

## 7 A Policy and Program Framework Responding to Spatial Disadvantage

### **Lifeline Community Care Queensland Communities for Children project at the Gold Coast**

When the Northern Gold Coast Communities for Children Program began in late 2004, there were very few services for families and children located in the site. The rapid development of housing estates resulted in many young families in the area, and few points of access for them to meet each other, or gain support for their important roles.

Canal developments with walled communities and expensive houses, are one characteristic of the Northern Gold Coast. There is also a corridor of proliferating housing developments intended for first home buyers in the average income bracket. Additionally there are numerous pockets of rental properties attracting low income families to this area. Cut through by the nation's main north-south motorway, it is not an easy place to develop a sense of community. In the more affluent areas surrounding the site, major developers have provided some community infrastructure, but within the site itself, small developers have provided little by way of community resources. This meant there were limited halls, community centres, or meeting spaces from which to launch activities.

One of the many challenges facing the project was the need to quickly develop a web of inter-related activities and programs across the site that would be easily accessible to all families.

Five interrelated strategies supported this plan: Early Childhood Community Hubs, Creating Community Connections, Strengthening Family Relationships, Children's Developmental Strategy and Social Infrastructure Strategy.

A particular characteristic of the plan was its outreach to the places where people live. A web of connected Early Childhood Hubs was constructed across the site, attached to schools, a community centre and a church. Drop-in Centres, playtime, craft, cooking, groups facilitated by a maternal child health nurse, baby playtime, infant massage, reading activities, breakfast clubs, move to music and Stepping Stones to prep, are just some of the activities held in the Hubs. The activities are designed to ensure that children's language and cognitive development, physical and large motor skill development, nutrition and social skills are well developed. Importantly the activities are all easy access, freely available, fun, inclusive of all family members and offer opportunities to build sustainable peer relations and community networks.

Many families coming to these activities would be reluctant to present to more conventional child or family welfare services. These kind of 'soft entry' approaches can be viewed as signaling a more complete paradigm shift away from the usual intake, assessment and individual intervention of welfare services to a more universal form of proactive engagement which complements and builds upon the strengths of both those who participate and the communities and societies in which they live.

Ingamells, 2007

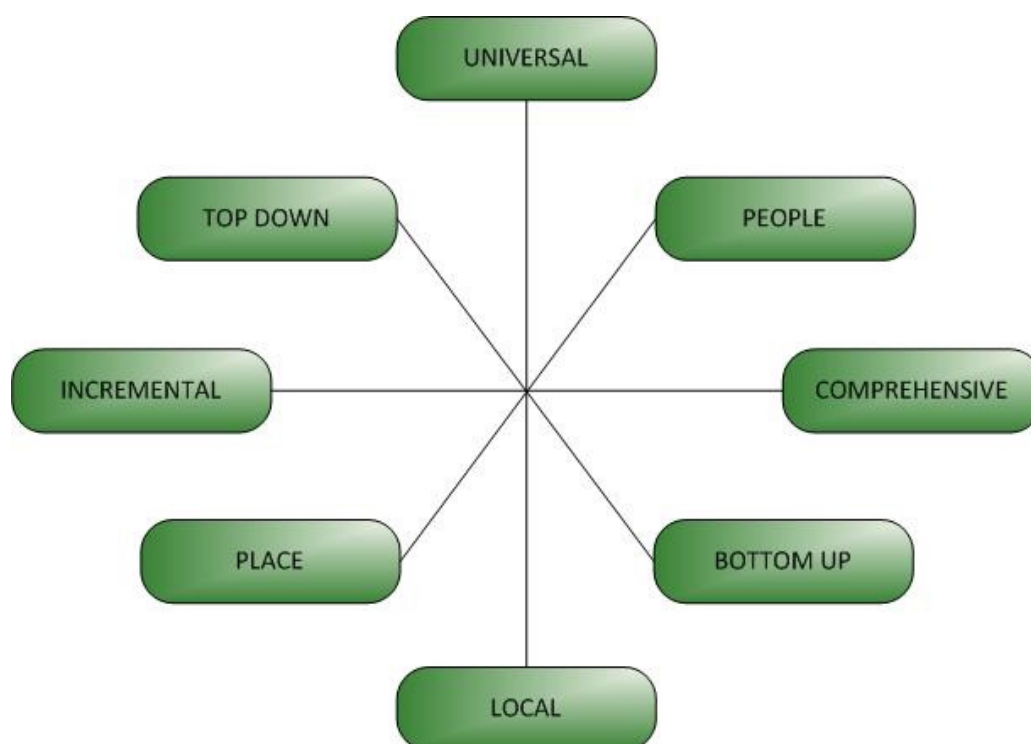
## 7.1 A Framework for Place-Based Responses

The following framework has been synthesized from the range of place based initiatives cited earlier. This framework recognizes the various modes of working including:

- Service delivery
- Community development
- Local economic development
- Advocacy for improved policies and programs.

There are also various starting points and dimensions to consider. In Section 6, the value of National and State level policy frameworks with high level leadership and significant resources is acknowledged and forms the basis of some recommendations in Section 7. The following compass (adapted from Kelly and Burkett, 2007) highlights a number of possible starting points and dimensions that represent opportunities to deepen the capacity for reflective practice across any of the modes and in any scale of initiative.

**Figure 112. Compass for Starting Points**



For example, a particular initiative might represent an example of top-down policy with certain impacts and opportunities for a disadvantaged location. The challenge might be to consider how top-down initiatives can enable bottom-up engagement in opportunities as they emerge. Similarly, a community might already have experimented with innovation and begun to work incrementally on an issue or situation. This type of incremental effort is grounded in local knowledge, strengths and capacities and has been driven from within the community, thus reflecting a bottom up approach. As a result of this initiative, there might emerge a case study or precedent that is the basis for advocacy about more comprehensive policies that better support grass root efforts at reducing disadvantage. None of the points on this compass are binary concepts that require a decision of one or the other. The challenge is to synergise these different dimensions and therefore generate practice frameworks that can engage with the level of complexity involved in entrenched and longstanding disadvantage.

It can also be true that some programs tend to focus more on incremental approaches and target particular groups or issues from a top-down perspective. To seriously address spatial disadvantage, it is helpful to adopt approaches that are local in focus where the geography of a place is defined as a basis for comprehensive strategies focusing on that area and which support bottom-up engagement.

The following framework is synthesised from the literature review and has evolved also through the consultation component involving key stakeholders within UnitingCare Queensland. It outlines important elements within place-based responses with some explanatory notes exploring key components of each element.

Every area will have a different starting point depending on existing capacity and existing or emerging opportunities at a local, regional or national level. These elements are presented for consideration in the process of planning particular area based approaches.

## 1. Assessment and Planning

Element	Explanatory notes
Vision, purpose	<p>A vision and purpose is shared among key stakeholders (can be part of the action-planning process)</p> <p>A clear vision and purpose to reduce poverty, disadvantage and social exclusion is articulated.</p>
Geography	<p>The boundaries and scale of the area is smaller rather than larger, although boundaries avoid treating places as 'containers'.</p> <p>Linkages with strategic opportunities, infrastructure etc. are important.</p> <p>The area in relation to particular issues like employment, might be broader/strategic.</p>
Scale	<p>Where initiatives are being driven from the bottom-up, it can be helpful to decide on a few strategic and achievable initiatives as a way of building a foundation for taking next steps and for continued dialogue with funding bodies and decision makers.</p> <p>Similarly, larger scale, comprehensive, place-based programs, can respond to wide-ranging and connected issues.</p>
Policy context	<p>Assess which existing federal and state level policies and programs already impact on a place.</p> <p>Identify any emerging opportunities to tailor a universal or issue/target group specific policy or program to a particular place.</p> <p>Advocate for specific policies and programs that are 'place' focused.</p>

## 2. Structural Support and Governance Arrangements

Element	Explanatory notes
Governance, engagement and civic participation	<p>Governance arrangements will actively involve local residents and other key stakeholders - however governance and engagement processes take account of power and resource differences and do not overtax communities.</p> <p>Governance arrangements will involve all key stakeholders in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Achieving interagency and inter-sectoral agreements that are formal and outcome focused</li> <li>▪ Further assessing need, the drivers of disadvantage, trends and also assets and resources</li> <li>▪ Developing local area action plans</li> <li>▪ Effectively implementing these plans with a focus on outcomes and solutions</li> <li>▪ Making best use of universal policies and programs through actively facilitating better integration of these policies into outcomes for a particular place (including analysing which universal and place-focussed initiatives should be better facilitated and integrated towards outcomes)</li> <li>▪ Ongoing dialogue with all levels of government to encourage a place-based approach to priority needs and issues.</li> </ul>
Joined up commitments	<p>Place-based responses involve multiple stakeholders in joined up responses to issues. Strong structural arrangements are facilitated between government departments, across levels of government and among government, community and business sectors.</p> <p>Innovative partnerships will help to build investment capacity.</p> <p>Operational structures will also be in place to support interagency collaboration towards particular practices and outcomes. Where governance arrangements establish a framework and show leadership, operational structures are close to or at the front-line and focus hard on making things happen for people and places.</p>
Funding	<p>Budgets and staffing roles are identified and allocated. Funding for place-based responses is available.</p> <p>In more incremental and bottom-up approaches, there is a commitment to synergising all existing resources to achieve new and better outcomes.</p> <p>Innovative funding options such as foundations and trusts are explored and initiated.</p>
Evaluation	<p>An independent evaluation framework is developed which includes key measures of success, targets and milestones.</p> <p>Relationships with research institutions help to monitor implementation and measure outcomes/successes.</p>

### 3. Processes

Element	Explanatory notes
Culture	<p>Organisations foster a culture supportive of innovation and learning, focusing more clearly on outcomes rather than outputs. Innovation and creativity are encouraged and sanctioned to flow from the front-line up, sideways and top-down.</p> <p>Initiatives, roles and resources are geared towards identifying and overcoming inhibiting factors in responding to needs - obstacles are challenged.</p>
Flexibility	<p>Different solutions are allowed to emerge in different areas reflecting local needs and conditions (Randolph, 2000).</p> <p>Funding options are flexible within and across program areas. New funding programs emerge with a focus on the capacity for innovation in particular places.</p>
Focus on assets and capacities	<p>While the overarching purpose is to reduce locational disadvantage, there is also a focus on the strengths and assets of a place. Place-based initiatives will focus on developing the capacity and strengths of a particular place, and focus on the attributes and various 'capitals' present in that place. Initiatives focus on achieving better responses to individuals and households in a place, but also build networks, affiliations and associations through which people build social relationships and governance networks.</p> <p>While defining spatial disadvantage as an issue, a focus on assets helps to avoid stigmatising places and the people who live there, and also avoids blaming individual traits for the cumulative effects on places.</p>
Practice	<p>A practice framework/model includes :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Scope for direct service delivery including a focus on prevention an early intervention</li> <li>▪ Community development work</li> <li>▪ Advocacy.</li> </ul> <p>Practices are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Solution focused</li> <li>▪ Strongly related to the implementation of the action plan and tied to evaluation processes</li> <li>▪ Geared to ensure access to services and participation opportunities: there is no wrong door.</li> </ul>
Time	<p>Time is an important resource. Significant examples of success involve reasonable time commitments.</p> <p>Initiatives are scaled over a period of time that allows for successful implementation of a staged action plan (at least 5-10 years).</p>

**4. Roles**

Roles	Explanatory Notes
Leadership	<p>Commitment to working assertively to achieve innovation, a focus on solutions and the removal of barriers.</p> <p>Includes the capacity for vision and leadership to achieve the implementation and evaluation of plans.</p> <p>Can be taken up by various players (government and non-government).</p> <p>Champions are identified.</p>
Staffing	<p>In addition to leadership, coordinating, facilitating roles are defined and put in place on the ground to build partnerships, identify and capitalise on opportunities and support innovation and synergy.</p> <p>Organisational and workforce development strategies providing training, support and supervision to people in key roles, particularly at the front line.</p> <p>Staffing roles including a place manager or facilitator based with a lead agency with the capacity, authority and budget to drive outcomes.</p>
Citizens	<p>Citizens are actively engaged in governance arrangements, and social capital strategies are implemented to result in stronger social cohesion, more networks, reduced isolation. The level of volunteering in the area increases and existing volunteers are well-supported.</p>

## 5. Example Issues

Example Issues	Explanatory Notes
Problem/ solution focus	<p>Processes, programs, funding are flexible enough to focus in on the problem and generate solutions.</p> <p>Governance and engagement processes allow any local issues to be identified and responded to (safety, transport, housing, health, isolation etc.).</p>
Economic	<p>Economic strategies focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Generating employment</li> <li>▪ Boosting the local economy</li> <li>▪ ‘Stimulating local-level responses to entrenched disadvantage’ through social enterprise.</li> </ul>
Housing	<p>Housing strategies link National and State level programs with specific places.</p> <p>Affordable housing is available in less disadvantaged areas helping to reduce the push factors.</p> <p>Housing in disadvantaged areas helps to reduce isolation and lack of access by being near transport and other infrastructure.</p>
Families	<p>Focus on enhanced service delivery and prevention early intervention approaches.</p>
Transport	<p>Comprehensive and integrated transport initiatives make best use of private, public and community transport options.</p>
Supporting infrastructure	<p>Places, spaces and buildings are identified and available to underpin the solutions.</p> <p>Integration of places, buildings with improvement programs with employment programs achieve layered responses including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Physical improvements</li> <li>▪ Employment outcomes for local people</li> <li>▪ A stronger sense of place identity and belonging.</li> </ul> <p>There is an awareness of and utilisation of broader infrastructure such as schools, libraries, hospitals, churches etc.</p> <p>Transport needs are assessed and responded to through a combination of mainstream and community transport responses.</p>
Urban and Regional Planning	<p>Important to link with this dimension in terms of access to affordable housing, infrastructure, transport and community involvement in planning. Also affects push factors causing more disadvantaged people to leave less disadvantaged areas.</p>