

Reflections on Forty Years of Community Development

by DAVID HAIGH



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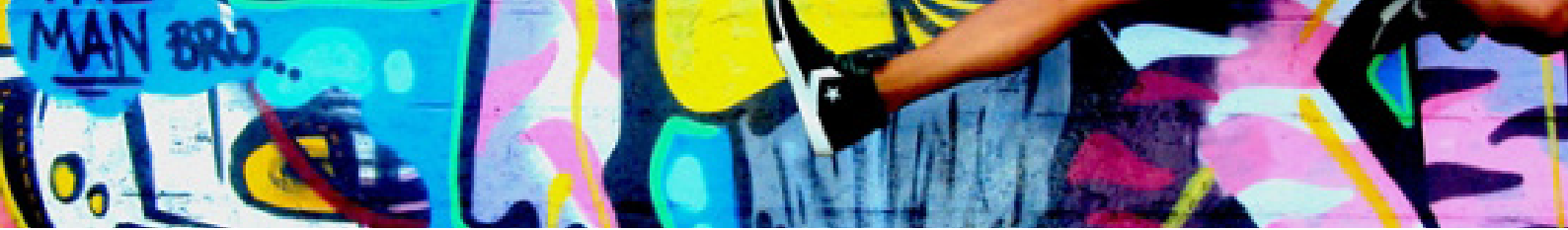
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Practice

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Abstract

My involvement in community development in Auckland spans forty years. It began with community work for Manukau City when the state housing suburbs of Ōtara and Māngere were being created. There was little accommodation by the agencies that were creating these new suburbs for the wellbeing of new residents. Apart from schools and churches, few facilities existed and my time was spent within the community setting up new services and facilities.

Local authorities in metropolitan areas were particularly concerned at the rate of change due to rural-to-urban migration exacerbating problems like housing, social service accessibility and unemployment. Community workers were busy trying to find resources to meet an expanding demand and at the same time fostering community engagement processes. The 1970s and 80s was a period of innovation, with the creation of new community development models such as Community Volunteers Inc. and community schools.

Change came in the mid-1980s with neo-liberal policies, local authority restructuring and the shifting of power from elected councillors (key supporters of community development) to management. New public management placed pressures on community development staff and new ways of working had to be found. Community organisations were also affected and contracting for services became the norm. With the financial downturn in the economy in 2008, government agencies forced community organisations to do more with less. In spite of this, community organisations have shown much resilience and community work is recognised as an essential part of civil society.

Introduction

Since the late 1960s, I have been involved in community development through paid and voluntary work. I was employed by local authorities, then became a consultant with community organisations, local authorities and Māori organisations. Over many years, I have had a number of voluntary positions, such as Chair of Community Volunteers, both Auckland and national, convenor of the Local Authority Community Workers Association, member of the Social Impact Assessment Group, member of the social monitoring group of the NZ Planning Council, member of the Auckland Health & Disability Ethics Committee, member of the Unitec Research Ethics Committee, member of the Auckland District Health Board, Chair of the Grafton Residents Association, Chair of the Newmarket Arts Trust, and recently the Chair of

the Auckland District Council of Social Services.

My academic studies in sociology led me to the classics and the critical thinkers from the Frankfurt School. This particular school, together with my associations with Māori, taught me the simple principle that humans are part of the natural world and that by destroying nature we are destroying ourselves.

I have always had a strong affinity with community development as a natural way of conducting my work, both paid and voluntary. These are some reflections on the past four decades.

Local Authorities

I will commence with my experiences, research and reflections on community development within local authorities. I



was appointed as a community worker for Manukau City Council in the late 1960s. Ōtara was a newly built suburb and the Ministry of Works was making progress building Māngere Central. They were both state housing and private group housing suburbs. The people had been decanted out of other parts of Auckland's inner city to make way for new infrastructure such as motorways and the building of the medical school in Grafton. With the oil shock in the 1970s, middle class people started migrating to the inner city suburbs of Ponsonby, Grey Lynn and Parnell and poorer families were shifted into South Auckland. The new suburbs of Ōtara and Māngere were largely devoid of community facilities except for churches and schools. There were few professional services like doctors and lawyers. It was against this background that I commenced work. New facilities and services were the priority and, over time, new services emerged. Citizens Advice Bureaux became a focus, along with school holiday programmes, community centres, community houses, legal services and a new health centre in Māngere. During this period, community workers were appointed by Auckland City Council and other metropolitan authorities in New Zealand. Local authorities recognised the social changes that were taking place due to Māori migration from rural New Zealand and from the Pacific Islands into cities, particularly Auckland. This urbanisation resulted in many social issues connected with housing, poverty, loneliness and lack of social engagement. This was the context for employing community development workers.

"Their roles included community engagement, and assisting and training community groups to provide local services and run facilities. Most started with citizens advice bureaux, community centres and community houses. As needs were uncovered, their work extended to include emergency housing, women's refuges, women's groups, child care facilities, housing for the elderly and youth work" (Haigh, 2013, p. 79).

Local authority community workers were supported by local councillors and mayors, and a symbiotic relationship between the two followed (Haigh, 2013). However, with the restructuring of local authorities by government in the 1980s, power shifted towards management and away from politicians who were the supporters of community workers. At the same time, neo-liberal policies became the norm and community workers felt this impact. "The ideas of community development of social inclusion, social justice, citizen action and community empowerment did not fit into the new lexicon. A number of [community workers] felt uncomfortable being

part of this change, and decided to leave" (Haigh, 2013, p. 93). While local authorities still employed community workers, their roles had been proscribed, they had less freedom to activate new programmes. The expectation was that they would now act merely as facilitators for the community.

Below are some of the initiatives in which I was involved. Some were fostered by community advisers and others arose from community groups.

Community Houses

The first community house was a three-bedroomed state house in Māngere Central operated by Anglican Methodist Social Services. It was in an attempt to deal with the desperation of isolated women with children that the community house was established. A coordinator was appointed and the house became a drop-in centre, and provided regular programmes, mainly for mothers and children living in this isolated suburb. Coffee mornings were particularly popular. Slowly, the women started to organise activities themselves. Reflecting on the setting up of the house, Fullager, who was the coordinator, said:

"By the very nature of the new housing estate, everyone is a 'migrant'. Everyone has moved from another place to Māngere, and everyone faces the period of adjustment and settling in consequent on moving. This means that initially at least, and for some considerable time after moving in, there are no patterns of friendship or social interaction" (p.63).

Arising from experiences in South and West Auckland, the lack of planning for social infrastructure in new suburbs became evident. Stallworthy and Haigh's 1976 report highlighted this problem. The report was used to advocate for collaboration between agencies such as central government and local authorities in social planning and community development. As a result of this report and local community pressure, in 1977 the Massey community house was established and the council community adviser was involved in the house's formative years. Eventually it developed into a well-managed and community-run facility catering to the needs of the local people.

From these beginnings, community house numbers grew. They were seen as a low cost and flexible option, rather than building expensive community centres. This was particularly the case for new and expanding suburbs of Auckland such as Massey, Ranui, Wiri, Māngere, Birkdale and Glenfield. By 1987, there were 42 community houses in Auckland (Willcox, p. 114)

John Raeburn,¹ a University of Auckland academic

¹ John Raeburn retired from the University of Auckland Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences in 2006 after 33 years as teacher, researcher and practitioner in areas of health promotion, behavioural science, community development, mental health and public health. His work is known internationally.



and a local resident, pioneered a more developmental approach to community houses. From the start, he introduced within the operations of the Birkdale/Beachhaven community house (BBCP), in 1975, a more systematic approach to needs assessment and regular evaluation of progress. “The essential organisational principles of BBCP are, in fact, centred around goals” (Raeburn, 1979, p. 58). The yearly goals were a result of community surveys and community meetings. The goals clarified priorities and the allocation of resources. As in Massey, professionals eventually ceased to play a major role in the running of the house. Raeburn concluded:

“I firmly believe that it has been the combination of people power and professional resources that have made the BBCP the phenomenal success it is. Projects like this can change the face of society. What they need are people at all levels, be they professionals, politicians, bureaucrats, or residents to work together to fulfil common aims. But above all, these aims need to come from the community, not from the professionals” (p. 59).

Community Volunteers (CV)

Kilmister (1987) argued that CV had its foundations in the upheavals and challenges within western society during the 1960s and early 1970s. He points to social change as new social movements take hold, as well as opposition to the war in Vietnam. To this should be added the social change of rapid urbanisation in cities like Auckland, coupled with migration patterns of Māori and Pacific people into these urban areas, as well as growing concerns about unemployment.

In 1972, with modest government funding, the CV organisation was set up with a central structure and some regional groups in cities such as Christchurch and Auckland. The aim was, broadly, to provide opportunities for people to work as volunteers in the area of welfare and social change. Some charismatic individuals came forward to run CV, including Rev Bob Scott, Tim Dyce, Garry McCormick and Dennis O'Reilly. Tim Dyce became the national coordinator and was the inspiration for CV's values and mission. CV quickly evolved into a community development organisation, rather than having a welfare focus. Its volunteers were encouraged to seek ways to achieve social change.

An innovative process established by Dyce was CV's three-way contract for each volunteer position – agreed and signed by the volunteer, the agency and CV. The contract was seen as “the key CV concept” (Kilmister, 1987, p. 34). Its

aim was “to bring the agency (employer) and the volunteer (employee) together on an equal footing” (Kilmister, 1987, p.34).

At one stage, CV maintained over 300 full-time community volunteers (233 within agencies such as community centres, citizens advice centres and schools, and 96 involved in community and youth programmes). After 14 years of valuable community work, CV found it difficult to maintain funding. Central government had other priorities and, following a review, funding ceased for the central office. With the closure of that office, a few branches continued but eventually also closed down.

Community Schools

In 1974, the Minister of Education, Phil Amos, designated four schools as pilot Community Schools: Freyberg Memorial Community School (Te Atatu East); Aorere College (Māngere); Rutherford High School (Te Atatu Peninsula); and Normal Schools Community Centre (Mt Eden). In 1976, a new school, Ngā Tapuwāe College (Māngere) was added, which was a purpose-built school to accommodate community use of facilities. These schools received additional funding for facilities and the employment of a senior teacher to run the community programme. Later still, Glenfield College established itself as a Community School.

Sir Frank Holmes,² in the foreword to a review of Community Schools said:

“Those who advocated the community school approach saw advantages beyond the provision of more effective educational experiences for both children and adults. They envisaged, for example, that the schools would contribute to participatory democracy, to improving the cohesion of their communities, and to the more efficient use of abilities, skills, buildings and equipment” (Auckland Community Schools Working Committee, 1977, p. 1).

In the same report, the Hon Phil Amos³ stated:

“A Community School, as well as traditionally providing primary and secondary schooling. Also responds to the needs and aspirations of the community, second chance for adults, continuing education for local needs and offering leadership in providing recreational and cultural facilities in coordination with other local organisations including government” (p. 15) [sic].

² Sir Frank Holmes was a distinguished New Zealand economist and one of the founders of the New Zealand Association of Economists, and the first editor of New Zealand Economic Papers: he passed away on 23 October 2011. At the time referenced in this paper he was Chair of the New Zealand Planning Council.

³ Phillip Amos was a New Zealand Labour Party politician. He was the Minister of Education in the Third Labour Government from 1972 to 1975 and also served as the last Minister of Island Affairs from 1973 to 1974.



A typical programme for a Community School is noted for Aorere College. The programme included:

1. Adult students returning to the college to complete their sixth form studies, e.g. UE English. They shared a commonroom with sixth-form students.
2. Providing a licensed childcare centre for students and the community.
3. A general community programme with 1800 people in 77 courses.
4. School in the Community, with such activities as recreation and swimming in local facilities, community service projects and visits to older people.
5. The Aorere Neighbourhood Council provided the director of the Community School programme with advice, ideas and feedback. (Auckland Community Schools Working Party, 1977)

Ngā Tapuwae College ran successful holiday programmes for students. One popular day consisted of taking students by bus to a beach near Maraetai. For some this was the first time the students had ever visited a beach and swum in the sea (author's personal knowledge).

Eventually, successive governments reduced the additional funding and the designated Community Schools were left to manage using their own resources. The user pays philosophy also meant that community education class fees had to meet the full costs of study and, as a result, the adult continuing-education class numbers reduced significantly.

The Rise of Community Organisations

Community development is ideologically linked to both third way liberalism (equality, democracy and participation) and anarchistic ideas of cooperation and mutual aid. The third way debate was led by Anthony Giddens, a New Labour thinker who espoused, according to Hucker "a partnership model between the government and civil society. Both have a role to facilitate, but also to act as a control on the other" (2008, p. 59). The third way was designed to shift the political course from Thatcher's extreme neoliberalism to a more human and democratic approach that included partnership between government and civil society. Giddens stated, "Reform of the state and government should be a basic orienting principle of third way politics – a process of the deepening and widening of democracy" (1998, p. 69). The third way was adopted as the Blair Government policy but was eventually captured by the neoliberals. Contracting between the voluntary sector and government was used to drive down costs, transfer risk and attempt to silence the not-for-profit sector (Elliott & Haigh, 2012).

The third way approach in relation to civil society owes much to the thinking of Peter Berger (1979, p. 169). He

proposed that intermediate institutions (such as voluntary associations, neighbourhoods, subcultures and the church) should be strengthened to stand between an impersonal government and the vulnerable individual. These institutions could be used as agents of government in the delivery of needed services, an approach to service delivery than is now common. New Zealand followed this, and the third way approach, and now many services are contracted to the civil sector of society. The growth in the number, size and extent of community organisations has been phenomenal.

Statistics New Zealand has estimated the size of the not-for-profit sector in New Zealand. In 2005 there were 97,000 such organisations. A minimum of 436,000 people did voluntary work and 105,000 received payment for their work (Statistics New Zealand, 2007). It should be noted that these figures did not include all the informal groups such as book clubs, social movements and specific community projects.

The 1970s and 80s saw major shifts in New Zealand society and the not-for-profit sector. Tennant, Sanders, O'Brien & Castle (2006) explained:

"Fractures in the welfare state placed pressure on the non-profit sector, as did a new emphasis on community care and deinstitutionalisation. The sector found itself required to assume responsibility for activities that some thought should be the domain of the government. Equally, there were areas of need and activity in which some thought the state should not be involved" (p. 10).

By the 1970s and 80s, social movements such as the women's movement and Māori rangitiratanga resulted in a growth of new, and the re-emergence of traditional, social organisations. With Māori urbanisation, urban marae (meeting places) were established, sometimes at a community level, for example Papakura, and some as part of a local church such as Whaiora Marae in Ōtara. Later, Māori for Māori services were established in West and South Auckland, e.g. Te Whānau o Waipareira Trust. New community organisations have also risen to promote the values of community development. In West Auckland, Community Waitakere has been a major force in bringing together community organisations and coordinating community action. Similarly, Inspiring Communities, at a national level, has had a real impact in spreading the message of community-led development. Rapid migration into Auckland from Asia, Africa and other continents has also given rise to new community organisations that attempt to make the migration experience a positive one.

Conclusion

The search for community has been a central issue in philosophical debate between the rights of the individual and that of the community. Historically, during periods of rapid



political, social and economic change, the rights of individuals and the community have been undermined, neglected and often destroyed. The enclosure of the Commons in Britain resulted in the destruction of traditional communal use of land. The Jacobins tried to destroy the mutually supportive relations in France that people had held with their commune, village, church and guild. British capitalism destroyed the communal ownership of land in Aotearoa New Zealand as a result of Crown purchase of land, land wars and the imposition of laws requiring individual ownership of land.

The rapid growth of cities in the twentieth century resulted in efforts to recreate the local community within those cities. Modern ideas on globalisation have been met with opposition from those who wish to see recognition of

the inherent pluralism of local identities. Notwithstanding the fact that the term 'community' can be a romantic and nostalgic one, or that it can wrongly assume a homogeneous collection of like-minded people, it can still be a catch-call for action on issues that people find important in their own and their children's lives. At the same time, recognition of the strength of community can counteract the centralist tendencies of some extreme political ideologies and ensure that people have a say in their own lives and the life of their community. If the concept of community is dead, as some assert, it refuses to lie down. In spite of attacks on community values over many years through revolutions, and by different ideologies, the spirit of community remains resilient.



David Haigh has an MA in sociology and diplomas in public health, community work and professional ethics. He has been self-employed, carrying out social policy research for local authorities, NGOs and Iwi. He is also a lecturer at Unitec in the Department of Social Practice and an external examiner for the Planning Department at the University of Auckland. He has sat on two ethics committee dealing with social and health research. He is chair of the Newmarket Arts Trust. David received the Queen's honour of Member of the New Zealand Order of Merit (MNZM).

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