



**NCOSS**

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## Linking Advocacy to Social Capital

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Social Capital is an all encompassing concept that allows us to link the work we do to other forms of capital, ie. financial capital, making our work relevant to the current dominant market paradigm. The other piece of linking work that needs to be done, is to link social capital back to the work of people in the community sector, and in this context, to advocacy.

The best way is to identify the elements of community work that create social capital. These obviously are:

**Community work** that empowers individuals. There are forms of community work that do not improve trust, communication or people's ability to act for themselves.

**Community organisations** that provide the location for community building activities and opportunities for people to interact positively, especially those organisations that have close links with their local communities.

**Community development** as a way of working that uses the process of supporting people to find solutions to their own problems.

**Social Justice** as the underpinning value of community work

**Advocacy** is the work of those people with power or who take up power to achieve social justice.

Of course social capital is much more widespread throughout the community than just in community work, encompassing personal acts of neighbourliness, kindness tolerance, selfishness, as well as other social programs like health, justice and fair trading.

The point from this is that we need strong advocates to build social capital.

The best expression of this was found in a speech delivered by Justice Marcus Einfeld at a conference organised by NCOSS to help prevent the defunding of systemic advocacy for people with disabilities. It said

*"it is the role of the social welfare advocate to make sure that it cannot be said by any government that money would definitely been available were the authorities not in the dark about the sufferings and grievances concerned. It is the job of the advocate to make knowledge of those facts undeniable"*

The Local Community Organisation (LCSA) is the peak body for Neighbourhood and Community Centres throughout NSW. Through contact with these Centres, LCSA recognised that one of the most pressing needs in the community sector was the survival of small organisations. Most of the Neighbourhood and Community Centres who are our members are small organisations. We therefore set about a process of

advocacy for those organisations, based on producing a publication to be used as a lobbying tool.

We were not alone in the quest to support small organisations. When talking to other program peaks, we find they have similar concerns. When talking to NCOSS, we find some of the issues, like insurance or OH&S are common to the sector. However, the capacity of larger organisations to deal with these operational issues is often greater and LCSA often finds itself raising the impacts on small organisations, along with representatives from regional organisations like Western Sydney Community Forum. It is beneficial to have several voices at meetings like FONGA to add weight to the concerns.

Government departments tend to decide what to do from a policy angle and do not greatly consider the impacts on small organisations. Some of the corporate strategies being employed by government impact negatively on small organisations. There is lots of work to do at departmental advisory meetings to raise the impacts on small organisations. Our concerns are listened to, but do not always result in changes that are helpful.

Voice of SONG has been a major catalyst in bringing this issue to light. It is especially valuable in that the members **are** the small organisations and can give evidence that is irrefutable. LCSA saw them as a leader and a partner in moving this issue forward.

As well as support, informing and advocating, LCSA has published a book.

The book has several purposes:

- Identify the value of small organisations
- State that small organisations are under threat and something needs to be done
- Identify the impact of both 'big picture' market forces and smaller operational changes that are causing stress
- Make some recommendations for what needs to be done

The book was developed to support further action:

- Gathering a body of information and evidence to support our position
- Giving voice to the small organisations
- Providing a focus for further informing and lobbying action.

LCSA has developed an election Campaign Strategy, where Neighbourhood Centres will be using the book and a paper that benchmarks an adequate level of core funding for Neighbourhood Centres to lobby their local candidates for more core funding for Neighbourhood Centres and support for small organisations. We have produced a lobbying kit with some tips on how to go about it.

Finally, as advocacy often takes us in the area of taking direct action, there are some things to keep in mind when moving towards social action.

Action needs to be based on a sure footing.

- A strong belief in your cause ie. social justice, not just as a concept but as a practicality.
- Good information that is well researched well presented and widely distributed. It needs to be brief and focused.

- Your own organisations need to be well managed to add credibility and a sound base for organising the action.
- Leadership that rises out of the cause and is spread amongst the group – not the usual idea of a super person. It's about individuals having the courage to speak up.
- Hard work to get the support started. A good cause, coming out at the right time, will gain a momentum of its own and spread throughout the sector
- Picture of the frog being swallowed by the pelican – never give up!  
Though this is often hard if resources are limited and response is not forthcoming.