



Community Organisations, Contracts for Service and the Government: An Unholy Trinity?

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Article

Community Organisations, Contracts for Service and the Government: An Unholy Trinity?

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ABSTRACT

The New Zealand Productivity Commission is currently undertaking an inquiry into the tensions between government contracts and community organisations. The inquiry raises important issues, and has potentially far-reaching consequences for these organisations and the sector as a whole. This paper explores the tension between a contracting model that privileges tight specification of outputs, short time frames and rigid accountability mechanisms, and community organisations grounded in a desire to work for a more equal, inclusive and just society. This tension is heightened by a reliance on an 'evidence based' approach that is narrowly focused and uninformed by a clear or transparent problem definition or view as to how societal change will occur. There is often no apparent 'theory of change' to underpin government contracting for social services. Within this context, how can community organisations respond and sustain themselves while resisting the many incentives to become just another contractor delivering widgets for government? This paper draws on a submission made to the Productivity Commission's inquiry by Community Waitakere and the WAVES Trust (a West Auckland family violence network), and is supported by a number of West Auckland community organisations (WAVES Trust and Community Waitakere, 2014). While it is possible to identify community outcomes that are attractive to both government and community, it is also clear that community organisations and government will likely remain uncomfortable bedfellows with potentially very different dreams and goals.

INTRODUCTION

It has become increasingly obvious to policy makers and politicians alike over recent decades that complex social issues, or 'wicked problems' (Rittel and Webber, 1973, p. 160), as they are often described, require solutions that transcend the traditional boundaries between different areas of social service provision (Humpage, 2006). As such, the effort to foster collaboration and integration across government services, as well as between government agencies and local government and community organisations, has become a key feature of recent policy initiatives (Cheyne et al., 2005). As Cheyne et al. note, the idea of whole of government approaches to policy issues is manifested particularly in the concept of partnerships in the social services, and the need to move beyond the contractual relationships that emphasise specifically purchased outputs to a focus on outcomes, which emphasise results.

At the same time as the realisation has grown that partnership and collaboration are likely to play an important role in responding to these wicked problems, there has also been a growing concern to identify the particular 'intervention' that will make a difference. There has been a significant level of frustration amongst ministers that they cannot be confident that money spent on social services is achieving their objectives, and this in turn has led to a renewed emphasis on the importance of 'evidence'. For example, as the Minister of Social Development, Anne Tolley, stated: '[a]t the moment there is little evidence of the effectiveness, or not, of funding in this sector, because up until now most contracts have focused on the numbers of clients receiving services, rather than the effect that the service has on improving the lives of vulnerable people' (Tolley, 2015, para. 4).



A renewed interest in evaluation and research is also shown by the transformation of the Families Commission into a Social Policy Research and Evaluation Unit (Superu): 'Our purpose is to increase the use of evidence by people across the social sector so that they make better decisions – about funding, policies or services – to improve the lives of New Zealand's communities, families and whānau' (Superu, 2015, para 3).

The co-existence of these two drivers – acknowledgement of the complex and joined up nature of the issues to be addressed, and the desire for evidence – creates its own tension. To be effective, joined up approaches need to be based on sustained and respectful relationships that are developed over time. The search for evidence, however, has tended to lead to a narrow focus on available data, clearly specified deliverables and, ideally, a rigorous point of comparison to demonstrate the efficacy of a particular intervention.

A relatively short political cycle of three years, and the consequent desire from ministers to demonstrate value, adds to an environment of competing and often conflicting motivations and agendas. It is within this context that the relationship between community organisations and government needs to be navigated.

The first part of this paper lays the foundation for our argument by outlining the key shifts that have influenced the current contractual relationship between government and community organisations. We then consider the issues confronting these organisations in entering into contracts with government for the delivery of social services.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Lyons (1998, p. 1) argues that there are a variety of terms commonly used to refer to those organisations which are neither seen to be 'business' (i.e. profit making) or government, and that these terms differ depending on the field. He comments: '[f]or example, in the social services, non-profit organisations are commonly referred to as community organisations, but sometimes as charities or as voluntary or non-government organisations.' Beyond the fact of being non-profit, however, clearly articulating what constitutes a 'community organisation' is fraught with difficulty, given that such entities are diverse, and differ with regards to size, workforce and organisational structure. As Neilson et al. (2015, p. 11) comment, '[t]his diversity makes it difficult to demonstrate how the work of the sector impacts positively on New Zealand without reverting to generalisations, abstract concepts, taken-for-granted assumptions and broad rhetoric.' Furthermore, not all community organisations are contracted to deliver social services – nor would many wish to be. Instead, many such organisations would describe their core function as 'community development', which Frank and Smith (1999, p. 3) define as 'a process whereby community members come together to take collective action and generate solutions to common problems'.

Nielson et al. (2015) argue that community organisations are distinguished from other sorts of organisations by virtue of the 'organizational specific capital' that such entities possess, which they have defined as:

- Their organizational mission in action;
- Their accessibility for clients;
- The fact they are embedded in their community;
- Their knowledge of government agencies and community;
- Their networks and ongoing collaboration with other agencies, both government and community;
- Their ability to respond innovatively to identified community needs; and,
- How they express manaakitanga (that is, how they care for their own wellbeing and that of others) (Nielson et al., 2015, p. 8).

This article is primarily focused on the tensions that exist for community organisations contracted by government to deliver social services, which also see themselves as undertaking community development or offering organisational specific capital as described by Nielson et al. above.

BACKGROUND

In 1984, the Fourth Labour Government embarked on a series of reforms, which resulted in profound changes to the social services landscape. These reforms were influenced by an international shift away from the previous Keynesian model of a state-managed economy and towards a market-based approach to social service delivery, which was concerned with minimising state intervention while promoting the market as the key mechanism for the distribution of goods and services within society (Cheyne et al., 2005). In



particular, neoliberal reforms introduced by the Labour Government (and continued and expanded under the subsequent National Government in 1990) included the corporatisation and privatisation of state assets as well as the separation of the roles of funder, purchaser and provider of social services. Competition between social service providers was encouraged, as this was seen as a means of giving consumers choice. As Humpage and Craig (2008, p. 45) comment:

[T]he language of the market (choice, self-reliance, and devolution) appealed to a range of groups, not just free market economists, because it appeared to meet the calls by Māori, women and other identity groups for improved access, cultural appropriateness and control over the services they used.

Although the new market-based approach seemed to offer opportunities for community organisations to have more control over services previously delivered by government, the new emphasis on contractualism, which underpinned these changes, would have significant implications for the relationship between government and community organisations. Prior to the 1980s, this relationship was largely informal and often reliant on personal connections. Government provided support in the form of grants-in-aid, which enabled non-profit organisations to prioritise their own agendas and work programmes while at the same time supporting government goals (Baxter, 2002, cited in O'Brien et al., 2009). As Stace and Cumming (2006) note, this somewhat relaxed system enabled a measure of flexibility in the use of government grants, with minimal reporting requirements on the part of recipients. However, following the changes brought in by the Labour Government in 1984, these grants were increasingly replaced by formal contracts, which were awarded by a process of competitive tender, tightly specified the outputs required by government, and contained strict accountability and compliance mechanisms (Stace and Cumming, 2006). These changes served to place a number of organisations under significant stress by pitting previously collaborative entities against each other in competition for funding, while at the same time prioritising government goals over the needs of the communities they were serving. Furthermore, this shift raised a number of important questions about the nature and roles of both government and community organisations in the provision of social services.

A SHIFT TO THIRD WAY APPROACHES AND AN EMPHASIS ON 'PARTNERSHIP'

By the late 1990s, it was increasingly acknowledged that the 'New Zealand Experiment' – as the rapid introduction of neoliberal economic reform had come to be known by some commentators – had failed to achieve significantly improved outcomes for the country's most vulnerable citizens (Kelsey, 1995). Instead, a reliance on the 'market' had resulted in increased rates of unemployment and rapidly increasing income inequality. In 1999, a Labour Government was again returned to power, as voters increasingly turned away from the hard neoliberal stance held by the previous administrations. The incoming government took its cue instead from Britain's New Labour, which attempted to find a middle way between the Keynesian model of a state-managed economy and the market-led approaches which underpinned neoliberalism – an approach which would become characterised as the 'Third Way' (Humpage and Craig, 2008). Third Way policies focused on issues of 'social inclusion' while also reflecting an increasing awareness that solving complex social issues, or 'wicked problems' (Rittel and Webber, 1973, p. 160), required solutions that transcend the traditional boundaries between different areas of social service provision (Humpage, 2006). 'Partnership' thus became a key focus of government with regards to achieving social outcomes, both across the various state departments and between government and community organisations.¹

Partnership and collaboration are themselves contested concepts. They are variously described as broadly defined terms applying to a wide range of relationships (working to advance shared objectives), or more specifically as displaying particular characteristics at a point on a continuum between coexistence and partnership as shown in Figure 1. below:

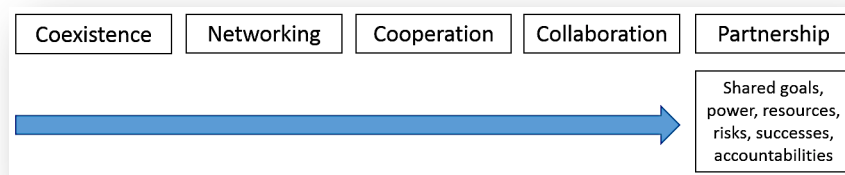



Figure 1. Coexistence to partnership: A continuum

Source: Craig and Courtney (2004, p. 38)

¹ This focus on partnership can also be seen in the state's attempt to reconcile its relationship with Māori through the Treaty settlement process, as well as through its strategy of devolving some social service delivery to kaupapa Māori organisations.



Coexistence, networking and cooperation involve a range of relationship possibilities from awareness of each other's existence, to working together, to helping another organisation to achieve a task without necessarily any commitment to long-term engagement. Collaboration, however, is described by Craig and Courtney (2004, pp. 38-39) as having the following ingredients:

- Involves trust;
- Is based on negotiated and agreed actions;
- Has an agreed set of principles for working together;
- Has shared decision-making;
- Means giving up some things (like power and control); and,
- Provides an opportunity to add value to others as well as yourself.

In response to the desire for an improved relationship between government and community organisations, the government undertook a number of actions. In 1999 a new ministerial portfolio, Minister Responsible for the Community and Voluntary Sector, was established in recognition of the value of building strong government sector relationships. This portfolio was supported by the establishment of an Office for the Community and Voluntary Sector in 2003, which was situated within the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) (O'Brien et al., 2009). However, the commitment on the part of government for improved partnership with community is best illustrated by the Statement of Government Intentions for an Improved Government-Community Relationship (SOGI), which was signed by Prime Minister Helen Clark and Steve Maharey, who held the Community and Voluntary Sector portfolio. Amongst a number of commitments made by government, the SOGI included the statement that:

'[g]overnment acknowledges the valuable contribution made by community, voluntary and iwi/Māori organisations to the achievement of shared social, cultural, environmental and economic goals. Government agencies will, together with the community sector, undertake a programme of work to address concerns about funding arrangements, effectiveness, compliance costs and related matters' (Office for the Community and Voluntary Sector, 2001, para. 3).

As O'Brien et al. (2009, p. 19) note, '[the SOGI] framed the language used by government agencies to describe interaction with sector organisations – building capacity, capability and co-operation being key phrases repeated in many key documents.'

However, in spite of the clear commitments made by the government in the SOGI to overcome some of the key barriers to effective partnership between government and community organisations, the Government has continued to rely on the contractual system as the basis for these relationships. As such, a number of tensions continue to exist between the social service delivery goals of government and the goals of non-government organisations, which often encompass a broader focus on community development. We explore these tensions in the remainder of this paper.

COMPETING PRIORITIES: GOVERNMENT GOALS VERSUS COMMUNITY INTENTIONS

It could be argued that, at least initially, some organisations responded to the opportunities afforded by government contracts enthusiastically. It was seductive (and sometimes useful) to be able to make visible outputs that had been delivered; to feel that efficiencies had been gained and that it was possible to demonstrate to funders (or now purchasers) that community organisations could be as businesslike as the corporate world (Tennant, 2007). Almost immediately, however, cracks have appeared in the façade, and there is significant concern that the role of community organisations has been undermined and diminished.

The factors that drive a contractual approach do not sit easily with a number of the core values and intentions of community organisations. Nowland-Foreman (1998) suggests that the shift from a system of grants-in-aid to formal contracts enabled the government to exert increased control and specification of services that had previously been provided autonomously by community organisations. In response, many community organisations have sought to increase their size and capacity in order to meet rising costs of compliance and to remain competitive with larger and more corporate entities. Nowland-Foreman (1998, p. 117) comments that, as a result, 'smaller community-based organisations often seem to survive in the contract culture by modifying the qualities that might have made them attractive in the first place as contractors: being smaller, more informal, and perhaps more accessible'. Elsewhere, Nowland-Foreman (2000, p. 3) refers to the pressure placed on organisations to remake themselves according to the requirements of funders as 'funder capture'.

These challenges are crystallised when the priorities and motivations of a purchaser are considered alongside those of a 'typical' community organisation:

Purchaser of a contract for social service delivery	Community organisation
Wants a clearly defined service to be delivered to specified standards.	Wants to assist people/neighbourhoods to make changes.
Is not really interested in 'other' issues for which there is no purchase agreement.	Sees the connections between issues and wants to connect them – and work broadly.
Is interested in evidence which 'scientifically' proves efficacy.	Is interested in feedback and stories from those they are working with.
Wants time bounded arrangements that avoid long-term commitment and facilitate competitive tendering processes.	Values long-term relationships and sustained effort. Seeks long-term, sustainable change but is less clear on 'the next step'.
Sees advocacy as threatening and in no one's interests.	Sees advocacy as a key responsibility to speak to issues of social justice and for those marginalised.

Table 1. Priorities and motivations of purchasers versus those of typical community organisations

The tensions described above arise partly from the fact that community organisations typically start from a different position from government, and have their own origins and history. In some measure this is linked with a struggle for social justice and a voice for the excluded and marginalised. A starting assumption for many community (development) organisations is that the bureaucratic institutions of central or local government are the 'enemy', to be challenged wherever and whenever possible.² This impulse may be characterised by a strong concern about issues of inequality, the grossly disproportionate wealth and power of the 'one percent', or concern about the impact of big business on the environment. In the face of this seemingly overwhelming context, community organisations may also be characterised by a desire to regain some sense of agency over a neighbourhood via 'place making', or a concern about family or community well-being generally.

Tension is often most visible around the issue of advocacy. As briefly alluded to before, the issue of advocacy can be the lightning rod that crystallises the divergent attitudes and perceptions of community organisations and purchasers of services. Communities feel that a crucial part of being 'empowered', as the Mayor of Auckland intends (Auckland Council, 2015),³ is the freedom to criticise, to comment and to make life 'difficult' for large agencies at both central and local government levels. However, there is increasingly a view held within community organisations that advocacy or criticism of government is unwelcome, and places an organisation at risk (Elliott and Haigh, 2013). The *State of the Sector Survey 2014 Snapshot* of over 300 organisations (ComVoices, 2014) reports that 60% of those surveyed are not prepared to speak out publicly about the issues they are facing. Identified reasons for this silence include a desire 'not to jeopardise currently positive relationships with ministers and officials for fear that they might not support future funding' (ComVoices, 2014, p. 7).

The situation described, however, cannot be where it all ends. In New Zealand there is some sense of a mutual dependence between community organisations and government. We are a small place, and we know each other at a very personal level. Individuals wear many hats (Elliott and Haigh, 2013). Community organisations and government institutions (and policy) each have enormous influence on people's lives at every level. Interactions are numerous and complex, and the tensions described here need to be navigated. There undoubtedly needs to be significant change from government and associated agents. It is not good

² There is also, of course, a long history of 'charitable' organisations working to assist the 'deserving' poor and essentially seeking to maintain the status quo.

³ 'The community development function is an area where I would like to see us change our delivery to a much more empowered community approach. This would see us move away from direct delivery (and therefore save overheads) and fund community groups to deliver more' (Auckland Council, 2015, p.15).



enough (and there is no point) in seeing a community organisation as simply one amongst a number of potential delivery agents. Many community organisations seek to represent the interests of the sector, or to speak directly to the issues of inequality and social justice that they confront in their work. Governing documents of community organisations often explicitly identify this activity as a key role. At the same time, community organisations need to be prepared to engage constructively. They need to be brave enough to speak out when needed, and to choose not to place themselves in the position of a supplicant waiting for the crumbs to fall from the table of government. This is not what 'a place at the table' means.

Given the tensions between the goals of government and the goals of community organisations described above, it is useful to consider the extent to which current government strategies for improving social outcomes are likely to resolve these gaps.

SHIFTING BACK TO A MARKET-LED APPROACH TO ACHIEVING SOCIAL OUTCOMES


If the relationship between government and community organisations can be broadly described as having moved through periods of devolution and contractualism in the 1980s and 1990s to capacity and relationship building in the 2000s, it is arguable that recent initiatives introduced by the current National-led administration (2008 to present) are signalling a shift back towards a market-led approach to achieving social outcomes. One of these initiatives is the Productivity Commission, an 'independent' Crown entity, which was established in 2011 in order to: 'provide advice to the government on improving productivity in a way that is directed to supporting the overall well-being of New Zealanders, having regard to a wide range of communities of interest and population groups in New Zealand society' (New Zealand Productivity Commission Act, 2010, p. 3).

Since its inception, the Commission has undertaken a number of inquiries that focus on social issues such as housing affordability, as well as the current inquiry into the contracting of social services (Productivity Commission, 2014). The Commission's issues paper, *More Effective Social Services*, was released in October 2014. According to the terms of reference, the aim of the inquiry is to 'focus on potential improvements in the ways government agencies commission and purchase social services' (New Zealand Productivity Commission, 2014, p.5). This clearly limits the scope of such an inquiry to a narrow focus on improving the design of contracts, rather than challenging the basis for a contractual relationship in the first place, or continuing previous conversations about how to progress the relationship between government and community organisations. The issues paper signals a renewed interest in market-led approaches in the form of social enterprise models and the introduction of social bonds, both of which attempt to circumnavigate these historical tensions between the government and community organisations by introducing third parties in the form of for-profit business and philanthropic sectors. Importantly, what the Commission's inquiry explicitly excludes from its scope is any discussion about overall levels of funding for social service delivery, despite many community organisations identifying significant shortfalls while delivering services on behalf of government.

The language used by government to articulate its goals for social policy has undergone a quiet transformation across a number of different government departments and Crown entities. The fact that an entity such as the Productivity Commission is seen as an instrument for improving social outcomes suggests that, from the government's perspective, the primary goal of addressing such issues is not to facilitate social justice, or to remove barriers to people participating equally in society (i.e. the ability to exercise the rights of citizenship), but rather to reduce the cost burden to the state, and in doing so improve 'productivity'. This increasingly corporatised language is also found in the restructuring of the procurement arm of the Ministry of Social Development, which in 2014 was re-branded from 'Family and Community Services (FACS)' to 'Community Investment'. As Deputy Chief Executive of the Ministry of Social Development Murray Edridge comments:

The Strategy also signals a renewed focus on informed decision-making and service effectiveness, to help MSD and service providers understand what works to make a difference in people's lives. We want to be able to demonstrate that things are getting better for individuals, families/whānau and communities because of the services delivered by providers (Ministry of Social Development, 2014, para 4).

More recently, we have also seen a more subtle shift in the language used to describe New Zealand's state housing portfolio, with the term 'social housing' replacing 'state housing'. This small change is significant, because in the latter articulation the role of the state as a social housing provider is clear, whereas this is less obvious in the use of 'social housing'. 'Social housing' could indicate that housing for some of our most vulnerable citizens is provided by any number of entities including private interests (or, indeed, community organisations).



Alongside the work of the Productivity Commission, the current administration has implemented a number of other initiatives and policy changes that further support our hypothesis that we are witnessing a shift back towards a market-led approach to achieving social outcomes. These include an increased emphasis on the use of ‘evidence-based’ policy and a reduced focus on partnership with community organisations. The emphasis on the role of ‘evidence’ in making decisions around the funding of social services is a key factor in the recent restructuring of the New Zealand Families Commission, and its subsequent re-articulation as the Superu. This change was driven significantly by a frustration on the part of ministers that large amounts of social expenditure were resulting in little or no movement in social indicators, and a concern that spending was being wasted:

Social Development Minister Paula Bennett has welcomed the passing of a Bill refocusing the role of the Families Commission, to house a vital new Social Policy Evaluation and Research unit (Superu). The new Superu offers a much needed service for the whole social sector to fill the gap that exists in New Zealand for independent, evidence-based research around social services. “By looking across the entire social sector, Superu will give organisations a clear and accurate picture of how effective their services are, and what could be done better” (National Party, 2014, para. 1-3).

However, while obtaining a comprehensive evidential basis for the services that are delivered by both government agencies and non-government organisations is arguably important, the use and role of evidence is open to contestation at a number of levels. In the first instance, unequal power relations are maintained where the government is the sole arbiter of what constitutes evidence and how such evidence might be interpreted and communicated. The use of evidence is not purely objective; evidence can be marshalled to further particular political agendas. Therefore it is important that there is transparency around who is conducting the measurement and evaluation. Furthermore, there is frequently asymmetric access to crucial information, including statistics held by various government departments, with the government maintaining control over what information can be accessed, by whom and when. This makes it extremely difficult for some non-government agencies to be able to get a full picture of the extent of the need that exists within the community. For example, the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) has been critical of the Government’s decision to stop producing its annual Social Report, which used a range of statistical indicators to monitor key trends and to track progress towards improved outcomes for New Zealanders:

‘The current National Government often talks about the need for transparency in decision-making and in many areas argues for improving access to data to make better decisions about public policy. However, it appears that the Ministry of Social Development is exempt from these exhortations to be more open’ (CPAG, 2015, para. 3).

The issues identified above are indicative of the fact that the tensions that have developed over the past three decades surrounding community organisations and the government operating under a contractual model are far from resolved. Furthermore, while previous administrations have made some attempts to address these tensions, we appear to be seeing a roll back of efforts aimed at brokering partnership between community and government. This is evidenced in the stripping back of the Office for the Community and Voluntary Sector. Although there is still a ministerial portfolio attached, it has been shifted from the Ministry of Social Development into the Department of Internal Affairs, and in the process, the capacity of the office has been significantly reduced; the website for the office was ‘disestablished’ in 2013. This suggests that while the façade of the office still exists, there is no longer a genuine commitment on the part of the current National-led government to give more than lip service to the notion of partnership with community organisations.

CONCLUSION

This paper has described the ways in which a managerial or neoliberal view of the world has become pervasive for community organisations over the last thirty years; so pervasive that it is often difficult to remember or give credence to alternative constructs that allowed for a grant making rather than contracting approach, and at some level either tolerated or even supported community organisations that represented the interests of those otherwise marginalised or excluded. The challenges posed to community organisations as a result of this shift from grants to contracts have been significant. Three decades on, it is clear that the tensions that have arisen between government and community organisations have yet to be fully resolved, and may in fact be strengthening. It is difficult to see how these tensions can be reconciled,

and the more important challenge may be to work to acknowledge and navigate the reality of these tensions, at least in those areas where there are overlapping interests.⁴

In order for government and community organisations to work together without losing the added value that community organisations can offer, the following areas need to be addressed:

RELATIONSHIPS AND TRUST

Work across sectors needs a high level of trust to be developed. This requires time and investment and a willingness for all those involved to share successes and failures. There is currently a strong tension between competitive drivers both within and across sectors (including contracting processes), and the need for 'joined up' responses to complex social issues. There is a vast difference between being committed to social change as a community member or citizen, and being a 'delivery agent' seeking to provide a specified service as cheaply as possible.

TRANSPARENCY

There is an ongoing challenge regarding information being easily and simply available to all involved. Information being held 'exclusively' or disproportionately by one sector is a real barrier to establishing good working relationships. Many government agencies still have a culture of keeping information close to themselves, rather than embracing an assumption of openness.

LONG TERM THINKING

It is not possible to work across sectors on a short-term basis. There are inevitably 'costs' associated with the involvement of multiple participants, and for such involvement to be effective, these costs need to be incurred in the context of a long-term commitment.

CLARITY OF ROLE AND PURPOSE

Each participant needs to be clear about the role and contribution they make. It is also vital that when a 'cross-sector' approach is undertaken, there is a shared awareness and agreement about what it is that is being 'changed'. Too often initiatives are started that are poorly defined, and the hard work of agreeing on objectives is 'fudged'.

If the lens through which a group is working to make change is to do with 'place' or with particular groups of families one is much more likely to see an issue broadly, to see connections and to identify issues not visible to those concerned with purchasing social services. When this approach meets a government system looking to specify outputs and narrowly define evidence there will be tension.

SUMMARY

Community organisations are noticing a strengthening of narrowly focused accountability mechanisms and a strong interest in a bounded view of evidence that is poorly equipped to deal with complex social issues. Community organisations continue to be seen as convenient providers of social services (as is currently apparent in relation to social housing), rather than as partners developing long-term and shared responses to long term challenges. The limits to effective partnership between government and community organisations are articulated clearly in the following comments made by the Auditor-General:

Collaboration and partnership between local and central government public entities and communities is now often expected if public policy objectives are to be realistic and achievable. However, I acknowledge that strong and sustainable relationships and, most particularly, partnerships, may be difficult to achieve where there are major disparities between public entities and NGOs in terms of relative power, size, and governance structures (Office of the Auditor-General, 2006, p. 4).

⁴ It should be noted that this paper has focused largely on the relationship with central government. There is potentially a very important role for local government in providing an alternative reference point and funding channel to support 'joined up' approaches to complex social issues. Local government is also interested in place making – and can think about a neighbourhood holistically through the experiences of families that live there. The concept of the 'well-beings' that were enshrined in local government legislation were important in this regard and The Waitakere City approach to establishing partnering agreements with community organisations provides an interesting example of this. Central government is more likely to mimic a collection of cabinet portfolios (Education/Health/Social Development/Justice, and so on), and fail to understand more joined up opportunities and approaches.



In this context, community development practitioners and organisations need to approach the business of contracting to deliver social services and their relationships with government with a degree of caution and an awareness of the likelihood of competing agendas and priorities. If we accept that government and community organisations are bound together in a desire both to deliver social services in the community, and to make a difference, we have to also accept that the binding will be uncomfortable for both parties.



CHARLOTTE MOORE is a Research Analyst and Family Violence Network Coordinator at WAVES Trust. Prior to this she held a number of roles in both the public sector and the private sector before returning to the University of Auckland to study Sociology and Māori Studies. Her recently completed Master's thesis focusses on the evolution of the government's Whanau Ora approach to social service delivery. Charlotte is particularly interested in the way in which social policy is influenced by the values and political ideology of those in power and how this in turn can serve to promote particular discourses around notions of rights and responsibilities, both for the state and its citizens.

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CHARLIE MOORE has spent many years working in both Auckland and Wellington in a variety of public sector and community settings. This work has included a number of roles with the Dept of Labour, (including 3 years as General Manager of the Community Employment Group (CEG)), with the Dept of Internal Affairs, the Office for the Community and Voluntary Sector and with the Families Commission. Charlie is currently employed as the manager at Community Waitakere. A constant theme has been a recognition of the critical importance of community development and working to improve the connection between community and government systems.

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