

Report on NZ Community Boards Conference 2009

Introduction:

The 2009 Biennial Conference was a celebration of 20 years of Community Boards. The theme was 'Reflect, Refresh, Revitalize.'

Held in the Christchurch City Conference Centre, the whole event was very well run with excellent time keeping and interesting speakers and workshops. The following is a summary of my experience of the Conference.

Day One - Thursday 19th March 5pm-11.30pm

The evening commenced with a moving Powhiri with Mr Tutehonuku (Nuk) Korako speaking on behalf of the Tangata Whenua, Ngai Tuahurhuri/Ngai Tahu, followed by Mayor Bob Parker and on behalf of the Manuhiri (visitors), Mr Major Herewini of Taupiri Community Board.

This was followed by opening speeches from Mrs Yvonne Palmer, NZ Community Boards Executive Chairperson, Mike Mora, 2009 Conference Chair, Lawrence Yule, President Local Government New Zealand, and Dr Andrew Hearn of the Alcohol Advisory Council of NZ. The award-winning Papanui High School Kapa Haka Group gave a stirring performance of songs, poi and haka.

The first of the **Best Practice Awards** were made:

Consultation:

Eastbourne Community Board. "Retention of a Property"

Facilitation:

Bluff "Supporting a Bus Service".

Heritage:

Riccarton/Wigram. "Restoring a Victorian Tea House".
Highly Commended: Greytown. "Town Hall Restoration".

Working With Children:

Eastern Bays (Auckland). "School Organic Composting".
Highly Commended: Shirley/Papanui and Fendalton/Waimarie,
Riccarton/Wigram Boards combined.

Safety (Sponsored by NZ Police)

Shirley/Papanui – "Host Responsibility".

We then had a speech from the **Prime Minister John Key** whose comments included:

- Community Boards stand for pride in communities.
- All politics are local.
- Community Boards need to develop a sense of importance and fight for local democracy.
- Central government should pay their own costs instead of passing them on to local government.
- The RMA Review is aimed at changing the process without diminishing the standards.
- Leaky homes resulted from poor standards.
- Globally there has been a loss of \$30 trillion in the value of equities and \$5 trillion in the value of housing. *(a trillion = a million million)
- The outlook is poor for the European banking system.
- In NZ farm lending is up 23% and business lending up 12% which indicates the NZ banking system is still working.
- Support for fast broadband (IPTV) especially for its role in education.

Mayor Bob Parker was the MC for the evening. As a past member of a Banks Peninsula Community Board he is totally supportive of Boards as is the Christchurch City Council. Christchurch Boards play a huge role in local government there. There are 144 Community Boards in New Zealand.

Dr Andrew Hearn of ALAC spoke about the effects of alcohol harm in communities. He said that Community Boards are vital to the community and are at the coal face of community issues. ALAC has the responsibility to moderate the drinking of alcohol. There is currently a Parliamentary bill in the process and submissions are urged by 23rd April 2009. Details are available on the Parliamentary website. The Law Commission is also producing a review of the Sale of Liquor Act in mid 2009. <http://www.lawcom.govt.nz/>

Part two of the Best Practice Awards continued:

Significant project:

Mataura Community Board "Community Centre".

Highly recommended: Bluff "Stirling Point Beach Refurbishment" and Twizel "Town Square".

Partnership:

The combined Clevedon, Howick, Mangere and Otara Boards, "Community Advocacy Plan".

Highly commended: combined Henderson, Massey, New Lynn and Waitakere Boards "Unsung Hero Awards".

Working With Maori:

Tamaki.

Supreme Award Winner: "Community Advocacy Plan".

The new 'Yvonne Palmer Leadership Award':

Went to Peter Dow for his 20 years service to community boards.

Presentations were also made to approximately 20 Board members who have served continuously from 1989-2009.

Musical items were provided during the evening by Becky Button who sang the National Anthem, the Intercity String Quartet and the 50's Up Brass Band.

In keeping with the 'Responsible Host' theme Barkers fruit juices were kindly sponsored by them.

Day Two - Friday 20th March 8.45 – 5pm.

Morning Session

Eugene Bowen CEO of Local Government New Zealand was the MC
Mary Hays of Christchurch City Council explained the innovative evaluation system being used for the workshops and the Conference overall.

Keynote Speaker:

Christopher Baker of the UNICEF (Italian committee).
"Child Friendly Cities and Communities."

Points recorded included:

- 20% of population is children.
- Climate change, urbanization and children's rights.
- World wide there are now more people in cities than the countryside for the first time.
- Key factors of children's rights include sustainability, biodiversity, thinking globally – act locally, good governance, citizen participation.
- A 'holistic' or 'whole community' response is needed for child rights.
- 'Children' include all from 0 – 18 yrs.
- Care for the environment is essential.
- A child friendly community is a local system of good governance fulfilling the rights of the child.
- A child friendly community toolkit is available on the web @ www.childfriendlycities.org

Nine building blocks for child friendly communities:

- 1) Participation of children and their views taken into account.
- 2) A legal framework in place to ensure consistency and to protect the rights of all children.
- 3) Develop a 'Rights' strategy.
- 4) A co-ordinating mechanism to ensure consideration of the children's perspective.
- 5) An assessment process to test policy and practice and amend as necessary.
- 6) Sufficient funding – can save money by reducing harmful outcomes.

- 7) Evaluation and promoting of policies and positive outcomes.
- 8) Making children's rights known.
- 9) Independent advocacy for children.

What can we do?

Support Youth Councils
Hold special Youth Forums
(In Italy 90% of initiatives are launched by Councils)

Children's wish list

- Cleaner cities/towns
- Safe playing areas
- Safe to go to school alone. (Or walking bus concept)
- More bicycle lanes
- All children equal

Initiatives

- Children can adopt a monument or an area
- Coming up: Copenhagen Summit of Climate Change December 2009
- European Conference for Child Friendly Cities 2010

Yvonne Palmer

Community Boards "Reflect, Refresh, Revitalize"

- To make submissions and try, try, try again, not just to council but to government agencies, health authorities etc
- Spend time in your communities
- Fill out your time sheets
- Commence the development of a work plan
- Identify who we can work with and why
- Identify who is missing from our contacts and why
- Identify our new community partners

Tim Sole (Civic Assurance) provided a summary of the benefits for elected members from joining Kiwi Saver

Workshop

**"Best Practice Partnerships at the Local level for the Environment".
Dr Bryan Jenkins, CEO Environment Canterbury and Carole Evans, Ecan Councillor**

Two case studies were discussed:

- 1) Waimakariri 'Clean air – Warm homes'
- 2) "Living Streams Pahau Catchment" (Culverden)

There was a comparison of processes and a checklist of questions provided. Copies of these papers are available upon request.

It was noted by the speakers that there is a shift in approach to sustainability. I.e. RMA emphasis is 'effects based'.

LGA supports partnerships to achieve community outcomes.

Self governing communities are applauded and the geographical area established which is appropriate to the issue.

Collaborative responses are needed.

LGA s76-80, are relevant i.e. s78(2).

Community views must be considered.

Ecan has established Area Committees i.e.

- 60 river rating districts – catchment based committees advise council.
- Pest management areas with different service delivering methods are determined.
- Water management and allocation zones.

In each case best practice approaches are used as there is no 'one size fits all' formula.

Keynote Speaker

Hon Rodney Hide, Minister Local Government

“Meeting the Challenges Facing Local Government for the next 20 years”

- Community board members are passionate for their communities.
- Individuals need to be able to make decisions.
- We need government which enables decisions to be made as close to individuals as possible.
- Decision making should be with the closest unit of governance.
- Decision making of community boards fits this model and allows for local diversity in decision making.
- Supports community boards.
- Councils need to make better use of community boards,
- Councils are not to dictate to communities.
- Royal Commission Report on Auckland due. Auckland decisions are needed which enable local differences to be considered. Report will need and deserve careful consideration.
- Sees local government in great need of reform to:
 - 1) Get costs under control. A lot of costs on local government areas are a result of central government decisions.
 - 2) Transparency and accountability is lacking especially in the LTCCP. Representatives stand on their views and visions and are held to account at election time.
 - 3) Reduce red tape. A 'can do' society has been turned into a 'can't do' one. Move back to more personal responsibility.
 - The Royal Commission will set the scene for a Review.

- 'Local Decisions for Local People.'
- Rates are driven by Council spending.
- Rates based on land values cause distortions.

At the conclusion of the speech and in thanking the Minister, Yvonne Palmer urged that there be no targeted rates on Community Boards which resulted in sustained applause.

Keynote Speaker

Steve Henry, Otago Polytechnic.

“Developing Sustainability and Action Plans for Communities”.

- Local government has many roles.
- Most only see a part of the picture.
- We can learn from Sweden for sustainability through collaboration, education and leadership.
- We need to sort the confusion.
- The Hammarby Model which mimics nature is recommended as a model for sustainability.
- The City of Stockholm has regulated to make sustainability 'normal'.
- There needs to be consensus decision-making.
- A LTCCP should look forward 50 years.
- A systems approach is needed from the bottom up.
- Systems are currently in decline.
- There are positive examples such as the Moana Pool in Dunedin which is moving its heating from LPG to a wood fired boiler.
- Resilient communities are those which don't harm people and don't harm nature.

Panel Discussion:

“What can the Rest of NZ Take Out of the Lessons Learnt From a Successful Decision Making Challenge”?

The topic related to the successful community challenge to the Christchurch City Council proposal in increase council housing rents.

The key questions that the court determined were:

- Q) Did Council comply with its significance policy?
 A) No, there was no reference to it.
- Q) Did Council consider all options?
 A) No. Did not approach Central Government for assistance.
- Q) Did Council consider affected parties?
 A) No. Did not follow statutory process only the 1st and 4th stages of it.
- Q) Did Council comply with the 'consistency' requirements s80 LGA?
 A) No. Technical breach.

It was noted that the Court decision has not been appealed.

Other factors:

Council could only legally increase rents by CPI amount (2-3%)

Bruce Robertson (Office of Auditor General) advised that the Court decision was made on the facts. He raised three key points which must be taken into account.

- 1) Define what is 'significant' and observe s79 LGA.
- 2) Carefully consider the matter to be determined.
- 3) Understand core costing systems i.e. Can we raise rents? What do we need to do to cover maintenance costs?

Jim Palmer (CEO Waimakariri DC) advised that 'significance' needs to be defined in regard to community sensitivity with a need to watch for 'grey zones' where there can be a lack of an understanding about issues which may be sensitive.

Andrew Williams (Mayor North Shore CC and former Board member) commented that CCC had not followed their own processes and had used out of date data (2003 data for a 2008 decision).

Pam Richardson (Community Board Member) commented that the Court decision was a great result for the community. Councils need to respect their communities, learn from the past and move forward. We need to acknowledge there will be conflicts and try to find ways to resolve them.

'Real' consultation is essential. A clear plan which identifies the role of each party i.e. delegations.

Develop good opportunities for liaison between parties using clear processes and common language.

"Councils aren't there to make profits but to provide services".

Workshop

"The Value of Council/ Community Board Relationships for Community Leadership".

Led by Dr James Stratford (Department of Internal Affairs), Tony Marryatt (CEO CCC) and Dale Williams, (Mayor of Otorohanga and former Community Board member).

James Stratford.

- History, personalities and prejudices have to be taken into account.
- There needs to be clarity of role and communication.

- Community Boards need to be determined what they want to achieve for their communities. A clear community board plan is helpful.
- Change from 'advocacy' to 'delivery'.
- Define goals and monitor them for being met.
- Obtain adequate information at the appropriate level.
- Develop process for early involvement.
- Share good news.
- Recognize respective roles.
- Decision making with an open mind.
- Obtain adequate resources.
- Seek opportunity for training and development.
- Develop a clear plan which identifies the role of each party i.e. delegations.

Tony Marryatt

- Community Boards really important for Christchurch City.
- Keep Boards informed.
- Provide sufficient resources and staffing.
- Be clear on roles.
- Seen as one team Staff/Board/Councillors.
- Dedicated Board advisor i.e. their own 'CEO'.
- Retain Board staff to enable consistency as far as is possible.
- **ALL** information goes to **ALL** elected members.
- Have a monitoring system for Board resolutions.
- Hold a monthly workshop for all Board members.
- CCC has no committee structures.
- CCC has a dedicated meeting for Board issues.
- Board Chairs meet once a month with their Staff.
- CCC asks Boards for priorities of projects.
- CCC feeds back to Boards the outcome of proposals.
- Boards with clear delegations work really well.
- Capital projects are the most difficult. Council needs to be clearer regarding the scope of projects and what is being consulted on. Tensions occur between Council and Boards about projects.
- Team work has to take into account aspirational differences.
- Boards facilitate resolution meetings between Council and residents.
- Difficult for Boards to support Council when a loss of a community asset is proposed i.e. loss of a swimming pool which a community wishes to retain.
- Under grounding power lines (lack of) is a vexed issue for some communities.

Dale Williams

- Otorohanga has 9,500 people.
- There are 16 elected members: 1 Mayor, 7 Councillors, 8 Community Board members.

- Councillors are appointed to Community Boards. (2 to Otorohanga Board, 1 to Kawhia).
- Full delegations to Boards.
- No committees of Council.
- Delegations attract a high calibre of people.
- Swimming pools funded by user communities.
- Security service in Otorohanga funded by targeted rate.
- Board members and councillors earn similar pay, all are referred to as 'Councillors'.
- Otorohanga model pyramid has 'Ratepayers' at the top followed by the
Mayor
Elected members
CEO
Staff in sequence.
- Board advocacy works both ways i.e:
To council from community,
From council to community.
- Boards are community focused.

Discussion:

- Mileage review could disadvantage rural representatives.
- Waiheke Community Board feels unheard with no delegations.
- The establishment of the Rotorua/Lakes Board was opposed by Rotorua District Council. The Board has no delegations. Councillors were concerned about the impact on their salaries from the creation of a Board.
- It was recommended that the Board needs to sit down with the CEO and Mayor and determine how the relationship can be made to work.
- Otorohanga DC accepts responsibility for Board decisions.
- Rates are a tax and the ability to pay must be considered.
- Going to the media is a last resort when approaches to the Mayor and CEO have failed.

Keynote Speaker:

Ross Banbury, Manager Te Papanui Trust, Papanui Youth Centre.

“Community Dreams will happen by working together”

- Papanui Baptist Church headed project.
- Shirley/Papanui Community Board provided \$35,000 seed funding which was essential to get project started.
- CCC guaranteed \$45,000pa income for first 3 years.
- Identified the need to own their building following disappointment with a proposed lease.
- St Pauls Anglican Church allowed building to be erected on their land.
- The CCC guaranteed rent was made available as a lump sum of \$135,000.

- Project team defined what was needed:
 - Climbing wall.
 - Computer room.
 - Art room.
 - Music studio.

The Youth Centre is a very successful project which is running well.

Day Three

Keynote Speaker:

Dr Phillip Bagshaw (Canterbury Charity Hospital Trust and North and South 'New Zealander of the Year' 2008).

“Leadership can make community initiatives and partnerships happen”.

Dr Bagshaw provided an interesting and entertaining power point address about the completion of the Canterbury Charity Hospital which is 'by the community for the community'.

- Beware of Orwellian lexicons which obscure real situations. i.e. “Dropped off the waiting list” becomes “referred to GP”.
- In the 1980's 60% was elective surgery and 40% acute.
In 2005 30% elective, 70% acute.
- Failure to treat on time is costly in all ways.
- Direct action is necessary to solve parts of a problem.
- Partnerships with the community are essential.
- Trust formed in 2004.
- Hospital operates using volunteers for everything.

Victor Hugo: “There is no force greater in the world than an idea whose moment has arrived.”

Keynote Speaker:

Getrude Matshe

“Community Boards preparing for vibrant, diverse communities”.

Getrude gave a most moving speech about her life in Zimbabwe and the effects of AIDS on Africa. Her book “Born on the Continent – Ubuntu” is an inspiring read. I purchased a copy which I am prepared to loan.

Workshop

“Enhancing Communities through Local Democracy and the Role of Community Boards in Local Democracy.”

Mary Richardson, Dr. Jean Drage.

“The well-being of democracy depends on the strength of our faith in it and the willingness of citizens and elected representatives to defend it.”

– Moira Rayner “*Rooting Democracy.*”

Principles of good practice for local democracy:

- Local people, right mix, elected locally.
- Provision of services in best way.
- Seeing and creating best initiatives.
- Being fair.
- Adding value.
- Collective approach.
- Affordability.
- Common good sense of identity and place.
- LGA 2002 s3,10, 52, 78 provide vital information.
- Identifying functions.
- Describe Board satisfaction.
- Identify changes needed.

Political Representation:

Hypothesis:

- Greater advisory role.
- Increased role in policy making.
- Increased role in consultation.
- Key role in defining community outcome.
- Increased role in community development.
- Strong relationships with Councils.

Records show:

- Reduced number of elected positions since 1989.
- Decision-making undertaken outside democratic process.
- Increased focus on participatory democracy.
- Growing mistrust of politicians.
- Falling voter turnout.
- Ongoing ideological debate regarding ‘core services’ v ‘wider services’.
- Increased emphasis on governance model.
- Local Government is **NOT** the same as a Board of Directors.

Long Term Council Community Plans:

- Community Boards and community often excluded from the development of plans.
- LTCCP’s have become high level directions and for setting rates.

Suggestions for Improvements

- Board members have speaking rights at Council meetings.
- Co-opting Board members into working parties.
- Southland, Central Otago and Kapiti provide excellent examples of inclusiveness.

- There needs to be National Standards for the operation of Community Boards.
- Acceptance into Council processes and relationships is favoured rather than delegations.
- Councils get bogged down in process and lose the democratic intent.
- Shared remuneration from the pool is a declared (or undeclared) underlying issue.
- Central Otago Community Boards drive Council. Full delegations there since 1989. 50% of rate take is administered by the Boards.

Keynote Speaker:

Lawrence Yule, Chair LGNZ and Mayor of Hastings.

Introduction:

- Acknowledged Yvonne Palmer, John Key and Rodney Hide's comments.
- Understands the common sense and value of Community Boards.
- Wonderful, well organised Conference.
- Disappointed by the attendance of only a small number of mayors.
- Local Government complains that they are not trusted by Central Government.
- Community Boards complain that they are not trusted by Councils and vice versa.
- Royal Commission on Auckland local government may lead to National change.
- Sceptics don't go to Conference.
- Boards fulfil a wide range of community needs as evidenced by the Best Practice Awards.
- Boards working with their communities best fulfil their communities' needs.
- Councillors become remote from communities.

Future of Community Boards:

- Edward Burke described 'the little platoon model' as the 1st subdivision of society through grassroots community organizations.
- Decision making is needed where citizens can have real input.
- Local organizations are needed with an aging community.
- Encouraging greater involvement by young people vital.
- Excluding Boards from the development of LTCCP is wrong.
- Community Boards are the best place to invest time and effort in building community connection with Council i.e. strengthening neighbourhoods.
- Fostering a richer form of consultation along with self governance and personal responsibility.
- Get democracy down to a local level.
- More involvement = better quality of community.
- Don't lose sight of your value to your communities as the contact point.

Workshop

“Achieving Best Practice Consultation with Controversial Projects”. Mary Hay, Christchurch City Council.

This workshop revolved around techniques to secure engagement and contributions from all participants.

It included allocation of a topic to groups.

- Groups dividing and reforming with others to continue contribution of ideas to a list.
- Groups moving round from topic to topic as a cohort viewing and adding to lists.
- Individuals marking issues on lists which were of importance to them personally.

The techniques provided new ways of engagement. Whether they will achieve better outcomes was unclear from the brief experience of the workshop.

Civil Defence Emergency

At this point following a cacophony of sirens, Mayor Bob Parker declared a full Civil Emergency as a result of a force 8 earthquake. Conference attendees were man-powered to assist and after mustering in the Conference Centre foyer, boarded buses for Wigram Airbase. The passengers on each bus were divided into groups to undertake a variety of roles.

The group I was in served in the triaging of injured persons and we set up our base in a corner of the Wigram Hanger. Our small group identified the skills and resources we had within our membership and set up a triage station. A large number of patients exhibiting a variety of injuries descended on us and we set about treating them in the most appropriate way for their condition. Our efforts were overseen by St John's Ambulance personnel without interference.

At the conclusion of the exercise a de-brief was held and St John's were generally impressed by our efforts with some helpful suggestions as to how we may improve them.

We then moved to another hanger where the venue for the evening meal was set up. A spokesperson for each group reported back to the whole gathering.

There were 'thank yous' to various organizers. Yvonne Palmer announced her retirement as Chairperson of NZ Community Boards and received a standing ovation in recognition of her work. Her place is being taken by Mike Cohen from Devonport Community Board.

The meal prepared by the Salvation Army was served after which we were bussed back to the City.

Joe Bell
24th March 2009