

# NCOSS SECTOR DEVELOPMENT SEMINAR

## SHARED SERVICES IN THE NGO SECTOR

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10 November 2008

### Lessons from Practice: Katoomba Neighbourhood Centre

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Katoomba Neighbourhood Centre (KNC) has been operating for 30 years – the first 3 years were volunteer run then 27 years ago a WSAAS grant was received. KNC core funding is through CSGP/DOCS. We currently have 20 employees (4 full-time and 16 part-time) spread over 6 services (community development, child care, aged/disability, mental health, building/trades, administration and manager). Each service has a Coordinator and 3 services have small teams of workers. Each service has its own service committee. KNC operates on social justice principles.

We deal with 6 funding bodies: DOCS, DADHC, SWAHS (Sydney West Area Health Service), DEEWR (Dept Education, Employment and Workplace Relations), Health and Ageing and BMCC (Blue Mountains City Council) for the CDSE (Community Development Support Expenditure scheme/clubs money) and for the lease on our 2 buildings. We also deal with DOCS separately to our funding for a building in South Katoomba called “Clairvaux Community Centre” where 4 non-KNC services operate from (we are the landlord). We also operate a mental health service from a SWAHS building and our Home Mod service rents a private workshop.

Our income is just over \$1 million. We have approximately 110 volunteers. Our reception area is staffed by 10 volunteers.

In the past 15 years 10 services that KNC initiated went on to separate incorporation - 4 children's services, Elizabeth Evatt Community Legal Centre, Gunedoo Child Protection Service, 2 Neighbourhood Centres, a Volunteer Home Visitors service and a Community Housing Service.

I have been the Manager of KNC for 12 ½ years. There are many complexities in the operation of KNC and I would say the biggest challenge is to maintain a social justice perspective while being as efficient as possible and not compromising our social justice principles.

This has been an interesting exercise in reflecting in a short amount of time about what works and what hasn't worked in relation to sharing resources.

KNC has moved with the times and hasn't lost its way by just being internally focussed. We've stayed connected and engaged to community, volunteers, staff and the issues by being open to different ways of doing things while meeting our accountability requirements.

KNC has both and internal and external ways in which we share resources. Significant to both internal and external work is the importance of people – ENGAGING people – whether staff, clients, volunteers, or management – it is essential to ensure that “maintenance of relations” is as highly valued as the “tasks”. Strong respectful connections are vital for a sound base and creative thinking.

Internally, what works for KNC to provide the best outcomes for people/community is a combination of structure, processes and attitudes which underpin developing and implementing good outcomes:

- 1) Being visionary and pragmatic;
- 2) Shared financial management backed up with 3 Admin workers – we then have 1 centralised payroll, 1 bank account, 1 audit and 1 Bas statement. These admin workers have different programs specific to their service and they get skilled up to provide relief for each other. All of this saves time and money. The Manager and Financial Manager work closely together and there is an Administrative committee who meet bi-monthly.
- 3) Securing and keeping good staff is pivotal to the “success” of services. Good salary (less control over) and good working conditions - as flexible as possible to accommodate/work in with people’s personal lives – no staff now work more than 4 days a week (by choice – even if still working full-time).
- 4) Team building that’s fun and meaningful and that stretches people (challenging, when have diverse backgrounds); training that crosses all services e.g. Mental Health First Aid, IT Training.
- 5) Having a FOCUS each year where all services develop strategies specific to their service e.g. we have had a focus on mental health, OHS and this year is sustainability. All services whether childcare or aged/disability are required to develop strategies in their respective services (as well as the overall neighbourhood centre) in how they address “sustainability.”
- 6) Relief - the better workers are connected with each other and feel confident in their abilities to adapt and learn the easier it is to do relief work in each others services.
- 7) Volunteer training – we are consolidating that with 1 worker taking a primary role.
- 8) Annual appraisals have been a challenge to get done – what works better is more regular “supervisory sessions” with the Manager where the employee identifies areas needing attention as does the Manager ( based on a Burnside model) and sets their goals to be achieved by identified tasks and in specified time frame. The Coordinators do this exercise in their teams. Staff takes responsibility for reflecting on their work practice and defining goals to improve skills and knowledge.
- 9) These supervisory sessions have assisted greatly when disciplinary action was (as a last resort) needed because there was a record of goals and showed if/how they weren’t achieved. Jobs Australia was also used.
- 10) Having a Manager overseeing all KNC services and functions means one person only has to deal with some issues. E.g. lease/maintenance issues, AGM prep, DGR/PBI lobbying.

- 11) Communication - all meetings are bi-monthly and most decision are made at the service committee level not at KNC Management committee meetings.  
Considered and efficient IT use reduces meetings and paperwork.
- 12) Before we take on any new projects or make major changes we talk it through thoroughly, ensuring all the players are invited to participate – weighing up the pros and cons and ensuring we have all the info we need to make an informed decision (e.g. what resources are needed? – dollars, people, time, venue needs.) Recently we were asked to auspice a community arts project – the person had great technical skills but we were concerned about their process – the final outcome confirmed our concerns and we were glad for our credibility we didn't get involved.
- 13) Sharing of power – the Manager doesn't micro-manage and allows as much autonomy as possible when the staff feel confident, know what is expected of them and what the limits of their decision making are. This is empowering for staff and relieves Manager of having to “do it all”.
- 14) All staff need to know how to communicate well and know how to problem solve with a range of people “hard on the issues, soft on the person”. Working co-operatively and collaboratively is essential.
- 15) Being clear on team work expectations is essential – good teamwork builds trust and respect and reduces resentment and stress.
- 16) Having a Management Committee who are reliable, supportive, cohesive ethical and willing to learn the ropes is essential.
- 17) Having multiple “entry points” for people: a variety of ways in which people can engage, get involved get there needs/ideas taken up.
- 18) Co-location of services works better but isn't always possible.
- 19) Morning and afternoon teas every day – not allowed talking work.
- 20) When new management committee starts – spend time getting to know each other along with workers – our background, experiences, talents/skills, what we would like to see happen in our community and how much time we can contribute. This has always been a good investment in engaging and keeping people rather than going straight into business/task. Being clear on MC responsibility without bogging people down with too much info (idea of question and answer).
- 21) Knowing when it's the right time for services to separately incorporate – don't push them and conversely if some people want a service to incorporate – we want to ensure all appropriate steps that have been undertaken so the service doesn't sink.
- 22) A recent success was forming collaboration with 3 other services to vie for the residual funds of service that went into liquidation. After 5 years we were successful. I don't think we would have held out had we done this by ourselves.
- 23) Essential to have clear lines of communication and decision making.

Externally we share resources by collaborative actions and coalitions e.g.:

- 1) Having a combined AGM with three other services – reduces costs, shares tasks getting over 100 people to attend especially when we get a great guest speaker.

- 2) Administration workers meet with 15-20 other admin workers across BM to identify common needs/ideas, organise training, buddy system relief, and look at bulk purchasing. Breaks down isolation.
- 3) BM Community Congress established to broaden base for sector in BM – “The BM Congress is an open collaboration of organisations that provide services to the community in the BM working actively to achieve outcomes that would be difficult for individual services to achieve on their own.. We share a passionate commitment to maintaining a vibrant, resilient connected and sustainable community. We will achieve this by listening to our community, working collaboratively, educating and celebrating our achievements.”
- 4) Currently developing a “station st community services precinct” flyer another way of sharing resources with our community service neighbours (family support, legal centre, PLWHA – have to be continually aware of needs and perceptions of the community.

### **What hasn't worked?**

- 1) When people get on to the management committee or staff who have different values/agendas – particularly if they withhold info, do their own thing/don't consult.
- 2) Having funding for a service that operated from another centre but the person was a KNC employee (impossible to supervise when problems occur).
- 3) Having too many services: at one stage we had 2 other services and a total of 40 employees – too big and too many different awards, job specialities.
- 4) Services located in other places: don't have the ease of informal contacts which are essential for support and camaraderie.
- 5) Short term funding and tendering – both consume huge amounts of time. Not good use of resources, difficult to attract and keep good staff, staff don't get good holiday/long service leave, stifles creativity, keeps you being reactive and the work required to keep on top of things is often invisible.

In these hard economic times the more we can share resources the stronger we will be – the pressure is on – and small services that are doing great work, but struggling under the weight of compliance, I think are in a precarious place. Simultaneously, NGOs are essential for strong communities and provide a great entry for people to engage and play active and meaningful roles in community.

Dianne Jacobus,  
Manager Katoomba Neighbourhood Centre  
Phone: 0247821117  
Email: [Manager@kncinc.org.au](mailto:Manager@kncinc.org.au)