

**PAPER FOR  
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Session 21**

**Perpetuating the Change : making it happen at a local level  
Jane Allen**

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Great ability develops and reveals itself increasingly with every new assignment."  
*Baltasar Gracian*

Good morning, I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land.

This morning I would like to take you on a journey, one that tells the story of an organisation in Northern NSW; an organisation that through necessity has looked hard at itself and tried to develop the flexibility of structure that reflects the level of flexibility requested of staff.

The mission statement of our organisation is:

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Community Programs Incorporated is a non-profit community based organisation that assists in the identification and the analysis of community needs. Our commitment is to develop and deliver exemplary services by promoting quality life choices in a supportive community environment.

I will share an abridged version of the history up until 2001 – mainly because this part of the story will be familiar to many of you – possibly mirroring what has happened in your own organisations. But first, a quick snapshot of what we look like now – 54 programs, an annual income of more the 5 million dollars and a service delivery area on the mid and far north coasts and on the northern tablelands.

In 1992 I applied for a Maternity Relief position as the Co-ordinator of the Clarence Valley Family & Youth Support Service which had been established some 5 months earlier with Recession Buster funding. I had no experience of the NGO sector and so quite blindly stepped into this management role in a fledgling service.

For those of us who remember this time it was one where there was a huge influx of government funding and in our community at least, there was a myriad of little “organisations” springing up to deliver services.

Interestingly what most of the program Co-ordinators in our community did not have their heads around was that many of these small programs were in fact part of a much bigger whole. As the 1990's progressed it became quite common to sit in an interagency meeting and find that there may well be upwards of 15 people from the one auspice – many acting in ways that were inconsistent with each other.

Towards the mid 1990's a number of the staff were growing increasingly concerned about the accountability and sustainability issues. Together with the Board, a plan was drafted to draw the organisation together. This included bringing the bank accounts, sales tax exemptions, wages, ATO, audits and funding agreements into order – thus creating an economy of scale. It is important to remember up to this stage there was a single auspice with a group of programs operating under their own discrete banners and in isolation from each other.

So our organisation consolidated – we minimised the number of bank accounts we held, we tidied up the ATO issues, we began to see that we had support staff employed in a number of programs that were really employed by the same employer and so we needed to develop a Human Resource Management response.

It appeared it was time for our organisation to grow up. The late 1990's saw the appointment of the first manager for all the program areas. This saw a change of structure underneath the manager's position that created a series of silos. Concurrently, the organisation was continuing to grow – successfully submitting for additional funds. The Board and staff brought the programs together at a co-located site.

In the style of the government of the day silos were created in Family & Youth Services, Aged Care Services, Mental Health Services, Disability Services and Children's Services. Each of the silos was headed up by a Co-ordinator who managed the day-to-day operations of the service delivery.

In 2001 we recruited our first Chief Executive Officer. At this time the staff and Board identified that we needed to give primacy to enhancing enduring and respectful relationships with our clients. We were also experiencing continuing strong growth with new programs coming into the organisation, doubling our staff numbers to over 160 and substantially increasing our financial base and accountability. While adding to the demands on all staff, this expansion was consistent with our Mission Statement, which requires us to develop and implement solutions to identified community needs – a never ending challenge.

Our consultative strategic planning process informed the next phase of infrastructure development to allow us to promote a positive organisational culture and provide opportunities for both our staff and our clients to participate and to continue growing as people and partners.

To meet the imperative of offering exemplary service, we established five specific goals through the comprehensive strategic planning process:

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- Restructure – to focus on case management and respect for clients utilising [PLACE/WeServe](#);
- Professional Development – through training to establish minimum qualifications and professional standards for all staff;
- Accreditation – to examine our actions and ensure standards and service quality within a triple bottom line accountability context;
- Asset Management – to provide facilities to meet the emphasis on clients; and
- Cultural Sensitivity– to meet the needs of our Aboriginal communities.

It is these five threads and how they have been woven into a rich tapestry that I would like to concentrate on today.

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Community Programs Incorporated works collaboratively with clients, communities and governments to realise its Mission. Board members, employees and volunteers strive to meet the needs of children, young people, families, indigenous communities, people in remote and isolated communities, people with developmental differences, people experiencing mental illness, war veterans, the elderly, the frail aged and people with dementia related illness, within an integrated environment of care.

It is only when both our workers and our clients can relate within a framework of mutual responsibility and respect can we expect to meet their diverse aspirations. We determined that, to provide the best service to over one thousand clients, it was necessary to restructure the service delivery to locate decision making with the client and their primary support worker.

We have seen the considerable strain that moving between programs and agencies places on our vulnerable clients – they can be unsure about the program they receive service from and to whom they need to talk. In response we have disbanded the existing silos and created a case management structure to straddle our service delivery obligations.

We created eleven Grade 4 Key Worker positions. Each of the Key Workers:

- ◆ Takes a specific role with a funding body or bodies including reporting compliance;
- ◆ Has supervision responsibilities of a number of caseworkers;
- ◆ Carries an active caseload of their own – this may be the assessment of all the clients allocated to their team or a discrete caseload;
- ◆ Manages the budgets for the programs they oversee within specific parameters – staff hours, program costs and travel; and
- ◆ Is supported by the finance, HR and professional development through The Clarence Institute to ensure compliance.

The Key Workers all relate to the Client Services Manager who in turn is supported by Executive Services – The CEO, The Finance Manager, The Human Resource Manager, The Executive Officer and The Aboriginal Services Officer who work as a team.

The Key Workers work with the Case Workers, Group Workers and Support Staff of the organisation. Staff members in the client services area have the capacity work across all program areas or can nominate to work with a specific individual or family.

There is much talk in the sector at an international level about wrap-around services. Within our organisation we see that this is, in effect, the service style we are providing to our clients. Our holistic service approach, based on a community development framework was recognised last year when we gained a national Child Protection Award for Community Capacity Building.

This shift from a program centred approach to a client centred approach has been one that has challenged workers – with any organisational change comes uncertainty. However our restructure was achieved with a high degree of enthusiasm and without redundancy. It included the upward movement of some 15 staff from Grade 2 to Grade 3, 8 staff from Grade 3 to Grade 4, the creation of additional positions in finance and administration areas and a new position to look at managing our accommodation, both offices and houses.

To facilitate our move to a case based approach, we sought out appropriate electronic systems to minimise paperwork and to inform a generic management system. We found that there are few case management systems available for community sector use at present, and those that are available are usually re-worked Customer Relations Management tools oriented to the commercial sector, or require costly database design and customisation.

In an environment of frequent policy change and escalating requirements for performance data and information security, these systems did not offer a value proposition. We commissioned Community Ventures and Alliances to develop a tool specific to our needs.

The consequent **PLACE™** Suite (Planning, Learning and Community Engagement) built on work Community Ventures and Alliances P/L (CVA) had undertaken for the Northern Peninsula Area

Women's Shelter Aboriginal And Torres Strait Islander Corporation in Bamaga, a remote Indigenous community located at the tip of Cape York. CVA expanded the capacity of PLACE to meet our requirements and deployed **PLACE™** on Pocket and Tablet PCs to supply mobile tools that could accept handwritten input. Staff were quick to take up the technology and the success of this system points to its value for all direct care workers, especially mobile community outreach staff.

By using the new **PLACE™** tools, we capture data with a simple on-line form at the point of interaction, which can be readily re-configured using familiar Microsoft Office tools. As these forms capture data as XML, they can be linked readily to a database that can provide its output in many media and many formats.

**PLACE™** presents all this functionality to workers through a simple and familiar browser window. This is customised as the agency's own intranet portal. It presents an additional suite of options ranging from agency news and updates, to policies, shared documents and a chat room for interacting with colleagues. The portal provides easy access to the data and evaluation tools. These tools have been specifically designed for our sector. They capture workers' interactions with clients and their other activities as the basis for a centralised, consistent and lasting agency record. They do this using software the worker is likely to be already familiar with—Microsoft Office.

**WeServe™** is the next layer up from **PLACE™** where the opportunity exists for organisations to come together to share their information under strictly agreed protocols. **WeServe™** can bring together information about particular clients and provide access to the **WeServe™** members to the most up-to-date information, reflecting changes in the status of the client as promptly as the information is entered into the system.

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To achieve our restructuring goals, it was necessary to ensure all workers had the theoretical background to complement their breadth of life and work experience. We established a Registered Training Organisation – The Clarence Institute, to give us the best degree of work-based training flexibility to meet our specific needs. A skills audit was completed and sixty workers agreed to undertake training to meet our Certificate IV qualification benchmark as New Apprenticeship Trainees.

The Clarence Institute – Centre for Learning and Research engaged external professionals to train 13 staff in Certificate IV Workplace Training and Assessment. These staff took on roles as Sessional Trainers for The Institute in partnership with another RTO to deliver the customised training.

We have taken our Core Training comprising:

- ◆ An introduction to the organisation
- ◆ Occupational Health and Safety
- ◆ Manual Handling
- ◆ Child Protection
- ◆ Advanced First Aid
- ◆ Infection Control
- ◆ Develop and Deliver Client Services
- ◆ Challenging Behaviours

and created each of these areas as 8 components of the Certificate IV in Aged Care to ensure all internal training could be articulated into nationally recognised accreditation. To complete the

Certificate IV a further 6 units are required and these units are selected according to the areas of interest of the worker.

The training has a strong practical focus, ensuring that staff can deliver the services required by their clients. As all volunteers for the organisation are also required to complete the Core Training our volunteers are encouraged to complete the Cert IV taking on electives that relate to their areas of interest.

The response of our volunteers to this training opportunity has been very strong and we are proud to say that a significant number of our volunteers go on to join the paid workforce. Increasingly, clients are able to become volunteers, and some gained traineeships as workers.

The Clarence Institute has recently partnered with Charles Sturt University and we have graduated 14 staff in the Post-Graduate Certificate in Case Management. These graduates are collaborating in the development of a Certificate IV in Community Services (Case Work), to ensure all relevant staff members have the theoretical underpinnings to carry out their case work responsibilities.

The Clarence Institute has a dual focus on research and training and has formed a number of valuable research and training links with other tertiary institutions at state, national and international levels. The Institute's Director is currently negotiating with senior members of the Singapore Government to provide Certificate level Aged Care training in Singapore, Vietnam and Beijing.

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With the impending restructure, we felt it imperative to review all our work practices and procedures and re-configure them to meet the demands of the move to greater staff responsibility and accountability.

As we operate a number of Home and Community Care (HACC) funded programs, we satisfactorily completed a mandatory HACC Validation process in 2002. Being an integrated service delivery organisation, we realised that there was much to be gained in demonstrating compliance at an organisational rather than a program level. This meant finding an accreditation program that would be appropriate for an organisation such as ours – one that was diverse enough to reflect our organisation and not force it into ways of operation that were incongruent with our philosophy.

We worked through our accreditation with Quality Management Services. The process was long, it challenged our thinking and pushed us to consider issues from a number of different angles but ultimately we were able to come through having altered the perceptions of QMS about community organisations. We advocated for a quality accreditation process relevant to multi-faceted community agencies and were invited to participate with NSW Department of Community Services and the Peaks, to establish a set of generic standards which will be introduced to services funded under the SAAP – Supported Accommodation Assistance Program, CSGP – Community Services Grants Program and Families First.

Through this process, we have implemented a quality improvement cycle. The quality improvement cycle has meant that all staff members are now consistently considering how we can better carry out our work at both the organisational and service delivery ends of the spectrum and how the organisational needs can be met whilst ensuring that the service delivery and staff/client safety are not compromised.

It is interesting to hear the conversations of staff that reflect a new style of questioning the work they do – how they ensure there are quality feedback loops and mechanisms to provide the opportunity for 360° input to our programs.

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As a major regional employer with responsibilities to significant numbers of staff and clients, we felt it necessary to move to a secure operating base for all our services as a risk management strategy. Through valuable partnerships with the South Grafton Community Bank, investors, philanthropic community leaders and staff, the real estate and landlord communities and government departments we have developed a portfolio of owned and leased properties to securely meet our diverse needs.

To provide a sympathetic environment for clients and to meet our restructuring requirements, we contracted to purchase a wonderfully dilapidated set of produce stores and warehouses with enormous potential. An innovative financing arrangement and a very generous vendor allowed us to embark on the process of redeveloping the five buildings that comprise The Pullen Centre. These buildings were opened by Her Excellency Professor Marie Bashir, Governor of New South Wales on the 5<sup>th</sup> July 2004. We have been able to co-locate our services and those of fellow organisations, provide training and counselling facilities and establish an asset base at a cost less than previous rental outgoings.

The complex provides an ideal physical environment for the holistic case management framework we have been developing. Our community partnerships have also allowed us to develop activity centres for our clients in Inverell and Grafton, a Mental Health rehabilitation centre as part of a Memorandum of Understanding with the Health Service, two farming properties including a Bail Hostel, accommodation facilities for respite and twenty four hour support, departmental and private rental properties, transition housing, an Aboriginal Services complex and outpost offices in Inverell and Maclean.

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The Clarence Valley has one of the highest concentrations of aboriginal communities in NSW. We recognised that if Aboriginal people were to access our services equitably, we needed to consult realistically with Elders and community leaders to identify and meet the needs of these communities.

We have worked hard with the seven local Aboriginal communities to provide culturally appropriate services. We had been told in our early meetings with the community leaders that the best way to ensure that the Aboriginal voice was heard would be to create a senior management position designated as Aboriginal. The position was created to:

- Ensure generic services were structured and delivered in ways appropriate to the aspirations of Aboriginal clients;
- To develop Aboriginal specific services at the request of our aboriginal stakeholders; and
- To ensure staff were sensitive to the cultural and personal needs of Aboriginal people.

This was achieved as a whole of agency initiative, is not tied to particular funding. Rather through levying each of the program areas 1% of their total grant we have been able to ensure there is cultural consistency across our programs. We now employ a number of Aboriginal people across the organisation, three times the regional demographic, without resorting to an artificial strategy of Aboriginal specific positions.

Staff members who work predominately with Aboriginal clients receive specific training in association with the Southern Cross University. Our Aboriginal Services Officer received a scholarship to undertake a Masters Degree, which will allow her to offer this unique training to all staff upon graduation.

In recognition of a new beginning for the organisation in our new premises we made the decision to have an Aboriginal Smoking Ceremony before moving in. This was led by our Aboriginal Services Officer and was a deeply significant experience.

So exactly what difference have these five threads made to the four main areas of our operations?

1. Our Clients
2. Our Staff
3. Our Funding Bodies
4. Our Communities of Interest

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It is critical that the changes we have made will improve our service to our clients as they form the nucleus of all our activities. Through our commitment to training, we are providing our clients with highly motivated and competent support workers, with additional skills to manage specific issues presented by clients. The training is on-going with staff encouraged to develop their skills in areas that interest them.

Our staff deliver their services in line with our organisational policies and program procedures which are constantly reviewed through the quality improvement cycle. To ensure that procedures are always relevant to our clients and the delivery of safe services the mechanisms to review, renew or develop new procedures is simple and available to staff in consultation with their line managers.

The new building has been designed with our clients in mind. Whilst most of our service provision actually occurs away from our centre we have made a commitment that any refurbishments will provide a high level of accessibility – so all our floor levels are as constant as possible and where a level shift is required it is achieved through ramping rather than steps.

Our clients have the benefit of having an identified Case Manager – someone with whom they have regular contact and can build rapport, someone who listens to them, working with their identified needs and aspirations and finding ways of ensuring the goals they set are realistic and achieved. Services may well come from a different program or programs and the skills of the case managers ensures that the services are delivered seamlessly. For some clients this may mean limiting the number of staff they engage with whilst for other clients it becomes a stepping stone to re-introducing them to a social network.

Through utilising both the palm sized and tablet technology for the collection of data many clients will have greater control over the information that is collected. The use of reflective questioning and scaling questions for many of our clients about the activities undertaken at a particular session has provided valuable feedback on how to best modify new programs and interventions to improve client satisfaction.

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For our staff we have sought to ensure that there is an understanding of the high regard the organisation holds them in. We have actively chosen a path that is supportive to our staff, one that challenges them to take on new goals and achieve those goals. For some of our staff who had

completed their formal education more than 35 years ago the awarding of Certificate III in Aged Care Work and Certificate IV in Community Services Work at the recent Graduation ceremony was a privilege to witness.

Our staff have embraced the notion of accreditation and quality improvement. There are a number of people who have identified that participating in training to accreditation level to undertake internal audits is of interest to them. These same people form a group of culture shifters who consistently inquire as to the why's and the how's of what we do and challenge us to do it better.

The move to the new building has forced staff to re-evaluate their own work practices. Both the Senior Management and the Client Services Team are now working in open offices, albeit in different spaces. The Client Services Team office is a controlled space where only the staff of the organisation are allowed. There are meeting spaces of various sizes located throughout the complex. Staff have become aware of how they work – interacting with other staff and with their clients. This has essentially supported the transition to staff taking on case work from outside the traditional silos ensuring that there is a cross over in the provision of wrap-around services.

PLACE™ has meant that staff store their files electronically and that much of the writing of case notes is completed in conjunction with the clients. Both the staff and the clients sign off electronically on the case notes and clients are provided with a copy either paper based or electronic at the end of their engagement with our service.

As a whole, staff members have been enthusiastic in bringing to life the vision for the organisation. They have responded to the additional responsibility and are reaping the rewards.

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Our funding bodies have expressed a high level of support for the work that we do and the way that we seek to perform that work. We are able to demonstrate, through our training and accreditation that the service we deliver fulfils the mission statement of the organisation *“Our commitment is to develop and deliver exemplary services by promoting quality life choices in a supportive community environment.”*

Our funding bodies continue to demonstrate their support through the approach to us to take on specific programs and to recommend our organisation to others who are experiencing difficulties.

We work closely with other organisations, both local and from far field, to assist, where possible, in their development. It is fair to say we have learned many lessons along the way and are happy to share that learning.

We do recognise that there is always a risk to a community based, not-for-profit organisation taking on ownership of property and then developing that property. However the new building can be justified as a reasonable way of managing the space needs of the organisation in an ever-inflating rental environment. Through careful financial management and the support of the Bendigo Bank we have been able to structure a financial package that actually decreases our outgoings ensuring a higher level of direct client service provision than ever before. This situation will only continue to improve as our economy of scale grows.

PLACE™ has provided an excellent tool to be able to meet our reporting requirements to all our funding bodies in the myriad of ways that each Department and sometimes program area demands. The information is so flexibly stored that the enquiries can be made of the XML data to reflect the different reporting needs. Of course this comes about through asking the right questions in the

inquiry process and this has taken time to establish. However the inherent strength is that in the event of the funding body changing its data requirements generally all that is required is a different question.

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Let me begin addressing our Communities of Interest by saying that they are forever expanding. You may well ask how can this be so? The answer is found in our Mission Statement that directs us to identifying and analysing community need. This does not mean that we are the only ones who should “solve” this need, rather we work collaboratively with the specific community and other service providers to identify what the community would like to do about the situation.

In this way each new community of interest we touch leads us into a cycle of working with that community and identifying additional needs that we come across as we engage with the community. So it does sound like a long series of concentric circles each one getting larger and larger. We prefer to think of it as a matrix where individuals, families, neighbourhoods, hamlets, villages, towns and cities can find a place to have their needs and articulated aspirations met.

Community Programs strives to live by its vision – **Where People Matter** and this one thought captures why we do what we do.

My final words today come from Buck Rodgers – not of 25<sup>th</sup> Century fame but rather the American base ball player who said:

There are countless ways of achieving greatness, but any road to achieving one's maximum potential must be built on a bedrock of respect for the individual, a commitment to excellence, and a rejection of mediocrity."

This, I believe is a challenge to us all.

Thank you