

Queensland CD Conferences - Some Thoughts and Perspectives

Some recent history and where we are now – Tina Lathouras, November 2013

In 2009 CD Queensland (CD QLD) joined with the International Association for Community Development (IACD) and jointly hosted a conference in Brisbane. With over 500 attendees the conference called "*Building Community-Centred Economies*", was a great success. Ela Bhatt from SEWA (Self Employed Women's Association) in India gave the Les Halliwell Address.

After the mammoth effort to host that event everyone took a big breath and the process started to look for a community to commit to hosting an event in 2011. Unfortunately, although several communities seriously considered it, we were unable to secure that commitment. Therefore, the small CD Qld reference group (Ann Ingamells, Maggie Shambrook and Tina Lathouras) sought a mandate from the network via email to host a one-day 'CD Practices Day', including a Les Halliwell Address to be held in Nundah, Brisbane in late 2011. With a generalist theme, "*Community Development Futures: Social Change, it's in Our Hands*" the day enabled 130 colleagues to gather, renew friendships and connections, or start new ones; and to participate in some thought-provoking dialogue around contemporary community development practice. The Les Halliwell Address was given by Ann Ingamells and entitled: "*Sustaining a movement: Framing the work and Evading Capture: A reflection on community development practice frameworks*".

We've just had the 2013 conference at Deception Bay. The theme: "*Unlocking Citizen Led Change*" was explored and 140 people gathered for the CD Practices day. This event featured the much-loved Les Halliwell Address, given by Tina Lathouras and entitled, "*The Power of Structural Community Development to Unlock Citizen Led Change*". In addition and either side of the conference, two day-long events were held by Community Praxis Co-operative (*Conversations from the Heart about Community and Change*), and the Coalition of Community Boards (*Innovation in Fundraising for Community Organisations*).

We all look forward to gathering together again in 2015.

How it all began - Anthony Kelly, Brisbane 2003

The first CD conference was a small affair held in the East Brisbane State School next to the Gabba. It was a conference that was run by practitioners for practitioners.

The conference was designed as a forum to discuss community development practice. We wanted to share what we were doing in our work that may be of interest and to help our colleagues, but to do it in a way that was as careful and as thoughtful as we could make it. In those early days we deliberately decided not to seek the help of government subsidy that would naturally want the interests of their funded programs attended to, and not to engage "famous" speakers. To this end we asked communities to host the conference to make it personal and lower the

cost. We established a pool of money that was a roll over fund. At the end of the conference the money was returned to the next host community, hopefully with a bit added a little so that the fund could keep ahead with inflation. At the end of the conference the money was returned for the use of the next host community. This process started in 1977 and has continued just about every second year since that time.

Although this informal and participatory tradition has ebbed and flowed, and government programs have exercised more or less influence at various times, its open ended nature, its community base and practitioner focus remains the hallmark of the conference to this day.

CD Conferences - Perspectives on their meaning and value - *Morrie O'Conner, Brisbane 2003*

The first community development conferences in the 1970's were very special for me. Sugata Dasgupta's international perspective fostered a sense of solidarity with other activists and traditions worldwide. Being with my peers was a point of encouragement and creativity. Since those first ones, I don't think I've missed a conference and the renewed sense of community on meeting old peers and new ones is always a precious gift.

Why we hold CD conferences in local communities - *Anna Heriot, Cooroy 2003*

The Queensland CD conferences are co-creations which hold the experience of community at heart. We continue to do community work in our own communities, in paid and voluntary positions, on local, regional and state-wide management committees and with other communities of interest. Regardless of the various kinds of training we have each had (or not had), we have all learned from each other along the way.

Every two years we have gathered together, around the well of our common purpose, to replenish ourselves, through sharing stories, meeting old friends and making new ones. The local places where CD conferences are held will welcome you and I, and our experience of community to provide spaces and places for us all to share stories of our communities, our work, hopes, dreams and challenges.

How we share our learning at conferences - *Ross Wiseman, Brisbane 2003*

With regard to the biennial CD conferences, what I would most wish for is that they become places **of** community development, rather than a gabfest **about** community development. Imagine if we were able to come with the people (or just some of them) with whom we work, bringing the issues we confront, and share our stories and experiences. How rich our learning would be, particularly if we were all able then to reflect on our experiences and practice, and explore and expand our horizons together about how we can make some headway in a world that is squeezing the life out of too many of us. I think that a conference such as this would be so important in the times in which we live.

Why there should be a Les Halliwell address at CD conferences - Carmel Daveson, Mackay 2003

I first met Les Halliwell in 1961 as a young Social Work student at the University of Queensland. He was one of my lecturers in a course, which predominately focused on casework and the specialist approach to individual change. He provided me with the challenge of another way of working which inspired me to take, what was at that time the "less traveled road" - community development work. The simple message I got from Les was that ordinary people could work together to bring about change, and his faith in their ability to do that. I believe it is important to continue the Les Halliwell address to remind us that we are part of a long tradition of working to build community in many different fields in countries all over the world. The inspiration to work in this way is needed now more than ever. In a culture where the emphasis is on individualism, competition and economic rationalism, the address provides us with a challenge and an opportunity, to reflect on and to renew our faith in the importance of both micro and macro community development practice. In continuing the tradition of Les's belief in the wisdom and capacity of 'ordinary' people, perhaps from time to time, the address could be delivered by one of these people, telling the story of how they engaged with other to build their community.

Looking forward, looking back (as Slim Dusty sings) - Deirdre Coghlan, Brisbane 2003

I have been immensely privileged to work in a State which has had a tradition of community-driven community development conferences. Since the early eighties it has given me, as a community work practitioner, a solid base for peer learning and an opportunity to test the issues facing my work at that time. As others have pointed out these conferences have varied in their presentation and content, but so has my practice and so have the community environments we have worked and practiced in.

We have put this material together to record the history of the Queensland Community Development Conferences. The information can be updated, as the tradition of community-based, community development conferences continues to provide a vehicle for us to learn together.

Principles and processes for hosting a CD conference

1. The CD Queensland Conference is held biennially and in different parts of the State.
2. Seed funding for the conference is passed to the identified auspicing organization who will work with a regional conference organizing group to develop a budget and source further funding.
3. The aim is to make the conference accessible and affordable for CD workers in Queensland.
4. The aim is to make a small profit.
5. Profits are split between the auspicing organizations and CD Queensland 50/50.

6. The goal is to increase the seed funding that is passed on to the next conference planning group by CPI. Any additional funds generated for CD Queensland may be used for other projects, such as CD training, website or resource development.

CD Conference Hosting Traditions

1. It includes the Les Halliwell address
2. It is about sharing our work with peers
3. It has a strong local grassroots dimension
4. It does not do formal business eg passing motions
5. It helps develop current analysis
6. It supports and sustains the work
7. It is *for* communities and practitioners, *by* communities and practitioners
8. It is a statewide conference