

proud to  
**participate**



# Proud to Participate

A community-building project

## ‘Snap-shot Evaluation’ Final Report

August 2003



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## **Executive Summary**

Proud to Participate is one of the eleven government initiated Demonstration Projects launched by the Department for Victorian Communities in 2002. The Community Building Demonstration Projects are an initiative designed to teach Government and communities more about community building processes. Over three years, each project will test new approaches to:

- identify and address priority community issues
- mobilise local skills and resources
- develop new leadership and partnerships

A key element of the Demonstration Projects is active collaboration between State Government, Local Government and an extensive array of non-government organisations, businesses and local groups in communities.

Proud to Participate was launched in Noble Park on 17<sup>th</sup> May 2002. It is a three year 'community building' project. 'Community building' is about local people working together with government to bring long-term improvements to the places they live. Building better, stronger communities is a key priority of the current Victorian Government.

According to the Department of Victorian Communities, key outcomes of community building include increased capability and capacity. Indications of increased capability and capacity may include such things as:

- leadership skills
- participation in community organisations
- volunteering
- relationships with governments
- local pride
- sense of safety and well-being

Proud to Participate is considered something of a “flagship” in relation to the other demonstration projects. Proud to Participate has two major aims:

- Increasing community interaction and participation
- Building local partnerships and pride

The objectives of Proud to Participate are:

- Highlight the strength of diversity and provide opportunities for individuals, community groups and local business people to exchange information, resources and skills.
- Create a Resource Bank to identify and develop resources, skills and co-operation between local people, community groups, government agencies and businesses.
- Develop community projects in partnership that build confidence and increase pride-of-place.
- Engage individuals who feel isolated but would like to contribute.
- Develop partnerships and greater media understanding between individuals, community groups, business and the media.

Although members of the Reference Group state that Proud to Participate’s best work is still to come, Proud to Participate has already achieved many things in Noble Park. These achievements include:

- Development of the Noble Park Model
- Establishment of a shop and shop warming
- Planning for a Movie in the park
- Community Cooking class
- Diabetes support group
- Involving local businesses
- Assisting with RSL Christmas Appeal
- Establishing Community Consultation Leaders (CCLs)
- Producing three fliers, including recent “Take 5 minutes” community consultation flier
- Effective Reference Group

**Table 1: Key activities undertaken by Proud to Participate during first 12 months.**

	<b>Process Activities</b>	<b>Project Activities</b>
<b>Prior to May 2001</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community Consultations</li> <li>• Public Forum</li> <li>• ‘Proud to Participate’ branding</li> <li>• Pride, image and diversity</li> <li>• Forming planning group</li> <li>• Noble Park selected</li> <li>• Establish shop</li> <li>• Resource audit model</li> </ul>	
<b>2001</b>	<p><b>Funding from office of Community Building</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project Manager appointed</li> <li>• Reference Group Formed</li> <li>• Establish relationships with partner organisations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>∩ <b>Project launch (May 2001)</b></li> <li>∩ 1<sup>st</sup> resource audit</li> </ul>
<b>2002</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reference Group sub-groups formed (Publicity and Promotions; Resource Audit; Events)</li> <li>• Design Noble Park Community Resource Audit</li> <li>• CCLs recruited</li> <li>• Lead Agency Project Officer appointed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>∩ Shop warming Community ‘expo’</li> <li>∩ Christmas food appeal (RSL)</li> <li>∩ Community cooking program</li> <li>∩ Diabetes support group</li> </ul>
<b>2003</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>∩ Movie in Park and stalls</li> <li>∩ Positive good news media</li> <li>∩ Support enviro group</li> </ul>

It is easy to take for granted the achievements of a committee and staff that have established a friendly, energetic and thoughtful modus operandi, a goodly list of processes and activities of which many have been clearly successful, a thoroughly documented and comprehensive Action Plan, good working relationships and a keen awareness of the next areas needing attention (such as inclusion of more people from diverse backgrounds and sustainability beyond the State Government-funded period).

To its credit the Reference Group sought accurate honest feedback from its stakeholder groups to check its directions 'in flight' at the 12 months point of a three year demonstration period. It selected external independent 'critical friends' to facilitate getting that feedback as well as to supply an 'outsiders' perspective, and it took time out for a reflective self-examination. It chose a community-building approach to extend its own conversations including with people it knew to have divergent views about the value of the project. These views have been meticulously recorded for ongoing reflection - a process for which the Reference Group members have shown considerable commitment.

The result is an intentionally honest account that has successfully illuminated the elements that are working well and which the Reference Group wants to take into the areas needing a fresh approach. It is timely to both confirm what has worked and make some modest, bold new experiments for further re-examination in another 12 months.

**The evaluation brief**

As stipulated by the Reference Group, the current evaluation was required for only “parts of the evaluation”. These parts included:

- Two workshops to develop an evaluation framework
- Individual/group interviews

**Table 2: Tasks as stipulated in the Brief for Consultant Assistance with Evaluation**

<b>Consultant Task</b>	<b>Date</b>
<p><b>Task 1</b> Facilitate a half day workshop involving up to 8 key stakeholders to develop a draft framework for the evaluation of the project including the identification of key success indicators and benchmarks.</p>	10 <sup>th</sup> April
<p><b>Task 2</b> Facilitate a 2 hour workshop with the Community Reference Group to present the draft evaluation framework and make appropriate changes.</p>	23 <sup>rd</sup> April
<p><b>Task 3</b> Develop and write up the final evaluation framework.</p>	2 <sup>nd</sup> May
<p><b>Task 4</b> Conduct face-to-face interviews with twenty key stakeholders (these people will be identified and recruited by the project staff and Community Reference Group members).  Conduct four focus groups with community groups (the groups will be recruited and invited by the project staff and Community Reference group members; venues and catering costs will not need to be covered by the evaluation consultant).  The findings from the interviews and focus groups should assist in identifying whether or not the project is meeting project objectives, as well as contribute to the action research approach of the project i.e. what is working well and what isn't; and what should the project be doing differently?</p>	Completed by 22 <sup>nd</sup> May
<p><b>Task 5</b> Write a final report (including analysis of findings and recommendations).</p>	Preliminary report 16 <sup>th</sup> June Final Report 25 <sup>th</sup> July
<p><b>Task 6</b> Present the findings and recommendations to the Community Reference Group.</p>	30 <sup>th</sup> June

Given that the Reference Group wanted a “snap-shot” of feedback from the community, the evaluation team’s role was primarily to facilitate honest feedback to the Reference Group about Proud to Participate. The feedback was intended to aid learning and help the Reference Group decide on future directions.



The evaluation team and the Reference Group developed an Evaluation Framework. The evaluation team also worked with the Reference Group to develop a succinct list of core objectives that were relevant to the community. More detailed indicators will be possible as the project develops beyond the first year. The core objectives are:

- Increased pride in Noble Park
- More opportunities to be involved in Noble Park community
- Improved image of Noble Park
- Increase your abilities to participate in community
- More community connections and activities
- Show new ways for Governments and local communities to co-operate
- Include your involvement and feedback in this project
- Able to be continued by the relevant community group (i.e self sustaining)
- Include all kinds of people (e.g. different cultures, languages, ages, abilities)

The objectives used in the current evaluation were developed from the complex (and multiple) descriptions of this demonstration project in Proud to Participate's extensive documentation. The challenge in preparing the list of objectives was finding the right expressions. It was also difficult to discriminate between individual and community capacity building. In addition, objectives regarding inclusiveness and sustainability were included. Although these are not major objectives in Proud to Participate's action plan, they were frequently expressed as goals at both workshops.

The current evaluation activities focussed primarily on expanding the opportunity to stop and reflect on what has been achieved within the first 12 months, and how it was achieved. It was also a time to think about what could be done better and to discuss new ideas for the future.

The evaluation framework also aimed to broaden the evaluation activities to contain and explicitly recognise several components for ongoing use by the Reference Group. These include yearly evaluation questionnaires for members of Reference Group; the Action Plan (May & Dec 2003); reports to Reference Group (e.g monthly Project Manager's Report); quarterly reports to the Department of Victorian Communities, personal diaries and journals; feedback processes after each event or activity; photography; quick surveys or phone calls to participants after each event or activity; and talking with people on the streets in Noble Park about Proud to Participate. One

ongoing component involves stopping at the end of every activity and simply asking people “How did it go?” and then reflecting on the responses.

### **Summary of evaluation findings**

This section summarises the main findings from the evaluation under the following headings:

- Achievements
- Diversity
- Community expectations of Proud to Participate
- Community building
- Knowledge about Proud to Participate
- Focus and goals of Proud to Participate

#### **1. Achievements**

In a short period of time, Proud to Participate has achieved many things. A major factor in these achievements is the energy, passion and commitment of those involved.

*Proud to Participate’s staff play a major role in events being successful...it would not continue without their support.*

The cooking program and diabetes support group are two examples of programs that are successfully working. They appear to be working because the ideas originated from the community, the community ran the projects and Proud to Participate acted as a catalyst. Proud to Participate linked people with ideas to the resources that they needed to make the project happen. The models used by the community cooking program and the diabetes support group indicate that Proud to Participate is able to support ideas within the community and make them happen.

The community cooking program and diabetes support group show how well the project works when Proud to Participate acts as the catalyst, not the primary organisers. In both cases, Proud to Participate recognised that people in the community had skills and were able to support them to make the program a success.

As one participant described these factors for success as including:

*The concepts originating from the community, the community running these projects and Proud to Participate **acting as a catalyst** in linking the 'force' behind the projects to the resources they need.*

## **2. Diversity**

Proud to Participate would like to encourage the participation of people from different cultures, languages, abilities, faiths, ages, genders, sexuality, education levels, employment status, income levels and family structure. Up until now, however, Noble Park's diverse community has not been well represented in Proud to Participate activities. For example, promotional material is currently not accessible to people who do not speak/read English. The Reference Group is aware of the need to include all kinds of people in Proud to Participate and has begun to develop strategies to better engage diverse groups in Noble Park. To increase the participation of people with a physical disability, one suggestion is to advertise that committee meetings and activities are held in accessible venues. This may encourage more people with physical disability to participate.

## **3. Community expectations of Proud to Participate**

For many people interviewed, there was an expectation that Proud to Participate would organise activities and events in Noble Park. People suggested all kinds of activities that Proud to Participate could organise: markets, festivals, dances, activities in parks, multicultural choirs and swimming carnivals. One participant suggested that there are "over 20 things" that Proud to Participate could organise. Another participant, however, recognised that it was for the community to come up with these "20 things".

*It was not for us to think what can be done but the community who will think about what they want to do.*

These different views raised a fundamental question about Proud to Participate.

- Should Proud to Participate organise events? or
- Should Proud to Participate support people in the community to organise events?

In short, is Proud to Participate the "doers" (i.e an organisation that will organise a swimming day and a multicultural choir) or a "catalyst" who support the "doers"? Also, are there times when Proud to Participate should be one and at other times the other?

If Proud to Participate's role is to 'do everything' they will respond to people's suggestions by saying something along the lines of "leave it with us and we will make it happen". On the other hand, as "catalysts", they may respond to someone with an idea with something along the lines of: "That's great. How can a swimming day, a dance with drumming or and a multicultural choir be organised? How can Proud to Participate support *you* (or others) to organise them?"

#### **4. Community Building or Community Promotion**

Although the community identified Pride and Image as the key focus at the beginning of the project, some people felt the primary focus of Proud to Participate should be on community building, not promotional activities that improve Noble Park's pride and image. Although community building and pride are inter-related, it may be important for the Reference Group to be clear when the focus is on one or the other, and to what extent. It was also not clear to some participants what extent Proud to Participate's priority was linking into already established networks or trying to involve people who are not currently involved in community groups. Linking into already established networks and involving people who are not currently involved in community groups can be complementary activities.

#### **5. Knowledge about Proud to Participate**

Given that the project is new and in the early stages, many people interviewed did not feel that they knew much about Proud to Participate. For those who had worked hard to enhance the profile of the project through activities such as branding, marketing initiatives and media articles, this lack of awareness of Proud to Participate may be disappointing. For others, it may not matter that people involved in the evaluation did not know much about Proud to Participate. It was more important that people were becoming involved in activities in their community.

Participants who did not know much about what Proud to Participate was doing were nonetheless mostly very supportive of Proud to Participate. In general, it was accepted that much of the catalysing and even most of the "doing" during the early stages of a project was invisible to people in the community. Although many of those interviewed felt that the vision for Proud to Participate – its goals, focus, aspirations – needed to be better imparted to people in the community, they were hopeful that exciting things would be achieved in the future.

## **6. Focus and goals of Proud to Participate**

Analysis of the interview data and Reference Group questionnaires indicated that there were divergent views about the focus and goals of Proud to Participate. It was unclear whether:

- Proud to Participate's primary role is 'community building' or 'promoting pride in Noble Park'.
- Proud to Participate should 'support people to build community' or whether 'people in the community should support Proud to Participate'.
- Proud to Participate's role is to 'organise events and activities' - to be the 'doer' or to be more of a 'catalyst' for the community to do-it-themselves?

Clarification of these issues may free Proud to Participate for a renewed and strategic burst of focused activity. Clarification may also help address the issue of the project continuing after the funding ceases. Sustainability has been identified as a major focus for the next stage. Sustainability rests in part on clarifying the issue of "catalyst" and/or "doer" and ensuring that both have ongoing sustaining structures. Without these structures, there is concern about how activities will be continued.

## **Overview of the Report**

Although the evaluation report contains some complex ideas, we have tried to make these ideas as accessible as possible. We have specifically tried to be as insightful and direct as were the people who were interviewed. The directions for the future will depend on learnings drawn from the project's experience to date - and particularly the learnings drawn from the evaluation by those responsible for it. We are aware that there has already been some important thinking as a result and plans to clarify some of the fundamental issues. The directions will also depend on what people involved – and those who become involved in future - with Proud to Participate are interested in doing next.

This report begins with a description of the evaluation methods, followed by a detailed discussion of the findings. The report concludes with some discussion about what has been learned from the evaluation by the members of the Reference Group as well as by the evaluation team.

## **The evaluation methods**

A participatory process was used to develop the evaluation framework. Two workshops were held with interested members of the Reference Group. During the first workshop, we discussed the possible components of an evaluation framework and what this evaluation could achieve. The evaluation framework was finalised in the second workshop.

As shown in Table 2, the evaluation framework includes a range of ongoing evaluation activities, both formal and informal. It was designed so that the Reference Group could use some components as continuous evaluation methods. The current evaluation activities, however, focussed specifically on individual and group feedback at the request of the Reference Group in the tender brief. The specific activities undertaken by Research Matters were:

- 2 workshops facilitated by Yoland Wadsworth
- Individual interviews with 12 people selected by the Reference Group to represent experience of a range of project activities carried out by Sarah Russell
- Group interviews conducted by Sarah Russell and Jan Browne with:
  - ◆ stakeholders and participants (4 people in one group, 3 in the other)
  - ◆ CCLs (5 people)
  - ◆ Reference Group (10 people)
- Reference Group questionnaires (10 completed)
- Preliminary Evaluation Report for feedback by Reference Group
- Forum with members of the Reference Group facilitated by Yoland Wadsworth to discuss issues and draw out the learnings derived from the Preliminary Report and “where to from here?”
- Final Evaluation Report

The group and individual interviews, and the Reference Group questionnaire, provided an opportunity for people to reflect on the project so far. The ‘Preliminary Draft Evaluation Report’ provided further opportunities for the Reference Group to reflect and provide further input to the evaluation. The Final Evaluation Report was developed after receiving feedback to the Preliminary Draft Evaluation Report.

**Table 3: A summary of the Evaluation Framework.**

<b>Component</b>	<b>Method</b>	<b>Who</b>	<b>When</b>
Reference Group	<i>Questionnaire</i> <b>Group interview #3</b> <b>Individual, self-completed emailed questionnaire</b> <i>Government reports</i> <i>Action Plan</i> <i>Other documentation e.g. Project Manager's Report; reports to Reference Group</i> <i>Diaries</i> <i>Feedback Processes</i>	<i>All (12 people)</i> <b>All (not Agnes)</b>  <b>All (not Brian)</b> <i>Hugh</i> <i>All</i>  <i>Hugh and Jodi</i> <i>All</i> <i>All</i>	<i>Yearly, December</i> <b>May '03</b>  <b>May '03</b> <i>Quarterly, then 1/2 year</i> <i>May '03; review Dec '03</i>  <i>Monthly</i> <i>Ongoing</i> <i>After each activity/event</i>
Sub-Committees •Events •Resource Audit •PR	<b>Individual interviews with those not attending Reference Group's Group interview</b>	<b>Debbie</b> Sanja (N/A) Faye, Ken (C),	<b>May '03</b>
Ex Reference Group	<b>Individual Interviews</b>	<b>Elizabeth</b> , David (C), <b>Gay</b>	<b>May '03</b>
Community Consultation Leaders (CCLs)	<b>Group interview #4</b> Individual interviews <i>Satisfaction survey</i>	<b>5 people</b> Ken (C)	<b>May, '03</b>  <i>Part of Action Plan</i>
Ex CCLs	Individual Interview	N/A	May '03
Project Activities • Stakeholders • Participants	Preliminary focus groups <b>Group interview #2</b> Triple Interview from shop  <i>Photography</i> <b>Individual Interviews</b>	Stakeholders Cooking, diabetes Bianca, Olivia & Josephine (N/A) <i>CCLs? Hugh</i>	Held at outset of project <b>May '03</b>  <i>Ongoing</i> <b>May '03</b>
Other Stakeholders	<b>Group interview #1</b>           Individual Interviews	Reps from diverse groups*, services, organisations – Elissa, Chamber of Commerce; Shane, enviro group; Daryl, Com Centre (N/A)  <b>CEO local council</b> Graeme Booth (N/A)	<b>May '03</b> * (e.g., people from different cultures, languages, abilities, faiths, ages, genders, sexuality, education levels, employment status, family structure) <b>May '03</b>
General Noble Park Population	<i>Questionnaires/phone calls</i> <b>Kerbside recruit &amp; Take 5</b> Individual Interviews	<i>Participants</i> <b>General Population</b> Rose –Vietnamese community (N/A), Adele Breen - St Anthony's (N/A)	<i>After each activity</i> <b>May '03, CCLs ongoing</b>

**N.B.** Research Matters undertook only those activities marked in **bold**. Activities in *italics* were not part of the current evaluation but designed to be components of Proud to Participate's continuous evaluation. Those interviews marked N/A were not available; those marked C were cancelled.

Thirty five (35) people from a range of backgrounds and experience of Proud to Participate contributed to the evaluation. This was a relatively small number given the wide range of activities and processes engaged in by Proud to Participate. It is possible that a larger and wider representation of stakeholders may have produced different insights (in part to be addressed by the planned more regular or continuous evaluation). Specific stakeholder groups (e.g. multicultural, disability) were not well represented.

The methods used in this evaluation (individual and group interviews) relied heavily on talking with people who had knowledge about Proud to Participate. Although most people interviewed had been involved in specific events and activities, this involvement had not necessarily translated into awareness about what Proud to Participate is, or what it is doing. Apart from members of the Reference Group, most people interviewed knew very little about ‘Proud to Participate’.

Surprisingly, this lack of knowledge about Proud to Participate turned out to be useful. Although people interviewed did not necessarily know about Proud to Participate per se, and many had difficulties applying a numerical rating to Proud to Participate, they knew a lot about community development. In particular, the five (5) people who attended the CCL group interview demonstrated a wide range of skills, expertise and interest in community development.

### ***Data analysis***

To obtain responses to specific questions about Proud to Participate, the evaluation team and the Reference Group designed a semi-structured interview. All individual and group interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. Transcription required some editing and removal of irrelevant material. All participants agreed to have their quotations used in the report provided they had the opportunity to clarify or remove any quotes before the report became public. Given that **what** was said is the focus of the evaluation (not **who** said it), names have not been included with quotes.

The interview questions provided data that was readily collated into themes and sub themes. However, the questions also posed some limitations to the data. Firstly, by focussing on specific, pre-determined issues, answers were more often brief and focused rather than rich and complex.



A second limitation of the data available for analysis was the sampling. Organisers and “doers” of activities were interviewed rather than participants. This meant that the experiences of those people engaged in the activities, such as young mothers who attended the cooking program, were not heard. Also, many of those participating in the evaluation interviews knew little about Proud to Participate. The second group interview, for example, had three participants with only one having had any involvement to date with Proud to Participate. The two others in the group interview were new to the project. As such, they were not able to comment much on the project and the data collected from this group interview was minimal. There was also a lack of representatives of all the communities (especially immigrant communities) represented locally, as well as of areas outside Noble Park who are not yet involved in Proud to Participate.

The final limitation concerns the lack of contrasting views in some places. Some participants spoke at length about a particular issue without being prompted by the interviewer. As such, often only one person spoke about this particular issue. In these cases, no contrasting views could be obtained. As such, the data was not always apparently balanced. To overcome these limitations, future evaluations may require a stronger, more inclusive sampling strategy. However the data gathered nevertheless represented important ‘intelligence’ in its own right, and it was able to be put to use by the Reference Group for its conclusions.

It must also be noted that the data collected in the current evaluation is incomplete without it being incorporated with other ongoing monitoring and evaluation methods. Although reflecting on Proud to Participate’s documentation was outside the Evaluation Brief, the Reference Group may want to include Proud to Participate’s extensive documentation for its own future regular evaluation and reflection. Although some of this documentation is repetitive (see our final section for a suggestion regarding this), it is an important starting point for the Reference Group’s own performance monitoring and ongoing reflection. Information from regular and ongoing feedback strategies that document the experiences of everyone involved in the project activities may also be included in future evaluations.

## Findings from interviews

### *What does Proud to Participate mean to you?*

*Proud to Participate means a lot to us (the Reference Group), but does not mean a lot to the community.*

An important activity in the project has been to establish processes by which Proud to Participate can market the project and become well known in Noble Park. One of these strategies was to create a slogan and logo for the project. The expertise of a marketing person from outside Noble Park was used for the slogan and a graphic designer for the logo.

The slogan ‘Proud to Participate’ may not mean a lot to the community because the community was not more involved in the design of the slogan. Rather than use community building processes and expertise within the community, the expertise of a marketing person from outside Noble Park was used for the slogan and a graphic designer for the logo (although Reference Group members had a chance to participate).

*We used a marketing person... We had some short time frames. We had to meet with the Government and get things up and running by a certain date. That drives you to do things in a certain way that if you had more time, you might do it a different way. That’s why we didn’t go out and do community forums.*

Government timeframes had a major impact on the way the project has been designed. This may suggest the government did not have entirely realistic expectations for a community building project, particularly how much time the genuine community involvement they wanted takes.

According to those interviewed, Proud to Participate has not yet developed a strong identity. Few people interviewed knew what Proud to Participate was doing.

*A lot of people have said it is amorphous. I have to come to grips with it a bit too. I think we have to get more information and feedback.*

One participant felt the slogan needed something more.

*People say “what is Proud to Participate?” If it had something “Proud to Participate: getting the Noble Park community together”. Something like that. So it says “that is what we are doing”. As it is, people see it, scratch their head and just walk away.*

Although the slogan itself may not mean much to everyone in the community, principles of participation mean a lot. As some participants noted:

*The slogan doesn't mean much. The program means involvement. Lots of community groups getting together.*

*It means taking an active part in your community. It means being proud of whom you are within your community.*

*It is something that has been organised to help the communities to do what they want to do.*

*It is very hard to find opportunities like this to be part of your community.*

Some are glad to see a 'new approach' to community building.

*The traditional methods used in the past 40 years aren't working. People are now thinking outside the square when it comes to solving social issues.*

Proud to Participate was described as “a *wealth of skills bursting at the seams of an unopened treasure chest*”. With this 'new approach' to community building, the key to opening the chest is identifying how to build the desired partnerships across government, groups, businesses and individuals.

### **Achievements**

Proud to Participate's achievements are reflected in the long list of process and project activities that were part of the evaluation (Table 1). For many of these activities, people who were interviewed made comments about what was good about it, what was not good about it, and how it could be done better in the future. An important aspect has been what the Reference Group has called 'the Noble Park model'. Based on a small area focus, this has been trialed in one area prior to its use elsewhere.

### ***The Noble Park Model***

The model referred to as the ‘Noble Park Model’ is currently “a work in progress”.

*It is dynamic and in flux, a concept of process which is influenced by community and project members alike.*

A member of the Reference Group provided a succinct summary of the current components of the Noble Park model.

- A reference group steering the project. – essential to local community ownership
- A project manager co-ordinating the project. – essential resourcing to move the project forward
- A local presence, e.g. shop front. – provides local focus and identity
- Small specific working groups – makes involvement manageable and enables people with particular expertise to demonstrate that expertise and teach others
- A resource audit of community strengths and talents – the hardest part of the project and well behind in timeframes to date, I think because it is such a difficult component.
- Community Consultation Leaders – local people involved, owning and selling the idea
- Community Events held – tangible milestones, an essential component in measuring success - ticks on the board
- Identified project proposals developed up, funded and implemented – owned and prioritised by the community who will need to continue to invest in them, possibly after the funding life of the project.

While some think the credibility of Proud to Participate depends on replicating this model in another area in the City of Dandenong, others believe replication is a good idea “when there is a sense that it is right”. When asked whether they feel that Proud to Participate has got it right yet, the Reference Group was unanimous – “not yet”.

*We’re trialing this to show it can work by end of year. We have to get an answer to see if what we are trying to do really works.*

### ***The Shop***

The shop's guest book has over 180 entries since the start of 2003. . Many of these are people who have visited a number of times. The fact that people return to the shop may indicate that local people are developing a 'relationship' with the project through coming into the shop. Earlier this year, a sign with 'NOBLE PARK NEEDS YOU' was placed in the window. This sign received a lot of attention.

Most people thought the shop was important for visibility and providing Proud to Participate with a high profile in the community.

*They see the shop front every time they drive down Leonard Ave. There is a reinforcement of the message of Proud to Participate. That's why we put up the big banner at the front of the shop. But if it is not there, it is like any other Government program that is invisible to the community*

People who had been inside the shop generally had a positive view of the shop.

*I've been to quite a few meetings there and it is very inviting because you've got the table in front where people can sit and talk. And there is a little private area out the back and of course there is lots of information.*

There were some suggestions about how to make the shop a more inviting environment.

*Put a couch in there, a computer attached to the internet, serve coffee on Tues and Thurs...come and talk to us.*

One idea may be for people in the community to re-design the front part of the shop (with art on the walls, a comfortable couch, work tables etc).

Some members of the Reference Group felt the shop has been vital for Proud to Participate's success, others are not convinced that it is essential.

*I'm not convinced that it's essential. However obvious strengths of the shopfront are its exposure to the community at large, the opportunity for people to wander in and find out more about the project (this may also be a negative though), the opportunity to display what's happening in the area, gives credibility to the project with local business and community groups. The thing is, the shop can't stay forever, so its closure may send the message that it's all over for Proud to Participate.*

If Proud to Participate does not need to have its own separate shop, it was suggested that there may be cheaper options such as sharing facilities with other local groups. Some people also made suggestions about how the shop could operate differently. To improve accessibility, a suggestion was made to have volunteers from different community groups operate it. This would allow the shop to have longer opening hours.

### **Shop warming**

The official launch of the shop was an exciting community event, with over 300 people attending. The sausage sizzle and the big sheets of paper for people to write down their thoughts on the community were a great success.

*It drew the community together, enabled the sharing of views and opinions, elicited strong responses and facilitated the involvement of community members in their community at later dates.*

At the shop warming, many people were eager to share their ideas and visions for Noble Park with each other and with Proud to Participate.

*Those large pieces of project paper with big thick pens were very inviting. A lot of people queuing up to write....people were talking to strangers as well. Very friendly atmosphere, very comfortable.*

A resident of Noble Park wrote his story about the shop warming

*Walking one day down Leonard Avenue I came upon a sausage sizzle. You win me every time with a FREE sausage sizzle. As they were available I ate heartily, entered the shop and on the butcher's paper enquired "why there was no support for diabetes in Noble Park". As I ate my way through another sausage I struck up a conversation with Agnes [a young woman who is Chairperson of the Reference Group] and told her how I had lived in Noble Park for 14 years and was very happy to be so. I think I mentioned that I was retired and just walked to Douglas Street to use up energy. Also, I may have told her that I went to AA and since I had been very sober for a few months, Noble Park seemed even nicer and that I was proud to be a resident of Noble Park.*

For a resident who arrived early, however, the shop warming appeared lacking in orderly organisation.

*Well I have never seen such a shemozzle in all my life. When I arrived, Hugh was rushing off to buy sausages and bread. It was just a nightmare. I would have had my 20 kg of sausages in a box ready to go so that I could meet and greet. But no. There was none of that. I felt quite low key about the whole thing"*

The Project Manager received an email with “feedback” about this negative experience of the shop warming. To his credit, The Project Manager arranged a meeting, then later invited the resident to join the Reference Group. Soon afterwards, she attended the RACV forum, which she found very useful. This incident demonstrated Proud to Participate’s capacity to acknowledge mistakes and learn from them. It also demonstrated a capacity to make positives out of negatives.

### ***Movie in the Park***

A major community event run by Proud to Participate was a free ‘Harry Potter’ movie in the park. Proud to Participate organised the movie, and a range of community organisations got together and organised food for sale. Although the event had to be cancelled at the last minute, the planning of the movie in the park was widely seen as a significant achievement. It brought community groups and individuals together on a shared project. People told us how much they had learnt from the preparations.

*During the lead up, planning and almost-running of Harry Potter in the Park, where different community members and groups initiated their own links with each other as facilitated by Proud to Participate. This was most evident during the information sessions with the stall holders prior to the event, as well as linkages made after the cancellation of the event.*

*Harry Potter. Even though it didn’t come off, they had it right. Got everyone together, great concept. It was a marketable thing. Politically correct people got together and thought like a private company. And came up with a marketable concept.*

The free movie idea is clearly an idea that is strongly supported by people in the community.

### ***Community cooking program***

To establish a community cooking program, Proud to Participate helped people in the community with funding applications, linked groups in the community together to get things started and provided ongoing support through representation on the cooking program’s steering committee. As a result of this support, the cooking program has developed into something much bigger than anticipated. Through the cooking program, Proud to Participate has demonstrated that it has the capacity to link groups together “so bigger things can grow”.

The cooking program not only teaches young women cooking skills, it also brings older and younger people together to eat, play carpet bowls, and share experiences. The Vietnam Veterans also participate by transporting young women to and from the Community Centre and the CWA run the playgroup while parents attend class.

According to a member of the Reference Group:

*We want 50 or 100 of those examples. When that happens we're on our way.*

By providing support and expertise, Proud to Participate helped to make the Community Centre's idea about establishing a cooking program for young women a reality. For one participant this involved:

*Having someone like Hugh use his skills in seeing what the needs are and what our building can offer. Putting together a program that puts all that together. Applying for funding from the Community Building Initiative for Greater Dandenong...It has given us confidence ...we now know the processes for how to apply for more projects. We haven't done a lot of that before.*

Many people described the cooking program as a resounding success.

*The cooking class has been a resounding 'yes'. Connection between older women and young mums. Making a stew. The young women got terribly excited. If you can find out what one group has that the other can benefit from, that is how I see Proud to Participate.*

It is hoped that the cooking program will continue and be self-sufficient, though there are some concerns about leadership.

*I'd like the young woman to continue this on their own. When they go to do it themselves, they'd all say yes. But who would lead it?*

Cultural diversity was identified as an objective for the future activities of the cooking program, including learning how to cook the traditional foods of many nations. There was certainly excitement over the Hungarian pancakes.

*Making pancakes. Young woman told me she had made them for her family and they loved them.*

Proud to Participate is currently working with Council to evaluate the community cooking program, particularly collecting participants' feedback. The outcomes of the cooking evaluation could have a flow on effect across the municipality. It may become a model of good practice in establishing programs for community participation.



### **Diabetes Support Group**

Like the Community Cooking program, the Diabetes Support Group has been facilitated or ‘catalysed’ by Proud to Participate. The founding member tells the story of how the Diabetes Group formed.

*After meeting and talking to Hugh a few times about having to travel outside of Greater Dandenong to get support for my diabetes, he made contact with Ms Deborah Manning at Council to talk about setting up a group in Greater Dandenong. Deborah got in touch with DAV and then she contacted me. Through many advertisements in the local paper and leaving flyers at Community Health Services she had a list of 20 or 30 people interested in joining a group. From our initial meeting a committee of 7 was established. We have had 3 meetings so far, all of which have been very successful and about 24 diabetics attend each meeting. I am the secretary and enjoy the job. We have our meetings the second Tuesday of every month at the Noble Park Senior Citizens Club rooms from 2.45pm to 4.00pm. We are a happy, ongoing group of diabetics. We have written a letter to the Ministers of Health, Aged Care and our local MP asking for \$70,000 to employ 2 more Podiatrists at the Dandenong Community Health Centre. We await their answer.*

The diabetic support group is another example in which Proud to Participate successfully supported a community initiative. On this occasion, Proud to Participate supported a resident to make his idea a reality.

### **Linking community groups**

In each of the activities described above, community links have developed and/or strengthened. For example, the young women in the cooking program are transported to and from the program in the Vietnam Veteran’s bus. The teachers of the cooking program include various people from Youth Links and the Hungarian Association. After class, the woman play carpet bowls with the older women from the Senior Citizens.

*One of the best things from the cooking class was when the young women played carpet bowls with our carpet bowls group whose average age is about 70...and they loved it. That was the day our walking group came in and some stayed for a cup of coffee and the girls sat down and some were chatting with them and the knitting group.*

Proud to Participate also supported the traders’ annual festival.

*It was great. Last year we could resource Proud to Participate and get their involvement. Hugh had some great new ideas about things that we could do on the day. He has a lot of good contacts with council so we could really use his contacts and a bit of new blood. It was terrific.*

Bringing community groups together was also evident in the planning of the movie in the park. The planning of the event was “*the biggest buzz*”.

*It was really exciting, because I could see that it was going to be a great thing. I organised the Scouts, Girl Guides and St. Anthony’s to be involved in running stalls. This was going to be the culmination of getting the community together to have a great night.*

Proud to Participate also linked RSL to Youth Links for a Christmas food appeal. The RSL also has a 22 seater bus that it has made available to Proud to Participate anytime. There is also the possibility that the RSL (and a local church’s members) will help to paint the shops. The Project Manager of Proud to Participate acknowledged the importance of bringing people together.

*When the project team links people and groups together, this is a major achievement and helps achieve the bigger picture stuff.*

An important component of bringing people together involves connecting with pre-existing local networks. Hence, members of the Reference Group have given presentations to a number of organisations such as RSL, Rotary and Chamber of Commerce. In addition, a member of the Reference Group has been liaising with Chisholm Institute stakeholders for over a year (including taking some community development students on practicum placement).

### ***Involving the business community***

Proud to Participate has worked hard to develop links with local retailers in Noble Park. The success of this work was evident when 23 traders attended a Business Plan workshop held at Proud to Participate’s shop on the 3<sup>rd</sup> June this year. This was followed up with a Chamber of Commerce meeting on the 17<sup>th</sup> June with over 30 retailers attending. The Chamber of Commerce is “*thrilled with the job that Hugh is doing*”

*Like this afternoon. We are having trouble with our insurance... I can call Hugh and say “what do you think?...I’m having trouble with this... He has some great ideas. On a personal level as well. He helped me with my grant... It is a resource that we have not had before. And it is great. Being business people we are all really busy and if that means that we can receive help from Proud to Participate, we really appreciate it.*

### ***Community Consultation Leaders (CCLs)***

Several CCLs have been recruited, though they have not yet been able to begin to collect information for the ‘community strengths’ resource audit. The five (5) CCLs interviewed were enthusiastic and eager to get out in the community, talk with community groups and undertake the resource audit. This enthusiasm is here now. It is fortunate that training by a local tertiary institution, Chisholm TAFE, has commenced because any further delays may diminish their enthusiasm.

People who attended the CCL group interview have a lot of expertise. When they reflected on the title ‘Community Consultation Leader’ that had been given to them, some were not sure about having the word “leader” in the title.

*“Leader” puts you above. It took me a while to understand*

During the group interview, the CCLs created a new title together. They felt “Noble Park Local Links” better reflected their role.

*We can encourage others to join the chain.*

The group interview with CCLs suggested that the capacity currently exists for CCLs to conduct other forms of day-to-day evaluation. There is also scope for the CCLs to undertake random street interviews perhaps using the Take 5 fliers as discussion-starters.

### ***‘Take 5 Minutes’ fliers***

Five thousand fliers have been made and some of these have already been distributed. These fliers are a marketing tool to stimulate interest. They are also a way to collate information about residents and business owners’ skills.

*Initially it was supposed to be a fact sheet... that brought people up to date with the project. Then somewhere along the way the idea came up that we should add the resource audit questionnaire onto the flyer. Some of us realised that this would be duplicating the role of the CCLs whose job it will be to carry out the resource audit. So we cut the resource audit down to a smaller scale.*

Local Council, local businesses and Reference Group members all worked together to develop the ‘Take 5 minutes’ flier. Nonetheless, some people interviewed felt that a large number of people in the community would not be able to answer “all those

questions”. There was also concern that the otherwise attractive photos were not of local people. One responded:

*Gosh look at all those figures...that would be daunting to some people. I love the pictures of people... the headline stories, but as soon as I see the THAT, too time consuming. What is the idea of the clock? .....No I have to say that the cover is too business like. It doesn't draw me. I'd rather see a whole bunch of local faces.*

It was also not clear how completed ‘Take 5 minutes’ questionnaires will be analysed and fed back to the community or otherwise acted on by linking people up. However, there was an idea for the ongoing use of the collection boxes.

*When they have finished with those boxes for collecting the community survey, they could be used as suggestion boxes in community groups.*

### **Media coverage**

Establishing connections with the media and gaining positive media coverage about the project has been very important to the Reference Group for the community profile of project. The media coverage:

*Shows the community, shows the world, that we have something here that we are doing.*

The newspaper articles are designed to raise awareness of the project and branding. However, it was recognised that people who do not read newspapers, particularly English speaking newspapers, were excluded. It was also recognised that face-to-face contact with people in the community complemented the media activity. It helped people in the community to be more responsive to the media activity and making the connection with Proud to Participate.

### **Reference Group**

The reference group is composed of people who each bring skills, knowledge and experience to support the Noble Park community. The group consists of representatives across the community, including young people, representatives from local businesses and educational institutions and from the partnering local and state government departments. The Reference Group has established a friendly, energetic and thoughtful way of operating.

Proud to Participate's Reference Group aims to:

- oversee the direction of the Demonstration Project;
- provide support to the Project Manager;
- secure a wide range of community participation in the project;
- influence the marketing strategies for the project; and
- ensure that the Project's budget is spent according to the Business Plan and the project comes under budget

The enthusiasm and passion was reflected in the high rating that most members of the Reference Group gave when asked to rate the Reference Group as a score out of 10. Their scores ranged from 7 to 9 with an average score of 7.7.

The Reference Group is aware that some areas of Proud to Participate need attention. These areas particularly include diversity and issues of ongoing sustainability. There is also concern that there are insufficient numbers of community members on the 'Community' Reference Group. While it is an innovation for government officers to be included as active members of a community committee, work may still be required to get the membership balance right. Some people interviewed perceived the Reference Group as a group of people outside the community, with only three members of the Reference Group being residents of Noble Park. A resident tells his story of being invited to join the Reference Group.

*I can't remember when, but Hugh asked me rather earnestly, to join the Reference Group. I didn't know what he was talking about but gee whiz! I've been wanting to get involved in the Noble Park community. I was secretary of Neighbourhood Watch, have been president of the Springvale toy library, have been president of the pre-school kindergarten in Noble Park and I was a co-ordinator with the Community Adventure Playgroup, Springvale in Burden Park, but since then I've been rather quiet. Proud to Participate has been a terrific boost to my ego and sense of community pride.*

Several people interviewed felt the Reference Group should be more involved in meeting people in the community. However, volunteer members of the Reference Group refer to their "limited time" and doing "as much as they can". This feedback suggests that it would be helpful for people in the community to have a clearer idea about the activities and role of Proud to Participate's Reference Group. Is the

Reference Group's role to "mix and mingle" in the Noble Park community? Or is their role as a "catalyst" for community activity?

If the role of the Reference Group is to be more of a "catalyst" for community activity, people in the community will need to understand that members of the Reference Group are not the 'public face' for Proud to Participate, but a 'work engine' in the background. Nonetheless, it may be very useful for members of the Reference Group and people directly involved in the Proud to Participate's activities, such as the CLLs and activity leaders, to meet and know each other.

### ***Involvement in Proud to Participate***

All participants looked forward to the day when all different communities and different people are involved in Proud to Participate (people from different cultures, languages, abilities, faiths, ages, genders, sexuality, education levels, employment status, family structures). As a member of the Horn of Africa community noted:

*When some of my community will be involved. When I see them involved I will say "yes". Not only my community, but all different communities. All different people.*

People interviewed for the evaluation indicated varying degrees of involvement in Proud to Participate. Apart from members of the Reference Group and paid staff, others described themselves as "sort of involved" or "not yet" involved in Proud to Participate. Most did not know a lot about what Proud to Participate did.

To encourage more community groups to be involved, it was suggested that community groups be asked what they want, and what they want to do. The Primary School, for example, wanted to be involved with Proud to Participate, however many parents may not have time to be on another committee. Some parents may prefer to be on a list of "doers" for when Proud to Participate needs people to "do something", rather than organise and run activities or events.

***What drives people to be involved?***

Pride in Noble Park has driven many local people to be involved in Proud to Participate.

*Retail, sport, community centre...the strip shopping centre is interesting. Looking at the shop fronts. Networking...the hands on stuff. Your shops. Your street. Not the look of them whether they are dirty, the graffiti whatever **but the people**. Little old ladies with jeeps, young ones with prams. Even the ones just sitting on benches. The older guys sitting around talking away the morning. All that is an atmosphere. And you do something in the area to keep all that going. That's great. And you're proud to participate as part of that.*

Residents interviewed say that they want to be active in the community. Most of all they want to improve the community that they live in. They are proud to participate in their community and, therefore, think it is wonderful that 'Proud to Participate' has come to Noble Park.

*I am very proud of the community that I am living in. I have lived here all my life. Never moved house. I always have been interested in taking part in my community, instead of just being passive.*

Although government and local council representatives on the Reference Group mention their involvement in Proud to Participate as part of their work requirements, they express a commitment to Proud to Participate.

*I am enthusiastic about being a "government person" and demonstrating that I can work together with a community reference group.*

Some people interviewed believed that people will get involved if there is something in it for them. Others believed that their participation will help them to learn new skills and knowledge. For example, being involved with the Events Sub-Committee improved "planning, communication, interpersonal, organisational and deadline" skills.

One participant suggested that personal interests may get in the way of the "goals of Proud to Participate".

*Whilst it is great to see so many people volunteering, a lot of the time these people are volunteering because they are motivated by their own personal agendas. These sometimes get in the way of the goals of Proud to Participate.*

A concern that personal interests may get in the way of the goals of Proud to Participate” suggests that people in the community *need* to support the goals of Proud to Participate. Most, however, believed that one of Proud to Participate’s fundamental goals is to support people in the community to achieve their own goals, irrespective of what drives them to participate. As such, it may not be necessary for people in the community to support Proud to Participate. Instead, it may be more important that Proud to Participate supports people in Noble Park to build community.

Some people expressed a degree of cynicism that may drive people *not* to get involved with Proud to Participate . There is some concern that Proud to Participate is just another government project that will “*come and go*”. Proud to Participate is aware of this cynicism. Hence the ‘marketing-promotional approach’ that has been adopted.

*We have taken a marketing-promotional approach to this and we need to continue to do that. Otherwise we won’t get engagement. If 3 years down the track the government says “well we’ve done Community Capacity building, we’ll go away and do something else”, well why bother starting? This is not a 3 year project. If you are really serious about community capacity building, this is a long term commitment to engage with the community.*

### **Proud to Participate: what excites you?**

People who were interviewed are excited by Proud to Participate’s location in Noble Park and the opportunities for the community. For long-time residents, it was exciting just to have Proud to Participate located in Noble Park.

*At least something is being done about Noble Park. We are always stuck between Springvale and Dandenong. They call us struggletown.*

Others were excited by Proud to Participate’s potential and capacity to bring the community together.

*Excites me the potential to bring back the old days when we had kids playing on the street, knowing each other. Exciting to bring hope to bring community together.*

People interviewed were excited about participating in community activities and events that provide opportunities for people in the community to meet one another.

*If you can tap into that, you are half way there because people are meeting one another...And here they can say “that’s the newsagent...that’s the butcher...I pass that lady in the street with her pram.”*



People who were interviewed were also excited by Proud to Participate's capacity to link groups, so that groups can talk to each other and understand each other's needs.

***Proud to Participate: what disappoints you?***

People interviewed were disappointed to some extent by Proud to Participate's lack of clear direction and lack of tangible outcomes. They also expressed some concerns about Proud to Participate's communication with people in the community. Finally, the Reference Group members were disappointed that more people were not involved.

***Directions and outcomes***

Several people interviewed referred to a lack of focus and direction.

*In the future people need to argue about the right track. To decide what we really want to focus on. If they want to work with those who have fallen out of community, then we take that track. If that is our target, then we will think about how to go to them now. How to bring them together... As far as I am concerned there has been no focus.*

Although, it was also acknowledged that the project is in the early stages, some people felt that Proud to Participate needed more explicit goals. After twelve months, people could then see if these goals had been achieved.

Although it was acknowledged that community building activities (e.g building relationships) were often invisible in the early stages of a project, many people interviewed were disappointed by what they perceive as a lack of tangible outcomes. They would like to see the program "out there more".

People were very excited to have the opportunity to provide input at the shop warming. For some, this excitement was followed by disappointment when they did not see tangible outcomes from this process. They say there is no evidence so far that their input at the shop warming has made a difference to the project.

*When we did some brainstorming there were letters and it was wonderful but I have never seen any of that being used. I think everything gets stopped and halted and it all becomes too hard.*

At the shop warming, people were asked "What would you like improved in Noble Park?" This brainstorming may have resulted in people expecting Proud to Participate to fulfil their dreams for "a youth bus, disabled access to banks, better stocked supermarket shelves etc". Although Proud to Participate cannot possibly meet every

wish on the lists collected at the shop warming, Proud to Participate can ensure that people (including the right organisations) in the community are informed about these views, or involve the volunteers of the ideas in helping contribute to their realisation.

A different approach in future may obtain more information for the project without raising unrealistic expectations. For example, at future events people in the community could be asked “What do you want for Noble Park?” together with “What could *you* do towards achieving that?”, and “How can we support you?”

Several people expressed the view that Proud to Participate is currently “glitz and glamour”, with an emphasis on image (e.g promotional fliers, media articles). Rather than producing posters, some suggested that the resources could be better spent on something more productive for the community.

*I really question where the money is being spent. They have all these beautiful fliers, I don't know what the price is...If they have to account to the Government, I don't know how the Government can say that this money has been well spent. If it were me, I'd try to turn the money back into the community. Something for the youth, gardens...so people can get a sense of involvement.*

People who were interviewed would prefer to see Proud to Participate involved in organising activities and events that bring the community together. They felt an emphasis on “action” (activities, events) would lead, in time, to an improved image of Noble Park.

A member of the Reference Group suggested that government-reporting requirements used up valuable time that could be spent more productively on project activities. The amount of the time spent writing reports for government accountability is an important issue. Given the active involvement of key government representatives on Proud to Participate's Reference Group, there is the possibility of alternative forms of reporting being designed and implemented (for example their own narrative-observational reporting).

A participant who worked briefly with the Reference Group believed that the focus is on process, not outcomes.

*They are always concerned with how they are going about things, without asking “what are we ultimately here for”. They will have meetings to decide the format of the flyer they are going to have. They concentrate on the flyer, but they have not focussed on the fact that they are having a sausage sizzle.*

He also suggested that Proud to Participate was too politically correct. However, with public documents, political correctness may be important. Also, community consensus on the content of a brochure is part of the process of community building and empowerment.

There was an expectation among some participants that Proud to Participate could have achieved more during the past twelve months.

*They’ve been going for over 12 months and what flag are they flying? And that is where my disappointment is. They haven’t got anything concrete to show except a shop front and some fliers...I’m not saying that the small things are not important but when do you get the big fanfare?*

Although some people were concerned that “not much has happened”, most people who were interviewed remained keen to support Proud to Participate. Many people understood that in the first year of any project it is important to establish strong foundations to ensure the success of future activities. Establishing this groundwork is labour intensive and often undervalued, but will yield positive results in the future. Nonetheless, some local people want to hear more about what Proud to Participate is achieving. They want to see Proud to Participate in action.

With all the ideas and suggestions that have already been collected from people in the community (and with Proud to Participate as the catalysts), it is possible for Proud to Participate to support people to make these happen.

*When I gave them my wisdom, my idea, I felt that it would come. But they said that they are not going to help people right now. We are going to do other things first. Interview people to see how they are actually going.*

### ***Communication with people in the community***

People who were interviewed indicated that Proud to Participate could improve both its communication with people in the community and its feedback to people in the community. In the past 12 months, several people have come to Proud to Participate with ideas for community activities. For example, church groups and RSL have offered men to paint the shops. They are still waiting to hear back regarding information about insurance and it is hard if they do not understand why there are delays.

*We want to do stuff practically. We've been trying hard to help, but without any success at the moment.*

The CCLs anticipated that they would be in “full flight” by the end of the month. They have not been kept informed about the difficulties the Reference Group had finding a trainer and the delays in commencing the resource audit.

*We need an explanation as to why...communication is a problem*

Better, more transparent communication was also required when the movie night did not go ahead as planned. Several participants described their disappointment that members of the Reference Group did not demonstrated a willingness to communicate with people in the community when the movie night went wrong. They were left wondering why the movie was not relocated or rescheduled.

The current evaluation suggests that communication strategies have not always been effective. Establishing clear processes for effective communication with key stakeholders in the community, and between different groups involved in the project, will ensure people who participate in Proud to Participate will feel respected and valued. As a participant said, better communication will help the project to “flow”.

### ***Numbers of people involved***

Many people feel disappointed that Proud to Participate has not been able to get more people involved. In particular, there is disappointment that the Reference Group has not developed enough processes to facilitate “inclusive practices”.

*Information is always in English, not enough links with the different cultural groups and groups such as disability groups.*

The recent Take 5 Minutes flier, for example, excluded people who have difficulties speaking and/or reading English. Some people suggested having the promotional fliers translated and interpreters present at meetings. However, this can be very expensive.

*It is expensive to have translators for every meeting and every written work that you do. How do you get around it? I don't have the answer unfortunately.*

Interpreters are certainly not the single solution to engaging cultural groups and supporting them to participate. The CCLs had many ideas about encouraging non-English speaking people to get involved in Proud to Participate

*I speak 6 languages including English, Bosnian, Croatian, French, so could speak to different groups in their own language, depending on what the purpose of the project is.*

The CCLs suggested establishing non-English speaking groups that are linked to Proud to Participate. To establish a link requires only one member to speak English. A similar principle applies to other groups such as people with disabilities, youth groups, senior citizens, cultural groups and “petrol heads”.

The CCLs are looking forward to recruiting new CCLs through their community workshops. In addition, they suggested an innovative activity for a group that is often excluded from community activities.

*Those that aren't as accepted. Like 'petrol heads'. Organise a car rally to get “trouble makers and those not accepted” away from back of streets. Invite hot rods to a festival – free entry with hot rod.*

This suggestion indicated a willingness to explore unusual but responsive and appropriate options to support the participation of as many people in the Noble Park community as possible.

Nonetheless the CCLs were aware that some people who are not involved in the community may choose not to be involved. They are aware that there are often social barriers to participation.

*People may have concerns about being forward because of victimisation. For example, people whose English is not strong...If these people could be targeted to take up the role of CCL.*

In addition to social barriers, there are economic barriers that prevent participation.

*People may need some economic support to get involved. Some money could be provided for babysitting, transport so that more CCLs can be involved. Transport costs for presentation nights...important to feel safe getting home afterwards.*

Working together with the CCLs, or the Noble Park Local Links as they may choose to be called, will also help the Reference Group to be aware of the specific barriers to participation in Noble Park. This will help Proud to Participate to identify strategies to enable participation.

### **Rating Proud to Participate**

People who were interviewed were asked to rate Proud to Participate. The purpose of the rating was to get some summary sense of the value that people were putting on Proud to Participate. Although such ratings are not always an ideal method (especially for participants who felt they did not know much about Proud to Participate), this process provided some helpful and indicative information.

When twelve (12) interviewees were asked to rate Proud to Participate, they gave it an average score of 5.6. The scores ranged from 1.5 to 9 (with a median score of 6.5). Participants in the first group interview said that they were unable to give Proud to Participate a rating. Instead they came up with 5 criteria and scored these separately. These criteria, created by participants, may be very useful for future evaluations.

- Dedication of people involved (mean score 9 )
- Communication: Listening (mean score 9)
- Involving community (mean score 7.5)
- Input from community (mean score 6.7)
- Communication: Talking to (mean score 6 )
- Outcomes delivered (mean score 4.7)

This group's highest rating was given to the dedication of people involved. They also gave a high rating to the input and involvement of the community, particularly the shop warming. This group felt that Proud to Participate needed to improve its performance regarding the outcomes it delivers.

*Apart from the bits in the paper, you don't see a great deal.*

This exercise showed the value this group placed on communication, “listening to”, “talking to” and “acting on”. To date, they saw Proud to Participate as excelling at “listening to”, but saw room for improvement in “talking to”. In addition, this group would like to see Proud to Participate “act more”. For example, when suggestions for activities (e.g car rally, sausage sizzle, dance, swimming carnival) are given to Proud to Participate, a response may be “How can we support you to make your dream a reality”. This response builds on the Take 5 Minutes to “share your dream” theme.

Members of the second group interview were not in a position to rate Proud to Participate at this stage, because the three participants had experienced little, or no, involvement in Proud to Participate. In fact, these participants had come to the meeting expecting an information session. The CCLs also did not feel they were yet in a position to rate Proud to Participate.

### ***Auditing the project’s objectives***

As part of the current evaluation, participants were invited to reflect on Proud to Participate’s progress towards meeting the evolving objectives of the project. As the CCLs have not yet begun their activities, they felt unable to audit against the objectives. Several other participants found it difficult to audit against the objectives without baselines.

Participants were asked whether Proud to Participate was meeting each objective. For each objective, participants indicated “Greatly achieved, Achieved a little, Not achieved, Not Sure or Not relevant” (Appendix 1). As indicated, most participants felt that Proud to Participate had made progress towards meeting its objectives. The Reference Group felt that Proud to Participate was meeting most of its objectives. However, several members of the Reference Group felt that the following objectives had not yet been sufficiently met.

- Able to be continued by the relevant community group (i.e self sustaining);
- Include all kinds of people (e.g. different cultures, languages, ages, abilities)

### **Ideas for change?**

This section discusses some ideas for change that were collected when participants were asked “What parts need to change?” Apart from improving effective communication and involving more people (which have been discussed previously), participants felt that Proud to Participate would benefit from being less centralised, developing a clearer direction/focus, and having a stronger community presence. These points are briefly discussed below.

#### **1. Less centralised**

More community representation on the Reference Group will help Proud to Participate to have a genuine “Community Reference Group”. Current members of the Reference Group are fully aware that the Reference Group is ‘top heavy’.

*We don't pay lip service to ownership of the project by the Reference Group and community, but that we walk the talk (and that is not easy for bureaucrats)... if people are given ownership of a project – truly given ownership – they will invest significant amounts of energy to make it work.*

#### **2. A clear direction for Proud to Participate**

One participant felt that Proud to Participate needed a single “driver” while another suggested that people in the community should be driving Proud to Participate.

*If the idea comes from our community, we are proud, we are part of it.*

Although people in the community may not currently be driving Proud to Participate, many are confident that it will happen.

*To make something new, you move in slow motion. And these interviews now, you are trying to take it to the right track. So that it can move now. So it can flow... This interview to me now will create other things. Those who are talking now, when you put them together you will see which direction people can head towards.*

#### **3. Stronger community presence**

Several participants would like to see Proud to Participate get back more to the ‘grass-roots’. Identifying current leaders and elders was one suggestion.

*We can find the leaders and elders of the communities, ask them who can we contract and from there, ask who from the communities will come. They will have their ideas too.*



## **What was learnt from the Evaluation**

In the spirit of the community-building element of the evaluation, members of the Proud to Participate Reference Group and paid staff were invited to identify what they had learnt from reading the feedback from the evaluation for inclusion as the formal conclusions of the evaluation.

The sharing of these comments is of critical importance. While we were requested as external consultants to share our own learnings, we are not members of the local Dandenong community, have seen only a 'snapshot' and have not been privy to the more extensive and rich understandings derived from both a year of intensive involvement in Proud to Participate as well as the many more years of knowledge or interests derived from local community residency and participation, and we will not be the ones who carry them through.

The emphasis of the evaluation in this report is on the community responses to Proud to Participate which the committee considered of primary importance to it getting 'in flight' feedback.

The following comments are initial responses and made prior to the Reference Group carrying out its own internal analysis of further extensive material collected in questionnaire form for their own internal use regarding the Reference Group's own experiences of the project. They were also made in response to the Preliminary Evaluation Report that included more extensive 'raw' confidential data, some repetitive material and the full appendices of evaluation framework, questions asked, etc.)

In all, 11 of the 13 members of the Reference Group and staff (including the seven whose comments were in written form below or in the group discussion facilitated by Yolanda Wadsworth) gave their feedback or identified what they had got out of it.

### **Agnes Lichtor**

- We definitely need to improve our communication strategy. This is difficult, and we have had difficulties in the past. Examples that I've flagged demonstrate that we need to communicate not only more, but more effectively.
- Common language needs to be adopted by Reference Group members to avoid communication problems.
- Community building principles need to be revisited.
- More conscious effort to be aware of the resources we have (both people and otherwise) and more formalised way of documenting and utilising this.

### **Alan Leithhead**

Now I'm gearing up to the next lot of challenges and opportunities to learn. I've got a hell of a lot out of the evaluation and now I want to use this renewed energy to make our positives grow. I'm really looking forward to making the Market Day Festival bigger and better and I'd like to work with the project to strengthen the links across the community through the things we do.

The evaluation is not exactly the way I would have expected it. There were very few positives and too many negatives. [two people in particular] had too much to say. Not to say that what they had to say isn't valued, but they [were] reported excessively thereby disallowing other community members to not be heard. However I am sure that we of the Reference Group of Proud to Participate will be able to turn all of the negatives into positives. I think we can use the negatives as fodder for the positives.

I also want to tell you about some of the other things I have got out of Proud to Participate. Attending a meeting in the city (Office of Community Building Forum) where I met with a bunch of government people and other projects like ours. If it wasn't for Proud to Participate, I wouldn't have got this experience or the experience gained from the RACV [local business involvement] workshop. At both these, I had a chance to have a say and people listened and they take notice. I feel as if what I say means something to other people. It's a boost to my self esteem.

### **Jodi Sneddon**

- There is confusion about whether our role is a "doer" or "facilitator".
- The community reference group needs to let the community (including local leaders) know more about what we are doing
- We need to be clearer about what "community building" is.
- We need to return to our objectives. I still believe that we have a shared vision we just don't use the same language. Once we are clearer about our language maybe we can communicate our messages more clearly to the wider community.
- We need to develop up some indicators to show that we are or are not meeting our objectives and making progress.

## **Sue Roff**

The big message throughout for me was that our goals and objectives are not clear, and we are consequently having trouble communicating them to the community.

- The Reference Group need to agree on what it is we are actually doing. There appear to be divergent views about our goals and the process to reach those, so perhaps a regular 'revisit' on these issues would be a good thing.
- We are not tapping into existing networks enough - was interested to hear that we aren't linking into any other City of Greater Dandenong community building initiatives. I would like to know what those are and how we might strengthen or support them.
- I found it interesting that two of the strongest viewpoints in the evaluation were from City of Greater Dandenong people that I have never met or come across in my time with Proud to Participate. Not that I disagreed with all their comments, however some seemed a little overbearing from people who haven't been on the spot.
- It would appear to be a case of very different expectations from different sectors. And we need to try and align those expectations or temper them with reasonable and simple explanation.
- A lot more work to be done on accessing community leaders of all ages, nationalities etc., as well as more local representation on the Reference Group.

## **Wayne Stokes**

I have read Sue Roff's reply and largely agree with her comments. [As well:]

- The Reference Group needs to agree on what it is we are actually doing.
- There appears to be divergent views about our goals, and the process to reach those, which appears to me to be and has been between the 'professionals' and the community representatives.
- We do not appear to be tapping into existing networks enough.
- A lot more work needs to be done on accessing community leaders of all ages, especially ethnic nationalities etc., as well as more local representation on the Reference Group.
- The make-up of the Reference Group does not reflect the diversity of the Noble Park population.
- It seems from time to time that we are concentrating too much on achievements to satisfy sponsoring Departments and value for budgets instead of building viable, sustainable networks or enhancing established ones.

### **Hugh Kilgower**

- Feedback about diversity on the Reference Group and written materials produced by the project resulted in a meeting with council being arranged.
- The Reference Group's shared vision needs to be incorporated in every aspect of the project documentation through to presentations in the community. This may need to be re visited.
- Effective information dissemination strategies to the wider community, including different cultural groups. This could possibly be achieved more effectively by identifying and involving more cultural leaders in the project.
- I believe the report reflects that the project is not sensitive to cultural groups which I would argue is incorrect, rather we don't have a cross section of the community adequately represented in our project.
- Promotion / informing about project achievements is something we could do better in the future. This could also apply to promoting planned activities of the project.
- The argument of "**Community Building or Community Promotion**" is an interesting concept, but I'm not sure how this is linked to the project. While I recognise that part of our project focuses on Community Promotion, this is only one aspect of the project. The linking of people to establish the Community Cooking program, the planning for the Moonlight Cinema or involvement with the Market Day Festival is not Community Promotion. As part of our marketing strategy, we did incorporate promotion.
- Future evaluations of the project need to include more stakeholders and be reassessed to ensure we are heading in the right direction. The discussion of Catalyst or Doer needs to be balanced by the project.

### **Jan Martin**

Overall, we need to be more courageous, more inclusive, and most importantly have a shared vision which the community can understand and be part of. We have a great opportunity to learn from the evaluation process and focus on areas that have been highlighted as needing greater attention:

- We need to revisit our vision and be united in what we are trying to achieve with this project. Further we need to be clear about our action plan, our role as a reference group and Hugh's role as project manager - as has been raised in the report - are we the catalyst or the implementers of ideas/events.
- When we are all sure about what it is that we are trying to achieve then we need to smarten up the way we articulate the project so that the message is clear and concise for people in the community.
- We need to get a better blend of process and measurable outcomes and develop an action plan which includes the long range stuff like the resource audit and skills development and then some smaller tangible actions which generate community capacity. Some of Warwick's 20 ideas would be good to consider. We need timeframes for achievement of the action plan and we need to be able to tick our achievements off to demonstrate to people that things are

happening and to demonstrate accountability. Perhaps it is time to have a think about a second chance at the moonlight movie for Spring.

- An easily achievable tick would be to take up the ideas suggested in improving the Leonard Ave shop front - the idea of a more friendly and welcoming environment, with internet access and more Council/community information is a good idea.
- We need to be proactive in encouraging people from CALD backgrounds to be part of the reference group and to include stronger representation from the Noble Park community. That should be a priority.
- I think the idea of a new name for the Community Consultation Leaders to Noble Park Local Links is a great idea.

### **General group conclusions**

Overall the Reference Group conveyed that it was appreciative of the evaluation and had learned a lot from it. Indeed it had begun acting on it already and in doing so had learned that 'negatives can be positives'. It sought some contextualisation (balancing) of some of the feedback, some more general commentary as well as specific recommendations regarding 'what needs to change', and a slightly clearer structure for possible wider dissemination. It also reiterated its desire that we as the consultants, also contribute our comments and recommendations. These are included in Appendix 2.

## Appendix 1: Auditing the achievement of objectives

**Table 1: Individual and group interviews audit of the objectives.** Each number represents the number of people in each category.

Objectives	Greatly achieved	Achieved a little	Not achieved	Not sure	Not relevant to this activity
Increased pride in Noble Park	1	12	1	5	0
More opportunities to be involved in Noble Park community	6	9	3	1	0
Improved image of Noble Park	0	10	5	4	
Increase your abilities to participate in community	6	6	2		5
More community connections and activities	5	10	1	2	1
Show new ways for Governments and local communities to co-operate	5	6	1	6	1
Include your involvement and feedback in this project	8	7	1	2	1
Able to be continued by the relevant community group (i.e self sustaining)	3	6	6	3	1
Include all kinds of people (e.g. different cultures, languages, ages, abilities)	6	5	6	1	1
<b>Average</b>	<b>4.4</b>	<b>7.9</b>	<b>2.9</b>	<b>2.7</b>	<b>1.1</b>

**Table 2: Reference Group audit of the objectives**

Objectives	Greatly achieved	Achieved a little	Not achieved	Not sure	Not relevant to this activity
Increased pride in Noble Park	2	6	0	2	0
More opportunities to be involved in Noble Park community	2	7	0	1	0
Improved image of Noble Park	2	7	0	0	1
Increase your abilities to participate in community	4	3	0	1	2
More community connections and activities	3	7	0	0	0
Show new ways for Governments and local communities to co-operate	4	5	1	0	0
Include your involvement and feedback in this project	3	7	0	0	0
Able to be continued by the relevant community group (i.e self sustaining)	1	2	3	3	1
Include all kinds of people (e.g. different cultures, languages, ages, abilities)	1	5	3	0	1
<b>Average</b>	<b>2.4</b>	<b>5.4</b>	<b>0.78</b>	<b>0.78</b>	<b>0.56</b>

## Appendix 2 Evaluation consultants' observations, responses and recommendations

For a brief time we have accompanied the Proud to Participate Reference Group on its 'evaluation journey' – a journey that began at the outset of their work and which will continue for at least another two years yet. The Reference Group's ownership of the evaluation was clearly stated from the outset, however they wished to hear from us as well.

In being the temporary 'hands, eyes and ears' of the Reference Group in asking the projects' stakeholders about their experiences and views we ourselves experienced a vantage point from which to form views of our own. We organise these ideas under the key headings that we drew from the qualitative analysis of the interviews and focus groups' transcripts and add to it from our own experience and 'take' based on the brief time we have had to step back and reflect on the experience.

The following has been developed and partially tested with the Reference Group in a forum facilitated by Yoland Wadsworth. However – while we found the responses to the evaluation of the Reference Group were largely consistent with our own – the following do not represent the Reference Group's views but are offered as a contribution to their own thinking.

### Small project, big agenda

The Victorian Government's community-building vision is of:

*'local people working together, with government, to bring long-term improvements to the places they live'.*

This simple vehicle is conceptualised however as a way of achieving a quite ambitious vision of:

*'new and better jobs, greater opportunities for education and learning, better social connections and inclusiveness, increased community safety, improved health and wellbeing, more pride and respect for the local environment and a reduction in the impact of drugs and crime'.*

Given this extensive and serious agenda resulting from decades of social and economic change, the offer of three years and half a million dollars – which may initially sound quite a lot of money - doesn't actually go a long way beyond a handful of salaries for a few key facilitation and resource staff and some facilities.

The strategy to achieve these huge ends really seems to rest on *translating* this small investment and a few paid staff's time into:

- maximum local community engagement and participation,
- a range of community initiatives and projects to achieve long-term positive change,
- building on local skills and knowledge,
- increasing the opportunities for positive social interaction within communities,
- and encouraging and celebrating social and cultural diversity.

This is the focus of the Reference Group's strategic community development and promotion activities. Indeed the Greater Dandenong Proud to Participate group has focused most strongly on two of these:

- increasing community interaction and participation
- and building local partnerships and pride

in order to:

- highlight the strength of diversity
- provide individuals, community groups and local businesses with the opportunity to exchange information, resources and skills
- create a Resource Bank for such resources, skills and co-operation
- develop community partnership projects to build confidence and pride-of-place
- engage people who may feel isolated for one reason or another but who want to contribute
- and develop greater understanding between people, groups, businesses and the media.

### **The local model**

To make such ambitious and abstract goals and chains of logic a reality, the project has focused on one geographic locality in the first instance – Noble Park. As the point of the project is to build relationships between people – importantly that are face to face and able to sustain ongoing activity, this strategy appears to have been entirely consistent with the project’s purposes.

We are inclined to agree that it needs a small amount of further attention to consolidate its operation prior to being replicated elsewhere (such as in Keysborough). In particular we would urge applying the technique of determining *program logic* to its existing components. This is a matter of relating actions to the hierarchy of biggest goals, middle level objectives and smallest aims to achieve these. For example, the Reference Group could reflect on what exactly was the logic or string of assumptions that originally drove the content of the ‘Take 5 flier’. Then the CCLs would be in a position to:

- try and use it to that (or those) ends
- report back on its value for that (or those) ends
- propose a better way of meeting those logical ends or/and
- propose a way of using the fliers to better meet those ends.

We agree that it is then important to try and extend coverage of the project to more of Greater Dandenong. The logic of this could for example, relate to issues of achieving maximum participation; conducting a trial in an area with higher levels of non English speaking background communities; experimenting with techniques that require minimal additional time, money or energy, and so on. One method might be to take the current (but possibly expensive) form of that model, and substitute its elements with approaches that honour the conceptual and definitional concepts, but take alternate concrete practical forms (e.g. a local existing facility as a ‘shopfront’, draw more on existing groups *to extend* their activities in the direction of the P2P objectives – perhaps with small seed grants to help, etc.)

The major underlying issues discussed below are, we believe the key to successfully catalysing even more extensive and sustainable activity than has already been achieved (so far particularly with traders). This particularly applies to using community capacity-building approaches to catalysing many more ‘do-ers’ – among catalysts and doers on the Reference Group, among the CCLs, other volunteers, existing groups and networks, via the ‘take 5 minutes to dream’ discussion starter, and linking people met through taking the flier out quite widely and further afield.



## Moving to develop grounded indicators

In the course of the evaluation we worked with the Reference Group to develop wording of an accessible list of goals expressing the above strategic principles (which had been the purpose of the initial year of activities and processes) - and asked stakeholders explicitly for the first time about their achievement in these terms.

We think the project may now have developed to the point where it can begin to turn these into *routine audit questions* to ask of each planned or actual project, activity or process. That is,

‘Does this..... (project, activity, process) work to achieve :..... (test against goals list)’

‘What are the signs (indicators) of it achieving this?’

And, for planning purposes:

*‘What project, activity or process can we next try in order to achieve... ..(insert goals list)’*

*‘How will we know (what are the signs and indicators) if we’ve been successful?’*

This does not mean abandoning the capacity to revise higher order program logic or the hierarchy of goals, objectives, principles and aims (which may themselves need to be made more popularly accessible – perhaps starting with a big ‘map’ of them on butchers paper in the project office), but it does mean that initial feedback at the 12 months point has indicated which are ‘on track’ to achieve what people do indeed want of the project. They can now be better specified.

The committee is also now in a position to make sense of its own Action Plan milestones and current measures.

Once these questions deliver routine feedback the project may then be able to sustain the indicator measurement questions:

*‘To what extent/or in what ways – does this...(project, activity, process) work to achieve...(test against goals list).’*

*or*

*‘What are the quantifiable or identifiable signs that ... (project, activity, process) is achieving...(test against goals list.)’*

## Some conundrums

To maximise the strategic effort of a small group with an ambitious agenda, five areas of possible ambiguity have been identified that may have already assisted the committee find greater clarity. The most important of these - the first - we have devoted most attention to. There were other particular aspects on which we originally intended to comment but these have been dealt with by the Reference Group’s own consequent reflection and action. We have thus decided to focus on the following major themes believing their resolution will effectively address many concrete details of practice.

## 1 *'Doing' or 'catalysing'*

One of the critical needs of the project is to have strategic activity (catalysing) which then leads to community stakeholders self-organising and self-achieving (doing).

A longstanding issue in community development and capacity-building people finding themselves doing things 'to or for' others where they are seen to not yet be able to 'do it themselves'. Ironically the more this happens the less likely people are to either build the confidence to do it themselves or to exercise abilities which have hitherto been invisible.

A key insight of John McKnight, one of the originators of the community capacity-building movement, has been that communities *have* capacities and the role of others is to help remove the blocks so as to build on people's strengths and abilities. Times of crisis, need or desire often sees people stepping forward and surprising those around them who did not believe they were able.

The evaluation has identified those P2P examples that have successfully achieved this.

It may be helpful to think about this in terms of 'catalysing' being the activity of those when they are trying to achieve community 'doing-it-itself'. These are 'roles' and not necessarily confined to particular people, even while some people may be more catalysts and some may be more do-ers. Or a catalyst now, and a doer later, or vice versa. When catalysing, networking and doing come together we see the extraordinary power of the community's potential. The community cooking class example documented in the evaluation is a particularly good example.

In relation to this, an interesting aspect of the current wave of community development is the new blurring of old distinctions (e.g. between residents and professionals, government 'bureaucrats' and local businesses).

While some of these distinctions may still be necessary (e.g. a sense of who is doing what for whom), some of the blurring is a new invitation to join not as arms-length observers, but instead as part of a truly local 'we'. Again the relationship to catalysing and doing needs to be clarified. Can each be either? Both? More one than the other? And is the balance of government and community players right?

An identified risk is if the 'we' round the table does not entirely reflect the broader 'we' in this community. This is particularly so if that is a key goal of the project – and it was something of which the Reference Group in this instance was acutely aware. It has clearly expressed the need to involve more of the numerous culturally and linguistically diverse local groups and communities and is currently working with how to take the leads from committed individuals, local groups and communities towards that. One of the hopes that has emerged within the committee is to take the innovative step of auditing its own members for their own diverse identifications as a lead to extending outwards.

### **'The Frontroom' of 'doing' and 'The Backroom' of 'catalysing'**

There has seemed to be some value in conceptualising the 'doing' and 'do-ers' as located in an all-important expanded diverse metaphoric 'Frontroom'. While resourcing, facilitating & planning 'catalysts' might be thought of more as in the conceptual 'Backroom'.

In the Frontroom are the numerous groups and communities engaging in activities, projects and communication in which they have an active stake and part. Meeting, planning, carrying

out, assessing effectiveness, replanning, taking new actions, and so on. A church group, with Council's support, freshly paint local trader's shops. They go on to oversee a government-funded shopping strip revitalisation project – joining with a local unemployed group to design award-winning colourful street furniture. Community Consultation Leaders – who have named themselves the Local Links – use the colourful eye-catching “Take 5” pamphlet to start up a whole lot of conversations about skills and resources (possessed and needed). Some of them head into their own Backroom to work out how to catalyse some new activities that arise from this exercise, as well as pop into the P2P Backroom Reference Group to re-assess how to generate the planned Resource Bank in the light of it. Some of their former 'interviewees' become new 'do-ers' – heading straight for the metaphoric Frontroom (or the actual Frontroom of the Shopfront! – modified to include 'drop-in and do' resources like tea-making and 'conversation pit').

In the Backroom are a smaller number of people – holding the big picture, keeping track of all the 'doing', strategically linking, connecting, suggesting, communicating, helping, and constantly offering strategic questions like:

*'What would that take?'*

*'How could you find the people you'd need to help make that happen?'*

*'Would you like to take the running on that?'*

*'What is your vision for doing this?'*

*'What help do you need there?'*

*'What were you thinking you'd like to do to solve that problem?'*

The catalyst role is to elicit ideas and the people attached to them, help connect them with others, or with needed resources, relationships or information – and then let them go... checking back occasionally to see how things are going, documenting for the sake of reporting and media purposes, but otherwise moving on to catalyse some more. In first wave community development it was seen as the preserve of all interested community activists – whether a committee establishing a child care centre or a neighbourhood house – and later as the preserve of a funded community development worker. The same would appear to apply now with the catalysts role being both the primary activity of a paid officer and also the role of those who choose to be on the project committee – or on sub activities organising groups too.

Much of this work is – as has emerged from this evaluation – invisible, and deserves documenting in itself. It is skilled, subtle and committed. It needs creative 'can do' thinking, a fine feel for people and their lives, and will be needed long after funds run out. In first wave community development it used to be said that the idea was to 'do oneself out of a job'. While this does not apply to the catalyst role it certainly applies to the 'doing'. It may be helpful here to distinguish also its applicability to the idea of 'strategic doing'.

Not all 'doing' starts from simple 'catalysing', however.

### **The idea of 'strategic doing'**

Sometimes as the evaluation detected, it is important for catalysts to carry out '*strategic doing*', that is running an activity for the strategic purposes of identifying or 'building' ongoing community capacity.

The Movie in the Park was one such activity, as was the opening of the Shopfront. While the Movie in the Park idea might appear to be 'doing for' – in practice its surprising success (despite not actually being shown!) derived from the way in which it brought together people and in some important ways 'rehearsed' their abilities. The next time it is run (which we

strongly recommend), it will stand as a good test of 'strategic doing' if it can be more independently community-conducted.

The Shopfront opening also seems to be a means to an end rather than an end in itself – which is of course partly the case. But it too might have counted as 'strategic doing' if people were encouraged to think more about what they wanted locally – and perhaps encouraged to take action on it. The poster paper questions people answered might have been designed to lead to spontaneous forms of people meeting, community-building and self-organising (e.g. by use of some Open Space Technology elements). The project has discovered the drawbacks of inviting 'wish lists for which there are no magic fairies'. Ideas need legs (...and perhaps also wings). Thus when community members who do have the interest come with ideas and suggestions, it can work best to keep asking strategic questions to help people determine whether they can self-organise, or to work out for themselves if there is something more they need, and ideas for getting it.

It is worth explicitly observing that the precious paid time of staff as well as the scarce resource of Reference Group members would best be focused on catalysing (though they may also be 'doing' in their different community roles). On the other hand there is potentially no limit at all on the numbers of people who might become 'do-ers' – as the project sprouts numerous 'arms' and 'legs'.

### **Organising structures for 'doing' and 'catalysing'**

Here it might be worth distinguishing organising structures that might best reflect and nurture both these.

At present the Reference Group is primarily a catalyst group – but seeking to expand its ranks to include more interested local community people, particularly to address needs for greater diversity/inclusiveness. It may continue to follow this track but now be clearer about wanting to attract *both* catalyst-type folk for the Backroom *and* do-er type folk for the Frontroom – not just one or the other.

That is, all the local communities would need to be represented in both Frontroom and Backroom. It won't work well to have a more selective (elite) group planning and catalysing from the Backroom and the bulk of the diversity all crowded into the Frontroom! This may be obvious to the Reference Group but it will need constant evaluative feedback to achieve the 'culture shift' in 'how we do things here' that is implied.

In practice there should be a constant stream of back-and-forth between Frontroom and Backroom as some catalysts also go and 'do', and some 'do-ers' form an interest in central planning and catalysing. The example of three of the CCLs (Local Links) possibly having an interest in the Backroom catalyst Reference Group, while the others are more interested in 'doing' in the Frontroom, is a good example of how people – when invited to – can find their way to the area that most interests them.

It will be important to hold the sense of a genuine achieved 'we'. It may be important that any 'us' and 'them' is understood as 'we as catalysts of the larger group of do-ers' or 'we as doers including those of us who mainly are catalysts'.

If the Reference Group becomes seen as the main project 'Backroom' catalyst site, then what would the Frontroom look like?

It may actually have a location in the (literal) front room of the shopfront, but size will limit all meeting each other there or even overlapping. From time to time the catalyst group may

like to catalyse an activity which brings together or displays the sheer size of the Frontroom of 'do-ers' as a strategic community-building activity in its own right. The compilation or launching of a website or printed version of the community Resource Bank might be apt, as might be a future Movie in the Park or Food Festival.

### **Sometimes getting every one in the Frontroom together**

The Reference Group may like to consider the value of a *P2P Council of All Participating Groups* that might meet once or twice a year. Such a meta-group of 'doers' may like to meet to talk through and share their own activities and learnings from trying to achieve the project's various goals. Catalysts from the Reference Group might find attending (primarily in the role of observers and resource people) – helpful to their own bigger picture learnings *and* to assess the value of such a Council as a community-building exercise in its own right. Mutual assistance may emerge as the Council operates as a catalysing forum in its own right. It might be aided by a respectful title (*P2P Council of All Participating Groups*) and by meeting in an important setting.

'Doers' may also be catalysts within their particular communities-of-interest... aiming also to catalyse more self-initiated activity. (Just as the catalysts on the Reference Group may also be 'doers' within that group, also aiming to catalyse more self-initiated activity!)

### **2 Community Promotion or Proud to Participate Promotion?**

These examples may help sort out the strategic moments when knowing about Proud to Participate *might* become strategic for community self-image building purposes. A simple attractive badge or the T shirts might help build this sense of being part of something much bigger than one's own group or activity.

Another idea might be to develop a small set of exemplary narrative stories – illuminating an example of reaching each of the P2P's project's 7 main objectives (e.g. The Community Cooking group; Hugh's process and facilitation networking – or the shop as an example of 'The Backroom'; Alan's experience of learning the value of diversity; Elizabeth's experience of working with local diverse communities; etc.)

But it would appear that for most other purposes it will be more critical that activities focus on promoting the community and its pride and image per se. The evaluation may have conveyed the hard lesson that it doesn't really matter if people don't necessarily know about Proud to Participate – or might be vague about it – provided they (now or eventually) are identifiably or measurably more proud of their own community.

### **3 How to include diversity?**

We identified a clear commitment by members of the Reference Group to include not only members – or perhaps now reframed as both catalysts and doers – from differing cultural or nationality backgrounds, but also from all the other kinds of diverse identities represented in the Greater Dandenong area. These included people from different cultures, languages, abilities, faiths, ages, genders, sexuality, education levels, employment status, family structure.

It may not be entirely clear how to proceed to accomplish this – although members of the reference Group seem at the threshold of some exciting new small experiments – including exploring, honouring and documenting committee members’ own diverse communities-of-interest or identity aspects.

We suspect the principles are the same as before – whether with CCLs (Local Links) or with Horn of Africa groups; young pregnant teenagers or Chinese Baptist church members; Vietnamese businesswomen or elderly gay men; disability pension-holders doing degrees, retired servicemen interested in the internet, or local knitters for peace.

The usual applies: starting with sensitive outreach, networking and catalysing around the project’s highest goals. Identifying of the interested community members. Supporting them. Assisting the members of the communities follow their own impetuses – even if it doesn’t sound like how someone (not from that community) would do it – or it’s not quite obvious how it will relate to the goals. If the people think they do, you go with it. Giving them a chance to show how they do relate in practice. There is not a lot of need for too many official protocols – they aren’t so much P2P’s activities and processes per se – they are more the community members’. If there are problems, working to assist them solve them themselves. Trusting people know their own communities and what will and won’t work. If people really look like getting something wrong, inquiring with care (if it would be irresponsible not to), and then stepping back. Supporting them experimenting. Observing closely what one is learning oneself. Staying in touch from time to time if this is welcome. If nothing comes of it – nothing comes of it. But if something does, chances are it will be successful precisely for being grounded deeply in and responsive to the community’s own processes, knowledge and structures. Much the same goes for catalysing *within* communities.

As noted before, catalysts may work to involve people from diverse backgrounds and outlooks who share P2P’s highest goals – both as fellow catalysts or as direct do-ers, whatever the people are most attracted to. Working hard on including new participants without displaying unconscious in-group knowledge or practices.

Perhaps consider a small fund to help seed people’s activities.

#### **4 Sustainability**

A third analytic theme that emerged strongly in our minds was how to act strategically *now* – even this early in the life of the project – to examine each action, process and activity with the question ‘*How will this be sustained after the State government funding runs out?*’

For example, the simple question could be asked every time something is planned: How does this prefigure something permanent? For example, Who will fund the essential catalyst work? Who will house or pay the rent for the community shopfront? How will this food festival be organised in all coming years? If we run this this time, who will run it next time? If I tell this person about that other group now, who will know to tell them in future? How can everyone know what we are learning? How will our corporate learnings be held (by whom) into the future? If Shane Gardner organises a Noble Park ‘Yes! to local car-lovers’ rally that goes well this year, how could he ensure his succession? If Elizabeth organises a fabulous dance with African drumming for P2P’s anniversary this year, where would another ‘Elizabeth’ go in future for help to organise another one? Could there be a Great Dandenong Movies in the Park standing committee? Is there an incorporated already-organised movie buffs’ association that would love to take it on? Could a local Council Small Community Grants scheme pick up some of the P2P creations permanently? (Like the Local Links, or the

Street-based Progressive Dinners sponsored by P2P in 2005, or the ‘Yes! to Keysborough Bike-riders’ offshoot from Shane’s car rally), and so on.

As with many of the suggestions arising, the success of routinely asking this sustainability question will rest on the development of a P2P culture of continuous self-evaluation – and auditing against the project’s primary purposes.

While in the standard ‘hierarchy of goals and aims’ the lower ones will see change as new ones seem more apt (e.g. Community Consultation Leaders give way to Local Links; or the Take 5 questionnaires are used more as discussion starters and additional new ways found to develop an information and skills Resource Bank) - the higher ones will last longer as it takes longer for change to render them obsolete (e.g. engage local people in a shared vision for revitalising their community, or nurturing local pride).

### ***5 A note regarding the evaluation itself***

Finally it is worth reflecting on the evaluation itself. Early in the process of establishing the evaluation framework it emerged that the evaluation could have gone down one of two tracks. The following is a brief discussion of this for its value in considering the best form of evaluation in innovative community-building projects such as this.

Firstly it could have been a standard external evaluation by independent consultants – that is: ‘our’ evaluation, our data, our findings, and our recommendations, making our sense of the project to date. It could have been seen as a summative evaluation of Proud to Participate - performed after a year of activity - with the Reference Group receiving our report and then being guided by it. An underlying assumption to this kind of external unitary objective evaluation is that the evaluator/s, who hitherto know little of the situation, are thus able to ascertain what is ‘really going on’ in a way that those internal to the situation cannot because of their pre-existing ‘perceptual filters’ and desires to see with rosy glasses. It may also be assumed that the outsiders have access to numerous other comparable settings from which to supply a more scientifically valid way of judging the ‘value, merit, worth or significance’ of the new instance.

Secondly evaluation could have been seen more as an ‘assistant’ to build the Reference Group’s own ongoing capacity and processes of reflection and informal evaluation, going out to capture a more detailed ‘snapshot’ of stakeholders’ experiences and perceptions to bring back for use by members of the Reference Group to supplement their own learning. This would have been more of a formative evaluation, contributing to ‘in flight’ monitoring and correction, as those involved in the project committee could take the relatively uninterpreted feed back from nominated stakeholders and work out for themselves what it best meant in their own context. As co-evaluators on *their* evaluation, we would contribute our observations, responses and suggestions as ‘critical friends’, but without them necessarily occupying a more privileged position. The underlying assumption to this kind of internal collective-subjective evaluation is that external people are hampered precisely by *not* having the benefit of the much more detailed participant-observation that is available to insiders. On the other hand we too become participants albeit briefly and superficially, and thus bring another way of seeing which may actually be fresh and useful to insiders precisely because it could be from the ‘naïve standpoint’ of a newcomer.

In practice what has emerged has been something of a hybrid of the two.

We have as much as possible tried to remain true to the members of the Reference Group’s preference for the latter more formative capacity-building evaluation which would focus on

contributing to their own learning, and collecting stakeholders' experiences and perceptions in a transparent way and contributing them for the Reference Group's own interpretation. We have in this section, as also requested, offered our perceptions and ideas (recommendations), at the same time as having held them back till after the Reference Group members had a chance to work out their own meanings and conclusions first, and talk these through together.

It is worth observing that there can be something of a chicken-and-an-egg situation whereby competitive tendering requirements mean a group has to tender out a design in advance of working with evaluation facilitators - including on such a design. Tenderers need to quote time-for-money on the basis of activities (e.g. numbers of interviews or focus groups) and tenderers need to set timelines – often quite short - which can then later leave less room for flexible re-design.

The design for this study included a process for clarifying the evaluation plan and we were happy to make some changes by agreement, and add some when they were later needed. However one of the most important elements of the evaluation framework from our point of view was to sketch a design that might in future leave the committee less reliant on a single, relatively quick, relatively more expensive external evaluation, and more reliant on smaller-scale but more extensive and regular local evaluative activity.

That is, the Reference Group could 'build in' routine evaluative debriefing and the continuous seeking of evaluative feedback from many more of those involved in all the project's activities - including volunteers, staff and themselves. The Reference Group would perhaps then only need to seek some regular evaluation facilitation to continue to build their own capacity to do this. Special 'snapshot' more detailed interviews or questionnaires could also be conducted by the Community Consultation Leaders (or 'Local Links') from time to time to supplement with more depth.

### **The Action Plan**

One additional helpful feature of the project has been the extensive documenting of its intentions and activities – such as in quarterly reports and Action Plans. It is a simple step to add literally another column in the tabular format for continuous evaluative questioning and documenting responses.

That is, not just to describe *what* happened, but asking also 'what was its value, merit, worth or significance?' – and what its implications for next steps might be. Not just *what* is planned, but auditing to see 'did we achieve it?' – and what did that mean? For the Action Plan this 'last column' records these observations about the achievements of milestones. For informal efforts, asking the same questions verbally after any event or activity is like adding that 'last column'. It turns participant observation into evaluation.

Various written drafts of the Action Plan may have led to some confusion, and it may be worth settling on a final version, photo-enlarging it and putting it on the wall of the shopfront 'Backroom'. It could then become an explicit and shared tracking and recording device – regularly revisited so everyone knows where the project is on achieving its goals – and when, where and why there are changes or new developments.

It might be good to experiment also with some narrative reporting – such as identifying an exemplar, in story form, of each of the 6 or 7 key objectives. This might also help transform the extensive documentation required for reporting and accountability purposes into simultaneously being 'living stories' for project participants, funders and for publicity purposes – whether to directly contribute to local pride or strategically publicise the P2P project, or inform funding and policy bodies about the local outcomes of their larger intentions.

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