cultural activity make up the population. These are functional community groups (Ife and Tesoriero 2006: 82-83) who frequently form associations with other groups. How these functional community groups are included or excluded within the geographic community determines their visibility in place-based planning.

Local government is a key contributor to the integration of

services through the planning processes and budgets for which it has responsibility. Good decisions can be made if councillors and council staff are well informed through processes and structures that engage with the experiences of 'ordinary people' – community members whose daily lives are enhanced or limited by current policies and practices. Public participation processes ideally enable decision makers to better understand the reality of changed policies and practices in particular situations. Especially when a place-based approach that is founded on collaborative decision making is used, integration between departments and organisations in the interests of a specific locality is essential. Such a shift requires the establishment of partnerships that can work well together. It is a shift in direction as '[m]anagement as a command and control function is universally rejected in place management thinking' (Faris 2005: 33).

That organisations can achieve desired outcomes if they work collaboratively through partnerships rather than in competition has been broadly recognised. Mark Considine points out that establishing collaboration between individuals and organisations requires an investment of resources and is an essential part of the transition process (Considine 2006). Individuals and organisations come to this new relationship with different

expectations, skills and commitment and the capacity of the new partnership is not known prior to its existence. Attention to the following questions provides insight into factors which assist the development of healthy partnerships and in time the opportunities available:

- What is the mandate for the partnership, including its normative foundation?
- What is the structure of the partnership, including membership/method of work?
- What resources does the partnership have at its disposal, including those of affiliated agencies it is able to influence?
- What actions or activities does the partnership itself undertake, including the co-ordination of services and the creation of its own programs?
- What impacts does the partnership seek to achieve in regard to improved local governance? (Considine 2006).

The following responses to these questions document the experiences of the Focus on Fawkner project and offer a foundation to inform future community strengthening initiatives.

Discussion – establishing collaboration in Fawkner

People say hello. If I walk to the shops I can have 20 different conversations. You know who belongs. This never happened in ... (southern suburb) when I lived there.

(Moreland City Council 2002: 60)

The objectives identified in *Focus on Fawkner Community Action Plan 2003-2005* were to:

- Improve the quality of life of residents by enabling them to have an impact on local development through directing and implementing projects and activities;
- Build the self-reliance of the community through a program of facilitation, resourcing and building the capability of the community to identify, plan and achieve its goals;
- Strengthen the relationships between the diverse individuals and groups which make up the community of Fawkner;
- Strengthen individuals' and groups' identification with their local community of Fawkner;
- Strengthen partnerships between the community, government and business;
- Achieve stronger integration of the social, economic and environmental systems that support community capacity.

The Focus on Fawkner Community Group was the main vehicle to facilitate these objectives. For both council and the community, the

community group was a new approach to managing resources and relating to community organisations. The degree to which the process and initiative were successful is examined below, using the analytical questions provided by Considine (2006).

Mandate(s) and foundations of the partnership

The name says it all. There isn't an in-group and an out-group. It's focused on us together.

(Community Discussion Participant, Moreland City Council 2002)

Multiple mandates existed for the establishment of a community-based committee in Fawkner – the community, the state government, and the City of Moreland.

Responses to questions of why and when Focus on Fawkner began reflect the diversity of individuals and organisations in raising the profile of Fawkner and the changing governance environment.

Community mandate

In Fawkner, which had been a ward of the Broadmeadows council before coming under the jurisdiction of Moreland City Council, the rate capping that had accompanied amalgamations had resulted in limited spending on infrastructure. The community felt that it had lost part of its identity.

[Fawkner is] the forgotten part of the Moreland City Council, they spent lots of money in Coburg or

Brunswick – lots of money spent on roadworks etc. people in Fawkner felt forgotten...

(Interview with Focus on Fawkner Community Group Member 2007)

And

[T]here was recognition that the whole area had not had a lot of attention for some years and was looking a bit tired in terms of investment in physical infrastructure. It looked a bit brown and neglected. Parks with no grass growing, relatively poor facilities, broken wire fences ...

Council decided to have the next meeting on site at Fawkner. (Moreland City Council 2002: 14).

Fawkner residents' association with the Moreland City Council began in 1994 following the rezoning of local government boundaries (Moreland City Council 2006). They felt the need to establish a relationship with the Moreland Council based on what the community valued about living in Fawkner.

As is the case with many community development initiatives, agencies involved with the daily lives of residents became involved in assisting the integration of newcomers with existing residents and services. The Moreland Community Health Centre was an active contributor and discussions were held at the Health Centre as part of the Community Building Project. During these discussions it became apparent that Fawkner residents liked many aspects of Fawkner but felt that the benefits were frequently not known outside

the area (Moreland City Council 2000). They regarded Fawkner as having a close knit family orientated and friendly community, close to shopping and public transport yet without through roads. Housing was affordable.

Within Fawkner, established families had support and long-term friendships. Many residents enjoyed living in Fawkner and had a long-term association with the place. Residents found the negative reputation distressing, and even those who found fault with the community advocated its positive attributes to outsiders.

I've lived in Fawkner for a long time...sense of belonging to St. Mathews and Fawkner. A big part of what I've been doing since my early 20s (now retired) has been to give people things without having to go out of the area. To improve facilities, you know, beautifying the place – like out the front of the Leisure Centre that's how it started.

It happens anywhere I think. If you looked you'd find that things like break-ins and burglaries are not higher than any other area. For instance, if my burglar alarm goes off and I'm not home, someone tells my father. There's very much that community [spirit] if someone needs help there are ways of helping, whether it's through the Church or neighbours, but that's possibly not well known. Because they're not publicised, the good news stories are not the ones that get spread. (Interview with resident 2007)

Areas for improvement were also clearly identified. Businesses reported that the lack of signage in the area contributed to a lack of identity for the neighbourhood. People felt that public spaces were unkempt and littered with rubbish. There was a desire to invigorate these public spaces (Moreland Council 2002: 15).

In February - July 2002 the *Building Fawkner - From Strength to Strength* community building project was initiated. The project aimed to involve all those with an interest in Fawkner, to examine the situation in Fawkner and identify strengths, resources, activities and plans for the neighbourhood (Moreland City Council 2002: 10). The results of the process were summarised in an *Initial Audit Report* (Moreland City Council 2002, Appendix 2, 58 pp), which formed the basis for the development of a Community Action Plan.

In addition to a series of community discussions, the Audit Report also drew on feedback from the Moreland Health, Safety and Wellbeing Leadership Group. The group comprised senior representatives of government departments and organisations with responsibilities for provision of services in Moreland and aimed to facilitate an integrated approach to enhancing health, safety and wellbeing (Moreland City Council 2002).

The audit report indicated that there were barriers to collaboration and service providers operated under restrictive funding and regulatory

requirements, which narrowed their focus and did not provide for any developmental work or collaboration (Moreland City Council 2002: 61). Despite this the report noted that there were:

examples of imaginative collaboration such as that between the Domestic Violence Network, Community Health Service, Neighbourhood House, Lebanese Welfare Association and Legal Service and also between the Maternal and Child Health Centre, Playgroups Victoria and Anglicare Divisions (Moreland City Council 2002: 65).

The report regarded 'the facilitation of inclusive practices within the Fawkner Alliance and its working groups', as an overarching priority 'in providing a model of positive interactions and outcomes for Fawkner' (Moreland City Council 2002: 65).

Following from the Initial Audit Report, a Community Action Plan was developed through a series of discussions with residents. The Action Plan is a succinct and accessible document designed to implement an 'all of government/cross/functional approach to the service development and delivery in Fawkner' (Moreland City Council 2002: 11).

The Plan identified five priority areas:

- bringing the people of Fawkner together
- improving the image of Fawkner
- promoting the area and its businesses

- developing activities and entertainment for young people
- deciding what other community services are needed.

These items were included in an economic and employment development strategy for Fawkner and later documented in the Fawkner Community Action Plan 2003 – 2005 Council reports.

The community involvement in the Audit Report and the Action Plan, and interviews with council staff and community members indicate a strong grass-roots mandate for the Focus on Fawkner Community strengthening project 2005 - 2007. The initiative benefited from timely synergies with the changing state government policies and funding that supported place-based planning.

Identified projects and interests reflected the goals of improving businesses and facilities in Fawkner and the desire to be inclusive of those community members who can be hard to reach.

State government mandate

In our reforms to the institutional arrangements between State and local government we recognised the importance and value of integrated planning and the need to reduce complexity and red tape. (DVC 2006: 9)

It has already been mentioned that the Focus on Fawkner initiative benefited from the changing emphasis of State government policies towards place-based planning and a support of community

strengthening initiatives. These were outlined in *Growing Victoria Together* (launched in 2001), a detailed 10 year commitment by the state government to economic, environmental and social goals, including community strengthening (Department of Premier and Cabinet 2004).

The state government's creation of the Department for Victorian Communities (DVC) further reinforced the major commitment to developing responsive rather than directive relationships with communities. In recognition of the fact that agreement on priorities, processes and ownership of initiatives between all levels of government in consultation with communities would take time, funds were made available to programs variously named community building, community strengthening, or capacity building initiatives.

The broad appeal of this approach was founded on the concept of 'social capital' that had gained prominence through the work of Cox (1995) and Putnam (2000). Thus, community strengthening encompassed:

Any sustained effort to increase the connectedness, active engagement and partnership among members of the community, community groups and organisations in order to enhance social, economic and environmental objectives. (Considine 2004: 4)

Because of the assumption that increased community strength will

have beneficial flow on effects for the community in terms of economics, health and wellbeing, funding criteria for community strengthening initiatives favoured communities that appeared to be disadvantaged on a range of indicators that included income, access to housing, education, employment and age.

Considine points out that governments and organisations tend to duplicate past practice – the norm – despite wanting to achieve different outcomes (Considine 2006). This is evidenced by the fact that funding for community-building initiatives continued to be tied to indicators of disadvantage. Examples of this are the SEIFA indexes, and the Jesuit Social Services report on external indicators associated with localities such as income levels, crime rates and a range of health information (Vinson 2004, 1999).

Because Fawkner measured poorly on many of these indicators, the funding application to the state government for the Focus on Fawkner initiative was considered to be in line with identified state government priorities.

However, those listening to community members were aware that the label 'disadvantaged' was distressing to many whose lives had been made more difficult by past policies and who were the very people the new policies were intended to assist. Labelling people as disadvantaged can also reinforce divisions that group people as superior or inferior, and make it more difficult to work in partnership with community members.

Local government mandate

Council sees consultation as a key step towards informed decision making.

(Moreland City Council 2000: 1)

State government frequently regards local government as being best suited to respond to diverse local needs and take a lead in public participation at the local level. The question of normative foundations highlights the significant changes associated with the introduction of place-based approach through state and local governments.

Following the dramatic reforms and economic rationalism of the former Kennett Liberal government, the Bracks Labour government recognised the need for a change in focus. Consequently Best Value Principles were introduced and enshrined in amendments to the Local Government Act (1999). Amongst other things, the Principles required local government to 'be responsive to community needs' (208Bb) and develop a program of regular consultation with its community in relation to the services provided (208e).

In response to the requirement for local government to undertake community consultation, Moreland City Council developed a Consultation Framework to assist council staff and councillors. Council has a proud history of community involvement on issues of human rights, the environment and development and this consultation framework emphasises the critical

relationship between consultation and democratic government.

Each council report requires that internal and external consultation has occurred before decisions are made by council (Accountability Statement). The Communication Strategy and the Community Information Strategy outline a range of ways to implement consultation. These include uses of the internet, community radio, Moreland City Council News, Council advertising and mail outs of letters or special publications, surveys, focus groups, public meetings called either by the council or the community, reference groups and street stalls. Data bases to improve circulation of information are regarded as important (Moreland City Council 2000: 12-13). Language links, interpreters and translations are available to support council staff, councillors and community members.

In the majority of these communication strategies, however, ownership is located with the council, and community members are placed in the position of respondents. As noted by councillors, this can undermine community trust, due to perceptions that decisions have already been made or that planning processes have already been put in motion with little scope for further amendments. Under these circumstances, methods such as public meetings or ward meetings can be confrontational and reference to 'the usual suspects' is a reminder that broad participation is difficult to achieve. In the case of surveys or letters also, the agenda and scope of the consultation is owned by council.

If true dialogue and partnerships are to develop, strategies that move beyond 'one off' consultations are required. This is acknowledged by council, which encourages Councillors to engage in consultation 'with imagination and an understanding of the needs of the community' (Moreland City Council 2000: 1).

The aim of the consultation strategy is to create and foster a consultative culture within Moreland and provide a sound foundation for democratic practice in implementing the Council Plan. The principles shaping the choice of communication encourage inclusiveness, focus, responsiveness, provision of information, implementation and evaluation (Appendix 2, Moreland City Council 2000: 5). In July 2007, council adopted a revised and expanded Community Consultation and Engagement Policy Framework that uses the Spectrum of Public Participation developed by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) as a reference tool for encouraging appropriate community engagement.

A range of consultation methods was implemented by council to respond to the concerns raised by Fawkner residents, agencies and organisations. The demonstrated commitment that supported the formation of the Focus on Fawkner Community Group enabled substantial teamwork to occur within and amongst groups who were working together in the interests of the wider community. Thus the establishment of the Focus on

Fawkner Community Group provided a responsive mechanism for issues to be initiated by the community and responded to by the council.

The Focus on Fawkner Community Group evolved from the Community Building project 'Building Fawkner – from strength to strength' (Focus on Fawkner Community Group 2007; Moreland Council 2002: 10). It involved community members and organisations in discussions about the positive features of Fawkner, visions for the future and ways to work towards these goals. Audits, service mapping, and engagement with business and community groups were also undertaken. The resultant Action Plan provided the foundation for the Moreland City Council to apply for funds from the state government.

According to council staff, key elements of the success of the funding application to state government for the Focus on Fawkner initiative were:

- Fawkner is the most disadvantaged suburb in Moreland (ABS data) and among the 7 most disadvantaged areas of Metropolitan Melbourne;
- The community wanted better facilities – there was a perception of Council neglect;
- Existing networks in the community needed better support from Council;
- There was strong support from elected representatives for a project in Fawkner.
(Interview with council officer 2006)

In the short term, the community group has drawn on the expertise of those who were already active in organised groups and otherwise in the community. It has taken time, however, to establish relationships of trust with migrants and refugees who did not previously have experience of these forms of engagement.

In summary, the Focus on Fawkner initiative had substantial grassroots support from the local community and occurred at a time when state and local government policies shifted towards an emphasis on the participation of communities in local affairs. The combination of these factors provided a foundation for the successful funding application for the Focus on Fawkner community building project and willingness of the various actors to work together.

Partnership structure, membership and method of work

The success of the Fawkner Community Action Plan depends on the effectiveness and representativeness of the Focus on Fawkner Community Group. The community group plays a key role in recruiting and developing the skills of local community members, co-ordinating the implementation of many of the initiatives outlined in the Action Plan and working to link with activities of other organisations in the area.

Community involvement in planning and project implementation requires relationships and trust to be

developed and the co-ordination of a multitude of actors over an extended time frame. The establishment of a community-based group to represent the diverse interests of the Fawkner community was a way of devolving power to the community and provides a vehicle for sustained community engagement.

The key to the effectiveness of the Fawkner Community Action Plan is the strength and representation of Focus on Fawkner
(Focus on Fawkner Community Group 2007: 1)

The ability of the Focus on Fawkner Community Group to continue to organise and advocate beyond the initial three year funded period will depend on its capacity to develop leadership abilities and collaborative structures between all people and organisations with an interest in Fawkner (Moreland City Council 2007).

To facilitate this, the Focus on Fawkner Community Group was incorporated. At the Focus on Fawkner meeting on 8 February, 2007, the 21 community members present celebrated their recent incorporation and elected the following members to the Committee of Management.

Members of Focus on Fawkner Inc. include residents, business owners and managers, sporting clubs, networks, schools and local service providers such as Fawkner Community House and Moreland Community Health Service. Key aims of Focus on Fawkner for 2007 are to improve Fawkner's

sense of Place (Freshen Up Fawkner) and to strengthen the group's ability to achieve its goals in achieving a friendly, safe, proud and beautiful Fawkner. Council is a founding partner of Focus on Fawkner and will continue to support members and the group as a whole to achieve its aims
(Moreland City Council 2007).

The degree to which the Focus on Fawkner Community Group is representative of the wider Fawkner community is another important factor to its success.

When the community group was formed it was open to all residents and was resourced by two part-time project officers employed by Council with State Government funding. The group attracted 15 regular members, most of whom were already active in a range of local organisations. Hence community group members frequently had multiple responsibilities in the community and heavy demands on their time.

The desire to broaden involvement to provide a mix of persons with previous experience and newcomers was evident in discussions with community group members and active recruitment of members to the project is a priority.

I never even knew it existed, until they asked us to come and join, because I was president of our playgroup.
(Interview with Focus on Fawkner Community Group Member 2007).

The importance of providing a mix of participants lies also in managing the demands placed on the time and

resources of community members. A common dilemma is that few community members, who are often active in multiple committees and organisations, can carry the burden of educating and involving the broader community and the responsible authorities. This was evident in conversations with community group members who found attendance at multiple meetings demanding on family time especially if they had young families.

Being 'a member of an organised group' and 'attending community events' are regarded positively by the Community Indicators Victoria (2007). However, these indicators would benefit from further analysis as they are underpinned by assumptions relating both to the capacity of the organisation to be inclusive, and the resources of the individual to participate. Wellbeing can in fact decrease in some situations, if organisations do not operate in inclusive ways and if those managing community organisations are not skilled at facilitating community engagement.

... one of the difficulties is that people who are community minded have so many other things that they have to do. ...there is the fear that it's being hijacked by the council, or that there is some other agenda, and that's the real challenge, to establish credibility and then be able to stay focused on that plan and be heard
(Interview with Focus on Fawkner Community Group Member 2007).

The current community group is striving to represent their diverse

community. Interviews with the project worker, council staff and community members indicate it takes time to engage the broader community, especially those groups who are sometimes tagged as being 'hard to reach'; these groups require active outreach and time to build trust. One successful way of doing this has been through involvement in planning and implementation of activities and festivals.

Being on the committee has meant that I learnt a lot of what Fawkner was thinking. And sometimes how timid people have been, how browbeaten people in Fawkner have been, they have been very loath to have any opinion at all to Council... that the world is going to come down and even if you say in the political sense how different things have happened. We need to get people to speak up more to learn more. Even over a pot hole – if you say ring up the council, they won't. That shouldn't happen in Australia or anywhere really.
(Interview with Focus on Fawkner Community Group Member 2007).

While conversations reflected a commitment to inclusion, it was also evident that there was a level of distress about media sensationalism, which impacted Fawkner's Muslim community when suspected terrorists were detained. The Focus on Fawkner Community Group is proud of the steps it has taken to involve the Muslim community in celebrations, sport and other cultural activities.

Making institutional reform work requires robust and well-informed dialogue underpinned by an understanding and appreciation of each other's role.

Candy Broad, Minister for Local Government (DVC 2006: 11)

Often, co-operative and collaborative processes can be hampered by changes of staff, councillors and

demographics within communities. Consequently, it is necessary to acknowledge that skills development and education about goals and processes must be ongoing. To address this difficulty Focus on Fawkner developed an agreed upon way of working and direction. Broad consultation, access to skilled workers, a chairperson and

Fawkner Multicultural Women's Swimming Group

The question of whether there was a need for women's only swimming (to cater for the Muslim women in particular) was raised at Focus on Fawkner meetings. As a result, the Focus on Fawkner newsletter invited expressions of interest from Muslim women who wanted to participate in a culturally appropriate Muslim women's swimming group. There was a strong response to this initiative, and consequently the councillor responsible for the women's portfolio raised the issue and involved staff from Leisure Services and Community Development and Social Policy Units.

In a good example of departmental co-operation, various departments across council came together to implement the initiative. Leisure Services, who manage the Fawkner Leisure Centre, required an exemption from the Equal Opportunity Commission to enable women-only use of the pool. The Focus on Fawkner project worker assisted with the application by Council to the Equal Opportunity Commission by providing background information on the interest levels in the population and current use of the pool.

As a result, in November 2006, permission was granted for women-only use of the pool from 3pm - 7pm on Sundays. A private booking arrangement is available for Muslim women to have their own space with an appropriate dress code. In addition to boosting numbers at the pool, which had been under-utilised, the participation in swimming by over 200 women and children on Sunday afternoons has benefits for individuals' wellbeing and is in line with Council's health plan. Younger women, who had previously been identified as being reluctant to access mainstream health and leisure services, are especially likely to embrace the program.

In any new initiative, there are challenges, and the learning curve has been steep for the participating women, Leisure Centre staff and those other Council staff supporting the project. For example protocols for supervision of children to ensure safety required a high level of attention as did promoting safe and appropriate swimming attire. To meet some of these challenges, staff have considered training young women as instructors.

committee underpin this.

Within the City of Moreland, responsibility for managing the Focus on Fawkner project lies with the Community Development and Social Policy Unit. This locates the initiative within a committed, though hierarchical support system with a strong cross-council participation and awareness. Focus on Fawkner has a high level of commitment in Council, appearing in the Council Plan as a major commitment.

Council officers and councillors have roles in facilitating community engagement that assists in the development of working relationships that enhance good governance processes. It is important to provide good processes for community involvement that pay attention to respect, safety, the immediate relevance of involvement and the development of language and relationships towards greater tolerance and inclusion (Vella 2002). While this is the responsibility of council officers generally and project officers in particular, this approach represents a major shift away from traditional management and administrative roles.

Balancing responsibilities and resources is important to successful community building. When ownership in decision making is shifted to local groups, it is also important to support community participation in planning that does not overly burden community members or raise unrealistic expectations. In conversations with staff and community members, it was evident

that these tensions are being addressed.

Council staff have multiple commitments derived from state government Acts such as the Disability Discrimination Act, or from council plans such as the Health Plan, the Transport Plan, the Child Services Plan and the Early Years Plans. Implementing a shift to integrated planning can be particularly challenging for staff supporting negotiation within and between community groups while also meeting existing expectations of council departments and legal requirements. There are benefits for all parties when forward planning is possible.

Reciprocal relations can be established with increasing awareness of the difference in community agendas (which tend to be long term) and council agendas (which are often shorter term and limited by councillors' portfolio responsibilities).

In summary, the three year duration of Focus on Fawkner enabled trust to be established and relationships to be built between those involved. Regular meetings and participation by a large number of Council staff and Councillors affirmed the importance Moreland Council attached to this project.

Comments from community group members indicate a willingness to commit their time, energy and expertise in the interest of improving opportunities in Fawkner, not only for themselves but also for the diverse population.

[It is] an opportunity to promote the things we know that are good about Fawkner. It does require people to be able to get involved. Whether it's planting trees or having a festival, they are then things which will eventually get publicity

(Interview with Focus on Fawkner Community Group Member 2007).

However, the degree to which community groups should operate as a separate entity remained a matter of flexibility. Some interviewees from the Health Centre and Community House, who deal on a regular basis with people facing major dislocation and life challenges, felt that a devolution of responsibilities may place unnecessary burdens on vulnerable people. However, the Action Plan, prepared according to local and state government formats, included the goal of independent Incorporation for the Focus on Fawkner Community Group by 2007 (Focus on Fawkner Community Group 2007).

Resources available to the partnership

[T]he great thing about these groups and Focus on Fawkner is that they have provided the people of Fawkner with a voice, so they can talk to Council and the state government – and they can bring in key stakeholders as well.

(Interview with Project Worker 2007)

In addition to the time volunteered by committee members, Focus on Fawkner is resourced by the state government's three year grant of

\$300,000. The funding supports two part-time project workers who are employed through council. The project workers play a central role in facilitating discussions with multiple community groups and linking them to council protocols, time lines and planning processes. The grant money can also be used for activities. Further funding has been obtained for a range of initiatives.

The contribution of project workers is particularly important in the establishment stages of new initiatives, when community development workers are a critical resource for the community. One key role is to introduce community perspectives to council's organisational framework. This can be a challenging situation as workers are employed by council, and are therefore accountable to the mainstream organisation even though they also need to gain and maintain the trust of the community, with whom they work on a daily basis. In the early stages of this process, 'the council' and 'the community group' frequently regard themselves as different entities – them and us. The primary contribution of the community development workers is to establish respectful relationships and credible processes to facilitate dialogue between all parties. This process also occurred when the Focus on Fawkner community group was established.

The worker is frequently the accessible face of the initiative and becomes the first contact point for council staff, councillors and

community members. This is a positive role if the parameters of facilitating engagement between community members, councillors and council officers are clear.

Both Focus on Fawkner project workers have a strong commitment to and relationship with the Fawkner community. In the project, they have differing roles. One worker was primarily responsible for resourcing the community group and supporting the achievement of the objectives and aims of the project. The other person was primarily responsible for communication and administrative tasks.

I'm employed with Focus on Fawkner, and the reason why I went for the Focus on Fawkner job was that I read the action plan (Active Fawkner). I've got a lot of family that grew up in Fawkner. I'm very familiar with the area and felt strongly that Fawkner needed something done to it, needed some help, so that's why I went for the role.

(Interview with Project Worker 2007)

This is my third year as a paid worker here. I really adore Fawkner because of the people, the people are just fantastic ... because people really do have a very strong commitment to Fawkner. You really want to listen to what they say. Just to try and do your bit to help people do what they need you to do. It's actually been the best job I've ever had, because I feel very connected to the people and very connected to the place

(Interview with Project Worker 2007).

The project workers were committed to the project and played a critical role in establishing ways in which the various actors could work together towards a common goal. Their contribution was especially important as the Focus on Fawkner Community Group was a new entity and funding was only available for an initial three year period. The project was staged over the three years from Establishment Phase in the first year, Consolidation Phase in the second and Sustainability Phase in the final year to keep the process alive beyond the funded period. Workers also had to build the capacity and skill of the community and council members involved.

Changing organisational culture within all levels of government is central to the community strengthening agenda (Considine 2004). Council staff responsible for the implementation of Focus on Fawkner initiated a number of strategies to increase their understanding of this approach. Being involved in the Hard to Reach project provided an opportunity for ongoing evaluation by all parties, while seminars and workshops conducted by organisations such as the Municipal Association of Victoria and our communities.com have provided access to current thinking and relevant tools. During the Consolidation Phase, Council established a Local Area Planning group consisting of staff from every department. This formal committee meets regularly to discuss, plan and

share information that pertains to Council's two place-based community development projects, of which Focus on Fawkner is one.

Actions and activities resulting from the partnership

The important thing is that they have been heard. For example a lot of community input has pointed to concern about litter. Fawkner residents are proud of their place and want it to reflect that pride. Because of that input, there are now some community projects running under the banner Freshen Up Fawkner where people have a chance to beautify and clean up their suburb. To implement ideas around concerns that they have. Being able to take some action instead of whinge, to meet others in the process and to see the improvements and know that 'we did that together'. That is what it's about. (Interview with Project Worker 2007)

A broad range of activities resulted from the Focus on Fawkner initiative, including:

- the establishment of a Focus on Fawkner office
- production of a newsletter
- outreach to Culturally and Linguistically Diverse communities (now including the Fawkner Multicultural Women's Swimming Group)
- signage and promotion of Mutton Reserve
- establishing Youth Leadership initiatives
- encouraging and supporting the Active Fawkner Network (a Fawkner Sporting Club Collaboration)
- developing a Fawkner Economic and Employment Strategy
- developing and supporting a Children's Services Network for Fawkner
- implementing Freshen Up Fawkner, a series of projects aimed at building a sense of place and a more attractive Fawkner
- Developing the Fawkner Transport Group who successfully lobbied to improve the local bus service.

Without a doubt, however, the Fawkner Festival has been the most successful initiative so far. It has become a highlight of community integration and celebration.

The good thing about last year's festival and this year's is that it is the community's festival. In the past it was very passive, people just turned up and were entertained ... But this is now the community's festival, there are stalls that you will all be on and some of you are performing, it's really changed the whole festival. This is what Focus on Fawkner is all about, not just a hand-out from Council, it's your thing. (Interview 2006)

The significance of the Festival to the community was the way in which it brought many previously isolated groups and individuals together through a range of activities and shared responsibilities. The energy and enthusiasm with which people

participated surprised people not familiar with the area.

Just new, been involved three years – since 2005, I like everything we are doing. Very involved in Focus on Fawkner in Festival – Carnival like in Italy.
(Interview with Resident 2007)

The parade in the Focus on Fawkner Festival is what brought it home for me. That Fawkner is a really rich community and full of great surprises (to outsiders). I'm looking forward to lots more.
(Interview with Council Officer 2007).

You've seen that change over time... since the festival, people come out more, even the Muslim people since we had the festival. How many Muslims come and they looked and I think it brought a lot of people out. I hope in future that is what we will build on.
(Interview with Focus on Fawkner Community Group Member 2007)

Photos of the Festival show a wonderful mix of ages, cultures and people from many organisations contributing to activities. It is a great example of community spirit that is nurtured by all the activities that have strengthened relationships in the area. Each time contact is made through the schools, the sporting groups, the wonderful meals at the Italian women's lunch, the bus trips from St. Mathews, participation in playgroups, senior citizens, health centre, neighbourhood house, local businesses or tree planting, greater trust is created. They are all important and community group

meeting minutes record the work of the sub-groups working with Focus on Fawkner and note the range of activities supported by this integrated approach.

However, there were planned initiatives that did not eventuate. In some but not all instances, this was because community priorities had shifted. In the initial discussions of the Focus on Fawkner Action Plan, a number of proposals to actively involve unrepresented groups were included in the Plan. However, many of these proposals have either not eventuated or have changed over time (Focus on Fawkner Community Group 2007: Plan 23); e.g., a three step community leadership and advocacy training program and the involvement of community ambassadors to identify and liaise with 'hard to reach' groups such as young people, and each of the culturally and linguistically diverse communities in the area.

Hopefully there won't be that thing where you get identified with one particular group or another ... trying to get Muslim people involved, trying to get young people involved so it becomes a broader range of views yet not political.

...to see if Focus on Fawkner can take us forward in a way that... reflects the community – which this group doesn't quite do yet - but to represent all those groups -- whether it's the Italian community or the tennis club, footy club, or whether it's the schools or the community - get together and talk think of the great opportunity there

to build on that there's probably a lot of confusion about exactly what Focus on Fawkner can do

(Interview with Focus on Fawkner Community Group Member 2007)

Future goals for Focus on Fawkner build on its achievements so far. The incorporation of the Focus on Fawkner Community Group early in 2007 enabled the project worker to continue supporting the community group during the initial transition period towards greater independence. Council staff from the Community Development and Social Policy Unit are attending Focus on Fawkner meetings to link projects more closely with relevant council staff. Opportunities to access further funding sources are currently being explored while the community group, independent of Council, develops plans for future action.

Project practices, if proven effective, should be informing long term significant changes to the core planning and service provision activities of agencies, and partnerships with other sectors within communities
(Faris 2005: 34)

The slogan of Moreland City Council *One community – proudly diverse* reflects the view that difference adds richness to society. In 2005, Councillor Helou's inaugural speech as Mayor outlined Moreland's commitment to the inclusion of its diverse community and the extension of social, economic, cultural and environmental initiatives that will contribute to a vibrant and tolerant community. The Focus on Fawkner community building initiative was

specifically mentioned as an example of working towards this goal (Helou 2005). By 2006, the incoming Mayor Councillor O'Brien not only noted the importance of implementing local area community strengthening projects in Fawkner but also of extending this approach to other areas (O'Brien 2006: 8).

All projects had a focus on inclusion of diverse groups and improvement of the area. The range of projects that eventuated reflects initiatives planned prior to funding as well as changed direction in response to new opportunities that became evident due to the existence of Focus on Fawkner. While roles of individuals and organisations changed over the duration of the project, the goals of the initiative remained consistent.

Council has a continued commitment to reviewing and improving community engagement and its consultation strategies to better integrate Moreland's diverse community. In this context, the Fawkner Community Festival is specifically mentioned as a highlight and an inspiration to initiate a similar Glenroy Festival. This is evidence of the importance of the Focus on Fawkner community strengthening initiative for the wider council.

However, while Moreland has a proud history of democratic involvement and funding from the Community Support Fund, which resourced the Focus on Fawkner community building initiative, council staff generally have found that in practice significant challenges accompany this 'all of council, all of

government and all of community' approach (Blacher 2005).

Community building and joined-up government operate on selected projects rather than in an integrated manner within all departments and portfolios.

Summary and Recommendations

If the prime purpose of partnerships is to improve local governance it is vital to review the way such structures work, their distinctive operations and the manner in which they create something new.

(Considine 2006:15)

The Focus on Fawkner community-building initiative has had many positive outcomes for the local community. In addition to the tangible effects of the individual projects and programs that were implemented, the initiative has contributed to the local profile and highlighted the vibrancy of the area. The Fawkner Community Festival is considered to be a stand out event and has become a source of community pride.

While at times it has been a difficult and challenging process, the many parties involved in the Focus on Fawkner project have collaborated to find new and successful ways of working together. The place-based approach has been successful in creating and sustaining new relationships with many local groups and agencies and has contributed to strengthening local networks and trust.

The degree to which public participation can legitimately underpin democratic processes depends on the structures in place to engage the community. The legitimacy of public participation depends on the representativeness of the process (this requirement may vary depending on the issue

consulted upon) and the methods used to engage the community.

In the instance of Focus on Fawkner, public participation benefited from:

- a strong mandate
- the longitudinal nature of the civic engagement
- a place-based approach
- the utilisation of forward plans
- the availability of resources and community development workers to facilitate the process and build capacity
- the devolution of authority and responsibility on certain issues of the project to the community.

Taken together, these factors enabled the discussions and negotiations to take place that are necessary to facilitate a shift in the nature of relationships between council and the community. The approach taken also mitigated the reactionary nature of many participation processes and thereby allowed relationships and trust in the democratic process to grow.

However, a number of cautions need to be heeded. The integration of participatory processes into the framework of representative democracy remains a constant tension for local governments. Local governments have a key role in establishing partnerships with local communities and incorporating appropriate protocols and practices to increase understanding among staff and communities. The Focus on Fawkner initiative is a pilot project for

community strengthening initiatives in Victoria and a number of lessons result from its implementation.

The Fawkner study highlights the importance of appropriately resourcing community-building initiatives so that the various parties (council, local agencies, community group members, councillors and the broader community) can successfully negotiate new ways of working together and establish relationships of trust. The important role of project workers in this process can be appreciated. They are the critical resource to facilitate difficult negotiations between the various parties about their changing roles and responsibilities and as such they have an important role to play in building the capacity of all those involved. Project workers are in a difficult position as they are often employed for only one project within a large organisation. This places them in complex and often challenging situations as they are required to work in marginal and frequently short term positions with limited authority.

Community strengthening involves major shifts in attitudes, knowledge and skills, and these shifts take time to accomplish. Building capacity requires access to specific knowledge and skill. There is an urgent need to provide access to professional development on processes and protocols for establishing and resourcing community engagement for those in positions of responsibility. The peak local government bodies (Municipal Association of Victoria and the

Victorian Local Governance Association) recognise the importance of induction programs for new councillors. An extension of this could be inductions for community group members to council processes and for councillors to appropriate protocols in community engagement. Peak bodies are in an excellent position to promote the benefits of access to professional development on behalf of all local governments.

However, the responsibility for professional skills development lies not only with the local government sector. Victoria's tertiary institutions could also play a significant role in this field. There is at present no professional pathway with multiple entry and exit points for the many people taking on responsibilities in the fields of community engagement and strengthening. This is also a value to the profession as it prevents prescribed methodology and fixed thinking. Given this, co-operation between local government and the tertiary sector could provide a valuable community resource for council staff, project workers and residents. Clarification of roles for all those involved is another important factor in the success of community strengthening. The research on community governance cautions that this may take time to establish and suggests that these roles and ways of working together should not be decided prematurely (Hunt and Smith 2006). Especially from the point of view of community organisations, the transition to being an integral part of the local government decision-making structures and processes can be a difficult one. There may be

benefits in forward planning with community organisations to enable integration into council planning cycles while investing ownership within the community structure to facilitate smoother engagement. However, it is critical that such planning follow, not precede, agreed-upon ways of working to consolidate trust in the partnership.

Another key consideration related to the long-term success of the initiative and its continuation beyond the initial funded stages benefits from forward planning. Succession planning is an ongoing consideration. The current community group has attracted community members who are committed to the local area and who want to implement good practices (to give back to the community). As service clubs have learnt over time, there is value in inducting new members to the culture and principles of the association prior to taking on office bearing positions. This is a protection for the goals of the group as well as support for an individual taking on new responsibilities. Active outreach and induction protocols can also assist in broadening the representativeness of the community group.

Experimenting with strategies to reduce dependency on external grants is another important issue to discuss in partnership with all organisations that can offer support. There may be scope to explore opportunities for further employment from funds generated by the group through a range of activities to reduce dependency on grants determined by external bodies. For

example, a number of community newspapers earn income from advertising and printing that is reinvested in the community through grants or employment.

The experiences of Focus on Fawkner members would be of interest to other organisations if networks existed to meet with other community building initiatives.

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