

From welfare to place management: Challenges and developments for service delivery in the community sector

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There has been an increasing recognition that many government and non-government programs that have sought to ameliorate the effects of disadvantage and poverty have been inadequate. A recent report on the distribution of social disadvantage in NSW and Victoria, for instance, highlighted the persistent and localised nature of inequality. It revealed that those areas that were disadvantaged in the 1970s were still disadvantaged in the 1990s despite the proliferation of programs in the area. The report concluded that 'it cannot be assumed that social initiatives taken at the state or national level, can override extreme degrees of local cumulative disadvantage' (Vinson 1999:45).

As is the case in many other OECD countries, Australia's welfare system is in the process of being reformed. The impetus for reform is not only the significant societal and economic changes that have occurred since 'welfare states' were developed in the postwar period, but the increasing cost of welfare as well as the perception that many individuals are becoming reliant on welfare. An important part of welfare reform is the emphasis on encouraging and facilitating social and economic participation. For this to be achieved, a greater emphasis needs to be placed on programs that build individual and community capacity, focus on prevention and early intervention and enhance the creation of social capital¹.

Models of service delivery

This changing environment poses challenges and opportunities for those involved in delivering services in the community sector. A key challenge relates not only to the 'needs' that any community service program may meet but how the services of the program are delivered. Modes of service delivery differ not only in terms of the processes followed to identify the needs of the disadvantaged but also with respect to the broader philosophy or rationale underlying the goals, purposes, outputs and activities of a program.

This paper argues that three broad models of service delivery in the community sector can be identified: the 'welfare' model, the 'community development' model and

the 'place management' model. The main characteristics of the three models are summarised in Table 1. As with all typologies real life programs have aspects that defy neat classification into artificial constructs. Nevertheless, the typology developed provides a useful heuristic framework for better understanding and evaluating where community service programs such as those provided by non-government organisations (NGOs) lie with respect to current thinking and practice in delivering services to the disadvantaged.

The Welfare model: the 'client' in crisis

The 'Welfare model', has historically had most influence on the service delivery practices of public serving nonprofits (charities) and had its origins in 19th century Britain (Wearing 1998). The notion of the 'deserving poor' (those whose poverty was due to circumstances considered to be outside of their control) and the 'undeserving poor' (those whose poverty was considered to be due to personal factors) originates from this period. Although changes in the way government and non-government agencies view and deal with poverty have occurred since then, many of the underlying principles of the welfare model remain (e.g. The Commonwealth Emergency Relief Fund).

Programs within the welfare model have an individual or family focus and are designed as a needs-based service. 'Clients' seek assistance in times of crisis in order to obtain financial or material relief, such as vouchers, food or clothing. The provision of relief occurs through a professional 'caseworker' or a volunteer. In order to conduct the assessment and determine whether or not the

1. Social capital enables individuals, groups and institutions to interact with each other on a regular basis without the need for coercion or constant resort to legal argument. Social capital will only develop where people are participating in social networks characterised by norms of trust and reciprocity.

client is eligible for assistance the caseworker is expected to make a judgement based on the particular organisation's criteria and guidelines. The locus of power therefore lies primarily with the caseworker. The client must reveal their situation to the caseworker in order to be seen as eligible for assistance. This is likely to be a dis-empowering experience for the client whereby they are exposed and vulnerable to judgement (Wearing 1998).

Such programs tend to assume a degree of 'normality', namely, that families are coping well and only seek assistance because there is an unpredictable hiccup in their lives. They therefore only need 'emergency relief' in order to help them through a difficult period.

Although the provision of emergency assistance may keep families from falling further into the cycle of disadvantage, this assumption is usually only evident in a small number of cases. Many families who approach welfare agencies for emergency relief are experiencing a range of longer-term factors (e.g. poor health, long term unemployment) that lead to recurrent financial crises. For such individuals and families, any assistance received may not provide any tangible resources or coping strategies when a future crisis develops. This lack of agency or control over their future may in turn prevent them from breaking the cycle of exclusion and reliance.

Programs within the welfare model in Australia have been equally applied to metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas. Recognition that non-metropolitan situations may be different has been limited to the problems posed by physical distance for the delivery of services, namely the need for clients to travel long distances to reach these services. The means of overcoming the inequity of access caused by distance has relied on grafting the service or program (with its 'welfare' assumptions intact) to technologies better able to ameliorate the effects of distance (e.g. telephone access).

The Community Development model: consultation and collaboration

An increased awareness of the shortcomings of the individual client focus of programs within the welfare model began to emerge in the 1970s (Onyx 1992). Service providers began to recognise that programs and services should focus more on individuals as members of broader 'communities' (e.g. rural/urban). If programs were to be effective and widely accepted they needed to have community consultation and be implemented in a collaborative fashion (Gregory 1979). Programs within this model recognise that the individual and his or her

Table 1 Models of service delivery in welfare and community services programs

	Welfare Model	Community Development Model	Place Management Model
Underlying principles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Age of Benevolence Deserving vs undeserving poor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Self-help Consultation Collaboration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Self-help Consultation Collaboration Co-management Changing systems
Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individual in crisis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communities in need 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communities in need
Type of assistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cash, vouchers, clothing or food 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coordinated services & programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coordinated services & programs
Locus of Power	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Case worker Unequal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shared by Community and Government Unequal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shared by Place Manager, Community and Government Variable
Scope	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identification of an emergency need Crisis driven 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognition of need for local solutions to long-term problems Awareness of systemic nature of problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognition of need for local solutions to long-term problems Awareness of systemic nature of problems Awareness that systems may need to change
Short term benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individual is clothed/fed Utilities are kept on Eviction is avoided 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved services and programs Community involvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved services and programs Community involvement
Long term outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individual and family caught in poverty cycle Learned helplessness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community empowerment Increase in Social Capital 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community empowerment Increase in Social Capital New forms of governance

family are not isolated units, but are part of the wider fabric of a community, be it on the basis of geographical location, ethnicity, age and so on.

The move from a focus on the individual to the community also means a change in the locus of power. Rather than the unequal relationship between client and caseworker in the welfare model, programs within the community development model increase the decision making power of the individual within the community. The community members are recognised as the 'experts' in their area and integral to the consultation process. In the community development approach to service delivery, individuals have the opportunity to participate in the decision-making, planning and implementation of programs that will directly influence their lives. The scope of programs within this paradigm extend beyond the provision of short term solutions to immediate problems by widening the focus and recognising the systemic and cyclical nature of many of the problems experienced by disadvantaged families.

Most importantly, the community development model recognises the need for self-help and its ensuing benefits for the community as a whole. In addition to the immediate benefits to be gained by the community in the form of appropriately targeted programs designed to meet local needs there are other less tangible long term benefits (Onyx 1992). In particular, community development programs help foster and build social capital within a community.

While programs within this paradigm do involve a shift in the locus of power and a focus on longer-term solutions in theory, an equal sharing of power between the parties is not always achieved in practice. Funding bodies or organisations responsible for the provision of services are often reluctant to devolve program management responsibility to the community level. Although the allocation of funds may be more appropriate to the needs of identified communities (e.g. small rural towns), the

provision of services are usually conducted by government employees conforming and acting to externally determined guidelines and criteria.²

Place Management: building on community development

Place management characterises the most recent thinking in service delivery principles.³ The place management model arose as a response to the increasing complexity and difficulty governments have had in the effective and integrated allocation of resources. The inability of governments to manage resources has resulted in people becoming increasingly frustrated with 'large, distant, unresponsive bureaucracies whose primary focus seems often to be the integrity of the system and the process rather than solving the problems' (Stewart-Weeks 1998:9).

Although similar to the Community Development approach, place management seeks to dismantle the current systems of service delivery by adopting a radically different approach.

...a shift in the structure and design of public governance and management from functional or output units to a focus on outcomes. In its simplest terms, it is about a concern with ends, and not with means ... The promise of place management is to replace an input-driven focus on the means with an outcome-driven focus on ends. The place manager defines the outcomes for that place ... and then buys in the services needed to translate those outcomes into action (Stewart-Weeks, 1998:3-5).

The term 'place' can refer to a community, a geographic location, a region or a state. It can be as small or as large as people want it to be. 'Management' refers to the idea that the 'authority to determine outcomes is vested in the person or organisation looking after the place' (Stewart-Weeks 1998:4). Place management is a way for some of the most disadvantaged communities to finally move toward an improved quality of life by building up social interaction and an attachment to place as well as fostering mutual support. Similar to the community development model, the target group in place management is not just disadvantaged individuals within a community but the community itself.

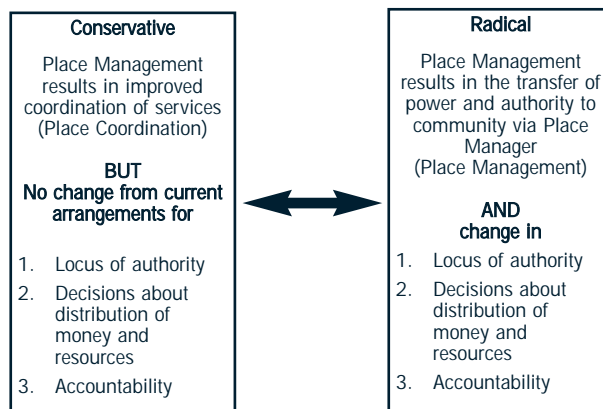
The extent to which a model of place management is adopted is largely dependent on the willingness of those who control resources to divest themselves of this power. This reallocation of power represents a radical shift. Large agencies must in many ways deconstruct themselves in order to fit with the new slimmed down model of service delivery. The emphasis is on co-management and as such the locus of power is transferred to the community who then employ a place manager to channel, facilitate and coordinate change in accordance with the communities' specific needs.

There are three key factors that determine the extent to which place management is embraced as a viable alternative to current service delivery systems and programs (see Figure 1). Thus place management may be viewed as a spectrum. The left of the figure

represents the minimalist or conservative approach to place management and involves little change to existing systems and is represented by all three factors being positioned at the left end of the continuum. This could also be more appropriately defined as Place Coordination because it results in the improved coordination of services and programs. At the other end of the spectrum is the radical approach to place management and would involve the transfer of power and authority to the place manager. In practice, programs within the place management paradigm adopt a mixture of elements from conservative and radical approaches.

Similar to the community development model outlined earlier programs within the place management model involve initiatives that have local relevance and local ownership. What distinguishes it from the community development model is that radical place management attempts to be innovative about the source, mix and quality of service providers. It also seeks to dismantle the current systems and change the way in which services are delivered. Rather than trying to coordinate services within a system it attempts to redefine that system.

Figure 1. The Place Management Continuum



Source: Adapted from Stewart-Weeks (1998:19-20)

Despite the benefits, place management also represents a significant challenge. Not only is there a need to address practical details of who the place manager will be, and how they will be held accountable, there is also a need to recognise that place management is a long term approach to achieving positive outcomes. As outlined above the shifting of power is in principle a

- One example of a community development project is the Miller Community Health Partnership, located in a low socio-economic public housing environment in Western Sydney which is suffering from a high level of social dislocation and has a poor level of community services (for a detailed description of this and other projects see www.communitybuilders.nsw.gov.au)
- This section draws primarily on the work of Martin Stewart-Weeks (1998, 2000). These papers contain references to other useful sources of information on Place Management.

desirable outcome, but in practice is likely to be something opposed by those with power. In addition, particular stakeholders within any place management initiative may attempt to dominate the process.⁴

Implications for NGOs and service delivery

Table 1 assists in identifying the underlying rationale and principles of different models of service delivery. Programs within all models have aspects that work towards building individual and community capacity, focus on prevention and early intervention and encourage the creation of social capital. The difference is the degree to which they emphasise each of these characteristics. The Place Management framework, however, seems to best facilitate the achievement of these principles.⁵ The adoption of place management approaches to service delivery poses key challenges as well as opportunities for NGOs in the community services sector. The nature of the challenges depend on whether NGOs wish to facilitate place management programs themselves or be part of wider service delivery frameworks utilising place management principles. The Smith Family is currently exploring these issues with respect to how it can unlock opportunities for disadvantaged Australians in non-metropolitan Australia. The challenges that place management poses for organisations like TSF are outlined in further detail in a forthcoming Briefing Paper and include:

- Choosing the appropriate 'place';
- Developing an understanding of the readiness of 'communities' to the place management approach and the sustainability of any community improvements and changes once the place manager leaves;
- Should place management programs target only the 'disadvantaged' within a place or community?
- Working with other agencies and organisations on place management programs;
- Reconciling the traditional approach of a service delivery program targeted at a particular need/s with the place management ideal that the exact nature of the need/s to be addressed cannot be determined a priori but emanate from the community level consultations and processes conducted and facilitated by a 'place manager';
- How can power be devolved to the community or 'place' in question?

- How can all stakeholders share decision-making responsibility and accountability?
- What are the avenues open to NGOs who wish to form partnerships with other service providers within a wider place management framework established by government or other non-government agencies?

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4. For examples of programs within the place management model see www.communitybuilders.nsw.gov.au

5. Given the recent nature of the place management model there have been few opportunities to evaluate its effectiveness. Caution should therefore be exercised when assessing the potential impact of its approach to service delivery.

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