Recreation Aotearoa

Community-led development

Powerful change can result from community-led development. Work with communities to identify their issues, involve them in developing outcomes, and take action to support their wellbeing and celebrate their identity.

Sometimes change emerges from disaster in unexpected ways such as the Canterbury CityCare/Student Volunteer Army Partnership, (winners of a Recreation Aotearoa Award 2018). Or change can result from a simple twist of fate – like when a space in a low-decile Lower Hutt school became available for growing food. This opportunity seeded the Community Unity Project.

There are already a huge number of people doing great work in the community – we've simply realised there's a gap we can fill, in terms of bringing the aspirations of community groups and local government together and supporting volunteer leads or guardians' [Sam Johnson, SVA, Citycare.co.nz news and views]

What is the key to the success of these two diverse and successful community led projects?

Principles

Community Led Development provides a framework for acting on what matters locally. It's an approach that empowers people to work collectively with one another and with other groups and organisations that have a stake or role in that place. [1]

Application of the Inspiring Communities' Community-Led Development (CLD) principles increases the ability of individuals and groups to realise the potential of their community.

It is not a simple or linear process because communities are complex and changeable. Perspectives and needs change, and diverse ideas will be expressed.

Community led development is a 'way of thinking' underpinned by 5 principles:

1. Shared vision
2. Build from strengths
3. Work with diverse people and sectors
4. Collaborative local leadership
5. Learn by doing.

Place-based planning is inherent in these principles. Listen to Janine Sowerby, Senior Planner Urban Regeneration at CCC discuss their award winning approach to supporting community-led, place-based planning through a decision-making framework and online toolkit.

The principles outlined in the Recreation Aotearoa Community Recreation Strategy closely mirror those of Inspiring Communities:

1. Recognise and address inequalities
2. Self determination
3. Collective action
4. Sustainability
5. Action-reflection.

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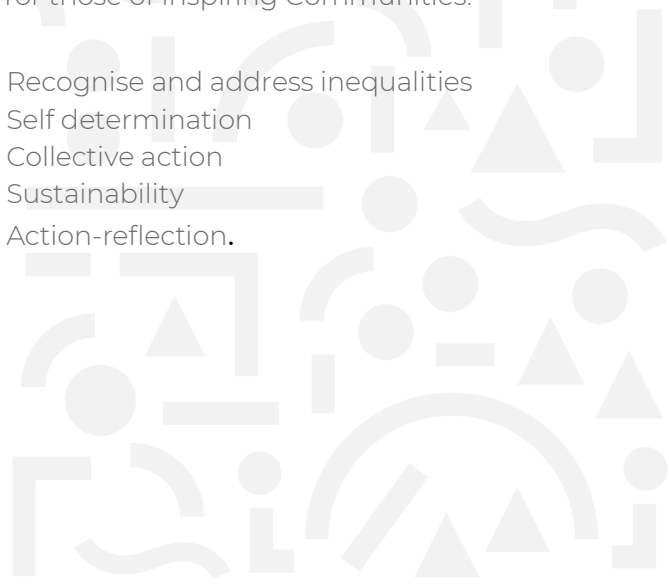
Case Study 1: CityCare – Student Volunteer Army 'Connect the Community' events

Recreation Aotearoa Award winners Outstanding Community Recreation Programme (2018)

Shared Vision

"This event [Connect the Community] really shows how different stakeholders in the community can band together to help a community in need, to show our solidarity and support". [Lucy McLeod, President SVA]

SVA Volunteers and CityCare staff cleaning up a local park. Image: Citycare

Citycare has a large staff, local assets, skills and tools. They bring safety management systems, and experience in project and event management. The Student Vounteer Army (SVA) contributed capable and motivated students, trained in resilience by Civil Defence, who were already experienced 'helpers' in their community. Community Guardians developed out of this initial partnership.

Key features

Place-based plans: many projects are undertaken with local community members in high deprivation areas of Christchurch, and include cleaning up community areas and planting.

Sustainability: The Guardians offer supported responsibility to sustain the work [e.g. tending native trees planted at a Big Give day]. A potential delivery model would mean local community members are paid to take on responsibility for maintenance of an area with support from Citycare staff.

Engagement: Volunteer commitment amounts to thousands of hours, up to 5200 on one Big Give event alone. Increasing numbers of volunteers, with positive experience reported, and a 60% return rate for the annual Big Give event ensures a sustainable model. Julia Christensen (12) saw the rollout of her award-winning Eco Guard plant protection used at the 2019 Big Give planting.

Further reading and resources
The Common Unity Project Aotearoa
UHCC Alive and Well; Effective Approaches to Activating your Communities
SNZ Community Sport Insights Tool
Sport NZ locally led development evaluation report
Community Led Development tools and resources
Community Led Development theories
Community Led Development publications
CCC Shape your Place Toolkit
Gap Filler Placemaking case study

Case Study 2: Common Unity Project Aotearoa

In 2012, the Common Unity Project Aotearoa started as a pilot project to explore the idea that, by inviting a community to partner with us and celebrating the strengths that we have, we might together address some challenges that affect us all. [2]

Vision: Every Child has a Village

Place-based plan: The first project converted Epuni School's football field into a productive vegetable garden. Now, Project Sunshine grows and collects sunflower seeds for sale/exchange throughout NZ.

Learn by doing: The Common Unity Project now includes a range of locally owned enterprises: Beeple Honey Collective, One Small Piece (knitting with schools), Sew Good cop-operative, Urban Kai Farms, Unity Kitchen, the Remakery and other activities. All of these are locally owned enterprises, under the umbrella of CUP. The ReMakery houses the projects and provides a place to market produce and art.

Building from strengths: The Common Unity Project created a partnership with Epuni School, its families and whānau, then extended this to include other organisations, including funders.

Collaborative local leadership: The project works with community, schools and organisations across Lower Hutt.

Principles into action

Shared local vision: Understand who was in this place, who is in this place and who will be in this place.

Build from strengths: Proactively involve people who are frequently ignored.

Collaborative local leadership: Seek leadership from across the community.

Work with diverse people and sectors: Foster connections between groups who don't usually work together.

Learn by doing: Build in time for structured reflection to understand what's working and what's not.

References
[1] Inspiring Communities Resources
[2] Inspiring Communities: Our Theory of Change
[3] From Award Nomination 2018: Citycare/SVA Connect the Community
[4] Common Unity Project