

Stories from the field: Whole-of-government, a whole-of-community partnership

A case study by Roslyn Cameron developed as part of the ALA-ANTA Innovation Grant 2004

North Lakes is situated in the Pine Rivers Shire, which is part of Brisbane's northern corridor. Pine Rivers Shire is currently the fastest growing major Shire in Queensland and the second fastest growing in Australia.

North Lakes is a significant, mixed use, master planned community with a relatively young population with 40% of residents aged less than 25, and areas of high structural unemployment. It is sited strategically located on the Bruce Highway and will have a mature population of 22,000 residents by 2016. It is projected that the emerging town centre and the mixed use industrial and business area will host 13,000 new job opportunities over the next decade.

The Hornery Institute leads a unique partnership between the developers of North Lakes and Pine Rivers Shire Council to meet the leisure and learning needs of residents in the growing communities of Brisbane's northern corridor. This has resulted in the implementation of the Pathways Enterprise Centre.

The Hornery Institute established the concept for the Pathways Enterprise Centre through community engagement and consultation together with market research and analysis. The Institute then led the design of Pathways and negotiated the funding to complete this ambitious project.

Stage 1 of the Centre opened in September 2004 and includes a 21st century library, vocational education and training centre, coffee shop, meeting rooms and community spaces, and family sports and recreation centre. Stage 2, to be completed in 2006, will include a year 10-12 secondary school.

The development of the Centre has been guided by the Stakeholder Advisory Committee (SAC), an independent governance group comprising representatives from government, business and the community. Stuart Hornery, Chairman of The Hornery Institute, has been the independent Chair of the SAC. Contributors to the Pathways Enterprise Centre have included Pine Rivers Shire Council, Lensworth, Education Queensland, Queensland State Librarian, Queensland Department of Sport and Recreation, and Queensland Department of Employment and Training.

The CEO of the Pathways Enterprise Centre explains how this collaborative process came about:

'When the original concept of the North Lakes development was put forward to council and the level of investment was offered by the developer, council engaged the Hornery Institute at that stage to go through the process of community consultation so we could find out what the community needed. We came up with a range of things in terms of education, access to information, recreation and leisure and employment opportunities.'

The funding arrangements really just attached themselves to the fact that each stakeholder is going to have some kind of use of the facility for whatever it might be in terms of programs... every investor if you like, has their investment leverage because they can use other parts of the facilities. That's what we want to have as an integrated approach, as really a learning campus.'

However, when you have a combination of very different types of stakeholders and organisations clashes stemming from the different organisational cultures or ways of operating will inevitably occur. However some key principles, prime among them, a clarity of vision, helped overcome these obstacles, as the CEO notes:

'I think across the projects that the Hornery Institute gets involved in we are often able to facilitate a strong partnership because we are able to capture from the different stake holders and different players around the table a real collaboration of what it is they want to realise. Whatever the project is meant to achieve and we are able to articulate that.

We are able to provide the vision as it reflects back on all the contributions all of the stakeholders have made to that process and the vision of that process is what we facilitated for North Lakes is a really good example of that. Its how Pathways came up because there was a process where a lot of discussion focus groups were hosted to make sure that the community had input, council had input local business had input, education that sort of thing.

Clear vision...is a constant thread because you can always come back to that and it anchors itself in the process.'

Solid research was also identified as a key ingredient:

'I think if community organisations try to develop and build partnerships on theories and on supposition, then its really tough to sell. But if you've got some really hard concrete evidence on what the community really needs then the research is very clearly substantiated. Then you've got a really good case to go into x, y, & z government departments, corporate organizations and whatever.

Whatever their role is groining to be – whether it is funding or some other contribution, the potential partners will want to know that we are actually going to have some kind of meaningful purpose. You've got to know that the outcome is really needed in the community otherwise these potential partners, especially government, probably won't come to the party. So research is critical and I think it was done quite comprehensively at the inception stage of the project.'

The Pathways Enterprise Centre has only just been established and has more challenges ahead. As the CEO observers:

'I think we're yet to be proven in terms of our community engagement and our ability to do that within and beyond our four walls. That's going to be our test but certainly what we have delivered to the community is a very, very attractive facility which the community can access. I think we need to be able to sell that to the community, because there is the danger that the perception maybe that it

is somewhat exclusive. We can't afford for that to happen because then we start aligning ourselves with a certain demographic.'

But until for the time being, the CEO of the project, at least, is happy with the progress so far:

'I just think it's a good example and a unique example of how government, a whole government approach can deliver something which is quite innovative, quite unique in what it offers to the community.'