BUILDING STRONGER COMMUNITIES

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INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS HAPPENING TO OUR COMMUNITIES?

What is happening to our communities? Over many years we have been involved in a wide range of different communities across different parts of Australia in various roles. We have sometimes despaired at what we have seen.

Last year one of us visited a diverse urban community in Melbourne. The experience was salutary. There was evidence of widespread mistrust within the community between people from different backgrounds. In particular, there was hostility towards new immigrants. People seemed to lack connection with each other. The physical environment showed signs of decay, anger and unrest. Wider statistics filled out the picture. Crime was up. People felt dislocated and lacked a sense of belonging.

In a rural community in another Australian state there was another set of problems. Over the years the drain of people out of the rural communities into the cities had left it weakened and demoralised. Increasingly, professional people servicing the town were living more than half an hour away in a larger centre. Housing prices had declined and the community had attracted a wide range of lower income people renting the cheaper housing stock. This population shift and community demoralisation had resulted in a blaming of the new residents and in hostility and distrust. The fabric of community and the basis for building a positive future had all but disappeared.

We live in an age of unparalleled opportunities for communication and connection. The car has brought us closer to a wider range of people and possibilities. Electronic communications have meant that it is possible for us to be in communication with someone on the opposite side of the globe as easily as with our next-door neighbour. We live in

a time when it ought to be more possible than ever before to grow our sense of community and belonging.

Yet for many the reality is quite the reverse. Many people are extremely lonely in this incredibly 'connected' society in which we live. Many feel lost and unsupported, and are struggling.

June, for example, is a battler, living in a public housing estate as a single parent with two children. In her late twenties now, she has struggled throughout her life to make things work. Born in a rural community, her family moved to a poor part of the city in search of work, but jobs were hard to find. The family was fairly dysfunctional and June looked for support and care elsewhere. At fifteen she had a baby. As a single mother she had become an additional burden that her parents could not bear. Before too long, she found herself on her own. Not being able to afford anything else, she moved into a public housing estate about an hour's drive from where she had been brought up. Alone, she is trying to do the job of bringing up children under immense pressure.

Gail is well-educated and in her late thirties. She has come from a good family in a leafy part of a capital city. Provided with a good education by supportive parents, Gail did well at school and pursued a university degree. During this time she was involved in a damaging relationship. A job opportunity in a large regional centre after university seemed initially attractive as an escape. As a result Gail moved away from friends and support. The job was disappointing and Gail resigned, suffering a great deal of loss of purpose and direction in the process. Without a career enhancing her sense of self-worth and cut off from support, life seemed extremely aimless.

What is happening to our communities? Are they dying? Falling apart? Does it matter that people live cut off from the support that a community can give?

DOES IT MATTER?

The answer to the last of these questions has got to be that *it does matter*. Even for those of us who feel strong and enjoy the possibility of relating widely and floating freely, the answer is that a sense of community matters … when you need it. When one is sick, or is dealing with grief

or struggle or unfulfilled hopes and longings, suddenly a sense of community and belonging matters. Really matters.

The issue of growing community and belonging for each of us as individuals is something we take for granted … until we lose it. It is something we might not even know we need until it disappears.

Based both on our own observations and on research data collected over 15 years, we would argue that communities are not necessarily dying. Rather they are fragmenting. The changes that have resulted from greater mobility, new modes of communication, increased social diversity and many other social forces have led to a breaking up of our experiences of community.

Consider the idealised village model of living so popular in films. The village community is portrayed as essentially static and stable. Several generations live within close proximity to each other. Work takes place in the local community. People's sense of identity is based on that geographic community.

While something approaching such 'village communities' still exists in parts of Australia and even within the heart of some of our large cities, most Australians live their lives across many fragmented communities of interest. In contemporary society the communities of which we are a part – our residential community, our occupational community, and the networks in which we pursue leisure activities – have few overlaps with each other. Among these fragments, some people find themselves without any communities to which they feel they belong.

Thus the problem we face is not so much that communities are dying but that they are fragmenting. The forms of society have changed, and we need to find new ways of developing community in the fragmented world in which we now find ourselves. We need ways to maintain and enhance those fragments so that they can provide a basis for the wellbeing and development of individuals, neighbourhoods, regions and nations.

We need to find ways of including the many people who feel they are missing out, who feel there is nowhere they belong. One aspect of our concern, therefore, is the need to build stronger communities in order to provide greater care and support for those currently falling through the cracks between the fragments of contemporary mass society.

MORE THAN CRACKS IN THE FLOOR

Yet our concern is more than about a residual category of people who are missing out on what the bulk of Australians have and take for granted. While it is true that there are many who are hurting, lonely or feeling lost, our concern is for us all. There is the potential for us all to hurt if we lose the support and sense of belonging that we take for granted as we grow and develop our lives. We can all say 'I'm fine at the moment', but what if …

Moreover, even when things are running relatively smoothly for us as individuals, we can ask about the quality of the social relationships in which we and others are involved. To what extent are we contributing positively to the wellbeing of others as well as ourselves? To what extent are we working actively to overcome injustices and prejudices? To what extent are we helping to create what Eva Cox (1995) termed 'a truly civil society'? At the end of the day a loss of community and of a sense of belonging will leave us *all* diminished.

The signs are there. As Richard Eckersley (1998: 7–9) asks, why is it that in a society where economic progress appears sustained and continuous, increasingly Australians are less positive about the society in which they live and its prospects for the future. If we really are prospering, why are we feeling increasingly anxious and less optimistic? Why is it that some people hark back to the 1950s, to idealised families behind picket fences in village type communities? Why do they point back to such times and invite us to believe in those? Is it because we so value the image of stable relationships and community?

The truth is that in an age of unprecedented choice and rapid change, including the fragmentation of our communities, together with a declining sense of belonging, many people feel increasingly vulnerable. By and large, as human beings, we have a strong desire to live in relationship with others. In practical terms we have to live in relationship with others – we cannot be wholly self-sufficient. In a fragmented world, one of our biggest challenges is to establish and maintain strong and resilient relationships and communities. Part of this has to do with issues of trust and trustworthiness. Somewhat similar issues also arise in relationship to the increasingly complex array of technological systems and organisations on which we depend.

RECOGNISING THE CHALLENGES

Concern about the nature of community is as old as human civilisation itself. It was a major theme in the work of Plato in ancient Greece, for example. At that time, much of the debate focused on power within communities. Who should have authority and how should that authority be exercised? The question of authority had ramifications for the ways in which people were educated, their memberships of various groups and associations, and their relationships with one another.

Throughout the centuries, people have dreamed of the ideal community in which there would be social justice, harmony and co-operation for the good of all. One of the greatest of the dreamers was Jean Jacques Rousseau, the French social philosopher. He wrote extensively about the nature of the ideal community, particularly in his book *The Social Contract*, in which he considered how people might create a community in which there would be freedom as well as harmony.

The emergence of industrial society in the 19th century led to new problems that affected community life. Sociologists such as Emile Durkheim (1893) observed that the increasing specialisation, mechanisation and anonymity in industrial societies could be problematic for individuals and for social structures. In his famous study of suicide, he noted how people who lacked strong social integration into society were more susceptible to suicide (Durkheim, 1897). Another classical sociologist, Ferdinand Tönnies (1887), saw the development of great cities as characterised by impersonal relationships and contractual ties. He contrasted these with the more intimate and enduring relationships of a village society.

While acknowledging the important social changes induced by technological and economic developments, Nisbet (1953) contended that the greatest single influence on social organisation in industrialised societies in the 20th century was the growing concentration of power in the sovereign political state. In another publication, Nisbet (1960: 82) noted some of the limitations of the state: 'The state can enlist popular enthusiasm, can conduct crusades, can mobilize on behalf of great "causes" such as wars, but as a regular and normal means of meeting human needs for recognition, fellowship, security and membership, it is inadequate.' In both these publications, Nisbet argued

for the importance of 'intermediate associations' such as families, local communities, voluntary organisations, religious bodies and the like to act as a check on the modern tendency to concentrate power in the hands of the state and also to meet needs that the state is ill-equipped to fulfil.

Ever since the first white settlement, communities in Australia have been shaped and altered by successive waves of migration, economic cycles, technological developments, demographic factors, environmental forces and political events. Some periods have been times of more rapid and more profound change than others. For example, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, increasing numbers of married women, who had previously lived much of their lives within the local community, were moving into a larger sphere of activity as they joined the paid workforce. As wealth increased, so did access to cars, allowing people to participate in a wider world. In metropolitan areas, regional shopping centres began to replace the strips of shops in local neighbourhoods. As a consequence of events such as these, local communities faded in importance for some people. Many people became more conscious of being part of non-local communities of interest, and they gave correspondingly less attention to neighbourhood communities.

Since then, the notion of community as a territorially defined collectivity of people has increasingly been supplemented by the notion of community as a network of people who have some characteristic or interest in common, whether or not they happen to reside near one another. Thus, for example, people now speak of ethnic communities, religious communities, communities of people with a similar occupation or economic interest such as the academic community or the business community, communities of people with similar leisure interests such as the surfing community or the netball community, communities of people with a similar sexual preference such as gay and lesbian communities, and communities of people who share some other characteristic that is particularly significant for them, such as the deaf community or the Vietnam veteran community.

The trends outlined above are further discussed in the first part of this book.

BUILDING SOCIAL CAPITAL

Closely related to some notions of community is the concept of social capital. Although he did not invent the latter term, Robert Putnam, a Harvard University professor of public policy, has done much to popularise it. For Putnam (1993: 35), social capital refers to 'features of social organization, such as networks, norms and trust, that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit'. A simple metaphor sometimes used in describing social capital is that it is a *glue* which holds members of a social collectivity such as a family or a community together. Another, rather different, metaphor likens social capital to *oil* that enables a community or society to function smoothly. Two of Putnam's most recent books on social capital (Putnam 2000; Putnam & Felstein 2003) have the word 'community' in their subtitles.

Putnam (2000) argues that social capital has been declining in America in recent decades. As evidence of this, he cites statistics on such things as people's informal connections with others, participation in voluntary associations and in various civic activities, levels of trust, reciprocity, honesty, altruism, volunteering and philanthropy. Major factors that he sees as contributing to these trends include: pressures of time and money, especially in two-career families; suburbanisation, commuting and urban sprawl; the effects of electronic entertainment, particularly television, in privatising leisure activities; and, most significant of all, the failure of subsequent generations to emulate the robust civic virtues of the generation that reached adulthood during World War II. In the final part of the book, Putnam explores various ways in which the decline in social capital could be reversed. He gives particular attention to six spheres in which initiatives could be developed: youth and schools; the workplace; urban and metropolitan design; religion; arts and culture; and politics and government.

From the perspective of political economy, writers such as Fine (2001) and Harriss (2002) have criticised the concept of social capital in terms of both its intellectual content and its use by organisations like the World Bank. Similarly, various commentators such as Navarro (2002), Mayer (2003) and Bryson and Mowbray (2005) have questioned the quality of Putnam's evidence and the appropriateness of some of his conclusions and recommendations. Nevertheless, others have

sought to refine the concept of social capital by identifying its various forms (including some that Putnam tended to neglect or downplay), and by noting not only its benign elements and beneficial outcomes but also the 'dark side' of some of its manifestations (see, for example, Field 2004; Halpern 2004; Winter 2000). Empirical studies of aspects of social capital in Australia have been undertaken by the Australian Institute of Family Studies (Stone & Hughes 2002; Stone, Gray & Hughes 2003), the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2004a; 2004b) and the Bureau of Transport and Regional Economics (2005), as well as by other researchers, including the authors of the present book. The Productivity Commission (2003) has reviewed the concept of social capital, together with the findings of various empirical studies, and considered possible implications for public policy. In addition to examining relevant Australian data, the present book draws on insights generated by the debates on social capital, and explores their implications for the strengthening of various types of community. This is a major focus of the second part of the book.

COMMUNITY STRENGTHENING DYNAMICS

The third part of the book looks in more detail at the dynamics of community strengthening. It begins with an examination of several concepts that have some similarity to the notion of community strength, such as community resilience, healthy communities, and community capacity. Each of these concepts has some valuable insights. Nevertheless, in practice they have generally been applied to territorially defined communities such as neighbourhoods, towns or regions, rather than communities based on some other form of shared characteristic.

Building in part on a framework developed by Verba, Schlozman and Brady (1995), part 3 then goes on to consider four processes that can contribute to people's active participation in, and strengthening of, various types of communities. These are the processes of motivating, skilling, engaging and leadership. The values underpinning these processes are of vital importance if they are to contribute positively to community strength. Parents, citizens, educational institutions and community groups can all contribute to the shaping of these values. Various organisations and networks can provide formal and informal structures through which desirable outcomes are achieved.

Many of these organisations are part of what is sometimes called 'the third sector'. The third sector is composed of 'all those organisations that are not-for-profit and non-government, together with the activities of volunteering and giving which sustain them' (Australian and New Zealand Third Sector Research Inc., 2006). In other words, the organisations of the third sector are distinguished from those that are part of the government or public sector and those that are part of the for-profit or business sector. The third sector is also distinguished from the household or family sector, the latter being sometimes termed the 'fourth sector' (Lyons, 2001: 10). The third part of this book includes an examination of ways in which the activities of the third and fourth sectors can be strengthened.

STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES IN VARIOUS CONTEXTS

The final part of the book considers how the principles outlined in previous parts may be applied in different contexts. It looks not only at communities that are geographically defined (such as various rural or urban communities), but also at communities that are defined in other ways (such as on the basis of common interest or non-geographically defined networks). Many books on community development have assumed that community must be built primarily in defined localities. Underlying the discussion in this book is the assumption that while some forms of locational community will continue to be important, Australian society will not return to dependence on local communities as the sole, or even necessarily the primary, form of community.

Hence, a major challenge for contemporary societies is how to build community effectively in and through diverse forms of human relationships, social networks and organisational structures. Throughout the book, practical suggestions are made as to how the quality of various forms of community can be enhanced. The penultimate chapter includes an examination of ways in which electronic forms of communication can either detract from, or contribute positively to, the experience of community. That chapter also considers the challenges involved in strengthening a sense of global community – a particularly important issue in our present world.

The final chapter summarises the main conclusions of the book and explores their implications, including implications for governments and

businesses, as well as for individuals, families and households, and for community organisations and networks.

THE RESEARCH BASIS FOR THIS BOOK

The book has arisen in part from research conducted into community life through two major surveys. The first of these was the Australian Community Survey undertaken by the Edith Cowan University Centre for Social Research (located in Perth) and NCLS Research, a church-based research organisation in Sydney. Near the end of 1997 and early in 1998, printed questionnaires were sent to random samples of adult Australians whose names had been drawn from electoral rolls. A total of 8500 people completed the questionnaires, a response rate of about 50 per cent.

The second survey was also undertaken by the Edith Cowan University Centre for Social Research, along with the Australian Centre on Quality of Life (Deakin University) and Anglicare (Sydney). This survey is known as the Wellbeing and Security Survey. It was sent in 2002 to a random sample of Australians selected from electoral rolls. Approximately 1500 people completed the survey, a response rate of about 35 per cent.

Funding for both these surveys was received from the Australian Research Council, together with institutional support from the collaborating research partners.

The book draws also on work undertaken for the Australian Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS) between 1999 and 2002. One of the authors was part of a think-tank on social capital, convened by that Department. This think-tank met several times over a period of three years. Two of the authors were later involved in preparing a report for FaCS on the identification and analysis of indicators of community strength (Black & Hughes 2001).

Between 1998 and 2002, FaCS oversaw a pilot program of community building projects. The Department contributed $8.3 million for these projects in a program known as the Family and Community Networks Initiative (FCNI). Altogether, 80 projects were funded under this program. Departmental officers in each state were responsible for the administration of the program in their state. In 2002, two of the authors of this book were involved in a national evaluation of the FCNI.

As well as examining documentary material on all of the projects, the evaluators visited 20 projects and met with staff employed, and with volunteers and local people involved. The national evaluation report (Black et al. 2002) was published by FaCS. That Department has kindly given permission for material from both of the reports prepared for it to be used in this book.

Further, the local organisers of an FCNI project in a suburb of Melbourne invited one of the authors to make a detailed evaluation of their project. This involved a number of visits to the project, lengthy discussions with staff, with the Council and with other stakeholders, as well as formal interviews with many people in the community who had participated in activities associated with the project.

This book also draws on research undertaken by some of us into effective leadership in churches. Based on an extensive international database of around 10 000 church leaders from a wide range of denominations in Australia, New Zealand and England, this research has sought to identify key aspects of effective leadership that can move churches as local organisations into greater levels of connection with the communities they seek to serve. It has also explored in detail key factors in developing patterns of leadership that are sustainable for the long haul, that avoid the pitfalls and traps of emotional exhaustion and burnout.

Furthermore, at various points the book applies insights derived from studies undertaken by other writers, whether in Australia or elsewhere.

Beyond the research data underpinning this book, *Building Stronger Communities* draws on the authors' experiences over many years in a variety of settings – in academic and research settings, in direct involvement in community groups and social agencies, with those involved in shaping public policy, with welfare agencies, with churches, schools and voluntary associations. Across the research team involved in developing this book lie years of practical experience in a variety of settings, from public housing estates to middle-class suburban communities, from diverse inner-city areas to small rural communities. Although we cannot claim to have comprehensive experience of every conceivable type of community, there nevertheless exists a wide range of experience on which we have drawn.

OVERVIEW AND AUDIENCE

In summary, the overarching purpose of this book is to analyse what is involved in strengthening communities and how that might best be accomplished in contemporary society. Drawing on insights derived from various studies and from direct experience, it provides useful principles and pointers not only for community workers and designated community leaders, but also for ordinary citizens who wish to contribute to the vitality of the various communities of which they are a part. For this reason, it should be of interest to leaders and participants in a wide range of community groups and networks, as well as to business leaders and to public officials in local, state and national governments.

Each chapter includes a brief overview at the beginning and a set of questions for reflection at the end.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Many people have contributed to the learning processes involved in the writing of this book, especially the many members of communities who have kindly shared their insights and experiences. To all of these the authors express their gratitude.

COMMUNITIES AND BELONGING

PART 1

As was noted in the Introduction, the term 'community' has been used with a variety of meanings. In a much-quoted article on the subject, Hillery (1955) identified 94 definitions of community and found many inconsistencies and differences of emphasis between them. Nevertheless, most of the definitions referred to a collectivity of people engaged in social interaction in a geographically defined area and having goals or norms in common. Although there may be debate about the boundaries of a community, about the extent to which interaction occurs among all its members, and about the degree to which they have goals or norms in common, it is generally assumed that these characteristics are present to some degree in most *communities of locality*.

The term 'community' has also been applied to categories of people who relate to one another on the basis of similar interests or shared activities, or who have some form of identity in common, though not necessarily associated with the same locality. The shared interest or activity may be related to work, education, sport or entertainment, for example. The shared identity might be that of ethnic origin, occupation, disability, age, gender, sexual orientation, religion or some other characteristic. In so far as members of groupings such as these think of themselves as thereby forming communities, these collectivities may be termed *communities of interest*.

This book deals with both communities of locality and communities of interest. It is important to note that there may be varying degrees of agreement or disagreement as to what membership of a given community implies about people's identities, connections, beliefs, values or practices. The practices through which these understandings and interpretations are developed and expressed may include both co-operation and contestation, whether in formal or informal settings. Furthermore, community boundaries may be well or ill defined, and people may think of themselves as belonging to – or excluded from – a variety of communities of different types or different geographic scales (Cohen 1985).

Residents of small rural towns, for example, typically think of their town as a community. Most of their day-to-day activities take place there. For some purposes, however, members of that community may be linked to larger communities nearby. Thus they may do some of their shopping in the smaller centre but travel to the larger centre

for major items. Children may receive their primary schooling in the smaller centre but their secondary schooling in the larger centre. In other words, people may simultaneously be part of several communities defined at different geographical scales.

The same may be true in metropolitan areas, but in the latter case the boundaries of communities are generally less well defined and a person may reside in one community, work in a quite different community and spend leisure time in one or more other communities, some of these communities being defined more in terms of shared interests, activities or identity than geographical location.

With modern means of transportation and communication, some people in small rural towns or remote locations are also involved in significant communities that are defined primarily in terms of shared interests, activities or identity rather than geographical location. Aboriginal kinship networks are one example. Professional societies are another.

Nevertheless some people, whether in metropolitan or non-metropolitan locations, do not have a strong sense of belonging to any community, and some communities are sharply divided by religious, ethnic, socio-economic, gender, age or other differences. Building stronger communities, the subject of this book, involves enhancing the quality of relationships within and between communities.

The first part of the book takes an initial look at trends affecting the forms and the qualities of community life in contemporary Australia.

CHAPTER 1

THE FRAGMENTATION OF COMMUNITY

Communities of locality have been largely replaced by communities of interest or task. Most Australians interact with several distinct groups of people in different contexts and oriented around different tasks, within a typical day. Increased mobility, electronic forms of personal and mass communication, and increasing specialisation of occupation and interest and the plurality of cultures within an increasing urbanised environment have contributed to fragmentation. Fragmentation has also occurred in the ways families live and the fluidity of family relationships. Individualism is both a product of and contributor to the fragmentation of community.

Most Australians experience community in the context of many fragments. They meet a variety of groups of people each day. Many days, they move from one group and one context to another as they move from one task or activity to another.

As morning breaks across the houses, streets, suburbs and towns of Australia on a typical work day, the rush of getting ready for school or work begins. Unless they live alone, people may trip over one another on the way to the shower, to breakfast or to the mirror. Someone is bound to be running late. Conversations with those who matter to us are often rushed as last-minute organisation needs to be fitted in between plates of cereal or toast.

On their way to work, many have a child to drop off. Outside the primary school, for example, parents meet as they take their children to school. They recognise some of the other parents, and perhaps stop and share something of their concerns for the school or their struggles in parenting. Perhaps they know the names of some of the parents. In other cases, the parent is known by the child's name: Jane's mother or Peter's father.

The parents move on to the workplace: perhaps at an office or factory, perhaps back at home. Chances are there will be a variety of groups of people associated with work: colleagues, clients and service providers. It is here, in work, that many people find their strongest sense of community. Yet the situation can vary greatly, from large organisations with many people on flexitime and different shifts to more intimate workplaces where there is close co-operation between colleagues who know each other well. Increasing numbers of people are working at home. Their colleagues and clients may well be interstate or overseas. With electronic forms of communication – phone, fax and email – distance poses few problems for co-operation.

Some Australians use public transport to get to their place of work. They may recognise faces on the bus, train or tram, but rarely do people talk to each other. Many people are wired to their radio or personal music. Others are communicating on their mobile phones to family members, close friends or business colleagues. Many of the people on commuter transport are linked to others electronically. Physically, bodies may be touching each other in the tight context of peak-hour transport. But psychologically and communally, these commuters are miles apart.

Whatever the situation, most relationships with colleagues and clients stay in the work context. Forty per cent of respondents in the Australian Community Survey (1998) said that other people in their household knew only a few or none of the people with whom the respondent worked or studied. People really do not know much about the lives of their colleagues outside the workplace, except the gossip that is shared over morning tea – with those who happen to be there that day. They may never have met the partner, and even less likely the children, of work colleagues. Their home may be a long way away. One's own household partner, on his or her part, may well have their own

career, their own set of colleagues, their own networks to build and social ladders to climb.

After work it may be off to the gym. Everyone is working independently on their personal programs. Some of the faces may be familiar, but there is a constant flow of different people in and out. There is little time or opportunity for relationships.

At the weekend, involvement with a sporting club may provide a stronger sense of belonging and the team a sense of identity. Team members enjoy seeing each other. There is time for some brief conversations before the match begins. But again, few of these relationships spread into other spheres of life.

The same applies to other leisure activities: churches, clubs or involvement with neighbours. In each context there is a distinct group of people. Even the language changes from one group to another: the level of slang, the abbreviations, the technical terms. Indeed, it can be very difficult for a person outside of the context to understand what is being said within it. People may enjoy seeing each other. However, within the diversity of urban life, most people see little of each other outside the particular context that brings them together. To that extent, community remains fragmented.

Then there are those relationships maintained by telephone: friends from the days of school or university, extended family members, people with whom one organises the various activities of life, the people who help when the computer does not do what it is meant to do or who fix the plumbing. There are others one meets in the shops. The butcher may have been there for a long time, but every week there are different people checking out the groceries at the supermarket. They all smile warmly and ask how you are. But there is nothing but a passing whiff of community there.

The one person who is there almost every night, the one who gives the world a sense of stability in all its turmoil, is the anchor on the television news. There is something comforting about the familiar face and the stability of the voice. But this contribution to community exists in just one direction. The watcher knows the newsreader, but the newsreader does not know the watcher. The talkback radio host tries to make it a little more personal, to incorporate some two-way interactions.

There is some exchange of ideas, some passing of information. But there is no one on the radio who can give face-to-face care for the listener, or can know any more about the individual than the snippets that add up to entertainment for those who are listening.

FACES IN OUR STREET

Australian communities have been steadily fragmenting, and our sense of community has fragmented also. Since the end of World War II, and particularly since the 1970s, most local communities have been absorbed into a swirling galaxy of groups and activities of a great variety of kinds, a kaleidoscope of tiny fragments that together provide to us some level of community and belonging.

Fragmentation is often evident at street level. Most Australians do not know their neighbours, at least no more than to say 'Good day'. They may know a few faces, but often not the names, and certainly little of what goes on behind the walls of the house next door. Occasionally voices may reach a pitch that travels down the street; more often unwelcome sounds of music waft from one house across to another. They know someone is there (and disturbing them), but little of the details.

The Australian Community Survey (1998) found that around half of all people living in cities said they knew hardly any or none of their neighbours well enough to be aware of their personal concerns. In small rural towns, it was somewhat different: around a quarter said they did not know their neighbours well.

The street is quiet for most of the day. One might imagine that most people have gone to work or to study. But in fact many people are in their homes. Some have retired from work. Others are involved in shiftwork and are sleeping. Others are working, studying, or just relaxing at home. Side by side, individuals go about their business, each in their own brick box or wooden cabinet, largely unaware of each other's existence.

The man over the road used to feed the magpies. Nearly everyone living in that part of the street knew his face. But last week, he was no longer there. Someone noticed the doctor's car. Then another day, there was an ambulance outside. He did not come back. Most people living nearby never quite knew when he died.

Often there is little sense of community tied to locality, particularly in larger centres. The existence of neighbours does not mean that there is neighbourliness. It is not that people dislike each other. Mostly, they rarely see each other. There are rarely opportunities or time to talk, to discover names or to share experiences.

While immigration has brought great richness to Australian communities, it has meant that people may feel they have even less in common with the people who live in the same street. Different languages and cultures often increase distance and contribute to the decline in the sense of local community and belonging, while they may also bring diversity and richness of cultural life.

Our sense of community tends to be experienced more through the workplace and through interest and sporting groups. Here, much more than in the immediate residential location, people get to know each other and share some of their experiences, even if those relationships do not spread into the home or into other aspects of life.

For many people, community of locality has been largely replaced by community of interest or task. Whether through employment or volunteering, through occupation or hobby, the fragments of community life are experienced. Apart from within the family or household unit, it is in common interests or tasks, more than anywhere else, that people develop warm relationships and enjoy one another's company.

MANY FRAGMENTS

The authors have sometimes asked people to think through the various groups of people they meet in a day. Many will come up with a list of eight or ten different groups of people. In each context, there may be some recognition of the others in the group, perhaps even a weak sense of belonging. But really the people in those various groups know little or nothing of each other. There is little or no overlap between the various groups or activities. The language and the assumptions of each group are different. The tasks and activities that bring each group together are separate. While a glimpse of community may be experienced in each, there is nothing that holds these little fragments together, no community umbrella under which each fragment can shelter.

The Australian Community Survey (1998) asked respondents to think of the people with whom they had frequent social contact –

people they knew well at recreational activities, church, clubs or in their neighbourhood (not including family). Respondents were then asked: 'In your opinion, how many of these people know each other well?' In small rural towns with less than 2000 inhabitants, 50 per cent of respondents said that all or most of these people knew each other well. By contrast, in metropolitan areas, less than 20 per cent of respondents said likewise. One third of people living in the metropolitan areas said that few or hardly any of their social acquaintances knew each other.

CAUSES OF FRAGMENTATION

There are a great many complex and interrelated causes for this fragmentation. We look in turn at some of these.

Mobility

A major cause of community fragmentation has been increasing ease of mobility. Prior to the 1970s, it was unusual for a family to have more than one car. If one member of the family took the car to work, the remaining members of the family had limited mobility via public transport, walking, or perhaps a bicycle. Without a car, people were more dependent on the local shops and local community facilities.

Cars have enabled families to live across much larger areas: to work in one area and attend a sporting group in another, to worship in one location and to be involved in voluntary or interest groups elsewhere. Cars have enabled people to maintain closer ties with members of the family or friends living some distance away. There has been less need to find one's social life in the local neighbourhood.

In 1971, there were a total of 398 vehicles per 1000 people. This number included commercial vehicles, trucks, buses and motorcycles. In 2003, the number of vehicles had increased to 662 per 1000 people (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2004c). This represents a significant increase in ease of mobility.

Further, as women have found their way into the workplace, they are no longer so dependent on the local neighbourhood for making social connections. With another income in the family, they can afford a second car. The use of large regional shopping centres has become feasible and the local strip of shops has faded in importance.

Electronic forms of communication

Community arises from communication. Electronic means of communication have reshaped our lives. The telephone has made it possible to keep closer ties with people a long distance away. In the 1990s researchers from La Trobe University found that in the suburbs of Melbourne there was little discussion over the back fence, but many people were spending hours every day in phone calls to friends and family members.

The Internet and email have extended these patterns, making everyday contact with people overseas a real possibility. Many people use the Internet for keeping in touch with family members living some distance away. By changing communication patterns, they have changed the shape of relational life. Through these electronic forms of communication, people can communicate in a way that overcomes spatial separation. New possibilities have emerged for work or study from remote locations, of personal relationships with people one will seldom or never meet. Many have enjoyed the range of people they have found in the Internet chat room. Or they have appreciated the answers that have come flooding back from different parts of the globe in response to some technical questions.

In *The Internet Galaxy* Manuel Castells argues that many of the connections people have via email are with people they already know – family, friends and colleagues. These electronic forms of communication mainly strengthen existing social relationships, allowing them to adapt to distance (Delanty 2003: 176).

There are also downsides to the new capacity to communicate so readily. The communication can only be knowledge and information, encouragement and support, advice or reprimand. Most practical forms of support that can be offered through face-to-face contacts cannot be offered directly through the Internet. The person on the other end of the cable cannot transport one to hospital if one falls sick, or look after one's children while one pops out to the shops. Some argue that these virtual communities can only ever be superficial, and that there is a lack of real commitment to others expressed through them. Because of their disembodied nature, dependence on them may be indicative of a withdrawal from community (Wilson 2000).

The electronic nature of these communications means that people can enter into communication with others on an anonymous basis, or as a distinct persona that they have created. This creates greater capacity for deception or manipulation, possibly weakening morality in relationships. There may be communication, but little accountability or sense of belonging.

The mobile phone

Another form of communications technology which has become commonplace, especially among young people, is the mobile phone. The speed and enthusiasm with which the mobile phone has been adopted suggests that it is relating to people's needs and desires regarding communication. Even more than the Internet, the mobile phone creates community unaffected by locality and distance. People may be surrounded by others in a crowded public place, but a sense of community with friends is maintained via the mobile phone.

Yet some research has suggested that, except for its use in business, the mobile phone is creating strong links mainly with other family members or with some close friends. It may be that the mobile phone is contributing to very small, tight friendships, but is contributing little to the wider sense of community. There are times when the use of the mobile phone becomes a barrier to communication, a device that separates one from the people in one's physical locality, replacing them with the people in one's virtual world.

There are other people who use the mobile phone for business or for making arrangements. While these people may be communicating on their phones with a wider range of people, they are interacting with these people largely in relation to specific functions and for specific purposes. They may have no direct knowledge of the individuals to whom they are speaking, although they may know the organisation with which these people are associated.

The mobile phone allows us to deepen some social bonds. It allows us to participate in community in new ways freed from the constraints of our physical location. It can provide a sense of security through the ability to connect with people we know. But through taking us out of our dependence on our locality, it can contribute, in some ways, to fragmentation.

Television

Back in our homes television has also had its impact. Older forms of entertainment, such as playing card or board games or singing around the piano, have became less common as television has come to dominate our leisure time, becoming our primary form of entertainment. And it can all happen alone. There is no need for anyone else to be present to enjoy television – indeed others can be a distraction. In this way television has replaced some of the leisure time once spent with family members, neighbours or friends.

Because the television says little about what is happening locally, it has changed our perspectives on community life. Through news and current affairs programs, television focuses us on state, national and international events. Local gossip is replaced by national news. What is happening to a business in the neighbourhood pales in significance to movements on international stock exchanges. The struggle of a local person with a debilitating illness is replaced in our minds by the tornado lashing the southern coast of the United States.

Television has also focused our interest towards professional rather than amateur sport. Increasingly regional sporting teams carry our loyalty, pride and identity rather than more local ones.

Urbanisation and increasing specialisation

We often hear the expression 'We live in a global village.' Much as it might express the increased communication and interrelatedness of nations, the expression is fundamentally inaccurate. In fact we do not live in a global village but rather a global city. On a worldwide scale urbanisation is a major phenomenon of contemporary life, fuelled initially by the industrial revolution and maintained and accelerated by continuing revolutions in transport and technology. In 1900 only 14 per cent of the world's population lived in urban areas. The United Nations estimates that by 1950, this had risen to 29 per cent. By 2005, it was up to 49 per cent (United Nations 2006).

Despite our vast open spaces, Australia is one of the most urbanised countries in the world. According to the United Nations, 87.9 per cent of all Australians lived in urban areas in 2005. This was up from 76.2 per cent of Australians in 1950 (United Nations 2006). To take Sydney as an example, in 1850 about 27 per cent of the population of New

South Wales lived in Sydney. By 1900 the figure was 35 per cent, in 1970 it had risen to 60 per cent (Neutze 1977: 9). Such a pattern of increase is reflected in the other States and has continued to the present day. Between 1960 and 1980 the percentage of the Australian population living in cities of over 100 000 people increased from 60 per cent to 65 per cent. By 2004, it was up to 75 per cent (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006a: 117).

Urbanisation is a process affecting all facets of society, creating ever higher levels of social organisation, interconnectedness, dependence and complexity. Its effect extends into even the smallest of non-urban communities. Community is often on the basis of shared interest rather than geographical location; there is a high degree of social segregation yet an interdependence of economy and social functions controlled by powerful interests and elites.

A major reason for living in larger communities is the wider range of facilities and opportunities to cater for increasing levels of specialisation in both interests and occupations across our society. Greater variety of options in sport is an obvious example. No longer do football and cricket clubs fulfil our needs. Today there is much greater choice: innumerable water and snow sports, track sports and team sports, sports demanding highly specialised equipment and sports needing none. With this level of diversity, it would be impossible to build teams or develop appropriate facilities for most sports in every locality. Hence, specialisation in sport has increasingly taken people beyond the local community.

Specialisation has also occurred in many other areas of life. In highly specialised areas of work many find that their international colleagues are the people with whom they have most in common. Whether in medicine, architecture or construction, in music or theatre, people find a place to make their individual contribution in an often highly specialised area. Large cities and global communication systems help to make such high levels of specialisation possible. As a consequence our sense of community is often found among people widely spread – even across the globe.

Specialisation in retailing has been made possible by increased mobility and larger population centres. Today much shopping takes place in huge shopping malls, with departmental stores made up of many small and individual departments, and with a multitude of specialist

shops. Enterprises of all kinds, from those that provide photocopiers to those that cut lawns, are being organised on a grand scale. Hence, many of our everyday dealings are with specialists whom we do not know personally.

And in our country towns?

While the fragmentation of community is most evident in the big cities around Australia, it is also occurring in rural areas. Our research suggests that in small country towns people tend to know each other relatively well. There is a strong sense of belonging and of local community where people work together, solve problems together and celebrate together. But community life is changing here too. Increased mobility has meant that people are becoming more dependent on larger service towns. Government services such as health and aged care are more likely to be found in these larger towns. Many have to travel to the larger centres for banking, much of their shopping, and for specialists such as insurers, traders, and service providers.

Young people are more likely to have moved to larger cities for study or work. There is a continuing flow from more remote farming areas into larger centres and major cities. As the economy changes, and more farm income ends up in the hands of the city dwellers providing machinery, the trade links, insurance and loans, so fewer people can be supported in the rural areas. Farms that once supported large extended families struggle today to support a lone farmer.

Some people are moving into small rural towns, often people on pensions or with low incomes, possibly lone parent families, looking for cheap housing. While a few of these people may become active contributors to the local community, many do not. They do not share the heritage, culture or commitment to the locality of the long-term residents and the farming community. In some places there are tensions between the newcomers and the established families. They have different values and different ways of life. The established families are sometimes resentful of the ways the resources of their towns are being used by the newcomers whom they see as contributing little to the community.

Thus, even in rural Australia, through the increased diversity of people, the centring of services in larger towns and the changes in the nature of rural populations, people's sense of community is fragmenting.

Increased plurality

Along with specialisation has gone a pluralisation of cultures and ways of life accompanying the huge worldwide mobility of people. Certainly in the larger cities of Australia, where most Australians live, the people next door may well have been born in another country, may well speak another language at home, and may well eat very different sorts of food. Indeed, according to the 2001 Census, one person in every four living in Australia was born overseas and one person in five speaks a language other than English at home. Many other people have close links to other cultures and heritages. Almost half of all Australians are either first or second generation immigrants.

The multiculturalism of Australia is most evident in Melbourne and Sydney. Close to 30 per cent of everyone in Melbourne and Sydney was born overseas and a similar proportion speak a language other than English. There are communities of more than 100 000 of Chinese speaking people and Arabic speaking people in Sydney as well as large communities of Croatians, Greeks, Hindi speakers, Italians, Koreans, Filipinos or Vietnamese. In Melbourne there are higher proportions of European people, with communities of more than 100 000 of Greek and Italian speaking people. There are other large communities of people who speak Arabic, Croatian, Macedonian, Maltese, Spanish, Turkish and Vietnamese.

This plurality of cultures in Australia has developed through wave after wave of immigration since World War II. The first waves brought immigrants from many of the countries of Europe. In the late 1960s, immigrants started arriving in large numbers from Lebanon and Turkey. In the 1970s, they came from Vietnam and then from many other places in Asia. From the late 1980s, many business people, professionals and academics have come from India, Hong Kong and other parts of China, as well as other places around the world. Refugees have continued to arrive from Iran and Iraq, from Albania and Macedonia, from Afghanistan and Sudan.

Immigration has contributed greatly to the richness of Australian communities. But it has also contributed to some fragmentation. Due to the diversity of languages, people cannot always communicate readily with many of the people in the local area. Australians old and new are sometimes suspicious of each other's values. They know there

are cultural and religious differences. They suspect that they think in different ways, that they hold to different values.

People tend to connect with those most like themselves. There are many ethnic community centres and many religious organisations serve people of specific linguistic groups. The plurality of Australian cities poses significant challenges for communities that cross the boundaries of language and culture.

And in our homes

Fragmentation of our lives and relationships has occurred at all levels. It has even occurred within our homes and families.

Patterns of car ownership and mobility are associated partly with changing patterns of family life. In the 1950s, comparatively few married women were involved in the workforce. Indeed, immediately after World War II, only 8 per cent of married women were employed. The change began in the 1960s. By 1966, 26 per cent of married women were employed, and by 1973 it was 42 per cent. As women moved into the workforce, they tended to curtail their involvement in local community life.

In the 1950s, many married women had no access to a car during the day. For much of their time they were confined to their local communities. Many found their social life there. Churches were one of the places they gathered not just to enjoy the opportunity to share their lives with others, but to work on auxiliaries, to contribute to public facilities such as hospitals and opportunity shops. There remain many little remnants of these communities in the cities and towns across Australia, but few young people have strongly identified with them.

With the wife working as well as the husband, the family could afford the second car. Regional shopping became a possibility. The higher the number of cars per family, the easier it has been for each member of the family to do their own thing and to go their separate ways. As a consequence, less time is spent in joint activity.

Other gadgets in the home have contributed to making life easier for busy households, but have also contributed to fragmentation at the family level. For example, microwave ovens and packaged food have made it easier for the members of the household to eat at their own times, often independently of one another.

Household size

Household size has decreased throughout the 20th century. In 1911, there were 4.6 persons per household. By 1992 it was 2.7 persons, and continuing to decrease (De Vaus & Wolcott 1997: 5). More people are living alone today than has been the case for many years, possibly more than at any other time in Australian history. According to the 1991 Census, 1.2 million Australians lived alone at that time. In 2001, the number living alone had risen to 1.7 million. In a decade, the proportion of Australians living alone has risen from 7.8 per cent to 10 per cent of the population.

Some of those living alone are older people who have lost their spouses through death. Indeed, of those people 75 years and older, 38 per cent were living alone, according to the 2001 Census. Others are middle aged, often divorced or separated from one spouse, perhaps from several. Others are younger but separated from partners who shared their lives for a while but who have now gone their separate ways. Others have never had a long-term partner … perhaps just a few temporary liaisons. In 2001, of all people between 25 and 34 years of age, 8.5 per cent were living alone.

Family size dropped significantly in the early 1960s with the arrival of the contraceptive pill. In 1961 the fertility rate – the number of babies the average woman would have in her lifetime – was 3.55. It declined to a low of 1.84 in 1989, rising only slightly since then. Only 2 per cent of Australians want to have four or more children (De Vaus & Wolcott 1997: 47–49).

Thus today there are fewer large families than in the past. For one thing it is too expensive. Few feel they can really support two children and a spouse on one income, paying a mortgage, the loan on the car, the school fees, and all the other bills that regularly arrive. Most households need two incomes … and not too many children.

Not only has the number of children decreased, so has the number of parents per household. The average is no longer just under two. The number of Australians living in lone parent families – one parent plus children – rose from 1.4 million in 1991 to 1.9 million in 2001. In 1982, 10.7 per cent of all families were lone parent families. In 2001, the proportion had risen to 15.4 per cent of all families.

A hint of the financial problems for lone parent families is apparent in the 2001 Census: 42 per cent of lone parent families had a family income of less than $500 per week. Just 7 per cent of couple families with children had incomes as low as that. Lone parents find it particularly difficult to make ends meet. Yet the number of lone parents continues to increase.

A major change in Australian society over the last few decades has been the increasing levels of marital break-up. Increasingly, expectations in society have shifted from the expectation of a lifelong partnership towards more of a notion of serial partnerships, often with substantial periods of living alone without a partner in between. Statistics tell the story. Given the longer life experience, we would expect older people to have had a greater number of partners than younger people. However, the Wellbeing and Security Survey (2002) asked people how many spouses or de facto partners people had had in their lifetime. It found that:

- 3.4% of people 70 years or more had had three or more partners, compared with
- 5.7% of people 60 to 69
- 8.8% of people 50 to 59
- 10.4% of people 40 to 49
- 9.1% of people 30 to 39, and
- 6.6% of people 18 to 29.

Underneath these changes lie the realities of increasing pressure on partnerships coming from changes in the structure of our society. Increasingly, to buy that dream home, two incomes are required, adding additional pressure to the stresses of rearing young children and attaining economic stability.

Research by the Australian Institute of Family Studies among people who have been divorced suggests that those not in the workforce (possibly due to the demands of caring for children) are less likely to find new partners. As researcher Jody Hughes (2000: 20) writes: 'Men and women who are unemployed … may be socially as well as economically marginalised, with fewer opportunities to meet people and establish relationships.'

Most large families today are blended families, where two people bring together children from previous marriages while, at the same

time, sharing those children with former partners. There may be six for dinner one night … and two the next. Families have fragmented, and many children experience a fragment of family life one night and a different fragment in a second home another night.

For many, the traditional nuclear family is no longer a reality. For some ethnic groups, people live in wider kinship networks, experiencing both the support and the restrictions of such extended families. Among other groups in Australian society, single parent families are becoming increasingly common. In the vast majority of cases, the mother provides most of the care for the children. Male adults are less rigidly tied into the family network. The result can be, for some children, the lack of an adequate male role model or father figure. If there has been violence from a male in the past, then it can be a very negative image indeed.

In other places, many teenagers and street kids know that they have no worthwhile home to which they can return. Relationships with parents or the single parent have broken down. There is no mediating community that can share some of the pressures of family life. There is no extended family that can take some responsibility for a difficult situation. Too frequently people, both young and old, find themselves isolated, faced with the prospect of making their own lives, but with few resources to help them do it.

Individualism

In addition to the changes that have occurred in the structures of society, there have been changes in our ethos. There has been a rise in individualism – a way of thinking about the world that starts with the individual and focuses primarily on the individual's needs and desires. Such individualism has been encouraged by some of the changes noted above.

The sociologist Peter Berger and his colleagues (1974: 173) have suggested that the size of families has also made a difference to child-rearing practices. With the decrease in infant mortality rates and the availability of reliable contraceptive methods, families in the Western world have decreased in size. In a two-child family, which has become the norm, it is possible to consider the interests of each child in a way that is not possible in a large family with four or five children. Hence, decisions in the small family tend to focus around the interests of the

individual child. In a large family, decisions tend to focus on what is best for the family as a whole – on the wellbeing of the social group, rather than the individual.

Such a focus on the individual is not necessarily 'bad'; nor does it necessarily imply self-centredness, as individuals may well be asking how best they can help others. Nevertheless, in thinking about options, the starting point is the individual. Interviews with 200 young people in Victoria in 2004 reinforced how individualistic young people are in their thinking. Their focus is on how they will manage their lives as individuals. Their individualism is not necessarily selfish. They are interested in how they, as individuals, can form relationships with others. Indeed, for most young people, the most important aspect of life was friendship (Bond 2004: 4).

Friendship was something they deliberately pursued. They did not see themselves as born into a pre-existing community to which they had some responsibility. Rather, they had to create the community or communities in which they would find the fulfilment of relationships.

The contrast with some of the young people who were recent immigrants was stark. Many of the young immigrants took for granted that they were part of an ethnic community that provided them with direction as well as defining their social lives. At the heart of the community was, in many cases, an extended family of uncles and aunts, cousins and grandparents to whom there was a certain level of obligation. Religious practices helped to bind together the community. 'Right' and 'wrong' were defined by the community, rather than being worked out by the individual. The primary responsibilities of social life were given by one's birth in the community rather than constructed through contracted relationships.

The individualistic ethos widespread among Australians reinforces the fragmentation of community life that is typical of Australian cities. In an age of high levels of specialisation, not only of work but also of leisure activities, most people move from one 'interest' group to another, each group having its own concerns and tasks, and rarely stray beyond to a more holistic concern for the people who co-operate within the group. As discussed earlier, high levels of mobility and the widespread use of electronic communications have contributed to the fragmentation.

Even within households, there has been an increase in the individualistic way that people live. Everyone has their own space. People often eat at their own times and watch television in their own rooms. They follow their individual pursuits and follow their own regimes of time and activity. With high levels of divorce and family break-up, household sizes are smaller with increasing numbers of people living alone. Other households grapple with constantly changing compositions from the 'blends' of previous families.

This ethos of individualism is part of the reality that must be taken into account in building community in Australia. It is rooted in the nature of child-rearing, reinforced by the patterns of education which encourage individual analysis and creativity, and expressed through the patterns of household and city. It will not be easily changed. Neither will the fragmentation that is associated with the specialisation of occupation and leisure activity of urban living, with the plurality of multiculturalism and with a world dominated by high mobility and widespread use of electronic communications. We do not expect to change these aspects of the Australian scene. Rather, the challenge is to find ways of building stronger communities within such a context.

Questions for reflection

1   Do you personally experience community life in a fragmented way? What are some of the distinct groups of people with whom you interact from day to day? What is the level of overlap between those groups?

2   Mobile phones have made communication possible wherever we are. In what ways do you think they may contribute to the fragmentation of community and in what ways have they enhanced community?

3   Give some examples of areas of life, both in terms of leisure pursuits and occupations, in which there has been increasing specialisation. Explain how such specialisation has contributed to the fragmentation of community.

4   In your experience, has there been much of a change in the nature of family relationships compared with the ways they were experienced by your parents' generation? What are some of the differences? Have they contributed to a general experience of the fragmentation of community?

CHAPTER 2

GETTING THE BALANCES RIGHT

Most people want a balance between the diversity and freedom offered by large cities and the security of relationships in which people know and trust each other. The importance of that security becomes evident when people experience hardship and run out of personal resources. Communities of interest have an inherent attractiveness in that they bring people with similar interests together. However, for the sake of the functioning of the wider society, it is important to build ties across social divides of ethnicity, religion, education, culture, class and taste.

Australians deeply value friendship and relationships in their own right. These are some of the most worthwhile experiences in life. The Australian Community Survey presented more than 6200 Australians with a list of 22 values and asked them to rate each as principles for guiding their lives. The most strongly affirmed value was '*a world at peace*', underlining the importance for many of security. A close second was '*honesty*', reflecting the desire for connections with people in which there is trust and communication on which people could rely. The third most affirmed value was '*true friendship*'. Australians desire a community in which there is peace, honesty and friendship more than anything else (Hughes et al. 2003).

But do such relationships need to be developed within local communities? There are many who would argue that an end product of the processes of fragmentation is the eventual disappearance of the local community as a definable unit. They suggest that people will develop fulfilling relationships within communities of interest. The

influence for some of this work has been the writings of people such as Ferdinand Tönnies (1887, 2002) and Louis Wirth (1938). Tönnies, a German sociologist, described two ways in which people could be bound together. The first, which he described as '*Gemeinschaft*', was characterised by warm and enduring relationships encompassing all of life – work, family, religion and culture. Neighbourhood was the basis of their union. On the other hand, he used the word '*Gesellschaft*' to refer to large-scale, impersonal and contractual ties. Such relationships are not necessarily locally based. Wirth suggested that urban life involved a shift in emphasis away from primary relationships towards a range of secondary relationships.

Other writers have taken up these themes. Alvin Toffler (1970: 75), for instance, commented that 'never before have people's relationships with place been more numerous, fragile and temporary ... we are witnessing a historic decline in the significance of place to human life'.

Others have argued that local communities have a continuing role. Robert Park and Ernest Burgess (1921, 1925) maintained that urbanisation creates a range of different social contexts and forms of social networks within the larger urban area. For these writers, the local community maintains its importance though taking different forms in different places. Foley (1952) saw city life as a balance between 'vestigial' local community patterns and an array of metropolitan-level relationships. Replicating Foley's work in the 1970s, Hunter (1975) found little decline in levels of local interaction or sense of community, though he did note a decline in use by residents of local shopping, entertainment and other facilities.

Even in large urban areas there can remain 'urban villages' where residents have strong local ties and identity (Gans, 1962). In some places, ethnic ties may contribute to such communities, though they can also develop in some traditional blue-collar industry-focused communities as well as among residents of public housing.

Nevertheless, modern social processes are refashioning how we create community and experiences of belonging. 'Community' and 'belonging' are now things each individual has to create. People are no longer born into a community that necessarily acknowledges and cares for them. Indeed, some are not even born into a family where there is stability of commitment. In a world of fragmented communities,

individuals must find their own fragments, make their own connections, develop their own supportive networks.

At one level, connections have never been easier. Phone, email, SMS, radio and television keep people in touch wherever they are. Yet, in other ways these means of communication can narrow the range of communication, leaving little room for the stranger. They can cut out a person with whom we share physical space in favour of someone in our 'virtual community'.

DO LOCAL NEIGHBOURHOODS MATTER?

If people choose to seek community and belonging via communities of interest rather than in local neighbourhoods, does it really matter? Should we not have the choice as to whether to spend time with our neighbours or alone? Who would give up the diversity of goods in the large regional shopping centre for the sake of meeting a few people they know in the local strip of shops? Would we be willing to turn our backs on the range of opportunities provided by other types of community in work, sport, hobbies or arts?

Indeed, many enjoy the fragmentation of community life. They enjoy its diversity, its challenges, the pleasures of constantly meeting new people in different contexts, of experiencing different ways of life, of exploring new ideas and activities. Most people would not want to give up their involvement in these forms of community for the sake of forming local alliances.

There are many advantages of not living too closely to a neighbour, of not having all one's activities shared as neighbourhood gossip. Acquaintances bring few burdens by way of obligations. In contrast, neighbours can sometimes create very substantial burdens. The fragmentation of community contributes to the sense of freedom, to being oneself, to doing one's own thing.

Yet many hanker for the security of a close-knit local community in which to live and bring up children. Advertising of new housing developments demonstrates well this desire. Whatever the realities, many seek to market their developments as ideal communities with great neighbours and neighbourliness. They advertise shared spaces as well as the features of the privacy of the home.

While people may be wary of each other, wary of what obligations

might evolve, there is also a desire for connection. Most people enjoy the company of others. The attraction of a community in which there is space that is shared, where people can make connections with each other, is clear. The idea of being with people who hold similar values and ideals, who share the desire for an enjoyable and relaxed communal atmosphere is attractive to many.

Zygmunt Bauman (2001), a social theorist who has written extensively on contemporary community life, has suggested that people have always lived across a substantial tension. Although they want security in relationships, they also want freedom to do their own thing and enjoy life their own way. They want to be known, but also to have times when they can be anonymous. Security without freedom is slavery, says Bauman (2001: 20), but freedom without security is equivalent to being abandoned.

DO WE HAVE THE BALANCE RIGHT?

While the freedom to explore widely is understandable, one wonders whether contemporary Australia has got the balance right. In the Western world, fragmentation is becoming increasingly problematic and there has been a swing away from an emphasis on freedom towards an emphasis on security. Social theorists such as Robert Putnam have noted that in the United States there has been a general decline in trust of others and confidence in social institutions. Similar patterns are evident in Australia. In 1983, 46 per cent of Australians felt they could trust most Australians. By 1995 the proportion willing to trust was down to 39 per cent (Hughes et al. 1998/1999: 6).

As trust falls, people become more wary of each other. They become more wary in their business dealings, afraid that the other person will somehow cheat them. Each step of the transaction then involves careful checking and rechecking. The fine print will take longer to read and even longer to digest. As Fukuyama (1995) has pointed out, distrust is bad for business. Economically, it adds costs to every transaction without contributing anything of value.

At some point, this distrust affects both physical and psychological health. It contributes to increased levels of stress in people's lives. People's sense of freedom diminishes as they begin to feel afraid.

Such trends are showing up in our research data. The Wellbeing

and Security Survey conducted in 2002 by Edith Cowan University, Deakin University and Anglicare (Sydney) among a national sample of 1500 Australians found that security issues impact significantly on behaviour. Because of fear of crime, around 40 per cent of the adult population sometimes avoid public transport, 50 per cent sometimes avoid going out at night, 52 per cent sometimes avoid parks or public spaces and 65 per cent sometimes avoid travelling to certain places.

The survey showed that these fears are closely connected with low levels of trust in other people. Compared to others, people who lack such trust also tend to have lower levels of satisfaction with Australian life and with their own personal lives. While it is not clear from these results what is cause and what is effect, it is evident that satisfaction with life is significantly related to one's sense of safety and security.

IT'S FINE WHILE THINGS ARE GOING WELL …

Being disconnected from other people is fine when life is going well, when people are healthy and have plenty of their own resources. At such times people can afford to be self-sufficient and independent. But when crises occur, being alone can become a problem. When one's own personal resources give out, one needs somewhere to turn. On such occasions it is good to have connections with other people on whom one can rely, with people who are willing to provide support when things get difficult.

In contemporary society, people must find their own connections and supportive networks. Some are able to do this with ease. Others find it very difficult. Commentators such as Jim Ife (1995: 92) have pointed out that many people fall through the cracks of our fragmented community life. In the galaxy of interest groups and fragmented communities, many fail to find a place. There is no one with whom they have long-term connections, no one who cares intimately for them. There is some evidence that there is a social 'underclass' consisting of people who miss out on supportive community and relationships. These people find themselves without personal supports, and without a range of acquaintances on whom they can call. They often also have little ability to access the services of organisations.

In some cases personality may be a decisive factor. Some people do

not make friends easily. Some people have little self-confidence when it comes to developing relationships. In other instances, it seems that social circumstances have conspired to exclude people from society. The Wellbeing and Security Survey (2002) found that people with low incomes and renting public housing, people with low levels of formal education, and people whose health was not so good, tended to have correspondingly lower levels of confidence that they would be able to find help if they needed it. The survey found that people who described their work as casual or who were self-employed were also more likely than others to say that they had no one to give them emotional support and encouragement.

COMPOUNDED DIFFICULTY

The housing market in Australia separates people according to what they can afford. In this process, people are segregated into different kinds of communities and different groupings. Those with few means have no choice but to move to places where housing is cheaper. In this way people without means and under a wide range of social pressures tend to be clumped together.

Public housing areas, for example, 'gather' groups of such people. Areas where housing is cheap, where there is little employment, or where employment is mainly casual, tend to attract people with few sources of emotional or material support. The pressure on intimate relationships is therefore further increased. People under pressures of personal survival also have lower levels of involvement in community life. They have little confidence that they can give something to the community. Geographical concentrations of such people often mean that few people in such areas are able to take initiative and there are fewer opportunities for social and civic involvement.

Some of the recent programs to strengthen community life have been developed in such places. Community workers have been placed in such communities to empower people, to raise their levels of confidence, to help people develop supportive relationships and to take action to respond to their challenges. Nevertheless the persistence of serious personal and community issues in such locations highlights the

difficulties of effective intervention.

Often one problem builds on another. Low levels of income mean fewer opportunities to be involved socially with other people and to build relationships. People who leave the workplace through retrenchment or retirement often miss deeply the relationships that the workplace provided. People with low levels of education generally have low levels of income and are more likely than others to find themselves unemployed. Consequently they also miss out on many forms of social interaction that work and money can provide.

The fluidity of family relationships is increasing the size of the 'holes' through which people fall. Our research suggests that, as partnering and family relationships become less stable, many people find themselves without strong relationships and ongoing emotional and material support.

The transitory nature of many forms of employment due to the casualisation of work also has an impact. Again, it increases the chance that people will find themselves without relationships on which they can rely as a first port of call when crises occur and which will provide emotional support and encouragement. The Wellbeing and Security Survey (2002) found that 15 per cent of those who had casual work had no one to whom they could turn for personal support compared with 8 per cent of those people in part-time work.

One of the significant factors explored in the 2002 Wellbeing and Security Survey was mental health. Many people who had experienced a deterioration in mental health had also experienced a range of other problems. They had lost some of their social relationships and many had experienced a decline in relationships with partners and other family members. Some had found that they were unable to hold down a job. Financial issues had increased for them and they had no money for immediate bills. Often these people had experienced physical as well as mental health problems. The extent of this compounding of problems is illustrated in table 2.1.

Table 2.1 Problems experienced in the 12 months prior to the survey

Problem	Percentage of those who have experienced mental health problems	Percentage of those who have not experienced mental health problems
Crime against person, close family or property	21	9
Decline in relationship with spouse or partner	24	9
Decline in relationships with children, parents or other close family	25	8
Became unemployed or job became less secure	26	12
Serious physical health or disability problems	30	7
Insufficient money for urgent bills	33	12
Serious decline in financial situation	41	12

SOURCE *Wellbeing and Security Survey (2002)*

People experiencing long-term mental health problems are among the most vulnerable in the world of fragmented community life. It can be very difficult for them to find a place where they are accepted, and even more difficult for them to retain long-term supportive relationships.

In close-knit communities of locality, the person who is different, or who is differently abled in relation to physical or mental capacity, is not easily ignored. People meet them in their daily activities, and usually find some place for them in the community, albeit on the fringe. By contrast, in communities of interest, it is easy to exclude those who do not fit too well, the people who are a drain on the resources of others.

DIVERSITY IN COMMUNITIES

One of the consequences of the dominance of communities of interest is that people tend to mix mostly with people like themselves. Communities of interest, by their very nature, have a degree of homogeneity in the interest that creates them. Many communities of interest are homogenous in other ways: in age group and level of education, in philosophy of life and worldview. The community of interest, as such, does not need to connect with the people who are different in language and ethnicity, in religion or belief, or even in age or taste.

Fragmentation means that most people are part of a range of social groups and activities. Yet, it may still be that there are 'groups of fragments' separated from and suspicious of other groups. People may have little to do with each other socially across the boundaries of ethnicity, religion or education, or across lines of culture, class or taste.

Similar problems can occur in locality-based communities. One community may develop its own wellbeing without concern for neighbouring communities or even at their expense. Deepa Narayan (1999), a researcher with the World Bank, argues that communities may be rich in social capital within a social group and yet experience debilitating poverty, corruption and conflict through their lack of ties with neighbouring groups or communities. She argues that all social groups have social capital, but one social group can sometimes develop its social capital by excluding other social groups. A group or network may develop ways of reinforcing forms of social exclusion, to such an extent that it becomes the base for corruption and assertion of power.

In many instances, one community does not have the opportunity to build links with others because of an imbalance in power, position or prestige. A group of recent immigrants, for example, may have close bonds with each other but find it hard to make connections with the wider community in which they find themselves. Language may be a barrier. So also may be the lack of financial resources, determining where they live and how they live. Hence, ghettos form of particular groups, largely isolated from the wider community. The lack of social capital in terms of relationships with the wider community can lead to many problems. In many places, it has led to racial tensions and conflicts, for instance.

Similar problems of lack of opportunity to build relationships with the wider community may occur for specific subgroups within communities such as among people with disabilities. Individuals or small groups may become isolated. With the isolation comes resentment.

Some of the problems experienced in Aboriginal communities reflect their sense of powerlessness and the lack of effective communication with the wider Australian society. As Trudgen (2000) has pointed out, there is much misunderstanding between Aboriginal communities and the wider community. Neither understands well the other's language or worldview. Aboriginal communities have to live within the wider

Australian society in relation to government and law, medicine and education. Their traditional forms of medicine, education, law and economy are largely ineffective in the contemporary world, even in the more isolated communities. Yet, there is a lack of effective relationships that enable them to find a recognised and respected place within our nation.

The building of social capital must involve the building of relationships across the divisions of language and worldview, across ethnicity and interest. It must address the issues of inequality of power and position.

Narayan (1999) suggests that two features are necessary in order to prevent social capital becoming the basis of exclusion and to develop strong communities that enhance rather than diminish the wellbeing of other communities:

1   The development of constructive ties between communities enables them to share at least some of their resources and prevents enclaves of power or powerlessness from developing. A variety of ties can help connect people to information, resources and opportunities beyond their own community whether it be a community of locality or of interest. These ties can enable people to get to know others who are different, diminishing the chance that social differences will grow into debilitating social rifts.
2   Appropriate laws and regulations that regulate the environment in which communities exist may make a significant difference to social capital. Recognition of citizens' rights and freedom to associate helps to create the social norms that influence the nature of social organisations. Effectively functioning states which maintain order while encouraging both tolerance of diversity and compromise in conflict, and which have low levels of corruption and high levels of efficiency, contribute strongly to overall levels of trust and to the development of social capital.

The first principle is also important in relation to the homogeneity that can emerge in communities of interest. Somehow, the homogeneity needs to be balanced by other forms of community which provide greater diversity, or communities of interest need to develop their own variety of ties to ensure that 'debilitating social rifts' do not emerge. For the long-term wellbeing of individuals, communities and societies, there is a need for multiple ties that transcend the boundaries of race, age, gender, social class, religion and interest.

THE BALANCE IN COMMUNITY LIFE

Communities can be strengthened as ways are provided for people to come together, to find their common interests and develop ways of co-operating. However, the bigger picture involves addressing some issues of balance. It may well mean finding the appropriate balance between communities of locality and communities of interest, a topic to which we will return in the final section of the book. It means respecting people's desire for autonomy and freedom, and yet finding ways of offering community and security.

Somehow, building community will mean finding ways to incorporate and care for those who find it hard to build relationships. It will involve paying attention to the needs and the wellbeing of the most vulnerable in society, including those with different physical and mental capacities. It will also mean developing positive relationships between the homogenous groups that naturally emerge. Strengthening community will involve a process whereby groups that are different in generation, in education or in social class learn to appreciate each other. It will mean fostering mutual understanding between people who are different in ethnicity and language, in religion and philosophy of life.

Questions for reflection

1   What do you see as being the advantages and disadvantages of the types of relationships Tönnies refers to as *'Gemeinschaft'* and *'Gesellschaft'?*

2   How does a city offer freedom and a local community contribute to a sense of security?

3   While communities of interest have an inherent attraction in that they involve people with similar interests, backgrounds or passions, what are some of the disadvantages of communities of interest for the wider society?

4   What are some of the significant social differences dividing people in your own local area? Are there ways in which ties that cross these divisions are formed?

STRENGTHENING RELATIONSHIPS

PART 2

Three kinds of relationships are found at the heart of community. To start with we can distinguish between two key forms of personal relationships. Firstly, there are family ties or close friendships, sometimes referred to as social *bonds*. Mutual support is often primarily located in such relationships. These relationships can be described as 'thick ties' in that they tend not to be limited to one particular task or circumstance. Correspondingly, the expectations in these relationships are generally broad. Most people expect their close friends and family to provide support both emotionally and practically whatever the issues of life.

Less intense relationships – sometimes called social *bridges* – are also important elements of communities, for they potentially provide access to a wider range of resources and social opportunities than any family or small group of friends can provide. In getting a small business off the ground, for example, the support of family and close friends may be very important, providing emotional and some practical help. However, to extend a business, a much wider range of acquaintances is generally needed, and the lack of them may keep a business very small or even lead to its demise (Narayan, 1999).

In Western societies people often have a great variety of bridging relationships. Via the many fragments of daily community life, we connect with a wide range of people. These relationships are often described as 'thin ties' because they tend to exist only within one fragment or a few fragments of our lives. There are few people with whom we have thick ties, but lots of people with whom we have thin ties. Both types of relationships are important.

To these two types of relationships, a third should be added. *Linkages* are the connections that individuals have with organisations, or that organisations have with each other. These are also very important in contemporary society as so much of what happens revolves around the connections we have with the organisations that provide employment and various goods and services. We need to understand and have some confidence in the organisations that provide the banking, communication, power and other services on which so much of our life depends. Such linkages are also important in terms of accessing the educational, health and welfare systems of our society.

The next three chapters explore these different types of relationships and their importance in building strong and resilient communities. As

we shall see, all three types of relationships contribute to the strength of the social fabric and are important for individual and social wellbeing. There are many in contemporary Australian society who fail to build resilient and healthy relationships in one or more of these areas.

Quality is as important as the quantity of these relationships. Trust has been singled out as a key element in relationships, but trust needs to be matched by trustworthiness. Treating others as you would wish to be treated by them is likewise important. People will be more likely to trust one another if they feel that the other person is genuinely interested in their wellbeing and will act accordingly. Trust will not be placed in people who are self-centred and who are only interested in achieving their own ends.

These qualities are also applicable in relation to organisations. People have confidence in those organisations which they see as genuinely seeking the wellbeing of employees and the public at large, not simply the organisation's owners or managers.

Social capital literature tends to focus mainly on positive relationships. It is often assumed that social capital is always a good thing. On the other hand, it is sometimes pointed out that people may form strong associations with others for evil ends – for destructive or criminal objectives. Thus, there can be a dark side to some forms of social capital. Furthermore, in families, sometimes people distrust each other so deeply that they avoid each other whenever possible. Among people who know each other within a community, there can be enemies as well as friends. Dealing with these negative relationships may be as important in some contexts as dealing with the lack of relationships.

CHAPTER 3

BONDS

Strong communities begin with strong bonds in the form of close friendships and family relationships. Such relationships have great significance for life satisfaction and are usually the first point for the provision of personal assistance in dealing with crises and maintaining personal wellbeing. Approximately one in twelve adult Australians say they do not have anyone to whom they can definitely turn for emotional and practical support in their daily lives. At the heart of healthy bond relationships are trust, trustworthiness and goodwill. Strengthening community involves encouraging strong social bonds in which people can rely on each other for ongoing support. Various forms of education, counselling and family-oriented activity can contribute to the enhancement of social bonds.

THE NATURE OF BONDS

When asked in social surveys about what is most important in their lives, most Australians point to their families. The Australian Community Survey (1998) asked what sphere was most important to people. Choosing between family, work, leisure, religion and other aspects, more than 80 per cent opted for family life. Australians most readily make sacrifices for their families.

In studies of the satisfaction people have with their lives, eight components are generally seen as contributing to the overall level of satisfaction. These eight components are:

- standard of living
- achievements in life
- relationships with spouse or partner
- other personal relationships
- health
- safety
- feeling part of a community
- future security.

The Wellbeing and Security Survey (2002) showed what other surveys before it have also revealed, that our close personal friendships and relationship with spouse or partner have great significance for our overall sense of life satisfaction. Our standard of living is also important, contributing directly to both individual and family wellbeing.

Breakdown in close relationships inevitably brings great hurt and pain. The Wellbeing and Security Survey showed that those people who were divorced or separated (and had not repartnered) were much less happy with life than were those who were living with a spouse or partner. The closer the relationship the greater the emotional hurt when it breaks down. For some people the possibility of hurt is too much to risk, and they avoid intimacy in relationships.

The motivation in bond relationships is complex, involving the long-term building of trust, dependability and stability. People do not generally form bond relationships instantaneously; rather they build them gradually over time. Little by little, people take the risk of trusting others and, as they find their trust vindicated, are able to trust more.

It is in the context of bond relationships that intimacy is experienced, not just sexual intimacy but the intimacy of sharing life experiences, ideas, opinions and feelings. Emotional intimacy is experienced when people feel they can share their most significant experiences, the highs and lows of life.

We generally do not need huge numbers of intimate relationships. 'More' in terms of bond relationships is not necessarily 'better'. Indeed, it is physically and emotionally impossible to maintain high levels of intimacy with a large number of people. Rather, it is important to have a few relationships that can be depended on to provide necessary material and emotional support. Most people primarily find such relationships in

their families – in ties formed through marriage or partnership and, in many cases, through the procreation of children. Family relationships between parents and children and among siblings may be significant social bonds at various stages of life. Sometimes relationships in the wider kinship network also provide high levels of personal support.

In the Wellbeing and Security Survey, people were asked whether they had someone with whom they were able to be completely honest, who encouraged, supported and was concerned for them in their daily lives. Approximately one in twelve Australians did not feel that they currently had such a person in their lives. About one in five Australians had just one such person. On the other hand, nearly a quarter of the sample had two such people, and about half the sample had three or more people who provided that level of support. It should be noted that the question did not ask whether these people were members of their family. Sometimes they would be close friends rather than family members.

The existence of someone who provided a high level of personal support related significantly to people's self-reported levels of satisfaction with life. Scoring satisfaction with life as a whole between 0 and 10, those who said they did not have anyone to provide daily support had a mean level of life satisfaction of 6.0. For those with one or two people, it was 7.0. And for those with three or more people who provided support, the level of life satisfaction was 7.7. Thus, those who had more support in daily life felt happier about life as a whole.

People without strong bonds

What more do we know about the one in twelve Australian adults who said they had no one with whom they were able to be completely honest, who encouraged, supported and was concerned for them in their daily lives? Further analysis reveals that such people made up:

- 18% of people who had never married
- 11% of those divorced and who had not remarried
- 7% of people who were married
- 6% of those who were separated but not divorced
- 5% of people who were widowed
- 3% of people in de facto relationships.

Although a higher proportion (18%) of people who had never married than of other groups felt they had no one with whom they had very close personal bonds, the vast majority (82%) of the never-married had at least one such close supportive relationship.

There was no difference among different age groups in the proportion of the population who indicated they did not have any strong supportive relationships. There were differences relating to other factors, however. Men were much more likely than women to feel they had no one to provide such encompassing encouragement and support. Similarly, people whose health was fair or poor, or who had low levels of formal education or low household incomes, were more likely than others to report that they lacked strong supportive relationships.

Factors of personality may make it hard for some people to enter and maintain supportive relationships. Very limited educational attainments and lack of financial resources may contribute to lack of self-confidence in forming relationships. The cultural expectations, particularly among men, that one should be independent and self-reliant, may contribute to making it difficult for some people to develop or maintain supportive relationships.

One's living situation can also make a difference (see table 3.1). Compared to people who shared a household with at least one other person, people who lived alone were about twice as likely to say they had no one to whom they could turn for emotional support. Although most people who live alone and most single parents living with children have friends or relations to whom they can turn for such support, some find themselves without adequate support networks.

Table 3.1 Availability of emotional support by household type

| Household type	Percentage indicating they had no one to provide emotional support
Living alone	16.2
Adults living together, but not married or de facto	9.7
Single parent with children	9.0
Married or de facto couple with children	7.2
Married or de facto couple without children	5.2

source *Wellbeing and Security Survey (2002)*

The percentage of Australians aged 15 years or older living alone increased from 7.6 per cent in 1983 to 13 per cent in 2001. The percentage is likely to continue increasing, partly because fewer people are marrying or entering into a partnership (De Vaus 2004: 100). It would seem likely that, as increasing numbers of people find themselves without partners and living alone, the numbers without support will increase. With the rates of divorce continuing to increase (De Vaus 2004: 211), it would seem likely that increasing numbers of people will reach retirement without the support of a partner. With smaller families and with high levels of mobility, it is also likely that increasing numbers will have no other family support. Even though some may be able to turn to friends for such support, others may not.

Practical support

Most people value intimacy in its own right as one of the major dimensions of wellbeing. However, intimate relationships are often also important for other aspects of daily functioning. When problems arise in life, most people turn first to family and close friends for material support and for social and psychological support. From a community perspective, then, social bonds are part of the network of resources that contribute to the fulfilment of a variety of needs. They are the first line of defence in maintaining the wellbeing of individuals and in dealing with crises as they occur.

In addition to providing emotional support, social bonds provide practical support. When a crisis occurs such as people temporarily running out of money or someone in the household becoming ill, the first call for help is often to family or close friends. In the Australian Community Survey, people were asked where they felt they could find practical help if they needed it. For example, who could people count on for help if they had some serious financial problems? People were most confident of help from their relatives, and secondly, from their close friends. The importance of family and relatives in providing such practical forms of support was evident here. People were much less confident about getting help from close friends than from relatives. Very few were confident that their neighbours would help, and while many indicated some willingness to try organisations such as charities, they were not very confident of help from them, as is shown in figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1 Confidence in getting help with a financial problem: sources of help

Percentage indicating confident of help
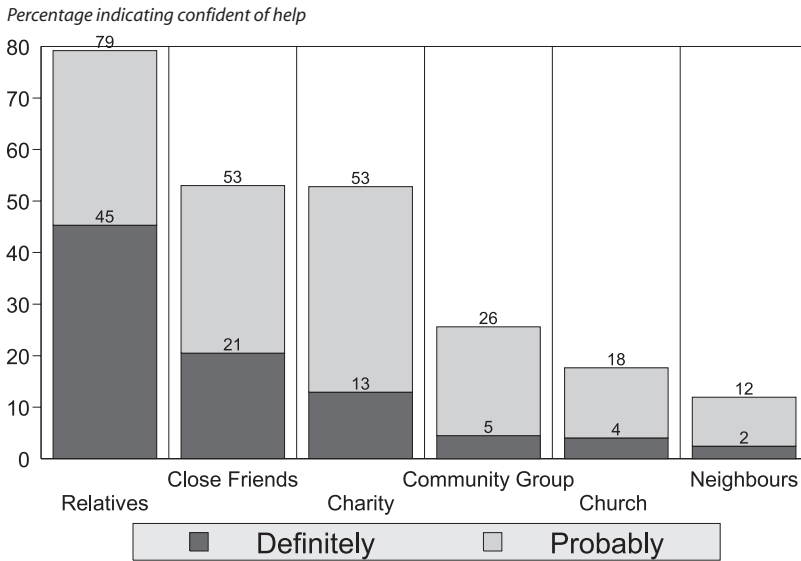
Moreover, close to half (46%) of the people surveyed indicated that there was nowhere they were confident of receiving assistance. They could perhaps try relatives or friends, who might or might not be willing to help.

The availability of assistance was related significantly to people's overall sense of personal wellbeing. On average, those who were not confident of assistance from any source rated their overall satisfaction with life lower than did those who were confident. It mattered little whether one had just one source of help, or two or three different sources to which one could turn. What was important was that people had somewhere they could go with confidence.

The importance of enmeshment

Many people in contemporary society live at some distance from their friends and relatives. Consequently, such friends and relatives are not always available to offer practical assistance. In fact, 43 per cent of respondents to the Australian Community Survey (1998) said that they had no close friends living in the local area (within fifteen minutes' walk). Does distance have an impact on the quality of social bonds?

Our research suggests that, while it may have an impact on some kinds of practical help such as finding someone to look after one's child while one goes to the shops, it was not evident in obtaining financial assistance. People whose friends did not live in the local area were just as likely (or unlikely) as others to say they could get financial assistance from friends. Of significance, however, was the extent to which one's friends were involved with each other. Those whose close friends knew each other were much more likely to report that their friends would assist them (see table 3.2).

This suggests that groups of friends support each other. They encourage each other in giving help. Within the group, loyalty to all members of the group is sustained and norms of active care are established. If a member of the group fails to contribute as expected, his or her reputation is at stake. The fragmentation of friendships that has been evident over recent decades suggests that, at least when it comes to practical help, the support offered through those friendships may have weakened.

Table 3.2 Enmeshed relationships and dependability for financial support

Extent to which friends know each other	*Percentage of each group who can definitely depend on their friends for financial support*
No friends know each other	7.5
Some friends know each other	19.5
Most friends know each other	20.9
All friends know each other	32.4

source Wellbeing and Security Survey (2002)

Intimacy and the quality of social bonds

The Wellbeing and Security Survey (2002) contained measures of people's satisfaction with and security in their marriage or de facto partnership. Both satisfaction and security in the relationship were related very strongly to the intimacy people were experiencing and the ways in which they felt they were being treated by their partner. Whether they were married or in a de facto relationship made little difference to their levels of satisfaction with the relationship, although people in a de facto relationship tended not to feel quite as secure in the relationship compared with those who were married.

In the past, a marital relationship depended greatly on the structure of the relationship and the social expectations surrounding it. Today, a marital or partnering relationship depends more on the fulfilment that both parties find in it. It depends more on mutual intimacy and the way people treat each other than on the recognised status of the relationship.

There are strong social expectations surrounding parent–child relationships in contemporary society. Comparatively few children are expelled from the family home and told to fend for themselves in their teenage years despite the strains that often accompany such relationships. Nevertheless, these relationships take a variety of forms. The structures in which the father was the disciplinarian and the mother was the nurturer no longer predominate.

In recent interviews with more than 100 teenagers, they were asked whom they most admired. They could choose anyone, either a person they knew through the media or someone they knew personally. The most common response was 'father' or 'mother'. Many young people expressed great admiration for their parents. In discussion about why they admired their parents, it was evident that the relationship did not depend on social expectations but on the quality of the friendship (Bond 2005: 7). Such relationships often extend throughout life, as parents and children help each other in practical as well as emotional ways. In many cases this pattern continues into the next generation, with grandparents contributing in significant ways to the care of grandchildren.

Friendships have never been structured in the ways that marriages have. They have always taken a great variety of forms and been expressed in many ways. Here too the qualities of the relationship, the intimacy experienced, the ways in which people treat each other, the respect and the dependability, will be important for the level of satisfaction in the relationship and its longevity.

STRENGTHENING SOCIAL BONDS

Good quality social bonds: A matter of trust and active goodwill

Social bonds are defined more by their qualities than by formal structures. A key element in bonding is the ability to trust and the presumption of active goodwill in the relationship.

Two Australian social researchers, Onyx and Bullen (1997: 5), define trust as 'a willingness to take risks in a social context based on a sense of confidence that others will respond as expected and will act in mutually supportive ways, or at least that others do not intend harm.' Trust is the expectation of predictability, that people will undertake what they have said they will do and will not seek to take advantage by trickery or deception. Trust and its counterpart, trustworthiness, are foundational to social order.

What one expects in each type of relationship may be different. In bond relationships, trust will involve loyalty, intimacy, even passion. It implies a willingness to help so far as one can, and it typically relates to many areas of life. Whether the crisis is occurring at work or in the household or in some other situation, whether it is financial or emotional, the trustworthy friend in a bond relationship will provide a listening ear, emotional support and, as far as possible, some practical support.

Being able to trust someone in a bond relationship means that one can share with that person one's deepest feelings, one's insecurities and anxieties, and know that these will not be divulged without consent. Trust may well mean that one can tell another of one's failures, confident that those failures will not mean the end of the relationship, but that there will be forgiveness and another chance.

On the other hand, there are likely to be some limits to this process. The one who forgives might look for reassurance that the person who has wronged them will try to behave differently on future occasions. Persistent untrustworthiness can undermine or destroy a bond relationship. Consider the following example. A young person borrows his parent's car and has an accident in it. He was speeding. The forgiveness of the parent is not an indication that the accident did not matter. Rather, it arises out of recognition that all people make mistakes and do things that they later regret. Trust is shown when the parent allows the young person to use the car on another occasion. But if that person is reckless in their driving on this occasion too, then the relationship of trust is likely to be impaired. In the long term, trust can only continue where people are trustworthy, where they meet the expectations of trust.

Good quality social bonds: At the heart of strong communities

The first lines of defence against the anomie of community fragmentation are bond relationships. The task of building community begins here – encouraging the formation of relationships in which there is a commitment to providing emotional and practical support.

Social bonds can be particularly costly. By the very nature of such relationships, there may be few limits to the burdens that people may place upon each other. Bond relationships involve responsibility. They require us to limit some of our individual freedoms for the sake of others. At the same time, there is something deeply fulfilling and valuable in intimate relationships, in having family members and friends upon whom we can rely and who trust us.

The loyalty and commitment involved in social bonds are not always easy to maintain, even within families. When the emotional support and practical help that is offered within families is abused, it is easy for families to fall apart. When people give support to members of their family, only to find that the support is not returned, it is often hard to keep giving, to maintain trust and optimism about the relationship. Moreover, in some bonding relationships, one partner dominates or seeks to control the other.

In the past, extended family networks have also provided important foundational support. When uncles or aunts care for the children for a day or longer, it provides respite for parents struggling to deal with some of life's demands. Extended family networks have provided opportunities for social bonds beyond the usual household. Contemporary families often have to develop other relational resources to compensate for the loss of extended family structures.

Navigating the complexities

The skills required to establish and maintain intimate relationships have become more complex in recent decades, because of increasing freedom within relationships. In the past, there were clear expectations linked to roles which were generally accepted or suffered throughout society. Up to the early part of the 20th century in Anglo-Celtic societies, whether one cooked the meal or not had a lot to do with social status. Servants cooked, the aristocracy did not. It also had to do with gender. Within

the household, women did most if not all of the cooking while the men were expected to be the main income-earners. In other words, there were certain roles considered appropriate for women, while men were expected to take on other roles. Men were expected to have the final say in many of the major decisions relating to household policies. There were relatively clear expectations for children too, and clear transition points at which new roles would be undertaken.

Clear expectations of roles can no longer be taken for granted. In contemporary Australian society, relationships are much more open and roles far less fixed. For example, the old maxim that 'children should be seen but not heard' has faded from minds and expectations. Children's roles within the family are not so rigidly defined as in the past; they are more fluid and open to negotiation. Even within intimate relationships, informal contracts form the basis of much of what happens. For example, there may be an understanding that one person cooks the meal and the other clears up afterwards. There may be an agreement that one parent minds the child today and the other does so tomorrow. In some cases, there is more sharing of household tasks than would have occurred in the past. It all has to be worked out and agreed to as part of the process of creating stable, ongoing partnerships.

This is also true at deeper levels of relationships. The ways people relate to each other, the expressions of intimacy and care, all have to be negotiated. In many relationships, these matters are not negotiated once and for all, but are continually renegotiated in light of the ongoing experience of the relationship and changing circumstances. There are many advantages associated with this in terms of individual freedom to find fulfilment. But in the absence of fixed roles passed from one generation to the next, partners and friends must develop the skills of negotiation and the ability to reach agreement.

British sociologist Anthony Giddens has written extensively on the processes by which individuals are constantly working out their own life journey. He argues that self-identity 'has to be created and more or less continually reordered against the backdrop of shifting experiences of day-to-day life and the fragmenting tendencies of modern institutions' (Giddens 1991: 186), a process he describes as 'reflexive'. What is true of the life of individuals is also true within relationships. Giddens describes relationships as one of the key environments 'for building the reflexive

project of the self'. There is no one way of being a spouse or a parent or, for that matter, a close friend. Indeed, the challenge of developing close relationships will be ongoing, a continuing project against 'the backdrop of shifting experiences of day-to-day life'.

Supporting primary relationships

Strong social bonds typically entail long-term loyalty – being with people through high and low times in life. In the past, such relationships have been held together by widely accepted social conventions and the accompanying expectations. In societies where a concept of duty has dominated, people who broke the social expectations that surrounded marriage, for example, were often socially ostracised. Today, these conventions and the associated expectations are weaker.

One of the 'supports' for partnerships has been the institution of marriage as a public statement of loyalty between the partners. The very act of making such a public statement helped to give the relationship stability. But many partnerships now do not involve such public statements.

In past times, many women were abused in relationships but stayed in them because of the constraints and expectations of loyalty in marriage and because of their economic dependence. People now realise that there are times when, in choosing between divorce on the one hand or putting up with ongoing abuse within a marriage, divorce is the only reasonable option.

While not permitting abuse to continue, there are ways in which the wider community can help to enhance the quality of marital partnerships and family relationships. Churches have traditionally been a major source of support for family relationships and parenting. They have done so by organising events for parents and children to undertake together. They have provided support for commitment in partnership through marriage ceremonies and occasionally through services for the renewal of wedding vows. They have encouraged husbands and wives to undertake joint activities, and have provided numerous specialised counselling and other services to support marriage.

Given that only one in five people and less than one in eight of those under 40 years of age have at least monthly contact with a church, such support also needs to be provided in other ways. Can the value of

social bonds – of various kinds – be publicly recognised and celebrated? There are important roles for communities to provide support for these relationships through education and counselling facilities. Some schools, for example, are now running parenting seminars and have found that such seminars have been well attended and deeply appreciated. Lacking the apprenticeship for parenting common in earlier generations in bringing up younger brothers and sisters, many parents look for practical advice as well as affirmation.

Counselling is often provided where relationships have fractured. Such counselling can play an important role in working through tensions and difficulties and in helping the parties to understand and appreciate their differences. At other times, however, more practical assistance is needed to relieve the pressure or to take some of the burden of responsibility, even for a short period of time.

Is there a possibility, for example, of a widespread small group movement for the support of parents in their role of parenting? Providing ongoing support through small groups, meeting from time to time with professionals who can give advice in areas such as emotional development, safety in the home, cognitive development, handling problematic behaviour in their children, healing the tensions of blended family life, and so on, might well be appreciated and help to enhance the quality of social bonds.

Given the relatively high rate of divorce in Australia and many other countries, it is clear that some social bonds are fragile. Moreover, the occurrence of domestic violence indicates that some social bonds are dysfunctional. The provision of women's refuges is both a recognition that, regrettably, various forms of abuse sometimes occur within families, and an affirmation that such abuse should not be allowed to continue.

Tremblay and Craig (1995) have examined a large number of studies on the origins of violence within families. These studies indicate that children who have been witnesses to, or victims of, family violence have an increased risk of later becoming perpetrators of violence themselves. This is not to say that the perpetuation of violence from one generation to the next is inevitable. Breaking this cycle of violence is essential if we are to have more harmonious families and stronger communities. Available evidence suggests that the years prior to the age of 12 are often influential in the establishment of aggressive and violent

response styles. Working with families and children at risk at this stage may help to reduce the incidence of violence and prevent its perpetuation into the next generation. As far as possible, children should be helped to learn that violence as a means of control is unacceptable. Enabling children to develop appropriate skills in conflict resolution is especially important. Success at school and healthy relationships with siblings and friends can also help to break the intergenerational cycle of violence (Indermaur et al. 1998).

Although pre-adolescent years tend to be pivotal in the development of attitudes towards the use of violence, adolescence is a time when previous behavioural patterns may be either reinforced or perhaps reconfigured. It has been noted that processes associated with adolescent development and dating may be crucial to the formation of healthy, non-violent relationships in later life (Wolfe et al. 1995). If so, violence prevention programs need to engage with adolescents as well as younger children. The most effective school-based programs appear to be those that focus on a range of social competency skills, that use appropriate cognitive–behavioural training methods such as behavioural rehearsal, feedback and various types of reward or recognition (rather than traditional lecture or discussion formats), and that are delivered over a relatively long period of time, so as to reinforce skills. Ideally such school-based programs should be part of a comprehensive strategy involving the wider community (Gottfredson 1997; Indermaur et al. 1998).

The task facing community builders is multifaceted. At the level of bonding, community builders may well seek to encourage strong, healthy, family and friendship relationships that contribute to people's feeling that they can rely on each other. Two major factors contribute to such relationships. The most important of these is people's active goodwill towards one another and their willingness to remain committed even when commitment becomes costly. It is this factor that will see relationships through difficult times, when a partner in a relationship needs support. That value is seen in forgiveness and the willingness to accept forgiveness – when hurts and failures are put aside for the sake of the relationship itself. It is also seen in continuing care and goodwill, through sickness as well as health, when times are bad financially as well as when they are good.

Skills in relating, particularly the abilities of understanding others and communicating with them, are a second factor that contributes to bond relationships. The ability to communicate feelings and interests and the ability to listen to the feelings and interests of others are vital for strong relationships. The ability to put oneself in the shoes of others, to understand what the other person is thinking and feeling, contributes greatly to such relationships. These skills are generally learnt and developed within the context of family life from early childhood. But they can also be extended through appropriate educational and awareness programs.

Both the values and the skills involved in healthy bond relationships can be addressed in many ways. Counselling seeks to address them at a personal level and within dysfunctional relationships. Community organisations may seek to address them through marriage enrichment and parenting courses. Churches address them through family oriented activities, as well as through the values explicitly encouraged through preaching, small group activities and in other forums. These values and skills can also be addressed at wider community levels.

Communities may positively encourage bond relationships through the respect that is accorded such relationships and through the community rituals by which these relationships are celebrated. They may also support them in practical ways, offering activities in which members of a family or a friendship network can participate together, deepening their understanding and trust in each other. An example of this is given under the next heading.

AN EXAMPLE: STRENGTHENING AND VALUING FATHERHOOD

A neighbourhood in Tasmania had a long history of crime and disruption. It was one place no one wanted to live. The police often roamed its streets or pulled stolen burnt-out cars from the nearby bush. There were many problems in the homes – conflict between parents, and between parents and their children.

A community worker looked for ways of turning that community around. Out of the discussions arose the idea of getting fathers to take their children on camping expeditions together. Facilitated by

the community worker, fathers and children were organised and the first camp planned. It was a great success among those who went. The following year, more fathers and children wanted to have the experience together. In this small way, the bonding relationships between fathers and their children were encouraged. The development of those relationships had an impact on the whole sense of community.

Questions for reflection

1   What are some of the personal and relational qualities that most contribute to strengthening bonds within contemporary family life? Are these qualities different from those that were important in previous generations?

2   What makes a good friendship? Do you feel that many Australians find it hard to make strong, enduring friendships? Why?

3   How should communities respond to high levels of breakdown in family relationships?

4   What can community builders do to facilitate the building of strong social bonds?

CHAPTER 4

BRIDGES

Social bridges include formal and informal relationships with associates and acquaintances. While formal links through membership of organisations that meet face to face may be declining, informal associations are growing. Trust and reciprocity are key qualities in social bridges. Their development can be inhibited by a sense of vulnerability and a lack of homogeneity, but most importantly, by a lack of trustworthiness. Building social bridges can occur as opportunities for socialising are built into pre-existing activities and as group support activities are developed. A major part of community building is simply bringing people together to achieve common or compatible objectives.

THE NATURE OF BRIDGES

Compared to social bonds, social bridges are less intense relationships with associates, acquaintances and other people with whom one has dealings from time to time. Bridging relationships are those through which many aspects of business are conducted, common interests are pursued and community initiatives are developed.

Such bridges vary greatly in strength. They include friendships with people one might not rely on for emotional support in times of crisis but whose company one enjoys. They include relationships with neighbours with whom one has a nodding acquaintance and the relationships one develops in a voluntary association such as a Parents and Citizens Association or a camera club. Bridges may be built with

work colleagues, clients, people with whom one plays sport, and so on.

There is a continuum between bond and bridge relationships. While the 'ideal types' are clear, some relationships occupy a position somewhere between these two 'ideal types' – the ties are neither very 'thick' nor very 'thin'. Some bridge relationships provide the potential to become bond relationships should the need arise. While close friendships in which people offer each other practical and emotional support through several dimensions of life may be described as bonds, many friendships would fall into the category of bridges. Relationships with mere acquaintances would also be classed as bridges.

Rarely is one emotionally dependent on people with whom one has bridge relationships. It is unlikely that one would turn to these people when one needed some money in an emergency. But the strength of community life, the harmoniousness of work, the efficient running of a church, club or school, each depend on the quality of these relationships. Much turns on whether people feel they can work together to obtain outcomes that benefit them all and the wider community. If there is trust and a willingness to work together, resources can be gathered when needed and common problems can be solved. A key contributing factor is whether the people who are appointed to positions of responsibility in such organisations are trustworthy and are trusted.

From time to time, some of one's 'bridges' are likely to change. One issue that has been raised in the literature on social capital is the importance of how people relate to strangers; in particular, whether one is willing to trust them (Cox & Caldwell 2000: 60–61). Depending on the circumstances, interactions with strangers may provide the basis for new 'bridges'. Some strangers may be people who are seeking assistance or some form of new relationship. They may also be people whom one seeks out as potential allies or collaborators to achieve mutual or common ends.

Patterns of friendship and social participation

Many friendships have long histories. People who shared a class in school, or who were colleagues in work at one point in time, or who enjoyed similar sporting interests, may continue to keep in touch, even though physically living some distance away.

Electronic communications have meant that people are less

dependent on forming relationships within the locality. Friendships are more likely to be based on common interests or on shared memories rather than locality. Overall, 42 per cent of Australians say that none of their 'close' friends live in the local area. The proportion is a little lower in non-metropolitan areas (36% in towns of between 2000 and 20 000 inhabitants) and higher in the capital cities (up to 46%) (Australian Community Survey 1998).

So how do we go about forming and maintaining friendships? There are various settings where people meet others and develop or maintain relationships, many of these well beyond the local neighbourhood. For example, the Australian Community Survey asked people where they meet with their friends. Analysis of the responses revealed four different patterns:

1   *Home-based pattern*, in which people meet each other in their homes, chat over the phone, and have meals together. This is the most common pattern for people of all ages and in all kinds of family structures.

2   *Sport-hotel-party pattern*, in which people meet their friends at parties, in hotels and at sporting events. This pattern is most prominent among younger people, and tends also to be the pattern for many who are not married or who are in de facto relationships.

3   *Concerts-cinema-Internet pattern*. This pattern is also common among younger people, among those who are not married or who are in de facto relationships. It is common, too, among those who are divorced but have not remarried.

4   *Church-clubs-shopping pattern*. This pattern tends to be common among older people, and particularly among those who are widowed.

Another set of questions asked people about the frequency of their involvement in various social activities, namely going to hotels or clubs, watching or playing sport, other outdoor recreational activities, parties, concerts or theatre, cinema, hobby clubs, churches or voluntary organisations, or dining out (see table 4.1). While this set of questions may not have covered all options, it covered a range, and thus could provide some measure of social participation. Of particular interest are the proportions of people who, for each listed activity, said they did not have any frequent involvement.

Table 4.1 Involvement in social activities by marital status

Marital status	Percentage in each group who never or infrequently were involved in listed social activities
Never married	7
Divorced	7
Separated	9
De facto relationship	12
Married (first time)	12
Remarried	13
Widowed	27

source *Australian Community Survey (1998)*

In general, younger people tended to be more involved socially than were older people. Marital status and family circumstances were also important determinants as shown in table 4.1. People without child-rearing commitments tended to have much higher levels of social participation than others. It would appear that marital partnerships and children can restrict rather than extend social participation, at least for the activities listed in the survey.

The American social commentator Robert Putnam (2000) has argued that the levels of social participation among Americans in organised clubs and associations in which people have face-to-face contact with others has fallen considerably since the 1960s. Membership of unions, professional associations, churches and many other organisations has declined. Likewise, there has been a considerable decline in active involvement in political organisations and even sporting organisations.

People now enjoy activities in less organised ways. By way of example, Putman (2000) contends that more Americans are going ten-pin bowling than ever before, but they are not doing it in organised leagues as they used to; rather they are 'bowling alone'.

Putnam recognises that there are some statistics indicating greater social activity; for example, going to museums and to rock-concerts. However, he is concerned at the fall in the regular social contacts that organisations have provided. Americans are also having less regular contact with their friends informally. They play cards less often and dine in each other's homes less often.

> Our evidence [also] suggests that across a very wide range of activities, the last several decades have witnessed a striking diminution of regular contacts with our friends and neighbours. We spend less time

in conversation over meals, we exchange visits less often, we engage less often in leisure activities that encourage casual social interaction, we spend more time watching … and less time doing. We know our neighbours less well, and we see old friends less often. (Putnam 2000: 115)

The average American, he says, is far more isolated both civically and socially than in the past (Putnam 2000: 97).

In Australia, it is clear that membership has been falling in many face-to-face organisations. Organisations such as Rotary and the Freemasons, for example, have been finding it more difficult to recruit members. Levels of involvement in churches have fallen from a high point in the late 1950s and early 1960s. At that time, surveys indicated that around 44 per cent of Australian adults attended church at least once a month (Bentley et al. 1992: 24). The Wellbeing and Security Survey (2002) found that 19 per cent of the adult population attended a religious service monthly or more often.

On the other hand, it is possible that informal bridges between people may have been growing. The American sociologist Robert Wuthnow (1996) has taken issue with Putnam, arguing instead that small informal groups have to some extent replaced formal membership of organisations. He takes the churches as an example. While church members now make up a smaller percentage of the population than previously, and overall rates of church attendance have declined, there has been a substantial increase of participation in informal small groups often sponsored by churches. Other informal groups gather at coffee shops, in shopping co-operatives, in informal meetings of parents who get to know each other through a school, in book reading clubs, through sporting organisations, and many other ways. In other words, bridges beyond the family and household are now being built through these informal associations and networks, as well as through formal associations and organisations.

Social bridges and trust

Social bridges are foundationally based on trust, in a similar way to bonds. However, in bridge relationships the expectations that constitute the content of trust are not as high as in bond relationships. While the high levels of interdependence that function among close friends and family members are not expected in bridge relationships, some measure of goodwill is necessary.

In a bridge relationship, trust will not mean the expectation of loyalty or confidence to share intimate details of life. Rather, it will involve the expectation that people are respectful of each other and mindful of each other's needs and interests. Trust involves the expectation that the other person will act according to the usual social rules of interaction. If one pays money for a service, trust involves the expectation that the service will be provided appropriately. If one arranges a meeting, trust involves the expectation that the other person will turn up. If one agrees to do something with others in a group, trustworthiness involves keeping those agreements. There is a close link between trust and honesty. Trust involves the expectation that the other person means what he or she says and intends to abide by what is negotiated. Trust is based on the assumption that the other person is honest and reliable.

Trust matters

Trust's importance in community life is clearly seen in our research. The Australian Community Survey (1998) explored aspects of trust and social capital. Respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the following statements:

* *Generally speaking, most people in my local area can be trusted.*
* *Generally speaking, most Australians can be trusted.*
* *Generally speaking, you can't be too careful in dealing with most people in my local area.*
* *Generally speaking, you can't be too careful in dealing with most Australians.*

Table 4.2 Correlations between trust/wariness and satisfaction with life/neighbourhood

	Trust in most local people	Trust in most Australians	Wariness towards most local people	Wariness towards most Australians
Satisfaction with neighbourhood	.281**	.160**	−.233**	−.125**
Satisfaction with life as a whole	.098**	.111**	−.138**	−.129**

*** significant at .01 level*
sᴏᴜʀᴄᴇ *Australian Community Survey (1998)*

As shown in table 4.2, the measures of trust have a positive association with levels of satisfaction with neighbourhood and satisfaction with life as a whole. On the other hand, the negative correlations in the table

indicate that people who are wary of others tend to have relatively low levels of satisfaction with neighbourhood and with life as a whole. These positive and negative correlations may be partly related to personality type. People who are more extraverted tend also to be more trusting of others and to have higher levels of satisfaction with various aspects of life. Nevertheless, the results presented in table 4.2 are not explained solely by personality type. Moreover, people tend to make a distinction between trust towards local people and trust towards most Australians. Forms and levels of trust also vary from one type of community to another, as will become clear in a later part of this analysis.

Although there are some exceptions, people are most likely to trust members of their immediate family. By comparison, the average level of trust towards work colleagues is lower. Lower again is the average level of trust towards people in one's neighbourhood, and towards people whose religion or ethnicity is different from one's own. This is illustrated in table 4.3 based on answers to the Wellbeing and Security Survey (2002) question: 'Generally speaking, how much would you say you can trust the following people?'. For each item, answers were marked on a scale graduated from 0 ('Cannot trust at all') to 10 ('Can trust completely'). These results can be summarised by saying that people are likely to trust others whose backgrounds and values are similar to their own rather than people whom they perceive to be different. To some extent, religious groups have helped to engender social trust through the provision of a common set of values. However, religions have also contributed to distrust of people who do not share the same faith. Nevertheless, the level of trust in people of other religions and races is not greatly different from the level of trust that people had in 'most Australians'.

Table 4.3 Trust towards various groups of people

Group of people	*Mean level of trust (on a scale of 0 to 10)*
Immediate family	9.0
People with whom you work or study	6.9
Most Australians	6.6
People in your neighbourhood	6.4
People of other religions	6.3
People of other races	6.1

SOURCE *Wellbeing and Security Survey (2002)*

If people in the local community know each other and trust each other, they will feel safer and more comfortable walking around the community. By contrast, where people do not know each other and are wary of each other, they generally feel less safe in the community.

The Australian Community Survey (1998) provided the opportunity to look at levels of trust in different kinds of communities. Eight community types were identified. Four metropolitan community types were distinguished by socio-economic status, based on levels of income, education and occupational status. Non-metropolitan communities were distinguished by the size of the largest town in the postcode area.

Figure 4.1 Mean levels of trust within various types of communities
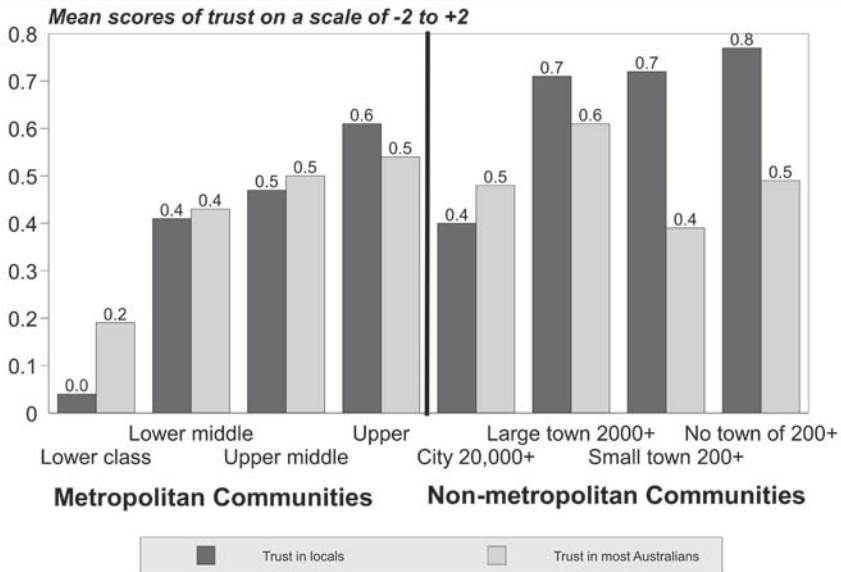
In metropolitan areas, as can be seen in figure 4.1, trust is lowest within low socio-economic suburbs and highest within high socio-economic suburbs. In non-metropolitan areas, levels of trust vary with the size of the community, trust in local people being highest in the smallest rural communities.

In small rural communities, trust in 'most Australians' is comparatively low even though trust in local people is high. Although trust in 'most Australians' is also comparatively low in the lowest socio-

economic metropolitan localities, the people in these localities have even lower levels of trust in local people.

One factor in trust is whether one knows people personally or by personal reputation. In small rural communities, people know a much larger proportion of the people living in the local area. The fact that whenever one goes to the shops one is likely to meet people one knows, even in a town of 15 000, contributes to people's levels of trust in other local people.

Other questions confirm the importance of familiarity. People with high levels of local involvement, who have lived in the neighbourhood a long time, whose friends mostly live in the local area, and who know their neighbours well enough to be aware of their personal concerns, tend to be more willing to trust others, particularly local people.

People with high levels of involvement in social activities, sport, parties, concerts and theatre, in hobbies and voluntary organisations, tend to have relatively high levels of trust, particularly towards local people. More involvement with people often leads to greater trust and vice versa.

However, such trust based on familiarity does not necessarily extend to people beyond one's local community. Indeed, high levels of trust within the local community may sometimes be accompanied by lower levels of trust towards strangers. People in rural areas tend to be more wary of strangers than of local people. As Margaret Levi (1996: 51) notes: 'Neighbourhoods (and other networks of civic engagement) are a source of trust and neighbourhoods are a source of distrust. They promote trust of those you know and distrust of those you do not, those not in the neighbourhood or outside the networks.'

There are also factors affecting the levels of trust that are not directly related to how many people one knows in one's local community. The levels of trust in local people are related to other perceptions one has about one's local area. Compared to others, people who said there were major problems in their local area such as crime, unemployment, lack of facilities for the poor, and little vision for future community development, reported lower levels of trust towards local people. Conversely, higher levels of trust were expressed by those who reported that crime and unemployment were not major problems in their neighbourhood.

Trust and vulnerability

Respondents' self-reported quality of health also related significantly although weakly to trust. Factors of age and health may be described in terms of vulnerability. The least vulnerable people in society, the people who are least dependent on others, are healthy people with secure employment and good social connections. The survey found that the unemployed had particularly low levels of trust. Young people are often vulnerable in that many do not have an established career and there is little public recognition of their contribution to society. Few own their own property, or even their own cars. Many lack security in the work they have. Until they are into their 30s, many are unable to take out mortgages to buy homes for themselves. Their vulnerability may well make them more cautious in dealing with other people.

There is some evidence in the Australian Community Survey that socio-economic wellbeing and social vulnerability relate to trust. People who live in higher socio-economic neighbourhoods and who do not feel socially vulnerable in terms of work, relationships in society, and ability to work the systems of society have higher levels of trust. Those who feel vulnerable and live in areas that are perceived to have high levels of crime feel the need to be cautious in relating to others.

These findings have some important implications for policies that may contribute to the building of trust. For example, strategies to assist the most vulnerable in society, such as the unemployed and the aged, are likely to enhance levels of social trust. As has been suggested from work based on international comparisons (Inglehart 1990: 36), economic development may also contribute to raising the levels of social trust.

Trust and homogeneity

The homogeneity of an area contributes to local trust among people in the area. If people feel that most other people in the area are similar to themselves in their values, opinions and ways of life, they are more likely to be trusting of them.

One of the factors here is language. Difficulties in communicating across language barriers can contribute to lack of trust. Evident cultural differences may also make it difficult. The Australian Community Survey found that there were significant negative correlations between

trust and the proportion of people in the area who did not speak English or who were born in non-English-speaking countries (Leigh 2006).

Building trust across the boundaries of language and culture is a particular challenge that is critical for the wellbeing of the wider society. It is easy for people to associate with people like themselves. It is more difficult to build bridges across the barriers of language and custom. Many people are suspicious of people who are different from themselves. Opportunities for building such bridges do not readily arise and language can form a barrier that is very difficult to overcome.

Minority cultural and linguistic groups sometimes have higher than average levels of unemployment. Frequently they experience isolation and lack the connections that help others to overcome simple problems in living. Building bridges that cross these barriers is essential in order for people of ethnic and linguistic minority groups to be well integrated into the community at large.

Reciprocity and altruism

Social bridges are strengthened when we have good reason to believe that our acquaintances are willing to take our interests into account. The functioning of a committee is dependent on the willingness of committee members to listen to each other. The functioning of a club is strengthened as common interests are recognised and due allowance is made for special needs and interests.

This further quality of relationships can be variously conceived and practised. Onyx and Bullen (1997: 5) talk about the importance of reciprocity. According to their description, reciprocity implies that 'the individual provides a service to others, or acts for the benefit of others at a personal cost, but in the general expectation that this kindness will be returned at some undefined time in the future in case of need.'

Reciprocity has sometimes been described as the combination of short-term altruism and long-term self-interest. On this view, people are willing to do things for others not with the expectation of a specific reward for themselves, but with the general expectation that such habits will ultimately be in their own, as well as others', long-term interests. The idea is that if I help someone now, there is a greater chance that I will be helped sometime in the future when I am in need. However,

people are often willing to help others without the expectation of long-term personal benefits. Helping others may be seen as its own and sufficient reward. Doing good to other people can be seen as something inherently worthwhile, whatever the long-term consequences may be for oneself. Active goodwill of this type may be described as altruism.

In practice, it is often not easy to distinguish between altruism and reciprocity. Nor is it always necessary to do so. What is important for the efficacy of social bridges is that people act in ways that take account of the interests of others. Although actions do not always accord with stated attitudes, it is likely that trust and altruism are mutually reinforcing. Genuine attention to the needs of others implies acting in trustworthy ways. Trustworthiness tends to evoke others' trust. It often also evokes or reinforces trustworthiness on the part of others.

The link between altruism and trust may help to explain why levels of trust have diminished in Australia in recent decades. There has long been a myth of Australia as an egalitarian society in which people cared for one another under an ethos of mateship. The reality has never matched the myth. However, some commentators have noted how difficult it became to sustain that myth in the 1980s and 1990s. In discussing social and cultural change in Australia, Jamrozik, Boland and Urquhart (1995: 119) argue that in the 1980s the excesses of financial entrepreneurs were flaunted with much publicity as heroic ventures; at the same time the gap between the rich and the poor became larger. This trend continued into the 1990s. Under the notion that, in a world of limited resources, some will have to miss out, philosophies of economic rationalism have encouraged people to be more competitive and less co-operative.

Whatever its particular roots, excessive individualism, in which the interests of the individual are always elevated above those of the wider society, can diminish levels of trust. However, some groups may also be exclusive, building trust within the group but developing antagonism to those who do not belong.

Barriers to trust and reciprocity in bridge relationships

The biggest impediment to being trustful is that some people are not trustworthy. In such cases, it is appropriate to be cautious. It is a fact of human society that, not infrequently, people betray the trust that has

been invested in them. It often happens in small ways. People indicate that they will do a job, but fail to do it. They agree to an appointment, but do not show up. Or they agree to keep something confidential, but then leak the information to others.

At other times, trust is abused as people take deliberate advantage of others. They may do that by providing poor quality goods or services, or by tricking people into paying more than they should. Sometimes expectations of reciprocity are not met. One person helps another, but does not receive help in return. One person invests emotional energy in a relationship but finds that the action is not reciprocated. Sometimes reputations are sullied, or people do not pull their weight in co-operative activities.

Part of the challenge of building stronger communities revolves around the fact that people do not treat each other equally. In many transactions, the parties are not equal in the status or power that they bring to the situation. Sometimes this is a product of assigned social functions. Police and magistrates are given particular authority by society, and society has built a range of mechanisms through which that authority is recognised and upheld. In such cases, a range of social mechanisms usually ensure that those with greater authority are responsible in the exercise of that authority to the wider society.

In more general terms, many relationships in contemporary society involve some sort of contract – from marriage through to the purchase of goods at a shop. It is through the contract, implicit or explicit, that the expectations are developed. The terms of the contract often depend on the relative power of the parties involved – economic power, social power, or, sometimes, physical power.

To the extent that trust involves the maintenance of the conditions of the contract, the problems of social relationships may arise prior to that. They may arise in the inequality of the expectations. Employers have authority because they have financial power over their employees. The relationship is not an equal one. What employers and employees expect of each other is not always the same. The employer expects the employee to do the job for which the person was hired. The employee expects to be paid for the work. On the other hand, there are times when the reputation or economic viability of the employer depends on

the work of the employee. In such cases, the employee may wield a certain power. In one sense, the one who needs the other most may be the most vulnerable in the relationship.

It is understandable that younger people and older people tend to feel more vulnerable than others. In general, they have less financial power and are more dependent on others. Many others find themselves in vulnerable situations. People looking for work and without other means of support are vulnerable. People with large debts are financially vulnerable. People with poor health, and particularly those with poor mental health, may feel very vulnerable.

Often people will transfer their vulnerability from one situation to another. The unemployed young person may feel vulnerable in dealing with the police, not because he has done something wrong but because he has a comparatively weak social position. The person who has performed poorly at school may feel vulnerable when approaching a potential employer. Most people have a certain vulnerability in dealing with the 'expert', whether it be a doctor, a financial advisor or a sports coach. We expect the expert to know more than we do. It is not always easy to weigh up the advice that is given. Trust is important in such situations, but there is the expectation of professionalism, that the expert will be clear about what she knows and what are the limits of that knowledge.

A significant part of building strong bridges is helping vulnerable individuals and communities to feel empowered as they enter into contracts, as well as encouraging the development of trust and reciprocity within the contracts. Often this is done by bringing people who have the same vulnerability together. Unemployed people may be empowered by being part of a support group with others in a similar situation, in hearing their stories and sharing their struggles. Employees may be empowered through unions or through other means of uniting together in their quest for a fair deal.

Certain social functions play an important role in protecting social contracts and dealing with situations in which there has been abuse. Government regulation plays an important role in defining what is expected of people in certain situations. The legal system also plays an important role in mediating between parties or dealing with cases where there has been abuse. A society that does not protect contracts through

regulation and through the application of law, that allows corruption and the abuse by one person or group of another, is a society in which it is hard to build social capital.

Some people have argued that social capital can only be built through 'horizontal' relationships, between people who are equals. They have suggested that 'vertical' relationships where one person is more powerful than another should not be considered part of social capital. However, a great many relationships have a 'vertical' component. The issue for social capital is not whether the relationship is horizontal or vertical. Rather, the issue is whether the nature of the relationship is in the interests of both people and in the interests of the wider community. A contract between an employer and employee, or a teacher and a student, or a doctor and a patient, can be beneficial for both parties even though there is a vertical dimension to the relationship. Social capital is created as the parties enter into a contract which is satisfactory to each of them and in which both receive the benefits that are defined or implied in the contract. Further, social capital is maintained as the contract is maintained over time, as each side continues to trust the other in terms of upholding their part of the contract. Nevertheless, imbalances in power may sometimes make it difficult for relationships of trust to be built.

STRENGTHENING SOCIAL BRIDGES
Good quality social bridges: At the heart of strong communities

At the heart of strong communities are good quality social 'bridges' – people enter into relationships with each other for their mutual and common benefit, trusting each other and acting in trustworthy ways towards each other within the terms of those relationships. It is through such relationships that people provide goods and services to each other. In other words, many forms of industry and commerce are dependent on the development of such relationships. So also are various health, education and welfare services, and the wide variety of activities that occur in the non-profit sector. It is through such relationships that people are able to work together to achieve common ends. If they know and trust each other, work colleagues can solve problems together. If they know and trust each other, members of a community can work

together to solve local environmental problems, for example. Thus, part of the process of strengthening communities is enabling people to develop strong social bridges with others.

Bridging: What we can do

How can we help people in our communities to strengthen their networks and bridge relationships? There are many possibilities and every situation is unique. Here are some examples of attempts to strengthen social bridges and bridging skills in different contexts across Australia.

Within a workplace, for example, attention to relationships among the employees will pay dividends in terms of the quality of co-operation. In one organisation, we measured the level of satisfaction among the employees with the ethos of the organisation. Did the employees feel that their ideas and input into the organisation were taken seriously? Were they clear on their responsibilities within the workplace? Did they feel that there were means for dealing with problems when they arose? Was there a supportive atmosphere among the employees?

The survey revealed that there were problems that the management needed to address. Some major changes were made to procedures and to the managing personnel. A couple of years later, the survey was run again. This time the results were more positive. It was found that the employees were working longer hours, but they were happier doing so. Their relationships both with management personnel and with each other were stronger. The whole organisation was functioning more effectively.

In the wider community, there are many organisations which seek to bring people together so that there can be common activity for the sake of the community. Organisations such as Rotary, the Red Cross and rural fire brigades contribute much to their communities, not only through their services but also through the social capital they engender among those involved. In recent years, some of these organisations have found it more difficult to encourage younger people to become members. Perhaps some people are reluctant to be involved because of the relatively high expectations that such organisations might have of members. Others feel that the organisational weight of such organisations is too much to bear. They would rather participate in

task-oriented groups than spend their time maintaining organisational structures.

But people do come together for particular purposes that are important to them. They come together to ensure their schools work well and are responsive to the needs of families. They come together, for example, to ensure that there are sporting opportunities for their children, or there is safety on the beaches, or to create a better neighbourhood environment. Often people come together because they share needs such as those that emerge in caring for elderly parents, or they come together because of their common interests in art or music.

While there may now be fewer people who gather on a neighbour-hood basis or because of a common commitment of faith, there are many who gather to solve a problem or to complete a task. It is appropriate within these task groups and activities to deliberately build in the processes of bridging, to encourage people to work together, to communicate one-to-one, to get to know what each can contribute.

New social bridges often arise when there is a crisis or a common problem that people need to solve together. Strangers start talking to each other when the lift breaks down. Neighbours meet together when there are a string of thefts in the local area. Natural disasters such as floods or cyclones often lead to the development of new, though perhaps temporary, bridges as people with various skills and resources come together to help victims and engage in rebuilding.

Some practical possibilities

Causing a crisis is not the way one would wish to build social capital. Yet, naming the issues and challenges and making people aware of them can be a first step in bringing people together to work for the common good. Sometimes it just takes the initiative of a single individual to call people together, whether it be inviting others to a street party, or mobilising people to deal with a local drug problem. Leadership is very important in building stronger communities. It is an issue to which we shall return in chapter 10. People are empowered to act as they find others with similar concerns and interests.

At other times, a deeper sense of community can be added to pre-existing activities and life situations. It is important that a committee finds time for a little socialising, so that bridges are built beyond the

context of the actual committee meetings. Through such social activities people get to know each other, and begin to trust each other more. As the 'bridges' become stronger, people will find it easier to co-operate with each other for their common ends.

The way that services are offered can contribute to the building of effective social bridges. A teacher, for example, can deal with students individually, or can set up processes whereby the students help each other. A doctor can treat patients individually, or can develop support groups or activities for those who share a common ailment. Group activities are not appropriate in every situation. The person whose car has broken down does not want to be introduced to people with similar problems. He or she wants the car fixed. But there are some services that can be enhanced through the development of 'bridging' between those who access them.

One of the authors was involved in establishing accommodation for rural students undertaking tertiary studies in the city. The management team, in consultation with participants, decided to make the sense of community a defining characteristic of the accommodation scheme. Young people were invited to be part of a community in which they would be supported and would give support to one another.

A number of steps were taken to establish the expectations and to reinforce them. All applicants were interviewed by a team and the expectations about living together as a community were discussed at some length. At the beginning of the year, all members of the scheme were required to participate in a weekend away. The main task for the weekend was defining the sort of social environment in which they wanted to live and how that environment would be maintained. It was an opportunity for them to get to know each other and to jointly establish the expectations they had for each other. A monthly gathering of the students sought to reaffirm what the community was all about. Mid-year and at the end of the year, assessments were made anonymously about how each member had contributed to the community. On the basis of those assessments, discussions were held with each member of the community about their future involvement.

The organisers expected that most students would stay just one or two years in the community and then move on. Many stayed for three or four years. At the end of their time in the community, many moved

into households made up of groups of students. Expectations had been established which contributed to a strong sense of community. Ten years later, many of the students were married and had their own children. While living in several parts of the world, close friendships remained. Bridges had been built and turned into the supportive bonds that will last a lifetime.

Questions for reflection

1   Where have most of your social bridges been built? Have they developed in the context of work, school, clubs or other formal contexts? Do they currently occur in those formal contexts or in loose associations?

2   What are the expectations you have of the people with whom you have social bridges? What would raise the levels of trust you have and what would inhibit the development of trust?

3   In what particular areas of society would you find it hard to build social bridges? Why?

4   What do you consider to be good community-building activities that contribute to the creation and strengthening of social bridges?

CHAPTER 5

LINKAGES

Community strength involves strong relationships between community members and organisations and structures in the community. The first issue is access to services and products. A second issue is having confidence in those services and products. Levels of confidence are most closely related to the belief that the organisation or structure is committed to serving the interests of the community members. Linkages can be enhanced by facilitating access to organisations and structures, disseminating information about them through responsible media, developing consumer organisations, regulatory organisations, educating people about organisations and systems, and establishing partnerships between government, business and the non-profit sector. Organisations can increase the level of transparency of operations, ensure effective and accessible complaints procedures and demonstrate that they are acting for the wellbeing of consumers and the community.

THE NATURE OF LINKAGES

Community wellbeing depends partly on organisations that provide services and products for members of the community. Every Australian community is dependent on retail organisations, and they, in turn, on wholesale organisations, manufacturers, farmers and many others. The quality of health in a community is partly dependent on health-related organisations such as clinics and hospitals, doctors and community health workers. The quality of education and the consequent ability of people to find a sense of achievement are dependent on schools,

universities, text-book publishers and other components of the education system.

When thinking about how to build stronger communities, it is important to consider the quality of community members' relationships with organisations and structures. Many contracts and transactions in community occur between a member of a community and a person who is functioning within the context of an organisational structure, such as a shop, school, hospital, factory or business. Indeed, often the person is only known within the context of that organisational structure and the transaction or contract is with the organisation that they represent. Such relationships are the focus of this chapter.

As noted in the previous chapter, researchers have sometimes distinguished between horizontal bridge relationships where there is equality – such as between friends, workmates and neighbours – and vertical relationships which involve hierarchy, authority or relating to wider social organisations and structures. Relationships with judges, teachers, police or doctors involve recognising the authority they have. Such relationships have sometimes been excluded from notions of social capital. However, there are two problems in excluding such relationships. The first is that vertical and horizontal relationships are often not clearly distinguishable. In many relationships, there is recognition of expertise and authority in informal ways that do not presume a social hierarchy. The local butcher has some authority when it comes to discussing cuts of meat. A friend's expertise with cars may well provide authoritative advice when one is considering the purchase of a used car. A doctor has authority conferred by the medical system, but such authority does not necessarily extend beyond the doctor's advice on medical matters. The second issue is that regardless of the extent to which hierarchy is present in a relationship, the quality of that relationship may remain important to the functioning of community life.

All communities need a range of organisations for their functioning and wellbeing. An initial issue in the linkages between members of a community and organisations is the quality of access that people have to the services these organisations provide. The second is the quality of those services themselves.

Quality of access

The Australian Community Survey asked respondents to rate quality of access to a range of services and activities. The results are presented in figure 5.1. In interpreting those results, it is important to remember that there are many services that are important only for a certain group of people in a community. Other people may not know much about whether those services are readily accessible or not. Hence, in examining people's opinions, one should also take into account the proportion of people who said 'don't know' to the question about access.

Figure 5.1 Access to services: Assessment by Australian adults

Percent of Australian adults

Good / Excellent   Don't know   Poor / Very poor
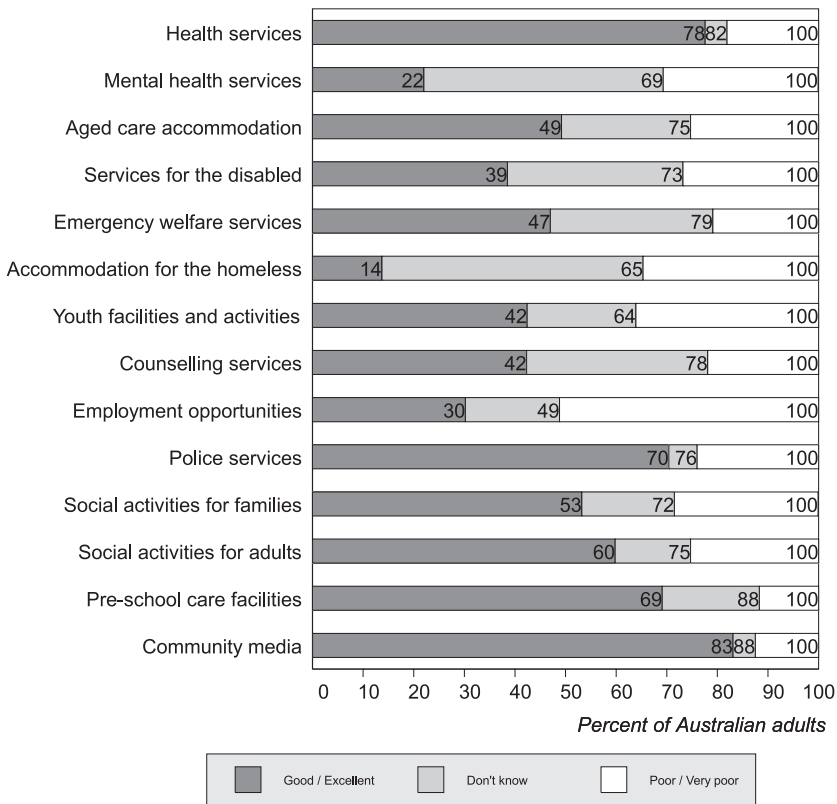
Most people do know about the basic health services, about community media such as local newspapers and about police services.

The large majority of people (70 per cent or more) felt that access to these services was 'good' or 'excellent'. Almost as many people affirmed the accessibility of facilities for the care of pre-school children.

At the other end of the spectrum, most concern was expressed about employment opportunities, with around 50 per cent of all people saying that these were poor. This question dealt with the availability of employment, not with the services provided by employment agencies. Respondents who were not in the paid workforce, such as retired people and perhaps some other people, probably responded in terms of their own opportunities for employment.

More than 30 per cent of respondents expressed concern about the insufficiency of youth facilities and activities, accommodation for the homeless, and mental health services, respectively. At least 25 per cent expressed concern about the lack of access to aged care accommodation, services for the disabled, social activities for families, and social activities for adults, respectively.

Access depends on where one lives. In general, most people living in middle or upper class metropolitan suburbs more strongly affirmed the accessibility of services than did people in lower class metropolitan suburbs and people living in rural areas. Generally, the smaller the rural township, the less access people had to services. There was just one exception to that pattern. Small rural communities appeared to have just as good access to community media as did larger rural towns, although not as good as in the suburbs of the large cities.

Overall, most people considered that access to general health services was good. A small majority in most areas, except for rural postcode areas with populations below 2000, said that access to services for the disabled was good. Most people felt that access to mental health services, however, was poor.

In general, the higher socio-economic suburbs of the metropolitan areas had higher percentages of people affirming the adequacy of access to all sorts of health-related services. In rural areas, as the size of the townships diminished, so did the levels of affirmation of the adequacy of access to services.

Do these facilities have much bearing on how people feel about their communities? Many people would only access most of the services

occasionally, and some might never be accessed. However, greater access to all of the services correlated with higher affirmation of their local community. The facilities that had most impact on how people felt about their communities were access to social activities for adults and families and to police services.

These services represent just a small portion of those that are important in the functioning of community life and which contribute to the wellbeing of individuals and communities. Many other services are often taken for granted. Most Australian communities have access to a supply of power and some form of waste disposal. The water supply has been taken for granted in most places in Australia but is becoming more problematic as global warming contributes to changes in weather patterns. Most communities have roads and telephones, although not all have accessible public transport. When services are cut off, people miss them, as shown by the outcry with the closing of banks in many small rural centres.

Good quality linkages: A matter of confidence

Linkages are partly about having access to organisations that can supply goods and services to a community. They are also about individuals having confidence in those organisations and in the adequacy of the services provided. It is no help, for example, if an organisation supplies an elaborate website for the unemployed if those who are unemployed have no means of access to the Internet or ability to use it if they did have access.

A word commonly used in assessing our relationships with organisations is 'confidence'. Confidence is closely related to trust, which has been seen as a key factor in personal relationships. One has confidence in an organisation when one feels that it is trustworthy, that it will deliver the goods and services it has agreed to provide, that its products are reliable, and that it will pay its bills. Confidence is closely linked to the sense that the organisation has the interests of client or customer in its purview and is not consumed by its own interests or greed.

At the most basic levels, society runs on such confidence. The consumer, for example, wants to be confident that those who provide the products have acted with the interests of the public in mind – that

the food is properly processed and that harmful ingredients have not been added, for example. The homeowner wants to be confident that the builder has created a home that is safe and will not develop structural problems.

If there is little trust or confidence, the processes of life slow down. Excessive resort to surveillance to ensure that a proper job is done slows the flow of activity. Making complaints and returning goods that have not been made to expected standards are burdens. Deliberate checking of every step adds time and trouble to contracts and services. But if there is little confidence or trust, these are the paths to which people must resort.

In 1983, the Australian Values Study Survey measured the confidence of people in a range of Australian institutions. These questions were repeated in the Australian Community Survey in 1998 and in the Wellbeing and Security Survey in 2002. Some results are shown in table 5.1.

Table 5.1 Percentage of the population indicating a moderate or high amount of confidence in various institutions

Organisation or system	1983	1998	2002
The press/media	28	13	15
Churches	56	39	35
Federal government	56	21	37
Legal system	62	29	34
Police	81	69	75
The banks	87	21	22

Note: The 1983 results are from the Australian Values Study Survey. The 1998 results are from the Australian Community Survey and the 2002 results from the Wellbeing and Security Survey. In all cases the percentages represent those who indicated that they have 'quite a lot of confidence' or 'a great deal of confidence' in the institution.

The levels of confidence in every organisation or system dropped steeply between 1983 and 1998, but in most cases rose slightly between 1998 and 2002. While confidence in the banking system showed the most dramatic decline between 1983 and 1998, there were also significant declines in confidence in government, in other areas of public service and in the churches. There was comparatively little confidence in the media in 1983, but this fell further. Confidence in the police fell least,

but they too experienced a significant drop. These declines in confidence affect the functioning of our communities. People are more reticent to rely on services these institutions provide. They are more wary of the claims organisations make. They take more time to read the fine print, concerned that the organisations might be trying to mislead them in some way.

Access to the facilities that organisations supply must be complemented by confidence in those facilities. Just as people live more harmoniously with each other if they can trust each other, so people co-operate with organisations more harmoniously if they have confidence in them. Indeed, the level of confidence in organisations is an important factor in the overall quality of community life.

Organisations and individuals often function in the context of large and complex systems. For example, the teacher is educated in, accredited by, and responsible to the education system. The system includes trainers, administrators, inspectors, people who provide educational resources, and many others. Such systems dominate many areas of contemporary life.

In contemporary society many of our critical dealings occur with people with whom we are not personally familiar. The person one deals with may be different from one occasion to the next, whether it be at the supermarket checkout, or having the photocopier mended, or reporting a crime which has occurred, or flying with an airline. In relation to these people, trust cannot be based on familiarity, as there are few, if any, opportunities to become familiar with the individuals who deliver the services.

These people work within the context of large and complex systems. Many of them are part of an army of people each with their own expertise, contributing their particular skills to the operation of the system. British sociologist Anthony Giddens (1990: 27) uses the term 'expert systems' to refer to these socio-technical systems. We live surrounded by them: educational systems, health systems, welfare systems, legal systems, transportation systems, telecommunications systems, water and power systems, banking systems, retailing systems, and the like. We largely depend on the educational system to train people in various fields of expertise required in other systems.

Within all these 'expert systems' there are procedures for hiring people, inducting them into the particular part of the system where they work and holding them accountable for doing the work they have been assigned. If one's trust in these people cannot be based on individual familiarity or reputation then it must be based on the systems that have trained, hired and held these people accountable. The trust one places in the individuals who are part of the system derives from trust in the system itself.

Confidence and goodwill

Various people have asked why a decline in the level of confidence in organisations has occurred and what it means for the wider society. Does the decline in confidence in government, for example, challenge the legitimacy of our political institutions? Does the decline in trust in banks and in other large commercial enterprises affect the operation the financial system or the marketplace?

One commentator who has looked closely at Australians' levels of confidence in various institutions argues that there are a variety of factors that relate to different sorts of organisations. Often those who feel they have least power or position in relation, for example, to government, tend to have lower levels of confidence (Papadakis 1999). Australian sociologist Michael Pusey (2003: 134) likewise notes that those who have the lowest levels of trust in others and the lowest levels of confidence in government are those in the low income bracket, the people he describes as the 'Battlers' and the 'Survivors'.

It has also been suggested that, more generally, the media have played a major role in the decline in levels of confidence, even though there are also quite low levels of confidence in the various media (Papadakis 1999).

In the Wellbeing and Security Survey (2002) we began looking at some of the reasons for the lack of confidence and how confidence could be built. An important finding was that confidence was strongly related to the belief that the organisation would act in the interests of the user of its services. Confidence was greater where people felt that the organisation had the public's interests at heart. Thus, there was a vast difference in the confidence with which Australians view community-oriented systems such as the health and educational

systems and the confidence they had in commercial organisations such as banks and large corporations. It is probably no accident that the level of confidence in the banks fell significantly when the Commonwealth Bank was privatised.

In the context of 'expert systems', such as the health system, the educational system or the legal system, trust in a few individuals with whom we are personally familiar is not sufficient. We have to be able to trust the system itself. Confidence consists of believing that those employed within the system know what is required in their job and will do their work properly. It means believing that the system has been built and is regulated in such a way as to ensure that the people within it play their part responsibly and that there are means of dealing with failures and providing redress when the system does not operate appropriately.

In dealing with these systems, it is often impossible to get to know people personally and to learn whether they can be trusted or not. There is no opportunity to check out their reputations. Much of the time, there will be no knowledge of mutual acquaintances through whom reputations could be checked. One cannot ask for someone familiar to serve at the fast-food outlet, or to deal with the crime one has experienced.

Confidence involves the belief that there are means within the system of checking that tasks are being done and that failures are rectified. The teacher is trusted because the education system is trusted. There may come a time when the parents see sufficient of the performance of the teacher to make their own judgments. At that point, personal familiarity and reputation also play a part. However, in most cases, confidence in people is dependent on confidence in the systems in which they operate.

Personality or experiences?

How much is confidence simply a matter of personality? Do those people who find it difficult to trust other people also find it hard to trust organisations? Or is it more to do with our experiences of organisations?

Some people do have a more cautious personality and are more wary of others. However, suspicion and wariness are also products of circumstances and background. People who are more vulnerable in

society tend to be more wary. Both younger people and older people tend to be more wary than those in the middle years, the people who have the greatest influence over social affairs. Employers and professionals have greater confidence in organisations than do semi-skilled and unskilled workers. People with higher levels of formal education have greater confidence than those with lower levels.

Part of the difference lies in understanding. Those who understand organisations and systems have more confidence in dealing with them. They are more confident they will know if the system is not working to their advantage or fulfilling their needs. They are more confident that they will be heard if they make some sort of complaint. Indeed, it is likely that the person who can confidently and lucidly communicate a concern *is* likely to receive a better hearing.

Another part of the difference may lie in that some people have more invested in society's organisations than others. Middle- or upper-class people are more likely than others to make use of a wide range of services provided by banks. Such people are also more likely to have shares in large companies. They are more likely to be employed at senior levels within such companies, or to have occupations with responsibility within the education, health or government systems. With less connection and less of themselves invested in these organisations, blue-collar workers, the young and the old are less likely to have the same level of confidence.

However, confidence in organisations is also a function of how those organisations operate. Some of the common complaints about organisations and systems were canvassed in the Wellbeing and Security Survey.

Table 5.2 Frustrations with organisations

Frustrations	Percentage of adult Australians indicating that they are frustrated 'often' or 'all the time'
Having only automated systems or machines rather than the opportunity to talk with people about problems	71
Organisations being concerned mainly with their own interests rather than the interests of customers, clients or the community at large	62
Not finding people who can provide appropriate information	48
Not finding people who will listen to concerns	40
Not finding appropriate ways of making a complaint	39
Not understanding how new systems operate	38

source *Wellbeing and Security Survey (2002)*

As is indicated in table 5.2, there are widespread frustrations about the use of automated systems and machines. Most people prefer to deal with other people rather than machines. Additionally, nearly two-thirds of the population believe that large organisations are concerned mainly with their own interests rather than those of customers, clients or the community at large. Further analysis of our data reveals that it is this latter frustration that has the greatest impact on people's general level of confidence in organisations. Another significant frustration which is allied to this is the problem of finding ways of making complaints. Together, these two frustrations account for about 12 per cent of the variance in people's levels of confidence in organisations in general, and a similar amount of the variance in their levels of confidence in the banks, large companies and legal organisations in particular. However, similar factors also lie at the root of suspicion about government and churches. In relation to the health system, for example, obtaining appropriate information is a significant issue for many members of the general public.

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF LINKAGES

What communities can do

1 Ensure easy access

Communities have some capacity to influence their degree of access to services and facilities through the various layers of government and through direct community action. There have been many recent examples of local communities making their voices heard in the quest to open (or reopen) public transport links, to protect hospital facilities, or to build aged care accommodation.

Special attention needs to be given to the needs of minority groups within the community. Many ethnic groups do not have facilities that they can access easily in their own languages. People with limited physical abilities or with mental illnesses often find it more difficult to access services. Some needs are in the broad public attention more than others, and concerted effort may be required to ensure that needs of minority groups are met.

It is also a matter of meeting needs in ways that are appropriate for those minority groups. Many Australians find little need for public transport. Yet, it is vital for those who are not old enough or are too old to drive a car. There are others who do not have access to their own transport, either through limited financial means or because of special situations such as the inability to drive.

2 Provide information

Communication may mean using the resources of the media – radio and newspaper, perhaps television and Internet. It may mean gathering people in common forums or sending information to community groups.

The media play a special role in relation to 'expert systems'. Although such systems use the media to develop and convey their images, the media can also provide critiques. They can tell of abuses and complaints and the ways they are being handled. They provide ways whereby organisations and expert systems can be transparent in their dealings with the public.

Hence, confidence in the media can help to build, or alternatively to undermine, confidence in many other types of organisations. However,

confidence in the media is quite low in Australia, and has fallen over recent decades. Levels of confidence are not helped when it is known that media ownership is concentrated in the hands of a few. Having a diversity of media available and limitations on cross-media ownership is important for the 'watchdog' role that the media can perform, and may also have a more general impact on the performance of, and public confidence in, other organisations and institutions.

The Internet has been seen as an antidote to the centralisation of ownership of the major public media outlets. There is, no doubt, some truth in that. The Internet certainly provides many Australians with access to a wide range of information. Yet, the diversity of material on the Internet means that people do not always feel confident about what they find there. There is no one authority by which the materials on the Internet can be measured. New skills must be developed in our communities in discerning what is reliable information and what is less reliable.

The Australian Community Survey asked about the means whereby people learnt about the issues, people and events of the local area. Overall, newspapers were rated as most important, followed by talking with friends, television, then radio (see figure 5.2).

There were significant differences in the patterns between different types of communities. In rural communities, people relied more on local newspapers and local radio than in the city. They also affirmed more strongly the importance not only of friends, but also of neighbours. In the small rural communities, particularly, communication through meetings, societies or associations was very important to many people.

In the cities, major newspapers, national radio and television received stronger affirmation of their importance than in the rural communities.

It was apparent from the responses that, overall, in small rural communities there were more ways of obtaining local information than in other types of communities. In small rural communities, people are more likely to talk with their neighbours and attend public meetings about local events and issues. They also take more interest in their local newspapers. It is relatively easy to get information around a small rural community … sometimes unintentionally!

The means of communication about local events in the cities are not so effective. Many people watch the television, and some read the major city newspapers. But these provide them with state-wide and nation-wide information rather than much local information.

Figure 5.2 Resources considered 'very important' for information about the local area

Percentage indicating resource 'very important'
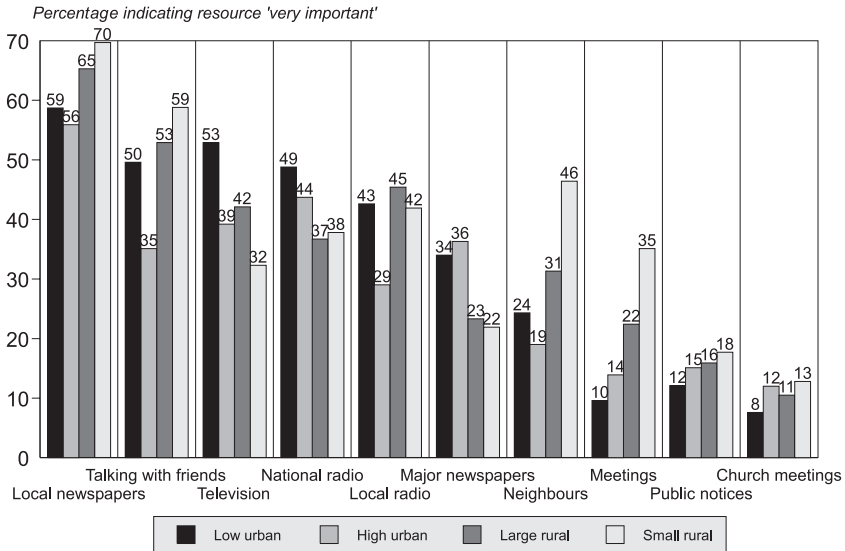
Interest groups within cities have to develop their own means of communication, such as email lists or publications sent through the mail. It requires considerable effort to create these lists and keep them current.

3 Develop consumer organisations

Consumer organisations that act as 'watchdogs' on various parts of society play an important role in our complex world. Not all of us can understand what is going on in the financial world, in the field of public health, or in the protection of the environment. There is a place for specialists who can inform the public about what is happening and alert them to concerns.

Not everyone can keep an eye on public transport, for example, or on the variety of products that organisations provide. The development

of specialist organisations that provide such services for the whole community helps to give people confidence that problems will be brought to light and action will be taken to remedy them. There are pressures that community members and community organisations may bring to bear to ensure that business organisations and government agencies are good corporate citizens and do not act in ways that are harmful to individual and social wellbeing. For instance, consumer boycotts have led some corporations to take greater account of the social, environmental and economic effects of their policies and practices. Similarly, realising the increased level of community concern about the environment, some companies have developed policies to reduce the use of non-renewable resources, minimise the waste products produced and recycle materials.

The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) has played a significant role in ensuring a 'fair market'. It has brought the attention of both government and people to cases where there has been collusion to force up prices of goods, for example. As well as disseminating information, the ACCC has been able to hold companies accountable through legal processes.

There is the danger within Australian society that people could develop an ethos of helplessness, feeling that it is all too hard to have an impact on the big systems. There is always a danger of people believing they are victims of forces that are far beyond their control, too powerful for them to match.

In some societies or situations, people who do take action, who speak out against injustices in society or against large and powerful organisations, take considerable risk in so doing. As the power of the expert systems extends, it is vital that people have the opportunity to express their views without fear or favour. It is vital that the right to make complaints, to seek redress for injustice, to gather with other people to seek greater transparency and accountability, is protected. Paradoxically, the exposure of corporate or governmental irresponsibility may reduce trust in the organisations and institutions where the malfeasance has occurred, but in the long run may produce a society where such behaviour is less likely to occur.

Strengthening community, then, involves developing a culture in which people are empowered to voice concerns. It involves pointing

to the successes that such groups have had. It involves leadership that is able and willing to articulate public concerns and find ways through which such concerns may be addressed. It means protecting people's right to voice their opinions.

4 Press for appropriate forms of regulation

Through various levels of government, communities have some indirect power to regulate organisations and expert systems. Some restrictions on media ownership have already been mentioned as an example where regulation may help to contribute to public confidence. More controversially, some regulation of the fees and charges imposed by major utilities may be warranted, especially when, in practice, market competition has little impact at the consumer level.

There are some goods, such as food, where the problems occur rarely but can have very serious consequences when they do. One could hardly have the opportunity to try various pork pies until one finds one without salmonella bacteria in it! Various levels of government have roles to play in ensuring that appropriate health and safety standards are maintained in the production, distribution and sale of foodstuffs. Similar safety issues arise in some other manufacturing, retailing and servicing operations.

5 Empower through education

Education in relating to the expert systems in Australian society is a community responsibility. School education should include some basic introduction to many of these systems, such as the health system, the financial system and the systems of government, that people need to understand in order to operate within contemporary society.

Education can also contribute to the ability of people to make assessments of information and to evaluate products and possibilities. Many people are confused by the array of choices that confront them in many areas of life from banking options to telephone plans. Education can help empower people to voice their opinions and to make complaints. The skills of literacy and putting a case are important to such activities. As will be discussed in chapter 8, the ability to interact effectively with the expert systems depends on the ability to understand them. This is true for gaining employment within the systems, but it is also true for consumers who wish to access the services that they offer.

What organisations can do

1 Increase the level of transparency

Building trust in the context of contemporary society means creating systems that are transparent and in which there are numerous checks and balances. Trust has a lot to do with transparency. We are more likely to trust organisations if we know that their operations are publicly visible, even if we ourselves do not have time to examine them. Levels of trust are increased by the fact that there are appropriate government regulations to ensure organisations are accountable and to check their compliance. However, organisations should work at making their policies and operations transparent to those who have the responsibility of regulation on behalf of the government, or those who act in the name of consumer groups.

2 Put in place effective and accessible complaints procedures

Confidence is increased when people feel that they can go to an organisation and make a complaint and their complaint will be taken seriously. This means having in place a system that is well advertised and that is visible to the consumer or user of services. It may begin by having a person ready to listen to concerns rather than a machine that merely allows people to leave a message. It means, too, that there are mechanisms through which contact can be developed and maintained.

Some organisations ask complaints officers to use false names. When the person phones again to ask what is being done, no one knows the name of the person who first took the complaint. The complaint is lost and confidence is destroyed.

In other places, organisations listen to complaints, but no one seems to have the power to do anything about them. A responsive and effective complaints procedure that allows problems to be appropriately resolved is essential to public confidence.

3 Act for the wellbeing of consumers and the community

In some quarters, particularly in recent years, there has developed a mentality that the primary or even the only responsibility of corporations is to make money for their shareholders. The financial system tends to reinforce this, for companies grow if they make money. However, in the long term, companies will usually benefit financially if they are also

held in high esteem by the public. This will occur if companies are seen to be genuinely concerned for the wellbeing of the wider society. The wider society includes not only their employees and those who use their products and services but also the communities from which employees are drawn and the communities where their products and services are sold. Companies fulfil some of these wider responsibilities through taxes paid on company profits. There are also other ways in which some companies choose to contribute to the wider community. These include various forms of philanthropy or sponsorship. Further reference to these activities will be made in later chapters.

Various governments have encouraged 'triple bottom line' accounting, in which companies note not only the profits they make but also the social and environmental impacts of their activities. The procedures for ensuring that these contributions to environment and community are measured in a fair and comparable way are far from being standardised. Nor is it easy for community members to evaluate company claims. As better means of measurement in these areas are developed and procedures for auditing and public reporting are strengthened, companies will be held more accountable, not only for the goods and services they supply but also for the consequences in environment and community of their activities.

Developing partnerships

The Australian Government has been keen to encourage partnerships between private enterprise, community organisations and government. In terms of strengthening community life, such partnerships can be effective, although they may also be complex and unwieldy. In each sector, there are different operating cultures.

Governments demand accountability. Working with government is a large topic in its own right. Finding and accessing government support, co-operating with government regulations and guidelines and reporting to government are all important skills.

Private enterprise will be interested in ensuring that processes are efficient and do not unnecessarily consume time. Often, private enterprise is keen to see results for its input and to ensure that these are made known to the wider public.

Many community organisations, on the other hand, are maintained by volunteers who have a range of activities in which they are engaged. They will usually have the interests of the community at heart, but they will often not have the efficiency that private enterprise expects, and perhaps not the reporting and evaluation skills that governments demand.

Partnerships need patience and understanding. Yet ultimately, as these different sectors of society work together, the whole community may benefit.

Questions for reflection

1   What do you consider to be the basic services that are required for your local community to function effectively? In your own area, how accessible are those services?

2   What are some of the factors in your own experience that have contributed to or have diminished the level of your confidence in organisations?

3   Considering the various ways in which communities can contribute to linkages, what sorts of actions would make the most difference to these relationships in your own community?

4   Reflecting on an organisation of which you have been a part, what did it do to increase levels of confidence? What else could it have done?

COMMUNITY STRENGTHENING DYNAMICS

PART 3

The introduction to this book described the contemporary concerns that have contributed to the desire to build stronger communities. The second part of the book looked at how this might be done by strengthening the various types of relationships that constitute community, summarised under the headings of bonds, bridges and linkages. Part 3 builds on that analysis by considering the processes through which people are motivated to build such relationships, how they can become skilled so that their capacity for such relationships is increased, and what factors can lead to their engagement in relationships.

One of the primary ways of involvement in the wider society is through employment. In this regard, financial reward is a major motivator. Education is strongly oriented to providing the necessary skills, and engagement takes place through the wide range of employment bureaus and other means of advertising positions and responding to them.

However, community organisations also play a significant role in community life. They are part of what has been called the 'Third Sector', distinguished from the business and government sectors, and also from households and families. These organisations contribute much to civic life. Through them, people pursue common interests, tasks and activities, from hobbies to sport, from artistic exploration to religious worship. Such organisations provide the basis for joint action on common concerns and issues, from creating safer neighbourhoods to addressing environmental concerns. Community organisations and networks provide formal and informal structures whereby socially desirable outcomes are achieved.

Such community organisations and networks have been the focus of many discussions about building community life. In these discussions, various models of community building have been suggested. Chapter 6 examines these models, focusing on community resilience, the health of communities and community capacity. It also briefly examines communitarian perspectives. It attempts to synthesise and apply insights from these various approaches as well as taking account of their limitations.

Chapters 7 to 9 then examine three processes that contribute to people's active participation in, and strengthening of, various types of communities – motivating, skilling and engaging. The values undergirding these processes are explored as are some practical

suggestions as to how these processes can be enhanced. Many of the examples given in this section of the book refer to the processes of building community organisations. Others refer to the relationships in household or family and wider community.

Chapter 10 addresses the exercise of effective leadership both through designated positions and informally within the context of community life. It outlines the patterns of leadership that make it effective – the development of vision, the building of trust and commitment, the networking and communication. It also discusses some of the qualities that contribute to the capacity for leadership, such as self-understanding and having a clear sense of purpose at the personal level.

CHAPTER 6

LEARNING FROM VARIOUS MODELS

Various models have been proposed for building stronger communities. Some focus on enhancing community resilience, some on developing healthy communities, some on community capacity or assets, and some on specific communitarian objectives. Each of these approaches offers useful insights although all have some limitations. Underlying these models of community building are more general factors relating to people's motivations, skills and involvement, and appropriate forms of leadership. These will be more fully discussed in subsequent chapters.

Most models for building stronger communities deal mainly with communities of locality. Nevertheless, they may also offer insights relevant to other types of community. This chapter will briefly review several approaches and synthesise some key elements from them. Later chapters will build on this foundation.

ENHANCING COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

One approach to community development or renewal revolves around the notion of community resilience. A resilient community is one that is able to respond effectively and bounce back in the face of adverse circumstances, whether these be economic, environmental or social. A recent example is provided by the town of Moora, Western Australia, which was devastated by three 'once in a century' floods. It managed

to survive these devastations and plan constructively for the future, winning an award as Australia's 'Community of the Year'.

The Centre for Community Enterprise (CCE) (2000a: 2), a Canadian organisation, sees a resilient community as one that 'takes intentional action to enhance the personal and collective capacity of its citizens and institutions to respond to, and influence the course of, social and economic change'. The CCE's particular focus is on rural communities, although it notes that the community economic development strategies that it propounds have also been used, and some even invented, in larger urban settings (Centre for Community Enterprise 2000b: 3). The CCE has identified a range of characteristics that are found in resilient communities. These include:

- leadership which is visionary, but which shares power and builds consensus throughout the community;
- community sense of pride, willingness to work together in a self-reliant way;
- strong belief in and support for education at all levels;
- partnerships and collaborative relationships across the community;
- local ownership of the organisations which are employing people, and strategies for increasing independent, local ownership;
- a variety of forms of employment and economic activity; and
- ongoing action towards achieving community goals, both in terms of economic development and in terms of evaluating progress towards the community's strategic goals.

This approach puts strong, but not exclusive, emphasis on structures and strategies for community economic development. The community must have a vision and a means of achieving it that is embraced by the community as a whole. There must be structures for co-operation in achieving these goals, and alternatives if one set of options becomes unsustainable.

This approach provides helpful reminders that towns or cities should not be too dependent on one large employer or means of employment. It emphasises the need for visionary leadership, widespread ownership of the vision, and structures through which the members of the community can work together to achieve goals. It notes the importance of community spirit – pride in the community and a willingness to seek to resolve problems and build the community. It may well be that

increased trust and goodwill will be a by-product of such processes as people find a common vision and work together on it. Or, lack of trust and goodwill will inhibit the development of that vision.

This approach, however, does not deal comprehensively with the social components of community strength. While it gives primary attention to the economic resilience of communities at a local level, it gives relatively little attention to issues arising from the fragmentation of community life.

DEVELOPING HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

Some people have articulated their vision for community life in terms of the development of 'healthy communities'. The term 'healthy' is used here to refer not only, or even primarily, to the physical and mental health of individuals and populations. Rather, the focus tends to be on the social, economic and, in some cases, ecological wellbeing of communities. For instance, Lackey, Burke and Peterson (1987) contend that the goal of community development should be to develop healthy communities – communities in which there would be:

- local groups with well-developed problem-solving skills and a spirit of self-reliance;
- broadly distributed power, commitment to the community and wide participation in its affairs;
- leaders with vision and a strong sense of community loyalty;
- collaboration and consensus on goals and priorities;
- citizens with problem-solving skills and the ability to acquire resources;
- government that provides enabling support; and
- ability to manage community conflict.

Like most writers on community development, Lackey et al. focus primarily on place-based communities. They stress the importance of the community finding ways forward through visionary leadership, broadly based participation of members of the community, and the application of various skills and resources to deal with community problems.

Jenny Wills (2000), a public policy researcher in Australia, has argued that health can be applied to the various dimensions of community life and can refer to physical, social and mental health. She suggests that

as applied to the physical or built environment it means livability, in the economic domain it means viability and prosperity, in the social domain equity and conviviality, and in the natural domain sustainability. However, she contends that the key to healthy communities is democratic governance, the word 'governance' being a much broader term than the word 'government'. Democratic governance, unlike corporate forms of governance, encourages participation, respect for different opinions, devolving control and decision-making, empowering groups and promoting tolerance. It involves accountability to people. Democratic governance encourages active citizenship, the development of social capital, and social justice. These, she holds, are the building blocks of healthy communities.

FOCUSING ON COMMUNITY CAPACITY OR ASSETS

Some models for community development or community renewal focus on the capacity or assets of a community. For example, in America, the Aspen Institute (1996) uses the term 'community capacity' to refer to 'the combined influence of a community's commitment, resources and skills that can be deployed to build on community strengths and address community problems and opportunities'. In this definition:

- *Commitment* refers to the community-wide will to act, based on a shared awareness of problems, opportunities and workable solutions. It refers also to heightened support in key sectors of the community to address opportunities, solve problems and strengthen community responses.

- *Resources* refers to financial, natural and human assets and the means to deploy them intelligently and fairly. It also includes having the information or guidelines that will ensure the best use of these resources.

- *Skills* includes all the talents and expertise of individuals and organisations that can be marshalled to address problems, seize opportunities, and add strength to existing and emerging institutions. (Aspen Institute 1996)

According to the Aspen Institute, these three ingredients of community capacity do not 'just happen'. Rather, they are developed through participation, leadership, education and developing a vision and agenda for a community.

The Asset-Based Community Development Institute at North-western University in Illinois maintains that strong communities are places where the capacities of local residents are identified, valued and used. The Institute's approach to community development is radically different from approaches that begin by identifying a community's needs, deficiencies and problems. Instead it advocates the seeking of detailed information about individuals' skills, work experience, education and training, and experience in starting a business. The Institute also recommends the compilation of an inventory of local organisations and associations, and available physical and financial resources (Kretzmann & McKnight 1993). While not denying that resources from outside the community might be required, the Institute's main emphasis is on community development that is:

- *asset-based* – starting with what the community has, rather than with what is absent or problematic;
- *internally focused* – stressing the primacy of local definition, investment, creativity, hope and control; and
- *relationship-driven* – building or rebuilding relationships between and among local residents, local associations and local organisations.

In other words, the primary focus is on processes for identifying, mobilising and enhancing local assets and capabilities. A strong community will develop its capacity in these ways.

COMMUNITARIAN PERSPECTIVES

Further ideas on building stronger communities have come from various communitarian perspectives. According to a statement published by a network of communitarians in America:

> A Communitarian perspective recognizes that the preservation of individual liberty depends on the active maintenance of the institutions of civil society where citizens learn respect for others as well as self-respect; where we acquire a lively sense of our personal and civic responsibilities, along with an appreciation of our own rights and the rights of others; where we develop the skills of self-government as well as the habit of governing ourselves and learn to serve others – not just self. (reproduced in Etzioni 1994: 253–54)

Henry Tam (1998: 7–18), a leading British advocate for communitarianism, maintains that it involves three central principles: co-operative inquiry as the basis for what is accepted as true; mutual responsibility based on common values; and equal participation by all affected people in deciding how power is to be exercised. Tam rejects the criticism that communitarians wish to impose their sets of values on others and that they make insufficient allowance for individual rights and preferences. He sees various common values as emerging from the process of co-operative inquiry, which he regards as an alternative to authoritarianism on the one hand and extreme moral relativism on the other. In his view, where conditions of co-operative inquiry have prevailed, a consistent consensus has emerged in favour of at least four types of deeply valued human experiences: love, wisdom, justice and fulfilment. Tam contends that these are the common values that should form the basis for mutual responsibility within communities.

Many communitarians stress the importance of parents and schools in instilling respect for common values and acceptance of civic responsibilities. Many also stress the principle of subsidiarity, which states that the lowest level of authority capable of addressing an issue is the one best able to handle it. Some communitarians have been accused of downplaying the importance of governments or government agencies. Certainly many communitarians have been critical not only of the excessive individualism encouraged by an emphasis on 'the market' but also of the excessive collectivism embodied in authoritarian regimes and perhaps in some aspects of the welfare state. Others, however, see an important role for the state in helping to protect the legitimate rights of minorities, in adjudicating between competing interests and in facilitating the pursuit of social justice (Delanty 2003; Frazer 1999; Taylor 2003).

In our view, it is possible to learn from communitarian perspectives without necessarily accepting everything that they put forward.

APPLYING INSIGHTS FROM VARIOUS MODELS

Each of the approaches outlined in this chapter adds useful insights into what is meant by the term 'stronger communities' and how such communities can be built. For example, the descriptions of healthy

communities referred to the importance of broadly distributed power and wide participation in the life of the community. Tam (1998: 15) mentioned the importance of justice, by which he meant that people should treat one another fairly and that they should relate to one another without any form of unfair discrimination or subjugation.

The issue of justice and broad-based sharing of power is a critical aspect of strong and healthy communities. An imbalance in power is a widespread and insidious problem in society. It inhibits people coming together mutually to solve common problems. It leads to distrust and avoidance. It is destructive of goodwill. In the market-driven society, the imbalance of power must be controlled by contract, regulation, group solidarity or other procedures that ensure fairness and accountability. In voluntary associations, there is a need for structures which ensure that all participants can have a say and that the interests of all are well protected.

There is a natural tendency for some people to become more powerful than others because they have more financial or educational or other resources. Links to government or another form of authority may give some people more power than others. Some people take power because of their personalities, perhaps their aggressiveness.

Language and culture are important mechanisms of power in Australian society. Those people whose first language is not English are at a disadvantage. It is more difficult for them to express themselves and play an equal role in discussions and decision-making. They may miss the nuances of the decisions that are made, even if they speak English well.

People who do not share the dominant worldview are also at a disadvantage. They may know the words, but are unable to make full sense of them. For example, medical terminology is dependent on a particular scientific view of the human body, a view with which some Indigenous people in Australia are not familiar. Thus discussions with doctors and other medical personnel are not fully understood. Equally, few white people understand the worldview out of which comes the law and bushcraft of Indigenous people. The lack of ability for one group to understand the other has been explored and well illustrated by Richard Trudgen (2000) in his book on Yolngu people of Arnhem Land, *Why Warriors Lie Down and Die*.

Justice requires the establishment of procedures where the voices of all are heard, and where those who are most affected by the activities of the community have a say in what happens. This means ensuring that there are no imbalances of power, no ways in which those who are stakeholders in the community are excluded from or disadvantaged in the decision-making processes. It means dealing fairly with one another, treating each other with dignity and respect.

Other values are also important if communities are to be strong. Tam (1998: 15) identifies love, wisdom and fulfilment as three of these. The first implies virtues such as caring, friendship, kindness, compassion, sympathy and active goodwill. The second relates to being able to understand, to weigh evidence and to make good judgments. The third relates to developing and realising one's potential, being able to achieve worthwhile objectives and enjoy life. A strong and healthy community will uphold these common values. This implies, for example, that the community will encourage and support appropriate forms of education and lifelong learning. Its members will discern and respect the rights of others as well their own rights. There will be appropriate means of managing any conflicts that might arise. Bonding, bridging and linking relationships will be wholesome and non-exploitive.

The notion of resilience refers to another desirable feature of strong communities. At the heart of 'resilience' is the idea that a community can bounce back after times of difficulty. This depends on the community having some pride in itself and some sense of purpose. It also requires the community to make effective use of the skills and resources available to it.

The literature on community capacity or assets begins by noting that all communities have some strengths and skills, including a range of relationships and associations. Building stronger communities involves mobilising these. This may apply to communities of interest as well as communities of locality. A club, for example, may look at the skills of the people involved, their hopes and aspirations, and seek to build on these for the benefit of all involved.

Many of the principles outlined above are well summarised in the following list of characteristics of a 'good and well functioning community'. It should be:

1   *A learning community,* where people and groups gain knowledge, skills and confidence through community activity.
2   *A fair and just community,* which upholds civic rights and equality of opportunity, and which recognises and celebrates the distinctive features of its cultures.
3   *An active and empowered community,* where people are fully involved and which has strong and varied local organisations and a clear identity and self-confidence.
4   *An influential community,* which is consulted and has a strong voice in decisions which affect its interests.
5   *An economically strong community,* which creates opportunities for work and which retains a high proportion of its wealth.
6   *A caring community*, aware of the needs of its members and in which services are of good quality and meet these needs.
7   *A green community* with a healthy and pleasant environment, conserving resources and encouraging awareness of environmental responsibility.
8   *A safe community,* where people do not fear crime, violence or other hazards.
9   *A welcoming community,* which people like, feel happy about and do not wish to leave.
10 *A lasting community,* which is well established and likely to survive. (Policy Action Team on Community Self-Help 1999: 3)

Although this list was prepared with specific reference to place-based communities, many of the characteristics are also relevant to other types of communities.

UNDERLYING FACTORS

Underlying various models for developing strong and active communities are several general factors:

1   People are appropriately motivated. They recognise the importance of collaboration and co-operation for the common good and for the wellbeing of each other. They seek to serve not only their own interests but also those of others.
2   People's skills and abilities are appropriately developed and applied, so that they can make constructive contributions to the life of their communities.
3   People are actively engaged, thereby achieving personal fulfilment and enabling others to find fulfilment also.

4   There is visionary leadership that is committed to the wellbeing of communities and their members. The leadership seeks to facilitate active participation by community members. It also ensures that there are appropriate means of addressing conflicts and tensions.

The three factors of motivation, skill and engagement have been identified in the model for 'civic voluntarism' developed by three researchers in the United States. From empirical research, Verba, Schlozman and Brady (1995: 269ff) show that three factors have a significant impact on the extent to which individuals actively participate in politics. These are:

1   *Motivation* – perhaps in the form of personal interest, a sense of belonging to the category of persons who would be directly affected by political decisions, or a concern for others who would be affected.
2   *Skills and resources* – the individual's capacity to become involved in terms of having money, time and appropriate skills.
3   *Engagement* through some sort of recruitment network – whereby the individual is invited to participate in political activities.

While the model was developed particularly to account for political involvement, it has been widely applied to other forms of voluntary work. For example, Musick, Wilson and Bynum (2000) argue for the significance of these factors in relation to people's involvement in voluntary work in general. For some people, the motivation to undertake voluntary work relates to non-monetary benefits they personally gain. Others find that motivation in the desire to give something to the community or to others. Musick et al. (2000: 1542) suggest that 'Americans are much more likely to volunteer when they are compassionate toward those in need, feel an obligation to give back some of the benefits they have reaped, and believe that enhancing the moral basis of society is an important personal goal'.

In volunteering, people must believe that they have something to offer. People with more skills or education might be expected to have greater levels of involvement because they have a greater level of 'human capital'. Conversely, poor health may act as an impediment to involvement in some forms of voluntary activity. In general, people of higher socio-economic status might thereby have a greater capacity to

contribute financially and in other ways to various voluntary activities. Nevertheless, other people also have valuable skills that they can potentially contribute.

Musick et al. (2000: 1541) also note that people must have appropriate social connections through which they may be invited to participate or, at the very least, become aware of opportunities to participate. Voluntary work is, by definition, work which people freely undertake without any expectation of a monetary reward. Many people who undertake voluntary work begin doing so as a result of a specific invitation, in contrast to engagement in the paid workforce, in which individuals often take the initiative in seeking out opportunities, frequently impelled by economic necessity. Thus, people with a range of social connections are more likely than others to be invited to undertake voluntary work.

This model, which sees involvement as a consequence of the capacity to contribute, the motivation to contribute and the means of engagement, can be applied to involvement in many aspects of community life. In most relationships, people must feel that they have something to offer to the relationship. There must be some motivation for their involvement, whether it be the value of the relationship itself, or possible advantages or other beneficial outcomes that may arise from the relationship. Thirdly, there is usually some trigger factor that leads to people becoming involved.

The model provides a helpful way of evaluating ideas for strengthening community life. An important question that can be asked of programs and activities designed for that purpose is *what are the motivational factors on which they depend*? Will people become involved because there is some direct benefit to them? Will they find the program or activity personally rewarding? Will it, in some way, meet some of their own needs or interests, or contribute to what they value? Or will the activities appeal to their willingness to help others?

A second question is *how are people engaged in this program or activity?* How are first connections made? What means are used to encourage them to become involved? Is the first contact made in the workplace, through the home, or through some other community involvement? Is it dependent on advertising through mass media, or is there some personal connection through which the person can be urged to

participate? Are there ways in which peer group influence is brought to bear on participation?

In relation to any program, situation or relationship, one may ask: is it using knowledge, skills and resources that participants already have or is it enhancing their knowledge, skills and resources? *Is it contributing to their sense that they have something to offer to others*? This is one of the big tasks of education. Indeed, education can be described in terms of the development of skills and ways of life through which people are able to contribute to their own wellbeing and that of others.

The success of a program in involving people will depend on the strength of these three processes. *The outcomes of the proposed program also need to be specified and assessed*, both when it is being planned and conducted, and subsequently. How does the program contribute to strengthening social bonds, bridges and linkages? Or build people's connections with each other? How does it contribute to the quality of those connections, to the development of trust and trustworthiness, to a willingness to give oneself to others, to the affirmation of difference and diversity?

There is no rigid order among these processes of motivating, engaging and skilling. They are interrelated. They apply not only to people first becoming involved in community activities, but also to their continuing involvement. Engagement becomes easier following initial involvement, but it is a continuing issue which is often dependent on the levels of motivation to be involved. Having skills that one feels one can use for the benefit of others contributes to one's motivation. But skilling often occurs once people have become engaged. The process of engagement must build on those factors that will motivate people to become involved. At the same time, motivation is a continuing issue. Unless people continue to feel motivated, their levels of involvement will drop. In practice, the success of these processes will often depend on the quality of leadership.

A program must be evaluated, not only in terms of the processes but also in terms of the outcomes. Is it building the resilience and health of a community? Is it enhancing community capacity or assets? Is it helping to create a society in which active goodwill, wisdom, justice and fulfilment are more fully evident? The following chapters will look in more detail at ways in which people may be motivated, skilled and

engaged, and the qualities of leadership that are important in building stronger communities.

Questions for reflection

1   What are the key factors in making a community resilient or healthy?

2   In examining a community's assets or its capacity, what would you be looking for?

3   In what ways does injustice inhibit the development of strong and healthy communities?

4   What are the key questions one should ask in evaluating programs for strengthening communities? How might one measure the level of success of a program?

CHAPTER 7

MOTIVATING

Most human beings find great inner satisfaction in the relationships of social bonds and bridges. Many volunteers report great personal satisfaction in contributing to the wider community. Motivation also arises from people's values and particularly their desire to help others. Education in values and citizenship plays a significant role in motivating people to care for each other and contribute to the community. Community organisations may reinforce such values through their policies and the ways they operate, as they encourage discussion of values and as they provide experiences whereby people are introduced to the situations and needs of others.

At the heart of building stronger communities is the issue of motivation. How does one motivate people to become involved in community life, whether it be in the locality or in communities of interest? How does one encourage people to build stronger bonding, bridging and linking relationships?

There is an inbuilt desire within human beings for relationships. Most people enjoy the company of others. In various ways, people find fulfilment together. To that extent, then, people are self-motivated to form bonding and bridging relationships.

At the same time, there is a common tendency in human beings to put themselves first, to look after their own needs and wellbeing. This often leads to a reticence in relating to others. Relationships may involve giving up a little of one's control over one's own life. There can be costs

in being there for others. Other people take one's time and emotional energy. There are always risks in trusting others. While people want relationships, these relationships can sometimes be quite costly. The self-motivation to form relationships is inhibited by the possible costs and the motivation to protect oneself.

Within the marketplace, the major means of motivating people to become involved is through financial reward. Sometimes this can also be a motivation within non-profit organisations, many of which employ people. However, other motivations are especially important in bonding relationships as well as many forms of involvement in civic life.

MOTIVATION FOR BONDING

As has been noted in chapter 3, personal relationships contribute significantly to people's overall sense of life satisfaction. They are valued in and for themselves. By and large, most Australian adults who are living with a spouse or partner find great satisfaction in the relationship. Seventy-five per cent of the 1180 adults who responded to this question in the Wellbeing and Security Survey scored their level of satisfaction in their relationships with their partners 8 or more on a scale of 0 to 10. Fifty-nine per cent of respondents to the survey also said they found great satisfaction in their other personal relationships, scoring them 8 or more on a scale of 0 to 10.

Indeed, the average score that people gave to their level of satisfaction in their marriage and partnerships was higher than for any other area of life. The level of satisfaction with their friendships was matched only by the score they gave to their level of safety. By and large, people were much less satisfied with their standards of living, what they had achieved in life, their sense of being part of the community, their work, their health, housing and the spiritual aspects of their lives.

Nevertheless, 25 per cent of those with a partner indicated that they were less than highly satisfied with the relationship, scoring their level of satisfaction at less than 8 out of 10. A total of 41 per cent of survey respondents indicated they were less than highly satisfied with their friendships. Those who scored low in their level of satisfaction in either of these areas generally scored low in their overall satisfaction with life. Indeed, only 0.5 per cent of the respondents who reported a low level of

satisfaction with their spouse or partner (a score less than 5 out of 10) reported a high overall level of life satisfaction.

Yet, the fact that many people do not find satisfying intimate relationships and that many experience breakdown in those relationships at one time or another is indicative of the difficulty people are having making and maintaining such relationships. Breakdown in close relationships is generally accompanied by a strong sense of anguish. Survey results reported in chapter 3 indicate that adults who have gone through the traumas of divorce or separation and who have not repartnered tend to be much less satisfied with life than are people living with a spouse or partner.

The motivation for building bonding relationships is complex. There may be a natural 'chemistry' which leads to the formation of family units. But long-term relationships involve much more than that. People may initially 'fall into' romantic relationships, but the building of interdependent and intimate bonds takes place gradually over a long period of time.

Sometimes developing a willingness to trust involves healing hurts that have occurred in the past. Supportive friendship and counselling may help people to deal with those occasions when they have been let down, when the trust invested in a relationship has not paid off.

At the same time, the motivation can be influenced by general cultural factors. In some cultures, and at certain times in the history of a culture, there may be a greater readiness to take the risks of trust than at other times. Higher levels of equality in terms of status and in terms of financial power in a culture may be one factor that contributes to higher levels of trust throughout the culture.

It should be noted that the *stability* of marital relationships is not necessarily the same as *high quality* in those relationships. In many cultures, stability is achieved by taking power and independence away from one partner – usually the woman. It is maintained by the women having no economic independence and thus, having to put up with the situation in which they find themselves. This does not in itself lead to high levels of trust and goodwill. Most Australians affirm the ideal of marital relationships being based on a mutuality of trust and respect, of helpfulness and goodwill. In practice, there is wide variation in the extent to which this ideal is achieved.

MOTIVATION FOR BRIDGING AND LINKING

By definition, bridging relationships involve less emotional investment than bonding relationships. Indeed, many bridging relationships are created because people need to achieve things together rather than necessarily because the relationship is deeply valued in its own right. Colleagues will often learn to work together because their situation makes it necessary. They have a responsibility to the same boss and it is much easier for them if they can work co-operatively. Good interpersonal relationships will generally make for a more congenial working environment than will conflictual relationships.

Many relationships are formed in the marketplace where people buy and sell goods and services. The marketplace itself provides incentives for people to deal fairly with one another. People deal with various organisations because of the goods and services that they offer. The provider of the goods or services will be more likely to keep its customers if the customers feel they have been treated well. People tend to have confidence in organisations if they feel that those organisations are fair and honest in their dealings. There is an implied contractual nature to most of these relationships. The individual pays for the products or services that are desired; the organisation receives income in return. Politeness and expressions of goodwill smooth the process of contract making.

MOTIVATION FOR COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Beyond the workplace and the marketplace, there are various forms of community involvement that are motivated by neither monetary nor material satisfactions. Volunteer activities fall into this category. What motivations are involved in these activities? The Australian Bureau of Statistics (2001) asked a sample of 12 900 Australian adults about their involvement in volunteer activities, including their current reasons for being a volunteer. Respondents were invited to choose one or more of the reasons presented in table 7.1.

Table 7.1 Reasons given for being a volunteer

Reason for being a volunteer	Percentage of volunteers citing the reason
Helping others/community	47.0
Personal satisfaction	42.7
Personal/family involvement	31.3
To do something worthwhile	29.5
Social contact	17.9
To use skills/experience	12.7
Religious beliefs	11.9
To be active	10.8
To learn new skills	6.7
To gain work experience	3.9

SOURCE *Australian Bureau of Statistics (2001)*

The table illustrates the fact that there are many reasons why people engage in volunteer activities. While many do it because they value helping others and making the community a better place, the personal satisfaction they receive in so doing is also a major factor. For many, the volunteer activities arise out of personal or family involvement, such as the parents who become involved in their children's sporting activities. Many enjoy the social contact that comes from the involvement. That is especially true for those respondents who have retired from formal employment, of whom 28 per cent cited the social contact as a reason for their involvement. Others enjoy using their skills or experience for the wellbeing of others or the wider community.

Taylor, Barr and West (2000) likewise note that people join community groups for a variety of reasons such as the following: to engage in shared activities; to experience a sense of belonging and identity; to provide mutual support; to provide services to others; to resist a perceived threat or to defend rights that are under attack; to try to get a better deal for themselves and their community; to gain influence in the wider society. Not all these motivations are altruistic. People are motivated by what they value and what they want to achieve. Hence, building community involvement will involve linking people's values to the intended outcomes of the activities.

The Australian Community Survey examined people's explicit values at some depth. It built partly on the work of the social psychologist

Milton Rokeach. After extensive research into what people valued, Rokeach (1973) developed two lists, each of 22 values. One of these he described as 'terminal values' – what people want because they consider them valuable in their own right. This list included such values as 'a world at peace', 'a comfortable life', 'true friendship' and 'an exciting life'. The other list of values he described as 'instrumental values' – values that were seen as worthwhile because they helped people to achieve the terminal values. These values included 'politeness', 'honesty' and 'cleanliness'. Rokeach then asked people to place each of these values in order, from most to least important.

Shalom Schwartz (1994) suggested modifications to Rokeach's schema. He argued that the two lists of terminal and instrumental values could not always be clearly distinguished. Sometimes people saw the instrumental values as ends in themselves. Some people just value 'cleanliness' in its own right, for example, rather than as a means to other ends.

Schwartz developed a list of 57 values, each of which he asked people to rate. He found that these 57 values could be placed into 10 categories, and the 10 categories could be understood in terms of two primary value orientations. Of these two value orientations, one had to do with the extent to which people were self-centred or other-centred. The other value orientation had to do with whether people were wary of change or whether they enjoyed risk and stimulation.

The Australian Community Survey put before people a truncated list of Schwartz's values – 22 in all, but with at least two values from each of Schwartz's 10 major categories. Echoing the findings of Schwartz, it found that people varied in terms of whether they were self-centred or other-centred, whether their primary values had to do with enhancing their own lives or whether they had to do with enhancing the lives of others and the community. It also found that people varied in terms of the extent to which they enjoyed risk and stimulation or were wary of change.

In particular, it was noted that some people had a great desire for order in life. The people who wanted order tended to desire it at all levels of life: personal order reflected in the importance of cleanliness, communal order reflected in the importance of politeness, and social order reflected in the importance of national security. The study

identified a third dimension in people's values – the extent to which people were interested in a spiritual life, in finding meaning or having a relationship with God, or whether people were more interested in the material things in life.

Overall, the most important values affirmed by Australians had to do with the world of relationships, the social world. In terms of values rated 'most important', the following were most widely affirmed:

- a world at peace – free of war and conflict (68%)
- honesty – genuine, sincere (61%)
- true friendship – close, supportive friends (55%)
- equality – equal opportunity for all (49%)
- social justice – correcting injustice, care for the weak (49%).

In other words, people want a world in which there is peace and harmony and in which they can trust others because there is honesty. They value true friendship. They also want a world in which there are equal opportunities for all people, where there is justice, and care for those who are disadvantaged or relatively powerless.

This is not the world that is pre-eminently created by the marketplace, although the marketplace is certainly enhanced by peace and honesty. On the other hand, many community activities are directed towards creating that alternative aspect of society. The major motivating factor is not so much imbuing the values, rather it is showing that certain activities can effectively help to achieve those values in a way that will enhance people's lives.

Such values are deeply rooted in people's desire for worthwhile relationships. They particularly emerge, the study found, among people with children. For these people are thinking not only of their own wellbeing, but also that of their children. They are thinking not just of the present, but of the world that the next generation will experience.

At the same time, there are other values that are important, and sometimes in tension. Most people want to enjoy life. They enjoy having time to themselves, following their pleasures and, indeed, simply taking time for leisure. Our surveys show that these latter types of values are accorded high importance among many young adults, especially those who do not have children. They are also stronger among those in lower socio-economic strata of society and among those whose lives are

oriented to business and production, than among professionals whose work involves close interaction with people (for example, in the fields of education and health).

To some people, concern for the wellbeing of the wider society may seem to be a luxury. It comes more to the fore when one's personal needs are already being adequately met, when one is not fighting for one's own survival. For many of those for whom life is a struggle, financially or materially, there may be less of that vision of the wider society.

For many older people in Australian society, a major concern is for 'order'. The concerns of national security, politeness, cleanliness and thrift are uppermost in their minds. Ronald Inglehart (1977; 1990) has suggested that the shadows of the Depression of the 1930s and the World Wars continue to hang over the people who have lived through those periods. These were times when personal and social survival became the priority. In such times, people will temporarily surrender some of their personal freedom for the sake of the wider community. It was through the order that was imposed by government and authorities that survival came.

Similar tendencies have been evident in people's responses to the threat of terrorism. People have drawn into themselves a little. They have been willing to give up some of their freedom and liberty for the sake of safety and security. It is evident at airports, for example, where people submit to long queues and compulsory screening of baggage and person, for the sake of ensuring safety in the air.

Such values can lead to people placing great emphasis on doing what is necessary for the good of the society. But the concern with security and order leads more to obedience than to creativity, more to caution than to entrepreneurship.

People's willingness to engage in pro-community activities depends partly on their background and situation. It is more difficult to motivate those whose energy is absorbed with concern for their own survival, unless the communal activities are seen as directly contributing to that survival.

There are times in life when people tend to be focused more on their own lives – on establishing their careers and finding a place in the wider society, or on having fun and enjoying the pleasures of life. There are other stages of life when people tend to be more ready to contribute

to society for the good of all, particularly when people think about what sort of world their children and grandchildren are experiencing now or will inherit in the future.

One way of motivating people to engage in pro-community activities is to build on their value orientations and show how their values and goals may be achieved through these activities.

EDUCATION AND VALUES

We have noted that some values, such as the valuing of relationships, seem to be embedded in human nature. Most if not all human beings have an inbuilt desire for relationships. No human being can be totally self-sufficient for long. Nevertheless, the ways in which children are raised have a great impact on the types of relationships they develop. While some patterns of child-rearing tend to encourage self-centredness, others encourage at least equal attention to the needs of other people.

Many values are taught implicitly through the language. Children gradually learn that some words have a value content attached to them. In some cases children may learn that a positive value is associated with a given word, even though they may not fully understand the meaning of that word. For example, they may learn that democracy is a good thing even before they learn in detail what a democratic system looks like.

Explicitly and implicitly, education plays a major role in the development of values. But what values should these be? Values reflect people's views of the world and their situations within it. In a pluralistic society such as Australia, there are many views of the world and, one might expect, many views as to what values should be taught to children. Nevertheless, surveys indicate that there is quite a high level of consensus. In the Australian Community Survey (1998), when asked what values children should be taught in the home, parents attributed highest importance to values relating to personal interactions. In a list of 13 values, the one most strongly affirmed was that of 'tolerance and respect for others', followed by 'good manners' and 'a sense of responsibility' (see figure 7.1). In each case there was a high level of consensus. Only 1 per cent of the population said these were of little or no importance.

Following the interpersonal values, in order of the affirmation of importance, came those values that would enable a person to succeed in life and in work, and contribute to a community – the values of hard work and determination, of independence and imagination, followed by the value of unselfishness. Further down the list came the values of being in touch with one's feelings, obedience, thrift, spontaneity, adventure and (by far the lowest) religious faith.

Figure 7.1 The importance of values that children should learn at home

Value	Extremely Important	Very Important
Tolerance & respect	70	94
Good manners	67	91
Sense of responsibility	62	91
Hard work & determination	51	87
Independence	44	83
Imagination	44	78
Unselfishness	43	81
In touch with own feelings	38	73
Obedience	35	69
Thrift	30	67
Spontaneity	28	63
Adventure	27	59
Religious faith	20	37

Percentage of Adults Affirming Importance of Values
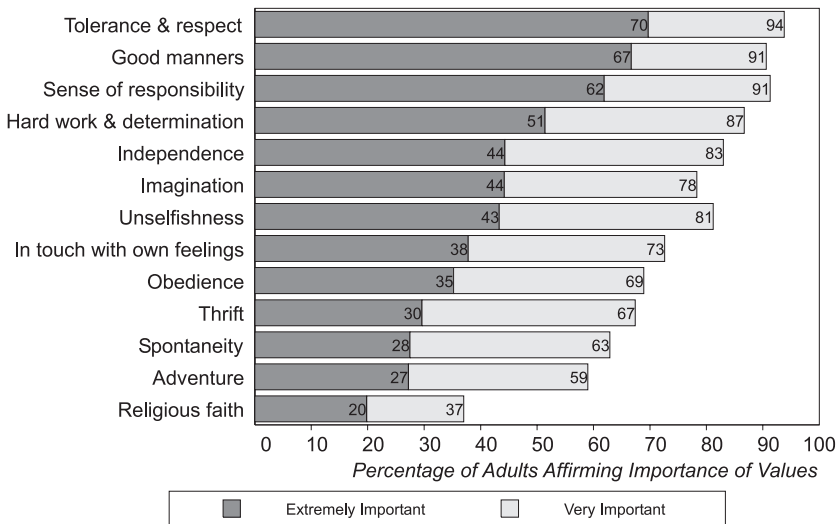
Another set of questions in the Australian Community Survey asked what qualities parents would look for in a school. The most widely affirmed value was the quality of the teaching. Then came the climate of care and concern for students. Following those two qualities, parents placed school discipline and the values upheld by the school.

Parents are aware that the harmony of a school, as well as the wider community, depends very much on the development of the values of respect and tolerance, care and concern, and acting responsibly towards others. Education at home and in the school is as much about learning these values and the interpersonal skills that emerge from them as it is about learning facts and concepts.

In 1999, Ministers of Education at state, territory and federal levels in Australia adopted a Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-first Century (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs 1999). That Declaration, which is still current, identifies eight goals that students should have attained by the time they complete their schooling. It could be argued that most if not all of these goals relate to qualities that are important in developing strong communities. Thus, the first goal speaks of 'the ability to communicate ideas and information, to plan and organise activities, and to collaborate with others'. The second goal requires that students attain 'qualities of self-confidence, optimism, high self-esteem, and a commitment to personal excellence as a basis for their potential roles as family, community and workforce members'. The third goal refers to 'the capacity to exercise judgement and responsibility in matters of morality, ethics and social justice'. The fourth relates to being 'active and informed citizens with an understanding of Australia's system of government and civic life'. The fifth speaks of laying the foundations for 'vocational education and training, further education, employment and life-long learning'. The sixth focuses on the capacity to make creative use of information and communication technologies. The seventh refers to attaining 'knowledge and skills to contribute to ecologically sustainable development'. The eighth speaks of having 'the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to establish and maintain a healthy lifestyle, and for the creative and satisfying use of leisure time'.

Embedded in that statement, either explicitly or implicitly, are various values. In 2002–03, a project was undertaken to enable a range of schools across Australia to develop and demonstrate current practice in values education, to provide an informed basis for promoting improved values education in schools, and to make recommendations on a set of principles and a framework for achieving this objective. In addition to funding action research in 69 schools (73 per cent of which were in the government sector), the project involved a comprehensive literature search for evidence on forms and outcomes of values education, plus focus groups and online surveys to discover parent, teacher and student views on the values the community expects Australian schools to foster. The project was managed by the Curriculum Corporation (a jointly

owned agency of the states, territories and Commonwealth of Australia), under whose auspices the final report was published in 2003.

While noting that the definition of the term 'values' is itself a matter for debate, the report followed Halstead and Taylor (2000: 169) in defining values broadly as 'the principles and fundamental convictions which act as general guides to behaviour, the standards by which particular actions are judged as good or desirable'. The report defined 'values education' as 'any explicit and/or implicit school-based activity to promote student understanding and knowledge of values, and to inculcate the skills and dispositions of students so that they can enact particular values as individuals and as members of the wider community' (Curriculum Corporation 2003: 2).

The action research projects focused on a range of issues such as the following:

> how to increase student engagement and belonging, and minimise student disconnection to schooling; how to tackle violence, anti-social and behaviour management issues; how to improve student and staff health and wellbeing; how to foster improved relationships; how to build student resilience as an antidote to youth suicide and youth substance abuse; how to encourage youth civic participation; how to foster student empowerment; how to improve whole-school cultures; how to develop a school mission statement incorporating a set of values; how to incorporate values into key learning and lesson programmes. (Curriculum Corporation 2003: 11)

Despite the tight timeframe within which these projects were required to be conducted, many of the insights gained (see Curriculum Corporation 2003: 40–146) could usefully be applied elsewhere.

The online survey was completed by a total of 129 parents, 431 students and 135 staff associated with 20 schools in all. These included primary and secondary schools from the government, Catholic and independent sectors, but not schools involved in the action research projects. Given the relatively small total number of respondents and the fact that they were recruited through only 20 schools, the results of the survey are at best indicative, not definitive.

Respondents were given a list of 28 values and asked to select the 10 most important for schools to foster. The items most frequently chosen by parents, students and school staff were:

- responsibility (being able to be trusted or depended upon)
- respect (treating people in a caring and polite way)
- honesty
- tolerance (acceptance of difference without prejudice)
- equality (the belief that all people have the same rights and responsibilities regardless of their race, religion or gender)
- freedom (of speech, association, oppression [sic], want [sic], information, demonstration or thought)
- compassion (caring for people and trying to help them by being aware of their suffering, hurt or pain)
- happiness (striving for personal contentment)
- excellence (doing your very best in anything you do and in the relationships you have)
- peace (a way of resolving conflict without recourse to violence). (Curriculum Corporation 2003: 215–16, 227–28)

In terms of frequency, *honesty* topped the student list, followed by *freedom*, *respect*, *happiness* and *responsibility*. Staff and parents both placed *responsibility* highest, followed by *respect*, *honesty*, *tolerance* and *equality*. For all three categories of respondents, *competitiveness*, *service to others* (unpaid or volunteer work to help others) and *economic values* (obtaining wealth, security and material wellbeing; full employment) were the least frequently nominated values (Curriculum Corporation 2003: 216, 228). Overall, although there were some differences between the three categories of respondents in the relative importance accorded to each item, the general level of consensus was fairly high. It is not possible to say from the above results what part the school system has played in developing this degree of consensus, compared with other influences such as the home or the wider community. Nor does this survey indicate how far the nominated values are actually being applied in everyday life. The results do, however, give some clues as to what values most people would like schools to promote.

Survey respondents were also asked a question relating to who is, or should be, responsible for teaching values. Parents were asked 'Who should your children learn values from?' Students were asked 'Who do your learn your values mainly from?' School staff were asked 'Whose responsibility is it to teach values to the students at your school?' In each case, respondents were asked to rank the items in the following

list from 1 to 8 in order of importance: parents/guardians, religious leaders, the family, the media, all teachers, specialist values teachers, the whole school community, the whole society. Despite differences in the phrasing of the question, for all three categories of respondents the results were much the same: *parents/guardians* were chosen most frequently as number one, *family* as number two and *all teachers* as number three. Of the eight choices given, *the media* and *religious leaders* were ranked last and second last respectively (Curriculum Corporation 2003: 216, 218–19, 225, 231–32, 237).

Various values also underlie the concept of citizenship. In recent years, there has been periodic public debate about education for citizenship. The term 'citizenship education' refers to 'a whole range of educational processes, formal or informal, that encourage and inform participation by citizens in community activities and public affairs' (Civics Expert Group 1994: 7). Citizenship education for all Australians can and should take place not only in schools and other educational institutions but also through radio and television, print and electronic media, and the activities of a wide range of community groups and organisations.

To contribute to the development of stronger communities, there are various characteristics that citizenship education should ideally have. First, it should recognise that citizenship can be exercised at various geographical scales, ranging from the local, through state and national to global levels. The salience of some of these levels may vary, depending on people's different circumstances and interests. Some people may be better placed to influence decisions at one level more than another. Nevertheless, the ability to think holistically is likely to be important in a world fractured by political, religious, ethnic, gender and other divisions.

Secondly, education should help to impart the knowledge, attitudes and skills that will provide a firm foundation for active and informed citizenship. The knowledge should include an understanding of how democratic processes and structures work, including a basic understanding of issues relating to freedom, rights, duties, justice, social justice and representation. The attitudes should include a predisposition to be interested in public affairs, respect for the freedom and dignity

of the individual, commitment to the rule of law, the spirit of a fair go, mutual respect and compassion for those in need, respect for evidence, and altruism. The skills should include those relating to collecting information, organising and evaluating data, expressing one's own views clearly (both orally and in writing), understanding others' views similarly communicated, and engaging in co-operation and conflict resolution (Heater 2004: 344–45; Kymlicka 1999: 81; Maiteny & Wade 1999: 42–43).

Communities encourage particular values in their citizens through a wide range of rewards and punishments. The legal system is part of that. So also are the public campaigns that have sought to shape behaviour in relation to smoking in public places and driving while under the influence of alcohol or other drugs.

Education in values, including citizenship values, has also been seen as a task for schools, though not only for schools. The task is complex and involves much more than affirming the importance of certain values. As noted in a recent review of the literature on values education, there is strong empirical evidence that the adoption of a range of different teaching and learning strategies is more likely to be effective than relying on only one methodology (Hooper 2003: 184). Among the strategies for values education are modelling by teachers and by school structures, engagement in values clarification and moral reasoning, and applying values in community-related immersion experiences.

Australian educators Cooper et al. (1998), for example, suggest that within the school a 'whole school approach is needed' in which there is a consistent approach to values in the policies of the school, throughout the curriculum, and in the way that the school is administered. Part of this approach, as they conceive of it, is through collaborative decision-making involving teachers and students on the rules within the school, the means of managing conflict and involvement in the school and wider community. They argue that teachers should model the agreed values in their own behaviour and relationships with colleagues and students. Likewise, they should develop activities through which students can reflect on, and appropriately apply, their values.

Experiences through which people young or old become aware of the situation of other members of society can have a powerful impact in

people's being motivating to engage in activities in the wider community. Some schools have provided opportunities for young people to live in a remote Indigenous community for a week. Others have taken students overseas for a work camp associated with an aid project in a developing nation. Some schools provide community welfare programs in which young people assist in such activities as therapy for the elderly or the provision of meals for the homeless.

Community organisations can use similar methods to those cited above to articulate values, to develop moral reasoning and to broaden people's awareness of needs and community issues. Through explicit values policies and the ways that they are administered, community organisations can model values. Through the intentional discussion of their values as an organisation and of social issues and the process whereby policies are developed, organisations can contribute to, and apply, skills in moral reasoning. By providing experiences whereby people are introduced to the experiences and needs of others, they can broaden awareness. All of these methods can contribute to people's motivations to be involved in the life of their communities.

AN EXAMPLE OF MOTIVATION

A suburb of a non-metropolitan city was built in the 1970s as public housing. Approximately 4000 people live in the area. Two-thirds of the houses remain public housing, while others have been sold into the private market. The area earned a bad name for itself. Almost no shops were built in the area and few facilities, such as medical services, were available within the area. In 1996, almost half of the young people in the area aged between 15 and 19 were unemployed.

A church-sponsored welfare organisation established a community strengthening project in the suburb in 1997. The project began by bringing young people together through some sporting teams. As well as contributing to people's physical fitness and social relationships, these team activities helped to develop a sense of pride in the community.

The project also gathered people together to tidy some of the public spaces in the area, to make them places that people could enjoy, with barbecues and play areas, landscaping and tree planting. Some community days were held to celebrate what was achieved and to give

a sense of ownership of these areas. Some of the work was done by a 'work for the dole' group drawn from the local area. In this way, young people were directly involved in the project.

As people came together, they began to discuss the specific needs they saw. Together, they realised they could actually do something to make a difference to their community. They established a range of groups to tackle specific issues. One group tackled access to doctors and medical facilities. It began by organising a regular 'drop-off' from a pharmacy that was not too far away.

Another group began looking at the issues of women's health. It organised for a nurse to visit on a regular basis and discuss health issues with them. These visits led to women taking pap smear tests and being more informed about a range of medical and health issues.

Another group began tackling the issue of youth unemployment. This group sponsored a 'work for the dole' scheme that contributed to landscaping some of the public areas. Several of the young people in this scheme moved on into employment and others into tertiary training.

Another group looked at issues of security in the area. They formed a branch of Neighbourhood Watch and began working more closely with the local police. People were informed about what was possible to create a more secure atmosphere for themselves. Together, they were able to contribute to a reduction of crime.

The issue for motivation in this community was the confidence that changes could be made. It was a matter of raising people's self-esteem and confidence so that they felt able to take action to improve their own circumstances. The community development workers had to be flexible. They brought people together. They encouraged the people to explore various issues, identifying suggestions about what might be done. They provided some resources. But motivation came from within as people saw what was possible and as they established better relationships with each other (Black et al. 2002: 94–98).

Questions for reflection

1   What are some of the discouragements associated with bonding and bridging relationships? How may these discouragements be overcome?

2   What are the primary motivations that contribute to people's becoming involved in community activities? Are there different motivations for different forms of involvement?

3   What should education for citizenship involve? What are the best methods of educating people for citizenship?

4   Think of a particular community organisation. In what ways can it seek to reinforce the values that motivate people to be involved?

CHAPTER 8

SKILLING

Building stronger communities involves developing skills in relationships. Both intimate relationships and other relationships often require skills in negotiation rather than reliance on well-defined roles. Skills in linking depend on understanding organisations and systems. The process of developing skills and capabilities within a community is sometimes referred to as capacity building. One aspect of this process is consciousness raising through which people become aware of the potential for individual and joint action. There are various ways in which community organisations can draw upon and enhance participants' skills.

This chapter will explore some of the skills that are needed for various types of personal relationships and for contributing constructively to the wellbeing of communities. It will also examine ways in which these skills can be developed and strengthened.

SKILLS FOR BONDING

The skills for bonding have their origins in the very earliest experiences in life. As children first find that particular noises they make or other behaviours they display are met with appreciation, they begin to develop skills of relating. As people mature, their repertoire of skills for relating to others becomes more diverse, although many of the basic attitudes developed in childhood and adolescence are likely to persist. Psychologists have pointed to the relational skill of being able to see things from another's perspective – the capacity for empathy.

This capacity is important in many types of relationships, including relationships between spouses, partners and friends.

As noted in chapter 3, the skills required to establish and maintain intimate relationships have become more challenging in recent times because of increasing freedom in relationships. Rather than simply learning pre-defined role behaviours, people now have a greater tendency to negotiate what they will contribute to, and what they expect from, such relationships. This brings some advantages in terms of individual freedom to find fulfilment, but there is also the possibility that people will disagree as to what it is appropriate to expect of one another. In the absence of fixed roles passed from one generation to the next, people need skills of negotiation, the ability to reach and fulfil freely chosen agreements and understandings.

Consequently, education that enables people to think through the dynamics of relationships is more important than ever. Parenting courses are available in some places, not to define the roles but to increase understanding of how to relate to children in ways that will contribute to their development. Marriage preparation programs are also available for couples. These programs deal with issues such as communication between partners, responsiveness to the needs of one another, developing agreement on matters of finance, and other important matters. Counselling is available for people experiencing difficulties in marriage or other relationships, and marriage enrichment programs are available for couples seeking to enhance an existing relationship. Such forms of education, counselling and enrichment can all contribute not only to the wellbeing of family relationships but also ultimately to the strength of community life if they engender qualities such as active goodwill, fairness and respect for the rights of others.

SKILLS FOR BRIDGING

Relationship skills are important in bridging as well as in bonding. The skills of communicating and understanding, of empathising and co-operating, may not have the intensity within bridging relationships that they have in more intimate relationships. However, bridges involve working with a wide range of people, each with their own personalities and ways of operating.

Modern communications technology has made the task of keeping in touch with others easier. But the challenge of building co-operative partnerships is no easier. Indeed, the diversity of contemporary experiences, the fact that so often co-operation must occur across space without physical contact, may make it harder. Productive co-operation depends on the extent to which those involved have common, or at least compatible, aims and objectives and can accept some basic ground rules for their activities. To get to this point requires an appropriate degree of trust and goodwill.

Various studies have shown that people's capacity to network successfully with a wide range of other people tends to increase as levels of education increase. This suggests that appropriate forms of education can help to develop the skills and attitudes needed for such engagement, a topic considered in more detail in the previous chapter. In addition to educational programs in schools and tertiary institutions, there are various forms of vocational training, adult education and informal learning, many of which have the potential to contribute to this process. There are, however, some communities in which levels of formal education are relatively low. Even in such communities, effective community work can help people to develop the confidence and skills to identify and address issues of common concern, to mobilise energies and take action, and to review and learn from the outcomes (Freire 1972; Ife 2002: 124–26, 242–43; Taylor 2003: 140–55). The Maribyrnong case study at the end of this chapter provides some examples.

SKILLS FOR LINKING

As was noted in chapter 5, various forms of education, training and experience are also important in enabling community members, and community organisations, to relate appropriately to the multitude of 'expert systems' in contemporary societies. These include systems relating to health, education, financial matters, the law, environmental management, information and communications technology, insurance and risk management. Specified educational qualifications are generally needed to gain employment at the various levels within most of these systems. Some understanding of these systems is necessary to access the services and the products they provide.

For much of the time, we must assume that the educational qualifications and the forms of regulation relating to these expert systems can be relied upon to protect us from incompetence and improper conduct. Given the complexity of many of the systems, it would be difficult for individual members of the public to make a detailed first-hand assessment of system reliability. However, the collapse of insurance company HIH, the findings of various commissions and inquiries into police services, and the malpractices of some investment advisors serve as a reminder that public trust may be abused. There have been instances of negligence, unfairness or illegality by corporations and governments as well as by individuals. When social trust is betrayed, it is often difficult to restore. Consequently, social mechanisms designed to encourage and protect trustworthiness, and to monitor performance, such as those outlined in chapter 5, are important.

CAPACITY BUILDING

Policy makers sometimes use the term 'capacity building' to refer to the processes whereby communities are strengthened. Capacity building has been variously defined. For example, in a book published by the Community Development Foundation, Skinner (1997: 1–2) defines capacity building as 'development work that strengthens the ability of community organisations and groups to build their structures, systems, people and skills so that they are better able to define and achieve their objectives and engage in consultation and planning, manage community projects and take part in partnerships and community enterprises.' More briefly, Wilcox (1994: 31) states that 'Capacity building is training and other methods to help people develop the confidence and skills necessary for them to achieve their purpose.' According to the Cooperative Venture for Capacity Building in Rural Australia (2006), 'Capacity building is about increasing the abilities and resources of individuals, organisations and communities to manage change.'

It is clear from these examples that there are some differences of emphasis in notions of capacity building. People may have various ideas as to what skills or capabilities are to be developed or enhanced, and with what purposes in mind. Nevertheless, the underlying notion is generally that of strengthening individual and collective capacities to

achieve socially desirable outcomes. From a sustainable development perspective, Warburton (1998: 27) argues that 'ways need to be found of ensuring that capacity-building links individual growth and development into collective action for social change, feeding personal growth back into enhanced collective action and enabling everyone to continue to learn new skills so that we are better able to help each other as well as ourselves.'

The emphasis on capacity building has sometimes been criticised as implying a 'top-down' approach and a deficit model that begins by focusing on a community's needs, deficiencies and problems rather than by discovering and mobilising a community's existing capacities and assets, the latter being the approach preferred by Kretzmann and McKnight (1993: 1). However, capacity building does not necessarily imply a top-down approach, nor does it necessarily begin by identifying deficiencies. At least to some extent, it can be seen as a process for finding, drawing out and applying capabilities that may already be there but perhaps lie dormant or unrecognised (Taylor 2003: 141). Taylor quotes with approval Warburton's (1998: 27) comment that programs of capacity building in disadvantaged communities must recognise that 'what is needed is not a redressing of the inequalities of *abilities*, but a redressing of the inequalities of *resources* and *opportunities* to practice [sic] and develop those abilities in ways which others in society take for granted' (Warburton's italics).

Whatever view one takes of these differences of approach or emphasis, it is clear that capacity building should be concerned with identifying, applying and where necessary enhancing various capabilities and resources at individual and collective levels. In this context, existing capabilities and resources should be neither disregarded nor romanticised. Not only in disadvantaged segments of society but also in other sections of the population, various forms of capacity building are needed. For example, among some relatively affluent people, there may be little understanding of – and little concern for – the situations faced by people who are financially and materially much less well-off. In some cases, the rich may be making or maintaining their wealth at the expense of the poor. Some people who are well-off may also be among those who hold ill-informed prejudices against people different

from themselves in ethnicity, skin colour, financial resources, religion or sexual preference. Wherever any of these situations occur, there is surely a need for capacity building – building people's capacity to understand, relate to, and deal fairly and compassionately with others different from themselves.

This example does not presuppose that the well-off generally act unfairly, insensitively or prejudicially towards others, and it does not assume that none of these ways of acting is ever found among the less well-off. Nor are the above remarks based on some form of envy or contempt towards the rich. They are meant simply to indicate that the need for capacity building is not confined to the less privileged sections of society. Of course, the types of capacity building required may vary from one community to another. The most effective methods of accomplishing this aim will vary accordingly.

Some commentators view community capacity building as practically synonymous with community development, each of these terms referring to an intentional process whereby members of a community collaborate to achieve social change that enhances their overall wellbeing and quality of life. Certainly, many of the goals, processes and strategies associated with capacity building are similar to those articulated in the theory and practice of community development. Some other commentators see capacity building as *part* of a broader community development process but not synonymous with it (Banks & Shenton 2001). Obviously, the precise relationship between capacity building and community development depends on the ways in which each of these terms is defined.

The term 'community development' has sometimes been used to refer to a process whereby local communities seek to improve their economic prospects by developing locally based enterprises. A more accurate term for this process is 'community economic development' although it could, of course, be part of a broader movement for revitalising communities. Some other writers advocate much more comprehensive and radical notions of community development. For example, Ife (2002: xii) advocates an 'integrated and holistic' approach involving six components – social, economic, political, cultural, environmental and personal/spiritual. He takes the view that community development should address issues such as social justice,

the quality of the social fabric and people's responsibility towards the environment. His model for community development includes elements such as consciousness raising, participatory democracy, empowerment, co-operation, and change from below.

Skilling for participation in the processes advocated by Ife will require somewhat different approaches than might be adopted if the focus is only or mainly on community economic development. The approach that Ife advocates can be illustrated by reference to the concept of consciousness raising, also sometimes called awareness raising. Here Ife draws on the work of Brazilian educator Paolo Freire (1972) and others influenced by him. One of Freire's underlying assumptions was that disadvantaged people often view their situation as somehow 'normal' or 'inevitable'. Such attitudes tend to reinforce their disadvantage, rather than opening up possibilities whereby the disadvantage can be alleviated or overcome. Freire sees consciousness raising as an important step in empowerment.

There are various aspects of consciousness raising, each interrelated. One involves people becoming aware that their situations and experiences are not unique – others are having similar experiences, and what some might regard simply as 'private troubles' can equally or better be regarded as 'public issues'. Closely related to this is a process of mutual learning. Effective consciousness raising typically involves much more than a one-way transmission of ideas from experts to members of a community. It involves a recognition that many members have the potential to contribute valuable insights relating to issues confronting the community.

Another aspect of consciousness raising is envisaging how one's situation might be different from what it currently is. This should involve a realistic exploration of possibilities for action. In some cases there might be severe constraints on the possibilities for immediate action. At the very least, the process of consciousness raising should help people to understand the nature of those constraints and to assess whether there is any prospect that the constraints might be overcome or lessened in the future.

There are many settings in which awareness can be raised and prospects for action explored. Community arts, community radio, local newspapers, street theatre, video and the Internet have been powerful

tools for raising awareness in some communities (Taylor 2003: 145, 151). Nevertheless, due account should be taken of the limitations of each of these media. For example, the Internet is a more effective medium of communication among the young and the well educated than among older people and those less well educated.

Discourse about community capacity building has often been accompanied by an emphasis on the importance of self-help. Various grounds have been invoked to justify this. For example, it has been suggested that there is no one solution suitable for all situations and that solutions to problems are best developed and implemented by those closest to the problem. The phrase 'local solutions to local problems' sums up this emphasis. Secondly, it has been argued that policies that encourage reliance on government intervention, welfare payments and the like sap people's initiative and reinforce undesirable forms of dependency. Thirdly, it has been claimed that resources from outside a community will largely be wasted unless its own assets and capabilites are mobilised first (Kretzmann & McKnight 1993: 376). Fourthly, 'while the main purpose of efforts to build a community's capacities is often to achieve a specific outcome (such as improving its ability to intervene early to prevent child abuse and neglect, youth homelessness, substance abuse, etc.), many practitioners and policy analysts argue that it is also a desirable end in itself because it contributes to the creation and maintenance of active citizenship and social trust' (Hounslow 2002: 21).

On the other hand, it is important to recognise that there may not always be 'local solutions to local problems', despite the best efforts to strengthen and apply a community's capacities. As Hounslow (2002) observes, some problems may require changes in policies, practices and resource allocations at national or state levels. This has led some commentators to suggest that rhetoric about capacity building and self-help has sometimes been used to legitimise cuts in government expenditures and to free governments from responsibilities (Bryson & Mowbray 2005: 92–93, 100; Taylor 2003: 4, 24). There is, nevertheless, no inherent reason why capacity building should be focused only or even mainly on community or voluntary organisations that provide services not currently provided by agencies of government. It could be

directed towards numerous activities, ranging from the development of new business enterprises to initiatives relating to social justice and care for the environment. In some cases, this might involve making a critique of government policy and arguing for changes.

DEVELOPING SKILLS NEEDED WITHIN COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS

In our increasingly complex society, community organisations need to give attention to developing the skills of those involved and those who might, potentially, become involved. Depending on the skills required, two broad approaches are possible, each with advantages and limitations. One approach makes use of informal learning processes. The tasks involved in some activities can be learned through informal mentoring when new participants are inducted into an organisation. This approach presupposes that the more experienced participants have the time and capability to train others. Another approach makes use of more formal training programs offered either within the organisation or beyond. This approach presupposes that such programs are available or can be arranged. Sometimes relevant programs are offered by TAFE colleges, universities or peak bodies in the voluntary and community sectors. Alternatively, there might be people within the wider community who are willing and able to conduct appropriate programs of adult education if invited to do so.

In addition to taking account of the points discussed earlier in this chapter, such programs should be carefully designed to make use of ways in which adults are most likely to learn. Ideally the programs should: allow for different learning styles; use multiple, mutually reinforcing methods; draw upon real-life experiences; enhance capacity for problem solving; encourage ongoing learning and openness to new information and ideas (Bandura 1986; Knox 1986; Kolb 1984; Merriam & Caffarella 1999).

Among the competencies required by at least some leaders in most community organisations are financial skills. Directors or board members of a non-profit organisation have a similar responsibility for the financial management of their organisation as do the directors and board members of commercial ventures. In both cases, they need to

understand budgeting, accounting and auditing procedures and ensure that these are appropriately followed.

Various other skills are also needed within many community organisations. These could include skills in running meetings, planning and organising events, writing, public speaking, advocacy, finding and analysing information, problem solving, negotiation and conflict management. While various members may exercise leadership in one or more of these ways, designated office bearers have major responsibilities to consider 'big picture' issues. Leadership will be further discussed in chapter 10.

Additional areas of skill may be useful in specific contexts. For example, communication with the wider community often means using the resources of the media – radio and newspaper, perhaps television and Internet. Using computers to produce newsletters and correspondence is another skill that is often relevant. So too is the use of computer technology to keep databases of members or supporters, and to maintain financial records.

From time to time, some community organisations apply for grants. The preparation of such applications usually requires a range of skills, such as financial, organisational and literary capabilities. If a grant is received, skills in implementation are also needed. There are obligations to ensure that all commitments, conditions and reporting requirements are met.

The next section provides an illustrative account of a community education program that was designed to increase leadership skills and levels of people's involvement in various community activities.

COMMUNITY EDUCATION: THE MARIBYRNONG EXPERIMENT

As noted above, one common community-building method is to provide education in skills pertinent to community organisation. This can be very effective as the first stage in stimulating community activities and in empowering people to work together in order to achieve common objectives. Such activities, in turn, can build trust and goodwill as people find themselves working alongside each other for the same ends.

One example is a community-building project that was initiated in 2001 in Maribyrnong, located in the western region of the Melbourne

metropolitan area. It centred on the Braybrook and Maidstone suburbs – two places with a lot of public housing, very high numbers of immigrants from a variety of cultural and ethnic backgrounds, and a lot of social problems. A report by the Jesuit Social Services, *Unequal in Life*, identified the postcode area of Braybrook and Maidstone as the most socially disadvantaged in the whole of Victoria. Funding was available from the Australian Government through a scheme of pilot community-building projects known as the Family and Community Networks Initiative. However, the project had to be completed by the end of 2002.

A group of local interested groups and service providers had been meeting with members of the Maribyrnong Council and the Victorian State Government Department of Human Services. This group, known as the Braybrook Social Development Group, decided on a project that had two major parts. The first of these was to develop a network of service providers, to look at the needs in the community and to work together in filling some of the gaps in services. A second part was to focus on the identification, training, support and networking of community leaders.

In April and May 2002, more than 30 people identified by various groups in the community as leaders or potential leaders completed a series of workshops. Many of these people came from the various ethnic groups in the area. Others were associated with churches and small community organisations or networks, such as a Patchwork Club, a music theatre group for children and a self-help group for people who suffer from panic attacks.

Eight workshops were held covering topics such as:

* What is leadership and how do we go about it?
* Government and the system: how does it work?
* Organising yourself and working together.
* Ideas and how to get them started.
* Handling the media.
* Technology and what it can do for you.

The participants were very complimentary of their experiences in these workshops. They reported that they had a clearer understanding of networking and how networks could assist community groups.

They had become better informed about decision-making processes and community funding. Many of the participants reported that their personal self-confidence had grown and they felt more able to play significant roles in their communities.

At the same time, many bridges were built through these weeks of workshopping together. People found that they had common aims and goals. Partnerships were built. People reported that their wariness of people of other ethnic groups had been reduced because of this context of working together.

Towards the end of the workshops, the participants were invited to make applications for some small community grants made available by the local government. The leaders of the workshops helped them formulate and design their applications.

As the people received their certificates for having completed the workshops, most of them also received cheques for their organisations – the grants for which they had applied. These grants were each around $1000. However, through them, many sorts of new activities could be started. Among the activities initiated were the following:

- development of a community garden at the public tenants association house
- planting of native trees on the escarpment of a nearby river
- a homework support group for students from the Horn of Africa with learning difficulties
- a cooking skills class for isolated and lonely men
- the production of a resource booklet for people suffering from panic attacks and anxiety
- a dance program for culturally and linguistically diverse students
- a program of leisure activities for Somali girls
- a program of music, creative and cross-cultural arts events
- development of a playgroup for 3- and 4-year-old children
- a t'ai chi program
- a support group for Macedonian women
- a research project into transport options for the Braybrook and Maidstone communities.

By the latter part of the year, most of the projects were in operation. There was a buzz of community activity and lots of new things were being accomplished. More importantly, the quality of community life

began to change. In interviews undertaken to evaluate the project as a whole, many people spoke about the increased levels of understanding between people of different ethnic backgrounds, the higher levels of trust, and the greater sense of safety people had when walking the streets.

In evaluating the project, it was assessed that the project had a high level of direct impact on around 50 people who were involved in the leadership workshops and in organising activities for which community grants were awarded. The project had a medium level of direct impact on another 250 people who had participated in the community groups and activities stimulated by the project. Many hundreds of people were affected at a lower level through their attendance of cultural events or activities made possible by the project.

Through a community-based education program, designed to enhance the leadership capacity of local people, the community had been strengthened. It appeared that many of the new activities and new relationships would continue long after the small grants were used and the funding ceased.

The program has not solved every problem in the community. There were two or three groups in the local community that had had low levels of involvement. For example, no young, unemployed males who had recently left school participated. While the Vietnamese community in the area was quite large, there was little involvement by Vietnamese people in the program. This program enhanced the activities of many small community groups. But it did little, directly, for those whose needs were not so represented. Much more needed to be done.

Nevertheless, the project gives some indication of what education for community leadership can achieve. Its strength was partly in the fact that it provided pathways whereby ideas could be put into practice and some dreams realised. Working with leaders and potential leaders within communities can have a positive impact on community capabilities and wellbeing.

Questions for reflection

1   If you were running a parenting course, what would be some of the skills you would seek to develop?

2   What are the critical skills in developing personal relationships with other people in contemporary Australian society?

3   Reflecting on a community with which you are familiar, what capacities or capabilities would you like to see developed or enhanced, and how would you go about this?

4   How do you feel about the 'Maribyrnong' experiment? In a series of workshops, what topics would you want to include for developing community involvement?

CHAPTER 9

ENGAGING

While a major form of engagement of people in communities is through employment, most Australians also contribute voluntarily by giving time and money to community organisations. For the giving of money or time and effort, people not only have to be motivated; there must be triggers through which people are invited to contribute, often best done in the form of a personal invitation. When an organisation has clear and socially acceptable aims, achieves its aims and values its participants, people are more likely to become involved than when it lacks one or more of these characteristics.

One of the most significant ways in which adults are involved in communities is through employment. In August 2006, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2006b) estimated that 10.27 million Australians were employed in the workforce. This represented 65.1 per cent of all Australians 15 years of age and over.

While employment and the market system of goods and services play very important roles in the wellbeing of individuals and communities, so too do the activities of a wide range of non-profit organisations. These organisations vary greatly in size and in the types of activities they undertake. Some are *mutual-benefit* organisations in the sense that the primary beneficiaries of the activities are the members of the organisation. Self-help groups, amateur sports clubs and other recreational associations are examples of this. Some other non-profit organisations are *public-benefit* organisations in the sense that the primary beneficiary is the community at large or people other

than the members of the organisation. Community (non-government) welfare organisations, environmental protection associations, and local branches of bodies such as Amnesty International are illustrations of this. Some non-profit organisations have *both member-benefit and public-benefit* aspects. Religious congregations may fall into this category, especially when they are involved in general social welfare activities as well as activities designed to enhance members' spiritual growth. Unless otherwise indicated, the various types of non-profit organisation listed in this paragraph are included in the term 'community organisation' as used in this chapter (see Lyons 2001: 5–9).

VOLUNTARY ACTIVITIES WITHIN COMMUNITIES

The Australian population spends millions of hours each year in a myriad ways voluntarily contributing to the wellbeing of society. They do this, for example, in working for charities, coaching children's sporting teams, or taking part in the activities of other community organisations.

Recently the Australian Government funded a large study into giving in Australia. The project was undertaken by a consortium of organisations, coordinated by the Australian Council of Social Service. Telephone interviews were conducted with 6209 Australian adults. This study found that 41 per cent had done voluntary work for at least one non-profit organisation in the year to January 2005, contributing an estimated 836 million hours of their time at an average of 132 hours per year per volunteer (Giving Australia Project 2005: vii).

Voluntary work can be defined in various ways. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (2001: 44) defined a volunteer as 'someone who willingly gave unpaid help, in the form of time, service or skills, through an organisation or group'. The Australian Community Survey took a broader approach for several reasons. First, it sought to include many kinds of voluntary activity that are not conducted through an organisation or group. For example, there are many people who, as individuals, voluntarily offer coaching for examinations, visit people in hospital, or undertake other voluntary activities that contribute to the wellbeing of others, but do not necessarily do so through an organisation or group. Volunteering through an organisation or group is sometimes

termed 'formal volunteering' whereas voluntary activities undertaken on a purely individual basis may be termed 'informal volunteering'.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (2001: 4–5) noted that for employed people the volunteer rate varied considerably between occupational groupings and that the type of voluntary activity undertaken was often related to the industry in which a person was employed. In some cases such voluntary activities are undertaken for non-profit organisations or voluntary associations and hence would be included in the definition used by the Bureau of Statistics. In other cases they are done on a one-to-one basis rather than for or through a non-profit organisation, in which case they would not be included in that definition.

A second definitional problem is that not all voluntary work necessarily contributes to the community. A person who becomes the secretary of a 'hate group' is doing voluntary work but is not contributing to the wellbeing of the community. Much voluntary work is done as people take responsibilities in the clubs and societies through which they organise their leisure activities – their sports and their hobbies, their personal passions and their interests. The Australian Community Survey wanted to distinguish voluntary activities that contribute to the wellbeing of others or the community at large from voluntary activities that may not necessarily do so. Such a distinction is not easy to make. Indeed, the secretary of a 'hate group' may well consider that the activities of the group contribute beneficially to society, working to rid the society of unwanted elements. However, without extensive investigation into every claim of voluntary activity, the best we could do was to ask the respondent the following two questions:

- In the past 12 months, were you involved in any volunteer activities assisting people who needed help?
- In the past 12 months, were you involved in any volunteer activities which contributed to the wider community (e.g. coaching a sports team, serving on a school committee, collecting donations)?

The response categories for each of these questions were:

No   Yes, once or twice   Yes, several times   Yes, frequently

A third set of questions asked about involvement in specific community groups and organisations, listing a range of them, including:

- work-related groups (e.g. professional or business associations, trade unions)
- educational groups/groups for children or youth (e.g. playgroups, school committees)
- art, music or cultural groups
- sport, recreation or hobby groups
- emergency services/health groups
- community service groups
- social action, justice or lobby groups (e.g. environmental or resident action)
- care, welfare or support groups.

These three questions provided a reasonably comprehensive picture of voluntary activities that contribute to community strength.

As the Australian Community Survey's three questions on voluntary activities covered a broader range of such activities than did the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) survey of voluntary work, it is not surprising to find that a higher proportion of our sample reported that they had undertaken some form of volunteer activity during the preceding 12 months than was recorded in the ABS survey. While the ABS found that 32 per cent had undertaken voluntary work in the preceding 12 months, the Australian Community Survey found that 67 per cent of the adult population had been involved in formal or informal voluntary activities within the preceding 12 months. More specifically, the Australian Community Survey found that:

- 45 per cent of the sample said they had been involved in volunteer activities assisting people who needed help.
- 40 per cent said they had been involved in volunteer activities contributing to the wider community.
- 52 per cent were involved in a community group or organisation in an unpaid capacity of one kind or another other than simply by subscribing or donating money.
- 63 per cent indicated that they had at least subscribed or donated money to a community group or organisation.

While 33 per cent of Australian Community Survey respondents had not been involved in any of the above mentioned types of volunteer activity during the preceding 12 months, 26 per cent of respondents had been involved in more than one type of community group or organisation in that same period.

GIVING MONEY TO COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS

As noted above, one form of involvement in community-related activities is by donating money. In the year to January 2005, 87 per cent of adult Australians made a donation to a non-profit organisation. Together, they contributed $5.7 billion. On average, those who had made a contribution had given $424 in the year. An additional $2 billion was raised in the form of 'charity gambling' or through the support of charity events. Furthermore, 67 per cent of all businesses in the 2003–04 financial year had made a contribution of money (mainly), goods or services to non-profit organisations, the total value of these contributions being $3.3 billion (Giving Australia Project 2005: vii).

Not surprisingly, people on higher incomes tended to give money in larger amounts, but nearly all people contributed something. Thus, 83 per cent of adults with incomes of less than $16 000 per annum made financial contributions, these averaging in total $264 per person per annum. Some 91 per cent of adults with annual incomes of $52 000 or more gave financial contributions, these averaging in total $769 per person per year. In comparison, the Giving Australia Project found that the proportion of the adult population that volunteered time and effort did not vary greatly according to income, but volunteers with lower incomes tended, on average, to contribute more hours than those on higher incomes (Giving Australia Project 2005: 9–10).

While some people are very intentional about their giving – working out what causes they wish to support, and making donations to these on a regular basis – many others give in a reactive way. They give spontaneously when asked in the street, at the door, at work, or by direct mail or phone. They do not necessarily have a great affinity with the cause, but are happy to contribute a little when asked (Giving Australia Project 2005: 10).

The Giving Australia Project looked at the effectiveness of various methods of eliciting donations. Table 9.1 shows that, in terms of frequency of a positive response, the most effective method is the doorknock. The second most effective method is by collections made in the streets or in other public places. In some states, the dates on which one or both of these methods may be used require local government approval.

Table 9.1 Effectiveness of various methods of seeking contributions to non-profit organisations

	% of sample who had been approached this way	How people had responded		
		% who had given most of the time or every time	% of sample who had given some of the time	% of sample who had not responded to this method at all
Telephoned at home	77	10	32	58
Television advertisement or program	69	2	14	84
Request through mail/letterbox	66	6	29	65
Doorknock appeal	61	47	35	17
Street or public place	60	21	44	34
Advertisements or fliers in magazine/newspaper	52	1	8	91

SOURCE *Giving Australia Project 2005: 40*

While doorknocking appears in this study as most likely to elicit a response, it is also a time-consuming process that typically requires the organisation of a team of volunteers to do the collecting. The amounts given by individual respondents are generally determined by factors such as their own financial circumstances, the ideals they live by and their assessment of the worthiness of the purposes for which the funds will be used. With some exceptions, doorknocking is likely to elicit a large number of small donations but relatively few large donations. The best ways of inviting people to give should take account of administrative costs as well as the frequency of responses and the amounts given.

GIVING TIME AND EFFORT TO COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS

Giving time and effort to community organisations often requires a much greater commitment over a longer period than does giving money. Some people prefer to volunteer on a short-term or episodic basis rather than as a long-term commitment, at least initially. If their short-term experience is positive, they may later be willing to take on longer-term or more demanding commitments.

For some people, voluntary work is an extension of the work they do on a paid basis. Thus, an accountant may contribute financial skills

to a non-profit organisation in a voluntary capacity. A tradesperson may do unpaid maintenance work for a charitable organisation.

In many cases, family life becomes a means of engagement. Parents may follow their children to the sporting grounds and contribute time to the organisations that enable their children to enjoy sporting activities. Or they may become involved in fundraising for a school, thus improving its facilities and enhancing their children's experience there. Other parents find themselves caring for children with special problems, and join in voluntary associations with others who share those challenges.

Some people take on voluntary work in organisations through which they pursue recreational interests. For example, the person involved in a sporting club for the enjoyment of the sport may move on to become a coach of a junior team or take some position of responsibility in the club.

Although some people naturally become involved through their personal history or their personal interests, engaging people in new community ventures can be a significant challenge for the community worker. A relatively affluent community, whether defined in terms of locality or of some other shared characteristic, might contain a variety of professional and personal skills among its members. If some form of action is needed to address issues pertaining to the wellbeing of that community or its members, it may not be too difficult to mobilise these skills.

Where such skills are less abundant, or where levels of formal community engagement are low, the task of building or strengthening community organisations and inter-organisational networks is likely to be harder. In such situations, it is often best to begin with a range of relatively small-scale activities that give people the opportunity to engage with others whom they feel they can trust in order to do something that needs to be done. Success in this can lay the foundation for subsequent wider collaboration addressing larger issues (Taylor 2003: 148–50). An example is given in the case study at the end of this chapter.

Sometimes religious congregations have been an important source of volunteers. A study by Bowen (1999) in Canada has shown that churches provide important venues for recruitment not only into church-related charitable activities but also into other community organisations.

Churches provide an environment in which people are encouraged to care for others and as people meet within that environment, both through formal and informal means, they tend to encourage each other to participate in such activities. Available evidence suggests that churches have had a similar impact in Australia (Evans & Kelley 2004; Hughes & Black 2002; Leonard & Bellamy 2006; Lyons & Nivison-Smith 2006).

However, religious congregations are only one of several potential venues for recruitment of volunteers. There has been some encouragement for places of employment to be used for this purpose, and even for those workplaces to reward their employees who respond to invitations for voluntary involvement in community organisations. In turn, those workplaces may receive public recognition for that contribution to the wellbeing of the community.

In many cases, people who are involved in the community activity invite friends, relatives, neighbours and other acquaintances to become involved. The personal invitation is often a critical element in engagement. A systematic but flexible approach to volunteer recruitment is outlined in a publication by Rehnborg and Clubine (2004). Although that document, which can be downloaded from the Internet, is oriented primarily towards the situation in North America, many of its suggestions could be adapted for use elsewhere. Volunteering Australia, the national peak body for volunteers, has produced various resources on best practice in volunteering and volunteer recruitment, including *National Standards for Involving Volunteers in Not-for-Profit Organisations* (Volunteering Australia 2001).

In summary, non-profit organisations provide some of the structures through which people can become engaged in community-related activities. Involvement may take various forms – such as through subscriptions or donations, through organisation and sponsorship of activities and events, or through face-to-face contact with the people for whose benefit the organisation exists.

CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS

Engagement in the activities of community organisations is either helped or hindered by various features of those organisations. Characteristics of the community organisations that are generally considered most successful in the Australian context include the following:

1 *The organisation has clear aims.* For a community organisation to be effective in achieving desirable social changes, in providing support for people, or whatever is its purpose, that purpose needs to be clearly articulated. In other words, an organisation needs a vision. The vision gives the organisation direction. It provides some standards for judging success.

2 *Participants are committed to those aims.* People will be more likely to participate in a community organisation if they agree with its aims and earnestly wish it to succeed. The aims must be consistent with their own values and goals. Ideally, there should be some sense of ownership, not only of the vision and aims but also of the methods and means of operation.

3 *There are mechanisms for managing disagreement and conflict.* People may not always agree. In most structures, people experience conflict at one time or another. Within any structure there will be people who want to shape the vision and the operations in one way, while others may have different ideas. Somehow, those differences must be managed. For example, there may be a committee or a designated person that has the power to arbitrate or resolve such issues. There may be a system of voting involving all members of the organisation. It is generally best to decide how conflicts or disagreements will be managed before the problems arise, rather than after. These are usually matters addressed in a constitution. For a structure larger than a group of friends, there will be need for prior decisions about issues such as the following:

- when meetings of participants occur
- who can call meetings
- who should be in charge of such meetings and how agendas are prepared
- who can vote and what processes should be used in voting
- what to do if votes are tied.

4 *Structures are light-weight.* While organisations operate best if there are appropriate constitutions and arrangements which determine how they function, most people want structures that are reasonably 'light-weight' in terms of their procedures. If procedures are unnecessarily cumbersome, this may reduce the effectiveness of

the organisation and deter some potential participants. Nevertheless, it is important that legal requirements are met, especially those relating to financial matters, duty of care, and the like. For more detailed consideration of models for governing and managing non-profit organisations, see Lyons (2001: 123–37).

5 *Programs achieve stated goals.* Participants are generally motivated by the prospect of achieving something worthwhile. They need to feel that they are making a difference, that the community as a whole, or a group of individuals within the community, will experience a benefit because of their involvement. Some evidence of progress towards the meeting of goals is therefore desirable. Extending people so that they feel they are personally growing through the activity or program can also be a very positive and motivating experience.

6 *Participants feel valued.* Within the program or activity it is important that people feel valued, that their contribution is recognised. This may be done both formally through explicit and public recognition of contributions, and informally through the ways in which leaders and other members personally acknowledge the various contributions.

7 *Good relationships are built* in the program or activity. Many people report that the development of positive relationships within the program or activity, a sense of teamwork and collegiality among participants, or a sense of mutual regard between carers and those they care for, contributes significantly to their continued involvement. Hence, attention needs to be paid to building those relationships. For example, it is often appropriate for teams to spend some time socialising together, getting to know each other, sharing something of their life experiences with each other. This, of course, should be in addition to, not instead of, the primary functions of the organisation!

OTHER ISSUES AFFECTING VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT IN NON-PROFIT ORGANISATIONS

In the Giving Australia study, non-profit organisations mentioned a number of factors that were important as they considered the recruitment of volunteers. One was the rising costs of compliance and risk

management. These factors were felt across all types of organisations, but were experienced most acutely by small organisations. Compliance issues associated with governance, qualifications for service delivery, accreditation, onerous evaluation and reporting on contracts and grants were major challenges in organisations' preparedness to engage volunteers (Giving Australia Project 2005: 46).

Volunteering Australia (2006a: 5) has noted that volunteers are not always covered by legislation relating to injury in the workplace, even though some volunteers work in non-profit organisations alongside paid employees for whom workers' compensation protection is required by law. Some volunteers carry substantial financial responsibility or other forms of legal liability. Consequently, it is in the public interest that the legal and organisational framework within which volunteers operate protects them against harm, and provides insurance coverage, as far as is reasonably possible. At the same time, there is a need for training programs to ensure that volunteers are aware of fiduciary responsibilities, duty of care and appropriate safety procedures.

There are further issues that need to be carefully addressed in non-profit organisations that have both paid staff and volunteers. Unless the roles of paid staff and volunteers are each carefully defined, and are understood and accepted by all, there is a potential for conflict between these two categories of staff and a danger that volunteers will not continue in this role. Irrespective of whether there are paid staff in the organisation, a volunteer job description should ideally include information on the roles and responsibilities, the expected time commitment, and the skills and attributes required of the volunteer. Such a description is important in the recruitment process. It reduces the risk that volunteers will either go beyond their mandate or neglect important responsibilities. It provides criteria by which volunteers, and others, can review performance. Nevertheless, the *Inaugural National Survey on Volunteering Issues* recently revealed that 42 per cent of surveyed volunteers did not have a clear, written job description. Further findings were that flexible working hours were important to 79 per cent of volunteer respondents; and 82 per cent 'would personally appreciate' having their volunteer work recognised in the form of opportunities to develop their skills (Volunteering Australia 2006b: 2–4).

As was noted at the beginning of this chapter, community organisations and networks come in many shapes and sizes. They almost all depend to some degree on voluntary effort. In total, they pursue a wide range of objectives and serve diverse needs. While for the most part they contribute positively to community wellbeing, some have more impact than others. Most depend to some degree on voluntary effort and the engagement of community members is generally important for their success. The final part of this chapter provides a brief account of processes of engagement in one suburb.

THE STORY OF A STRUGGLING SUBURB

Near one of our capital cities is an isolated suburb. It is completely surrounded by bush. There is just one road into the suburb. This housing estate was developed in the 1970s and in 1996 had a population of 2000 people. Seventy per cent of the people in the area were public housing tenants. Nearly 40 per cent of the households involved single parents. Around one third of the people in the area were unemployed.

An auspicing non-profit organisation began to visit the area, offering assistance to parents. But it found that its programs were not appropriate. A more sustained and larger project was needed through which local people could be engaged.

The non-profit organisation made contact with the local council, the Department of Family and Community Services, Centrelink, the police and some residents. Together, they began to develop some structures through which the community could be strengthened.

There were two objectives of the project that emerged:

1 To facilitate and develop social support groups and networks within the suburb;
2 To co-ordinate and manage the development of the area's central meeting place where activities of the support groups could happen.

Over time, a great variety of groups and networks developed. There was an Odd Jobbers group which provided assistance for people by doing odd jobs around the home. A homework centre was established in which volunteers from the community provided encouragement for groups of children to do their homework. Along similar lines to

Alcoholics Anonymous, a network was developed for men who had been involved in domestic violence. Another group was established to teach driving skills to women who had not previously been confident enough to learn how to drive.

Through these structures, people began doing all sorts of activities that they would not have dreamt of doing alone, or just as friends. The structures provided aims and goals. They gave people objectives to achieve and ways of attaining these.

A community development worker helped to facilitate these groups, but was careful to empower others rather than simply developing activities 'for' people. Another outcome was the establishment of an incorporated non-profit body to pave the way for further community strengthening initiatives (Black et al. 2002: 86–93; Millar & Kilpatrick 2004).

Some structures are necessary for engaging people and to ensure continuity of involvement. Such structures require appropriate leadership. This is the topic of the next chapter.

Questions for reflection

1   How important are voluntary financial contributions and volunteering to community life? What social impacts can such contributions make as distinct from contributions of employed people's providing services or products for which people are willing to pay?

2   What are the most appropriate ways of inviting people to contribute financially to community organisations, taking into account not only people's willingness to respond but also the costs of the invitation?

3   What characteristics of a non-profit organisation encourage volunteers to become involved? How would you develop those characteristics in an organisation?

4   How can the wider community, through its structures of governance, its media and education practices, contribute to an environment in which people are willing to contribute time and money to public-benefit organisations?

CHAPTER 10

LEADERSHIP

Leadership in contemporary communities involves being able to deal constructively with changing and often turbulent times. To do that, a sense of purpose is needed. Those who play transformational roles in communities require a deep understanding of those communities. They also need a forward-looking vision that is underpinned by an appropriate set of values, and the ability to articulate realistic and widely acceptable paths whereby individual and social wellbeing can be enhanced. Self-knowledge, integrity, a willingness to learn and to have one's blindspots corrected, and a capacity to bring out the best in others are important aspects of leadership.

What does it mean to exercise leadership or seek to make a difference in our communities, at home or at work, whether exercising formal responsibility in a designated position or not?

There are many books about leadership. Much that is helpful has been put on paper alongside much that perhaps is less than helpful. There are various ways of looking at leadership. For many it is about people in positions of formal authority. History is often written from the perspective of formal leaders. Often leadership is seen as a trait that someone possesses: how often do we hear it said that someone is a *born leader*?

Often people think they will achieve change when they have reached a position of enough formal authority. On the other hand, we often hear leaders of organisations or governments say that they were unable to achieve change because people did not want those changes.

Formal authority is not the only platform from which leadership can be exercised. Such authority has its own limitations. Often we appoint leaders and expect miracles of them. Then if they fail our expectations, we blame them rather than recognising that the process of leadership and of change requires us all to be participants in various ways.

In turbulent and uncertain times, in looking for a way forward or things to hold on to, we are tempted to seek out people who appear to have strength, who proffer simple solutions that make us feel better. We may want things to be different, but we may not be willing to accept the responsibilities that this requires. We find leaders and then make them scapegoats when they fail impossible expectations (Heifetz 1994).

Some may be given the privilege (or otherwise) of leading from the front, of having formal authority and sitting at the head of the table. Exercising leadership in such a position is no doubt important. Yet for many of us, we may be more likely to be given the opportunity for making a difference, of effecting leadership, from the foot of the table.

Which raises the question: can one really lead from the foot of the table? Indeed, is it actually easier to make a difference from the foot of the table? Answers to these questions can no doubt be debated, but one thing is clear: it is important not to wait until one has formal authority before starting to exercise leadership.

This chapter seeks to provide ideas and orientations for those of us wishing to achieve beneficial change in any aspect of life, to help anybody think about what it may mean to make a difference in our communities, to give leadership, to achieve things that we hold to be important. It seeks to be a provocative and helpful resource for self-reflection by leaders … and for those of us who may not see ourselves as leaders!

IN PERMANENT WHITEWATER

Writer Peter Vaill (1989; 1996) says it well when he describes the present context for life and leadership as being one of navigating permanent whitewater. We approach the rapids moving quickly and need to make significant decisions as we travel. Move to the right here, avoid that obstacle there, look out for this rock, that rapid, portage here.

Living effectively in contemporary society, so caught up with rapid change and social diversity, requires a flexibility of thinking and an ability to make judgments well and when needed. Some of us find it very difficult to make decisions and end up smashed across the rocks of indecision rather than choosing one course or another down the rapids on either side. Others of us make decisions too hastily with too little information or experience and find ourselves caught in dangerous back-eddies or rocky rapids for which we lack the skills to cope.

In the context of continuous change, many organisations have been caught flat-footed, unable to adapt, without the skills and insights they may need in order to survive and thrive. Often, like a frog put in water that is gradually being heated, they are in trouble and they don't even realise it.

THE CHALLENGE OF LEADERSHIP

Simplistic leadership may be one of the greatest dangers of our time. What we really need are leaders with an appropriate sense of purpose, who can act as catalysts and enablers, stimulating individuals and communities to respond effectively to the various challenges and opportunities confronting them. We need leaders whose process demonstrates integrity to their vision, whose words and actions are consistent with one another and are respectful of basic human rights and values.

What we need are leaders who, whether in the government sector, the business sector, the community and voluntary sector, or the household sector, do not encourage an avoidance of responsibility on their own part or on the part of others. There is much that can fall into the category of such avoidance. Individually or collectively we could be complicit in avoiding things that really matter and that may make a difference. In his book *The Abilene Paradox and Other Meditations on Management*, Harvey (1996) provides a graphic illustration of this in a story of a group of people spending some time together who, for many reasons, came to a decision to travel a long way to the town of Abilene in order to have a family meal. They undertook the journey and had the meal before returning home. Towards the end, one by one, they each owned up to the fact that they never really wanted to do the trip

but thought they were doing it for each other. The result of a range of attempts at caring was that together they did something that nobody wished to do. How often do organisations, groups and even societies go to Abilene, somewhere that nobody wishes to be?

Poor communication and avoidance of responsibility can make it easy for any of us to go to Abilene. In times of rapid change and permanent whitewater, the challenge of leadership is to help groups of people – families, organisations and various types of community – communicate and face up to issues, and develop a positive vision for the future and strategies for getting there. Such a process may be harder initially than going to Abilene, but it generally yields far better results in the long term. It can empower each of us and strengthen our sense of purpose, community and belonging. It can make conditions better for a great many people around us. It can grow us as individuals and as communities to be more fully human and complete. It can contribute to the social capital of our communities.

If we want life to be richer, more complete and more just, whether at the level of our families, communities, organisations, regions or societies, it is vital that we take the journey together. It is vital that we grow effective leadership in all aspects of our lives. Such leadership may not be heroic or macho in character. It certainly is not steady state or purely managerial. Nor is it purely pastoral, about caring and placating.

It is a journey of discovering where we wish to go, of calling others to be part of that vision and journeying together, one rapid at a time, through the permanent whitewater towards our intended destination.

Such leadership is not necessarily highly organised or orchestrated. It is often less like leading a symphony orchestra through a perfect rendition of a well-structured piece than it is like a piece of jazz or improvisation, where a range of musicians can work together with some order but also some flexibility of thinking and output to produce something that is remarkable as much for how it has been created as for what has been created (Hooper & Potter 2000: vii). This is the challenge of leadership.

Within communities and their constituent organisations and institutions, we need individuals and groups who can exercise leadership

that contributes in a range of ways to community strength, such as the following:

- promoting awareness and constructive action on issues relating to social justice, human rights, quality of life and community wellbeing;
- serving as exemplars of personal integrity and socially responsible behaviour;
- articulating visionary but realistic goals for the community and strategies for their achievement;
- working to achieve a high level of community acceptance of, if not commitment to, those goals;
- contributing to processes of creativity;
- fostering attitudes and practices conducive to learning and co-operative inquiry;
- encouraging the adoption of best practice in all fields of activity;
- engaging in strategic planning and action;
- responding quickly and positively to new opportunities;
- being willing to commit time, energy and other resources to well-conceived new ventures;
- endeavouring to identify, and where possible implement, local solutions to local problems;
- developing empathy and understanding of others, and being responsive to their needs;
- encouraging and facilitating collaboration and co-operation between individuals, between groups, between organisations, and between communities;
- actively encouraging community members to deal constructively with differences of opinion, work towards collaborative problem solving and overcome destructive conflict;
- displaying resilience in the face of difficulties or discouragements; and
- engaging in ongoing processes of identifying and developing leadership potential in all segments of the community, and providing opportunities for that leadership potential to be exercised.

Some of these qualities of leadership arise out of the personality and out of early relationship experiences. In relation to other qualities of leadership, education can play an important role. The leader must have a general understanding of the community which is being led and the broader context in which the community operates. Knowledge of the community, of development, of group processes and dynamics, of problem solving and team building, may be 'picked up' to some extent.

But the ability to pick up, appraise and synthesise relevant information is dependent partly on the cognitive and practical abilities to which education contributes. Such education is not necessarily confined to formal educational institutions. As has been noted in previous chapters, learning can take place in a variety of settings.

EFFECTIVE EVERYDAY LEADERSHIP

What are the characteristics of effective everyday leadership in times of continuous whitewater? How does one help individuals and groups move beyond natural tendencies to maintain past patterns of behaviour, even though these might not be best for the wellbeing of individuals and communities? What qualities are required of leaders to assist people and organisations chart a way forward?

Burns (1978), Bass (1990) and others draw a distinction between transactional and transformational leadership. *Transactional leadership* is about an exchange of rewards for good performance. For example, a manager could offer a pay rise that is contingent upon the employee's meeting specified performance standards. At a less material level, a teacher could give praise and public recognition in return for a student's meritorious performance. Essentially, transactional leadership motivates by appealing to people's self-interest. Besides the specific rewards, the main values it invokes are those that are directly relevant to the exchange process such as reciprocity, honesty, fairness and the honouring of commitments (Burns 1978: 425–26).

Transformational leadership on the other hand seeks to lift the quality of people's actions by raising their consciousness of higher ideals and moral values such as liberty, justice, equality, dignity, human rights and kindness, rather than invoking baser emotions such as fear, greed, jealousy or hatred. Transformational leadership appeals to people's 'better selves', not their narrow self-interest. According to Burns (1978), transformational leadership may be exercised by anyone at any level in an organisation or social group. It may involve people influencing peers and superiors as well as subordinates. It can occur in the day-to-day acts of ordinary people.

Depending on the setting, there is a place for both transactional leadership and transformational leadership in communities.

Vision and values

At the heart of transformational leadership is the importance of vision, undergirded by an appropriate set of values. In times of rapid social change, being clear on where we are seeking to go is critical. What is our vision of the future, of what could be? Such a vision needs to be couched in positive terms rather than negative ones. It is all too easy to define a vision by what we don't want to be and leave it at that. This is a good example of avoidance of responsibility.

Growing a vision often requires us to stop and reflect, to think about life, our families and communities as they are and to think carefully and critically about how we wish they could be. In the process we may discover some key imperatives and priorities for the future. We may also find things that we feel are difficult or impossible to achieve.

Examining these hopes and aspirations can be important. As well as thinking about objectives, we should assess the skills and resources available within the various communities of which we are a part. We should consider ways of dealing with unhelpful roadblocks. If a vision seems unattainable, what steps along the road may need to be taken to get us close to where we wish to go? How does one climb a mountain? Says Sir Edmund Hilary: 'One step at a time!'

Sometimes such a process of discernment can help us rethink our purposes. Many organisations get stuck because they have defined their sense of purpose too narrowly (Argyris 1991). In times of change, thinking more carefully and deeply about our real purposes can open up a whole range of possibilities.

The people agenda: Trust and commitment

Developing a personal vision is one thing, growing a community vision is quite another. In some studies, two dimensions of leadership have been identified. The first deals with the extent to which leaders actively structure the tasks performed by themselves and others. A leader scoring high on this dimension would typically take a very active role in shaping activities through planning, communicating information, scheduling and evaluating performance. A second dimension deals with the extent to which leaders take account of the personal and social needs of others. A leader scoring high on this dimension would be one whose relationships with others are characterised by mutual trust, respect for their ideas, consideration of their feelings, and warm interpersonal dealings.

The relative emphasis on these two dimensions may vary, depending on the setting in which leadership is exercised, the expectations and skills of the people involved and the purposes being pursued. Nevertheless, in most everyday settings, both dimensions are important for effective leadership. Communities are littered with examples of task-oriented leaders who have sought to impose a vision on an unwilling people. The result is often stagnation or conflict and, for the leader, a sense of frustration and failure. Life is also littered with examples of organisations where people may have reasonably cordial interpersonal relationships but little long-term vision.

Effective everyday leadership is characterised by a clear sense of purpose, underpinned by an appropriate set of values, including a strong focus on mutuality, empowerment and shared commitment. It is based on a vision within which people matter, where individual gifts are prized and the contributions of all are valued. It seeks to develop individual and collective commitment to the common good (Crosby & Bryson 2005). It seeks to involve people in the vision creation process, encouraging them to contribute positively to valued outcomes. It invites contribution and, in the process, develops and expects commitment.

In defining purposes and moving towards the achievement of these, empowering people actually matters. As people come to own these purposes and achieve good outcomes on the way, the process will encourage self-belief and a desire to take further positive steps. It is a delicate balance. Effective everyday leadership will encourage appropriate risk taking, provided that the risks are manageable. Encourage a child to step from stone to stone across a creek and take the risk of moving a little more quickly and the child will develop balance and self-confidence. On the other hand, asking a child to do so on stones that are too slippery or too far apart may create a very wet and disappointed child with a lower level of self-confidence. Effective everyday leadership will carefully hold the tensions between risk taking, goal setting, community building and responding to individual needs.

A positive trustable here and now

While the transformative skills described earlier are critical to growing vital and healthy community networks or organisations in times of change, our research suggests that leaders should not forget the current

realities and responsibilities of everyday life. It is possible for leaders to be so carried away with thinking about the future that more immediate issues and concerns are neglected. All groups need some security in how they function in day-to-day situations in order to be able to take risks in developing new directions or undertaking new endeavours.

There is a need for good and clear systems where everyone knows what is expected of them, where appropriate rewards or encouragements are provided when goals are met or tasks carried out well. There needs to be a good sense of belonging, together with a well-grounded trust of people, systems and communication.

Broadening the net: Effective networking

Achieving desirable social objectives with a group of people may well involve broadening the net of involvement and communicating widely with others on the journey. The development of social movements has typically involved creating networks of people willing to strive together to achieve significant social change. Networking is a critical part of social change theory, community development practice and daily living.

Networking involves communication and relationship building and may involve drawing together people with some overlapping interests but who are potentially on different journeys. The development of opposition to the Franklin Dam in Tasmania in the early 1980s, for instance, involved moving beyond the constituency of environmentalists concerned about protecting natural heritage, drawing in a wider range of people to think about energy requirements and developmental futures for the state. This required that attention be given to economic perspectives and issues as well as other public policy issues. Would a more positive future be achieved by cheap subsidised hydroelectric power to support energy intensive, low employment industries? Or would it be better to build a constructive future on the back of small-scale, community-based tourism options? The process involved engaging diverse constituencies on a journey of reflection and discovery.

Networking and extending constituencies may well involve talking with opponents, actual or potential. In the first instance, it may be helpful to meet informally with people from the opposition in order to facilitate communication, understand how they are thinking, and address any concerns they might have. Through such discussions, it may

become clearer whether there is any chance of reaching a consensus or whether the parties will simply agree to disagree. As Eva Cox (1995) and others have argued, legitimate differences of opinion are likely to occur from time to time in any community. How they are handled says much about the quality of community life. Skills in negotiation, mediation and conflict resolution are often important for effective leadership. Even where a consensus cannot be reached after the best efforts, it is important that people deal honourably with one another.

Real dialogue that includes active listening to dissident voices from both within and outside an existing constituency may alert leaders to issues that they would otherwise have been unaware of, and may save them from the arrogance of assuming that they always know best.

In summary, the process of networking involves careful and intelligent building of alliances and channels of communication, as well as sensitive listening to people of other perspectives and backgrounds. Through this process, everybody can become wiser.

Constructive communication

Contemporary society is made up of a wide range of subgroups. People differ in many ways. There are often differences in outlook associated with characteristics such as age, gender, occupation, income, ethnic background, religion, geographical location, sexual orientation and the like. In communicating constructively it is important that we seek to understand such differences and do not have our understanding restricted by blinkers associated with our own particular characteristics. Social and cultural blinkers can lead to a great deal of miscommunication.

Communication is a two-way process requiring listening as well as speaking, especially listening deeply to what is really being said underneath the words and cultural practice. Effective communication can take us deeper and closer, even if we disagree foundationally. Poor communication can only increase distrust, misunderstanding and avoidance of responsibility.

UNDERGIRDING LEADERSHIP

Self-knowledge

In our image of leadership we often think of the heroic person up front leading decisively and triumphantly. The type of leadership that

we are advocating for most situations is something quite different. Foundationally it involves mutuality. In most everyday situations, effective leaders encourage participation and are willing to recognise that they do not have all the answers and that the gifts and skills of others are also needed.

Some people in positions of leadership are too dependent for their own self-worth on the affirmation of those they seek to lead. The result can be a dependency that is counterproductive to all and paralysing. Mature leadership operates out of a clear sense of self without succumbing to the pitfalls of hubris or the excessive adulation of others.

Effective leadership will recognise that not all knowledge comes from leaders delivering riches from their intellectual bank accounts to those who are poor (Freire 1972). Learning and growth are mutual and interactive. One of the most critical lessons for a person seeking to make a difference in a struggling community is that, whatever their struggles, every single person has capacities, abilities and positive potentials (Kretzmann & McKnight 1993). Enabling those capacities to be used, those abilities to be exercised and those potentials to be fulfilled is an important element of true leadership. In this process, everyone can learn and grow as a person.

Compasses for the journey

Periodically we all encounter difficulties and times of great stress. Dealing appropriately with those difficulties and times of stress is one of the challenges of leadership. At the first or second moments of difficulty, some well-intentioned people with ideas and vision have fallen by the wayside and let go of the things they held as precious. Very often the result is despondency and a lack of willingness to try again. People will then say 'Why should we try something? Just look at what happened to …'

Leadership needs to be ready for the long haul, and a long haul needs a clear sense of purpose. Sense of purpose is about knowing what our values are, what we wish to accomplish in life and what sort of society we wish to be part of. It is unsurprising then that many of the most effective leaders in times past and present have had a sense of purpose drawn from some form of spiritual perspective. Think of William Wilberforce and Lord Shaftesbury in the movement to end

slavery; Martin Luther King in the civil rights movement in the United States; Nelson Mandela in the overthrow of apartheid in South Africa; Pope John Paul II in encouraging the recent political transformation of Eastern Europe. At the same time, leaders need to be alert to the dangers of arrogance and the possible imperfections of their vision. Even enlightened leaders have sometimes had serious blind spots.

As leaders we need to do more than just enhance our strategic wisdom and personal skills. We need to clarify, evaluate and strengthen our sense of purpose, identifying the things that will keep us going for the long haul, the things that are worth committing ourselves to.

CONCLUSIONS: THE LEADERSHIP JOURNEY

Exercising leadership is rarely stress-free and is sometimes difficult. This is not surprising given that leadership is about working with people, their hopes and aspirations, their needs and foibles, their strengths, passions and deepest yearnings. We would all do well to explore how we exercise leadership in the light of the priorities and perspectives presented here. In which areas are we growing and doing well? Which areas do we need to work on, where are we are having real problems that may diminish our effectiveness?

This chapter has suggested several key priorities for exercising effective community leadership that focus around growing a shared vision of the type of society we wish to be part of, developing active commitment to that vision and helping people find their place within it and make their contribution. It has also noted the importance of sensitive networking and relationship building at all levels with the people involved in or affected by what is being attempted. It has pointed to the importance of solid group foundations and systems where people feel safe and listened to.

Finally, it has underlined the importance not just of what leaders may do, but who they are. Effective leaders need integrity and a clear sense of self. They need purposefulness and a set of values that can provide them with a compass on which to depend when things get difficult. They need to recognise the difference between commitment and overcommitment, developing realistic expectations, pacing themselves for the long haul, balancing rest and activity.

Community groups, organisations and networks need to understand that the structures in which they place leaders are often ill defined, confused and pressured, with the ever-present danger of leader burnout. Community organisations need to monitor the wellbeing of leaders and put in place strategies for care, provide adequate preparation and ongoing support, carefully clarify expectations and boundaries, and emphasise to leaders the importance of their own personal growth. Since in principle all members should be able to contribute in ways large or small to the process of leadership, formally designated leaders should look for opportunities to encourage this.

For all of us, these are important issues. Growing in leadership will require us to: develop our skills for understanding our context; collaborate in defining what we and others wish to attain and the ways to get there; and enhance our capacities for relating creatively to others with whom we share the journey. Growing in leadership will also involve us in a journey towards self-knowledge and self-discovery – understanding ourselves, the things that matter to us, and how to tame any inner demons!

Questions for reflection

1   Think of an effective community leader you know personally, either in a local organisation or in some other context. What personal characteristics have led to that person being an effective leader?

2   What characteristics of leaders enable them to have transformative influences?

3   What are the critical elements in a vision for a community that will enable a community to change?

4   What do you consider to be important compasses for the journey of leadership?

STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES IN VARIOUS CONTEXTS

PART 4

One of the themes through this book has been the need to strengthen both locational and non-locational communities. Both types of communities have a part to play in contemporary life. Both have their strengths and their weaknesses as contexts for the sense of community. In locational communities people can work with each other on issues associated with the local area and the environment in which they live. In these communities, people often find others to offer practical 'hands-on' support such as for emergency child-minding. Non-locational communities, on the other hand, enable people to pursue specialist areas of interest and need with others who share those interests or needs. Through electronic forms of communication, for example, people can work with each other in addressing various challenges.

In considering the strengthening of both locational and non-locational communities, the multifaceted nature of community life must be noted. In both contexts, building stronger communities involves addressing a range of relationships and issues. Recent Australian Government documents have noted the range of indicators that need to be considered in measuring the strength of communities. For example, building on work that was done by Black and Hughes (2001) for the Department of Family and Community Services, along with other sources, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2006c) has designed a series of questions for its General Social Survey to measure social capital.

In making such measurements, it must be noted that a community that is strong in some areas may often be weak in others. Community strength cannot be reduced to a single measure which enables someone to say that one community is stronger than another. For example, a community that has strong internal relationships in which there is a high level of support for its members may be suspicious of strangers and may have low levels of acceptance of diversity. People who have a lot in common with each other, enjoy each other's company and give strong support to each other, may have few ties with people who are different from themselves. Building bridges across such barriers of age, educational level, ethnicity, gender, language, religion and social class remains one of the main challenges in developing stronger communities of both locational and non-locational types.

On the other hand, a loosely connected community in which there is

widespread acceptance of diversity may find it difficult to engage people sufficiently to address common problems together. The acceptance of diversity can translate into a laissez faire attitude that leaves problems festering and fails to achieve positive potentials. It may also express itself in the failure to give strong support to individuals who are in need within the community.

Chapter 11 will consider the issues relating to the strengthening of community in specific localities – rural, remote Indigenous and urban. In each of these contexts, there are particular challenges for strengthening communities. Chapter 12 examines several kinds of communities that are not tied to localities, such as associational communities, virtual communities and the global community. It considers what each of these can contribute to a sense of community. Chapter 13 reflects on the overall task of strengthening community in our contemporary context and explores implications for governments and businesses, as well as for individuals, families and households, and for community organisations and networks.

CHAPTER 11

STRENGTHENING LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Many rural communities are facing challenges through economic and population decline. Often the relationships between people are strong. Although there are seldom simple solutions to their problems, new initiatives may emerge as people work together for the sake of the community. Outback Indigenous communities suffer because of the lack of mutual understanding and communication with the wider society, as well as specific problems associated with their location and way of life. Addressing these issues is critical for their future. In large cities, communities of interest are usually important, but there remain several reasons for building community in local areas.

There are specific problems associated with the task of strengthening local communities in various contexts. This chapter will examine these issues in non-metropolitan and metropolitan settings.

RURAL, REGIONAL AND REMOTE LOCALITIES

Rural communities are facing many challenges in Australia at this time. For many years, there has been slow decline of population in many farming areas. Farms that once supported large families of eight or ten people have been amalgamated, and the enlarged farms may barely support a single person. Rural townships that once provided services for many large families now find they cater for just a few small families.

Many rural people watch as their children leave the area for tertiary education and for employment. Often those who have most to give, the highest level of skill and motivation to get things done, migrate to the city for more lucrative employment.

Many small towns have felt devastated as one institution after another has pulled up its roots. Bush hospitals have closed. In some places, schools have closed. Banks have gone. Small rural churches have found themselves without clergy.

One of the authors was doing some research in a small Victorian town. The people were noting that most of the professionals who served the town now lived in the large rural centre some 30 kilometres away. Banking staff and teachers, local government workers and accountants lived in the large rural centre but worked in the small town. When evening came, many of the professionals would be gone.

As professionals and other service providers had moved out, so people supported by social security payments had moved in. Among them were many lone parents and other people living on social security payments who appreciated the cheap housing. One night, a drama occurred in the town as a previous partner of one of these lone parents arrived in the town to confront her. He had a long history of violence and the confrontation soon turned into a hostage situation. The whole street was aware of the shouting. The local police arrived, but they needed help. All the people in social and community services had long gone. They called on the minister of the local church to help. He knew something of the family and, over a long night of negotiation, helped to bring about a peaceful solution to the problem.

A few years later, that minister has now moved on. The church where he worked does not have enough money to fund a replacement. Now there is a minister who comes from time to time from the large rural centre to take services.

Many small towns in farming areas find themselves with increased social divisions as newcomers with few resources and no commitment to the local community arrive in the town, and people with many skills and abilities that could be contributed to community life depart. The retired people often move to the larger rural centres. Most young people seek work either in these large centres or in metropolitan areas. Among

the young people who are left many have low levels of formal education and, often, little initiative. In many rural areas, there are more males than females because it is the males who are more likely to follow their fathers onto the farms (Alston 2004).

Some of these young men are loath to form de facto partnerships, let alone marry, because of the threat it can pose. If the relationship fails, the farm may have to be split. And that would leave them without land sufficient to earn an income. They are afraid it could mean that they would have to give up their whole way of life and try to find something else to which they could turn their hands. They have seen it happen in other cases and are fearful of it happening to them.

Not all rural areas are like this. Many of the towns close to the coast have growing populations. Tourism continues to expand. Upon retirement, many people like to move close to the sea. Others follow them to provide the services and resources these growing populations require.

Many of the larger rural centres continue to expand. As the small rural towns around them decline, larger centres take up the slack. The variety of medical and social services they offer expands, as do the commercial and financial facilities. In some places, local government has become more centralised in these larger rural centres.

Rural areas on the edges of the large cities may also grow with the ability of people to commute to the city, at least from time to time, if not every day. People who work in knowledge-based industries can often work in rural or semi-rural areas as long as they can get into meetings and conferences periodically and as long as the Internet and email facilities are good.

Small rural towns have some great advantages. People know each other and are aware of each other's reputations. They enjoy the fact that every time they go up the street, they find people they know. They know that children are safe when walking down the streets. They enjoy the fact that traffic jams never last longer than 15 seconds and that one minute is all it takes to get onto the open road. When compared with metropolitan areas, proportionately more people in rural areas and small towns are active members of a sporting, hobby or community-based club or association; proportionately more are active volunteers;

and proportionately more have neighbours who commonly help each other out (see table 11.1).

Table 11.1 Social capital indicators by remoteness class

Indicator of social capital	Major cities (%)	Inner regional (%)	Outer regional (%)	Remote and very remote (%)	Australia (%)
Have neighbours who commonly help each other out	55	67	70	71	60
Get together with friends/ relatives once a week or more often	64	60	63	67	63
Volunteer in a typical week	19	23	26	27	21
Currently an active member of a sporting, hobby or community-based club or association	39	41	43	47	40
Could easily raise $2000 in one week in an emergency	59	55	54	68	58
Attend religious services once a week or more often	20	18	16	14	19

SOURCE *From the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) sample survey wave 2004–05 reported in Bureau of Transport and Regional Economics (2006: 13)*

It is important to remember that the figures reported in table 11.1 are aggregates and that there are likely to be differences from one non-metropolitan community to another. Sometimes, too, tightly knit communities are found to be exclusive by people who, for various reasons, have not fitted in well. There is a relatively high rate of suicide in rural communities, especially among young men. Some of these are gay men who have not felt at home in such communities. Suicides also occur from time to time in farming communities that have had a bad run of seasons. It would be wrong, therefore, to assume that all is sweetness and light in rural communities.

Strengthening rural communities

How does one build stronger communities in such areas? As a recent book edited by Cocklin and Dibden (2005) amply demonstrates, there

are no simple answers that can be applied in all cases. And it partly depends on what one means by building stronger communities. To build the population requires developing employment. In some rural areas this has been accomplished by attracting new industries. In other areas, it has been achieved by developing facilities for recreation, opening tourist-related facilities. Some areas have attracted people through retirement facilities. Others offer a distinctive lifestyle. Successful development often depends on effective linkages with government and other service providers. It often also depends on well-developed social bridges that span communities.

In the discussion of building stronger communities throughout this book, we have focused more on strengthening the community spirit and developing the bonds, bridges and linkages between people than on building the population base. In many rural communities, people do know each other. There are many social bridges in place. There are organisations where people work together for common purposes, such as rural fire brigades and Landcare networks. Rural people are used to meetings that deal with issues of local concern. They support the local schools and find both unity and division through the local churches.

Not only are many social bridges in place, but so too are bond relationships. Often there are complex webs of inter-marriage within the long established small rural communities. Through the bonds of kinship support is provided. Nowhere is this more evident than at rural funerals. One of the authors presided over the funeral of one elderly man. He had been single all his life, farming a small area of land next to his brother. He had been an intensely shy and private person, often described as a loner. Yet, when it came to the funeral, one hundred and fifty people came to the service to honour him. Despite his reclusive ways, through his eighty years in the one area he had formed a great web of connections. Everyone in the area knew him and respected him. In a city context, such a person might have had just a handful of people at his funeral.

A major issue for relationship building in rural communities is the newcomers, the people who have recently moved in, either as professionals sent to serve in school, hospital or welfare organisation or as people looking for affordable housing. These people often lack

connections and some of them are highly mobile. They may stay only a short while and never develop the sort of connections that are made by those who have lived there for a long time. They may experience the web of interrelationships within the small rural community as hard to penetrate.

The larger problem, however, is gathering people in order to deal with the fragmentation of community life and the disappearance of services. How can one work in such places to address some of the local problems, of young people at a loose end, of the lack of public transport particularly for elderly people, of developing and maintaining infrastructure and community facilities in the area?

Community building in a non-metropolitan locality

In 1999 the Department of Family and Community Services identified one particular non-metropolitan community as being highly disadvantaged. They looked for things that were happening that they might support to strengthen community life. They found almost nothing.

One would have to work from the ground up. They called some public meetings for general discussion of the needs in the area. These meetings were designed to identify issues, to set priorities and determine some actions for implementation. It was evident that some leadership was required and some structures were needed to ensure good communication.

A number of task groups were formed following the Vision Workshops. These included:

- Community Pride and Communication
- Employment and Economic Development
- Environment
- Families and Elderly
- Leadership
- Transport
- Youth.

Each of these task groups identified specific needs and projects that would help to meet those needs.

Many people recorded their delight that other members of the community were willing to be involved and to work on projects.

Motivation was raised as people found others who were willing to work in order to change things.

Skills that existed in the community were identified – skills in networking and facilitation, in communication and marketing. As the process continued many people reported that their skills had grown through their experiences in the task groups.

Yet, there were problems. It became apparent to some that too much had been taken on in one go. Some people were involved in several task groups and their contribution was too thinly spread.

There were issues of power factions, of people who were threatened by empowerment of others. As the Australian sociologist Ken Dempsey (1990) has observed in *Smalltown,* there are often virulent power struggles in small communities. While people know each other, they do not always trust each other. They know the issues of personality and status. While on the surface it would appear that there is equality, underneath there are some people who are gatekeepers, deciding what happens and what quietly gets dropped. In other words, the quality of the bonds and bridges can hold the community back. Some members of the local government, for example, were not at all enthusiastic about these community-based initiatives that the Department of Family and Community Services was trying to develop.

The need for ongoing support and facilitation was evident – someone who would be paid to ensure things happened. There was the need for someone who could help people dream new dreams and find ways of achieving them. There was the need for leaders who would share ownership of their visions with the whole community. A community centre which could be used as a base for these activities was highly desirable. The initiatives did not quite achieve what had been hoped.

While there are many stories of projects imagined but never fully implemented, there are other stories of success (Black et al. 2002; Cocklin & Dibden 2005; Kenyon & Black 2001). There have been occasions when new ideas have taken off, created new links and offered people new possibilities of involvement with each other.

Remote Indigenous communities

There are about 1200 remote Indigenous communities in Australia, mainly in the Northern Territory, Western Australia, Queensland and

South Australia. Their average population is approximately 100 but they vary greatly in size, ranging from tiny outstation communities to larger remote townships (Altman 2003). The dysfunctioning of some remote Indigenous communities is well documented. Some of these communities have an extraordinary rate of crime, including violent assaults. Life expectancy is much lower than the average for Australian communities and health problems are rife. Substance abuse is endemic with major problems of alcoholism and petrol sniffing in some remote communities. Few young people succeed in education and very few move beyond school to tertiary education. There is widespread hopelessness and despair. Although a lot of resources are being poured into these communities, the problems often seem to be getting worse rather than better.

Analyses such as that of Richard Trudgen (2000) suggest that the problems spring in large part from the relationship of these communities to the wider society in which they exist. The wider society provides most of the products and services for life – most of the food and drink, shelter and transport, entertainment and education. Houses are built often by contractors who come into the community from outside. In most communities, there are no means whereby the people themselves can take control over access to these products and services. There is little or no employment. They are heavily dependent on government welfare payments.

Further, Trudgen argues, this sense of helplessness is compounded by the fact that there is little understanding of the systems on which they are dependent. The government is a long way away, both physically and conceptually. The education system is foreign to them and means little in their environment. The health system is not at all well understood. The service providers, the education, health and welfare officers who seek to serve these communities, often have little understanding of the people they serve.

Language is part of the barrier. But there are deeper problems that have to do with the nature of the worldview. Neither Indigenous people nor white Australians understand each other's way of seeing the world. Given the dominance of the white culture, it is the Indigenous communities which are most at a disadvantage due to this lack of

understanding, which is compounded by a feeling within Indigenous communities that they have little control over their circumstances or future. In terms of the analysis presented in this book, the problem of some remote Indigenous communities lies in the quality of the bridges and linkages between these communities and the wider society. Instead of trust and confidence, these relationships are characterised by estrangement, even fear.

According to Trudgen, the solution lies primarily in empowerment; in giving these communities back a sense of control over their own circumstances. This is not easy to do. Cutting these communities off from the goods and services that are available to other Australians will not be the solution. In large part, people's wellbeing depends on these goods and services. There is a need to find ways in which Indigenous people can be active participants in the shaping of their own future and that of the wider society. This in turn requires appropriate education so that there is an understanding of the wider society and the ways that it operates, and the development of skills that enable Indigenous people to interact constructively with, and contribute to, the wider society.

From a somewhat different perspective, Helen Hughes and Jenness Warin (2005) have proposed the following 'new deal' for Indigenous people in remote communities:

- Establishment of a framework for individual property rights in land to enable Indigenous people to develop enterprises and attract investment, thus creating jobs and incomes; also a system of 99-year leases to facilitate individually owned private housing.
- A volunteer 'literacy corps' campaign during school and university vacations to teach English literacy and numeracy within three years to all communities that want this; also Internet cafes to stimulate and maintain literacy.
- Subsidisation of a private system of health care through group practice clinics with adequate equipment in regional centres to provide competition for existing Indigenous health services, so that the latter improve their performance.
- Ensuring that Indigenous people in remote communities receive the same protection under the law as other Australians.

Other commentators have raised questions about the feasibility or desirability of some of these proposals (see, for example, Mooney 2005). While not necessarily endorsing all the above proposals, it is important

to consider whether they could contribute to the building of social bridges and linkages with the wider society, overcoming the present distrust, lack of understanding and sense of powerlessness. They may contribute to enabling Indigenous people to understand a little more of the dominant culture in Australia and to access its services. However, the resolution of the problem may need to be two-way. Other Australians must also seek to understand better the world of the Indigenous people, appreciating their culture and seeking to build social bridges that span existing social and cultural divisions.

Within Indigenous communities and beyond, opinions are divided on some of the ideas put forward by Noel Pearson, Director of the Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership. Nevertheless, in an invited address to the National Conference of the Australian Medical Association, Pearson (2004: 14) concluded that Aboriginal people in Cape York Peninsula have shown in recent years that by paying attention to social expectations, governance, supply of addictive substances, money (welfare payments) and use of time, significant progress can be made in addressing problems within remote communities. There is potential for other remote communities to learn from the successes and failures in Cape York. In addition to paying attention to issues such as housing, employment, medical services, law and order, there is a need to encourage and assist Indigenous people to strengthen social bridges and linkages within and beyond their communities.

LOCAL COMMUNITIES IN LARGE CITIES

For more than two centuries, people have argued about whether 'community' is possible in urban locations and what form it might take. Many have seen the ideal form of community as the geographically bounded small community in the rural context. Ferdinand Tönnies brought the matter to a head in *Community and Society*, originally published in German as *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*. For Tönnies (1887, 2002), community (the usual translation of 'Gemeinschaft') is found primarily in family life, the rural village and the small town. Community involves face-to-face associations. It usually involves people co-operating in their tasks, guided by habit, custom and tradition. Tönnies saw religion as contributing to maintaining the customs and traditions of community.

On the other hand, *Gesellschaft* is found predominantly in the city and in the relationships which characterise national and cosmopolitan life. There, according to Tönnies, relationships are built mainly around contracts, explicit or implied. Relationships are similar to those that occur in the business world. Rather than custom and tradition, regulations rule in the factory and the business house. Religion concedes to science and to public opinion as dominating forces on how people think.

For Tönnies, *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* are ways in which people associate with each other. Hence, it is possible that the patterns of *Gemeinschaft* can be found in the city. Family life, for example, can exist in the city, but he sees it as decaying in that context as individuals within the family pursue their own interests, pleasures and business.

In a sense, then, Tönnies is suggesting that community will not characterise city life. People will live in different ways, based largely on contracts and rules rather than on more intimate relationships and custom. Towards the end of his life, in 1931, Tönnies reflected again on the differences between urban and rural life. He continued to see very different types of social relationships in the two contexts. He suggested that capitalistic society inevitably increases in power and 'gradually attain[s] the ascendency. Tending as it does to be cosmopolitan and unlimited in size …' (Tönnies 1931, 2002: 258). Perhaps he was hinting at the possibility of the mega-cities which emerged in the late 20th century. He certainly never experienced the huge boom in electronic communications which has transcended the boundaries of space.

Yet, others have seen the possibility of community within the complexity of city life. There are some who look for the sense of community in long-standing groups within the city, as found for example in a pub or a club. Or there are the groups of immigrants who have shared ethnic backgrounds and who may live in the vicinity of each other. Or, occasionally, there are groups of neighbours who have come to know each other and who share a sense of belonging.

There have been many attempts to create community in city areas. Neighbourhood centres have been built. Attempts have been made to mobilise people around specific issues, and even around urban disintegration. Yet, despite all the efforts, the centres of many large American cities have declined into ghettos, gangs and violence (Delanty

2003: 60). Other attempts have been made through the creation of 'gated communities'. More than three million Americans currently live in walled communities, segregated from the wider society, protected by guards and complex security systems. But these urban fortresses may be seen as a very restricted form of community, based as they are on fear and distrust of those who are not part of that community (Delanty 2003: 62).

The Australian Community Survey certainly found that people living in the metropolitan areas were less likely to know their neighbours than were the people in small rural centres. The average city person travels for several hours every week, commuting to places of work, education, socialising and leisure. In metropolitan areas communities of interest tend to consume at least as much of people's attention as do residential communities.

Yet, there are several reasons why attention should be paid to developing communities at local levels within the large cities. The first is that there are some common interests and concerns that affect the people of a locality. They use the same roads and rely on the same public transport system. From time to time, they enjoy the same green areas, areas of public space. They breathe the same air, polluted by the same factories. They may experience the same local crime patterns.

When problems loom large, people often do get together. It may be the threat of a new freeway being pushed through the centre of the population, or a new factory complex being built. It may be the crime that brings people together in Neighbourhood Watch, or the quality of the public transport that causes a common outcry.

Crises such as these may create a sense of community. People caught in a train crash feel for each other, sharing their grief, coping together with their wounds. There are still strong remnants of community in the groups of soldiers from the various wars in which Australia has been involved, who gather together to mourn their fellow soldiers who died in battle.

The horrendous bushfires in the suburbs of Canberra in 2003 brought suburban people together in a remarkable way. A strong sense of community suddenly emerged as hundreds of people found themselves homeless, their possessions destroyed. Strangers opened their homes and their hearts to those who had suffered the loss.

If people do know each other, if the connections and means of engagement are in place, then people can respond more readily to issues of their locality. They can give better support to each other. Yet, unless there is a need, a task to perform, a challenge to confront, they will often be reticent to make the time and effort.

There is a second reason for creating community at local level in urban areas. That is, there are some in most urban communities who do not have the means to travel, who are thereby forced to find their community there. The elderly often look to the local area for their opportunities to socialise. Children must usually find their sense of community in the local area, unless their parents are ever-ready to provide a taxi service. People on very low incomes living in outer suburbs where there is little public transport may well be restricted to the local area by the cost of mobility. For these people, it may be either locally based community or no involvement in community at all.

A third reason has to do with environmental factors. If well-rounded communities are built in local areas, people do not have to travel so far to find the resources they need. This cuts down the environmental costs of mobility.

Strengthening local communities in large cities

How can one strengthen local communities in large cities? Here are a few possibilities:

1   By identifying locality-based issues and gathering people around them.
2   Socially, by building up the various little local groups and networks that currently exist. In almost every locality there are sporting clubs, and a host of other things already happening.
3   By taking the personal initiative to bring together the people in a street. Street parties, for example, have added to the sense of community in some places.
4   Initiatives such as these need people who are willing to go out on a limb, people who are willing to take leadership, articulating the issues and needs, and gathering people together to do something about it.

Strengthening community in urban localities needs the building of social bridges, and that requires ways of communicating with people.

In urban areas, the grapevine does not work as it does in the rural towns. Mass media can be useful, especially local newspapers and local radio. 'Snow-balling' works in the longer term. People connect with the people they do happen to know in the local community. Those people connect with the people *they* know. The word does get around.

A local group associated with a church wanted to contribute to local community by running sessions on 'Understanding the Faith of Your Neighbours'. A program was devised, involving a person of each of the major non-Christian faith groups – Buddhist, Hindu, Jew and Muslim. Advertising was done in a variety of ways – posters in local shop windows, an interview on the local radio station, an article in the local newspaper. However, the majority of those people who came were people who knew others associated with the church. For this event, people felt able to invite people they would not invite to a service of worship, but who might be interested in the discussion. About 70 people turned up, and the numbers gradually grew through the six week series of presentations, mostly through the personal connections people had with those who had previously attended.

As people had the opportunity to talk to each other and to the presenters of the various sessions, so the sense of community among them grew. For some of them, this has been sustained through other similar series of presentations based on other themes.

Schools are often in an excellent situation to strengthen community. They have access to a large number of homes and contact with people across the socio-economic divisions. A common interest is shared among these people – the future of the children. In many locations, schools have effectively contributed to communities, bringing parents together for the sake of the school, for the children, and for the future of the community.

Churches may also play a role in the wider community. They are often in a position to organise community events, having access to a group of volunteers and connections throughout the community. Their strength in such activities is enhanced if churches of different denominations can work together. Churches can bring together people to address social concerns or issues. At other times, it may be a matter of public celebrations of major festivals such as a 'carols by candlelight' or

an Easter parade. They may arrange educational activities – for children or adults. Or they may offer a blessing of the city and its commercial centre.

Sporting clubs may bring people together and give them a sense of identity through the sporting teams. Service clubs play significant roles in building community, mobilising people and contributing to the wellbeing of the local community.

Many locally based organisations run activities from time to time. Some focus on raising money for community facilities. Other events raise awareness or disseminate skills or knowledge. In order to develop community, a pathway approach needs to be employed. A large single event such as a festival or a craft market may make initial contact with a large number of people. The single event brings people together but does not, in itself, create community. Community is created as people get to know each other through more sustained connections. The single event can sometimes be the catalyst for the small group that explores something at further depth, that arranges other events, that provides support. In developing community, organisers may develop the large event as a point of contact, but on the basis of those initial connections develop group activities through which connections will be continued and deepened. The small group is one of the most effective generators of community in the urban landscape.

Questions for reflection

1   What are some of the best ideas you have seen or can envisage that could revitalise a rural community?

2   How can mutual understanding between Indigenous people and other Australians be built?

3   What do you think are the major reasons for building community at local levels in large cities?

4   What role do you think local communities will play in the future? Will their role further diminish as mobility increases and as electronic communications play an ever larger role?

CHAPTER 12

STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES BEYOND THE LOCALITY

Building stronger communities means ensuring that the expert systems that dominate contemporary life are trustworthy and socially responsive. Community organisations and networks can help to ensure this. Wisely used, the Internet and the mobile phone can each contribute to the building of stronger communities, sometimes by helping to create new relationships and sometimes by strengthening existing ones. They can, however, also be misused. There is a need to build links and greater understanding between different segments of society. One of the greatest challenges is the creation of global community in a time where there is much mistrust across the nations of the world.

Community is not tied to locality and its development should not be seen only in local terms. As acknowledged at the beginning of this book, community is often experienced in a wide variety of fragments, in the multitude of activities that contemporary people enjoy. Even rural people have many connections with people in the cities, interstate and even overseas.

People are not going to give up this variety for the sake of the locality, even if they find some of their sense of community in the locality. They

are not going to abandon the specialised, but often very meaningful, groups that give support to people suffering rare but debilitating illnesses, or that provide an opportunity for people to pursue unusual hobbies or special sporting interests. Nor should they.

Community will continue to be found in many experiences and connections that extend beyond the locality. Indeed, something of the sense of community will be found in the 'virtual' connections of the Internet (Rheingold 1994; Delanty 2003). There has been a lot of discussion about the pros and cons of Internet communities. People's connections with one another on the Internet are often on an anonymous or pseudonymous basis. The sense of community is based entirely on the flow of communication, the sharing of knowledge or ideas. Yet, these are real connections between people. One of the issues this chapter will discuss is the relative importance of these 'virtual communities'.

Another major issue for contemporary society is that much of society is dominated by what Anthony Giddens (1990: 27) calls 'expert systems'. Many connections between individuals occur within the shadows of these expert systems. Efforts to strengthen community must take account of these systems. We will consider this issue first, before moving on to virtual communities.

COMMUNITY AND EXPERT SYSTEMS

As noted in chapter 5, in contemporary society, many dealings occur between people who are not personally familiar with one another. When something goes wrong, it is often not the particular person with whom we have been dealing who should receive the blame. Suppose we are travelling in a bus and the bus breaks down. In most cases, the driver cannot be held responsible. She is not responsible for the maintenance of the bus. The mechanic may have contributed to the problem by failing to check something. On the other hand, it could be the management which arranges the schedules of maintenance that has greater responsibility for the breakdown. The mechanical checks did not occur as frequently as they should. Or it is possible that high quality parts were not used for the repairs. The problem may be in the system. Or it may be a problem that no one could have predicted and no changes in the system could have prevented.

Similarly, if the new video player does not work properly, the sales person may not be directly responsible for the problem. Nor can one usually blame the person who answers the phone at the company that makes the video player or distributes it in Australia. He may be quite unfamiliar with the product. That person's job is just to answer the phone. The problem may lie deep in the quality control procedures that the manufacturing company uses. It may lie in the training of the technicians. It may lie in the actual design of the product. In many cases, there will be no single individual who is personally responsible for the malfunction.

Much of our life as individuals and as communities is affected by how well expert systems function. The quality of education, for example, depends to a significant extent on the characteristics of the systems that train teachers, which hire and fire them, which oversee the development of curricula, which determine policies for the operation of educational institutions, which provide ongoing professional development for teachers, which assess the quality of educational outcomes, and so on. Thus, there is a wide range of interacting subsystems which together constitute 'the education system'.

Strengthening the education system means ensuring that each subsystem operates effectively in its own sphere of activity and also that the various subsystems function effectively together. There are long and complex chains of responsibility in the different areas of operation. Often weaknesses in the system are caused by a variety of factors and there are various ways in which a problem may be tackled.

Take, for example, the issue of bullying which leads to children not wanting to attend school. The school could be blamed for not picking up the problem and disciplining the bullies. It may well be that the policies of the school are not sufficiently clear on the matter, or that the principal is not sufficiently proactive. It may be that the School Council bears some responsibility, aware that problems such as this are occurring but failing to introduce policies that would deal with it. Perhaps individual teachers have not felt confident to deal with the problem. Maybe they have not had adequate training for such situations. It is possible that counselling facilities available to help deal with such situations have been curtailed due to funding cutbacks for which government policies have been responsible.

On the other hand, it might be claimed that this is really a community problem. Perhaps the bullies have been brought up in a culture which takes a lenient view of bullying; one where people only laugh at the pressures that bullying brings to bear on other children. It is quite possible that these bullies themselves have been brought up in homes where the parents act in a bullying fashion.

The parents whose children are fearful of going to school may well feel that they do not know where to start. Do they make an appointment with the classroom teacher, the principal or the school counsellor? Do they speak with the police, local social workers or government officials? Should they seek an opportunity to talk directly with other parents, and perhaps with the parents of the bullies themselves? Should they try to set up some sort of mediation between the two groups of children? Perhaps the interactions at this level are not as simple as the children have depicted them.

One result of the domination of complex systems in contemporary life is that it is usually easy to find someone else to blame. Any one problem can have so many causes that it becomes easy for individuals to move the blame onto others, or onto the system itself, rather than taking personal responsibility. At the same time, when one is a victim in the problem, it is easy to feel helpless, to feel that there is no way to deal with the problem. It may well be that, as a result of that sense of helplessness and of the tendency to blame others, people move easily to legal action, suing others over things that happen. For example, the obese person may blame the fast-food outlet. The person who has an accident in an extreme sport may blame the company which organised it. But it is often hard to draw a clear line between where one should take full responsibility for one's own situation and where organisations and systems should take some or all of that responsibility. On the other hand, there are times when the real issue is not finding who can be blamed. The problem needs to be effectively rectified, irrespective of how it may have occurred.

The market itself may encourage organisations to establish means through which complaints may be made and problems addressed. People will be attracted by the warranty that is offered on goods and by reports that a company will readily exchange or repair faulty goods. Such responsibilities cannot be left entirely to the market. As noted

in chapter 5, there are important roles for government to regulate companies, their operations and their quality control procedures, to ensure that their products and services are safe and reliable. One obvious area for this is the pharmaceuticals industry.

There are also important roles for regulation in the many areas of society in which market choice is not possible or not effective in ensuring that complaints are appropriately addressed. Despite the privatisation of many public utilities, it is not always easy or possible for the huge utility systems to be held accountable by market choice. Likewise, in many circumstances there are no choices in public transport.

Nevertheless, there are often pressures that community members may bring to bear on organisations and systems to ensure that their operations are not harmful to individuals and communities. For example, it may sometimes be appropriate to organise boycotts of companies that ride rough-shod over public concerns.

Community organisations can play a significant role in encouraging transparency and accountability within expert systems. Consumer organisations and community organisations can keep a watch on public utilities, the operations of media and government, on police and prisons, and a host of other systems in contemporary society. This 'watchdog' role is likely to be enhanced if consumer and community organisations have access to public media to voice their concerns.

Another field in which community proactivity may be needed is in relation to various forms of service delivery. Organisations of community members to check that all areas are as well served as possible by public transport, by educational and health facilities, by facilities to care for the aged and those with disabilities, perform a valuable function. Other organisations work with the police to enhance safety throughout the community.

Systems of representative government at national, state and local levels go some way towards the empowerment of communities. Ideally, the community members hold their representatives in government accountable for ensuring that there are appropriate public services, that public money is well spent, and that gaps in services are recognised and addressed. Accountability is enhanced as community members vote to retain those who have served them well or to replace them if their service has been weak. Community organisations, whether based on

locality or some other form of common interest, can play a vital role in drawing attention to issues that need to be addressed.

Thus, as noted in chapter 5, strengthening community involves developing a culture in which people are empowered to voice concerns. It also involves members of communities being willing to institute changes in their own attitudes and actions when necessary. For example, the problem of obesity in children is unlikely to be solved simply by taking legal action against fast-food outlets. Legal initiatives may be appropriate in some circumstances as one of a range of actions, but they are seldom sufficient by themselves. The problem of obesity may perhaps be addressed by forming parent support groups in which experts in nutrition talk with parents about the nutritional needs of children, and by forming sporting or non-competitive exercise groups through which young people are encouraged to do more exercise. Community groups may lobby food outlets, such as school canteens, to ensure that food with high nutritional value is readily available. They may engage in a public awareness campaign to encourage people to choose such foods.

This simple illustration is not meant to imply that there are always 'local solutions to local problems'. As noted in chapter 8, sometimes wider action is also needed. Building strong communities means building a society where, in addition to strong social bonds, there are numerous and effective social bridges and linkages, together with active community organisations and networks. Some of these bridges, linkages and forms of association may be locally based. Others will reach beyond the locality and will engage various communities of interest.

VIRTUAL COMMUNITIES

Email and Internet have extended and challenged the notion of community. Through these electronic forms of communication, people from all over the world can now communicate in such a way that spatial separation has much less significance than previously. New possibilities have emerged of work from remote locations, of study and education across nations and cultures, of personal relationships with people one is never likely to meet.

The 2001 Australian Census found that 37 per cent of the population had access to the Internet either at home or in the office or

both. (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2003). By 2005–2006, 60 per cent of Australian households had home Internet access (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006d). The proportion of Australians using the Internet continues to rise. Such usage inevitably has an impact on other activities in daily life. A study in the United States has found that Internet use has led to a reduction in the use of traditional media such as television, newspapers and phone calls to friends and family. Among some people, it may also replace leisure activities with friends and work for volunteer groups (Wellman & Haythornthwaite 2002: 23).

On the other hand, email and Internet have contributed to the proliferation of new forms of organisation, to the linking of people who have similar interests. Since the early 1990s, academics have been catapulted into a global arena in which they can often work as much with people who live on the other side of the world as they do with people in their own city. They can, for example, pursue ever more specialist areas of study alongside the handful of people around the globe who share their area of speciality.

Various commentators on public affairs have set up websites to disseminate their opinions. Some have invited responses to which they in turn respond (web logs or 'blogs'). Likewise, for little cost, people have used the Internet to find others who have similar leisure interests and to correspond with those people through email. They have been able to engage with people on a global basis.

Others, with more general interests, have used Internet chat rooms to find answers to technical problems they have encountered or to inquire about others' experiences of products they may wish to purchase. Young people have enjoyed the freedom of chatting with a wide variety of people from various backgrounds.

However, as noted in chapter 1, this capacity to communicate so easily has limitations and a dark side. It is seldom able to substitute for the practical help that a nearby resident could give in the event of an emergency. Moreover, some unscrupulous people have used the Internet to deliberately mislead others. The occasional occurrences when children have been lured into personal contact with predator adults whom they have met over the Internet have heightened awareness of this possibility. Likewise, the Internet has been used by fraudsters

to trick people into revealing secret information that is then used for criminal purposes.

The proliferation of 'spam' (simultaneously posted advertising messages) is a further, and growing, problem with the Internet. Many people receive daily avalanches of unwanted email from people they do not know. Some of these messages are fraudulent while others are for goods and services one is unlikely to need. In addition to being unwanted, both types of message have the capacity to clog email servers and trigger a direct or indirect cost to the recipient. They are antithetical to a socially responsible concept of community. Likewise, people who create computer viruses and use the Internet to spread them are part of the dark side of virtual communities.

Some writers have argued that the Internet is causing people to become socially isolated and cut off from genuine social relationships as they interact more with the computer screen and disembodied strangers rather than face-to-face with others. For example, one early study found that 'greater use of the Internet was associated with declines in participants' communication with family members in the household, declines in the size of their social circle, and increases in their depression and loneliness' (Kraut et al. 1998: 1017). However, a follow-up study of a subsample of participants in the original study indicated that these negative effects had generally dissipated three years later (Kraut et al. 2002).

A recent review of 16 quantitative studies investigating the impact of Internet use on social activity has found that the effects are generally small and inconsistent; and the research methods deployed tend to make a difference to the conclusions, with cross-sectional comparisons suggesting that Internet use is weakly associated with less interaction with friends whereas longitudinal research suggests the opposite (Shklovski et al. 2006).

Since 2000, the Pew Internet & American Life Project has been using telephone interviews to track personal usage and impacts of the Internet in the United States. By the end of 2006, 70 per cent of American adults were using the Internet at least occasionally, with most logging on from home (Pew Internet & American Life Project 2007). Harvard University lecturer Pippa Norris (2003) has used data from the

Pew survey and other sources to examine whether people who are active in online groups feel that their participation *widens* their experience of community (by helping them connect with people with diverse beliefs or backgrounds, thus building social bridges) or whether it *deepens* social bonds with people they already know and with whom they share similar beliefs and values. Evidence from the survey suggests that in general the Internet can serve both these functions, although the strength of these effects varies with the type of online group.

Nan Lin (2001: 214) of Duke University argues that the dramatic growth of virtual communities represents a 'revolutionary rise of social capital'. He says that the Internet has provided avenues for exchanges and the formation of collectivities in a wide variety of ways. He considers that these are rich in social capital as they allow access to information in an interactive way. In his view, the widespread access that people have to the Internet represents a new era of 'democratic and entrepreneur networks' (Lin 2001: 215). Lin (2001: 217) suggests that the Internet has been responsible for the growth of social capital on a global level and cites the example of the Falun Gong as a social movement sustained by the Internet.

In an overview of the impact of the Internet on social interactions, Wellman and Haythornthwaite (2002: 33–34) argue that 'the Internet reflects, facilitates and foretells a transition away from door-to-door group interactions in neighbourhoods and even place-to-place interactions'. Nevertheless, according to these writers:

> People remain connected, but as individuals rather than being rooted in the home bases of work unit and household. Individuals switch rapidly between their social networks. Each person separately operates his networks to obtain information, collaboration, orders, support, sociability, and a sense of belonging. (Wellman & Haythornthwaite 2002: 34)

The discussion on virtual communities serves to demonstrate that there are various kinds of social capital. One kind cannot be reduced to another. There are some great strengths in the communities created through exchanges on the Internet. However, these communities are not always able to replace the assistance that a neighbour might be able to offer.

MOBILE PHONES AND COMMUNITIES

Since the late 1990s, there has been a rapid increase in the use of mobile phones in Australia, especially among young people. Previously, mobile phones had been used mainly by tradespeople and business executives on the move. Now millions of people, both young and old, keep in touch with their friends and associates through mobile phones. This rapid expansion has been facilitated by decreases in the cost of calls, especially when these are made to people who subscribe to the same mobile phone company. It enables people to connect with others in ways that they very often seem to value. But it is interesting to reflect on what it means for changes in the nature of community.

It is evident that, even more than communication over the Internet, the mobile phone creates community that is unaffected by locality. People can connect with each other irrespective of time and place. People may be surrounded by others in a commuter train, but the sense of community is maintained through contact over the mobile phone. The messaging facilities (SMS), and now the possibilities of sending image and video, enhance the connectivity and are all the more private without the use of voice.

On the other hand, it has been argued that most mobile phone connections are with a small group of family, close friends or colleagues. Except for people who use mobile phones for work-related purposes, the mobile phone may restrict one's connections with others, rather than broadening them. It may create a deeper bonding with a small group of people as people connect with each other throughout the day irrespective of locality, rather than necessarily extending one's range of connections.

Nevertheless, the mobile phone may allow one to engage closely in several quite disparate communities. One can move rapidly from one group of friends to another on the mobile. One can talk with colleagues in one country and one's family in another while on the move in a third. In that way, it may contribute to the fragmentation of the experience of community. Again, although the importance of locality has diminished, the possibility of engaging in a variety of virtual communities has increased.

Most people have been aware of the annoyance of the mobile phone disturbing a public meeting. Even at intense moments such as a wedding

or a funeral, it has become almost inevitable that a mobile phone will disturb the atmosphere and send someone rushing out of the room. One of the present authors has inadvertently left his mobile phone on when lecturing, only to be disturbed in the midst of delivering some important observations. Mobile phones break into the community of locality, not always in a welcome way.

The community mobilisation potential of mobile phones has increased as the range of functions they can perform has expanded and as more and more people have acquired them (Glotz et al. 2005; Harper et al. 2005). A notable example of their use to mobilise the public occurred during the impeachment process of Philippines President Estrada in 2001. When some senators associated with the President succeeded in stopping that process, their political opponents broadcast text messages calling on citizens to gather in central Manila. Within an hour and a quarter, 20 000 people had rallied in downtown Manila for this purpose. The rapid mobilisation of this number of people would have been very difficult without the mobile phone (de Souza e Silva 2006; Rheingold 2002).

One other aspect of the mobile phone is that it leaves electronic traces. While there is a certain anonymity to electronic communications, and while locality fades to insignificance, these traces are becoming important. People's movements and activities can be identified. A history of activity can be reconstructed. Mobile phones can be used by the terrorist cell to plan their activities and by government for surveillance.

BUILDING COMMUNITY BEYOND LOCALITY

Communities beyond locality are important within the range of communities in which people engage. Electronic forms of communication are assisting in the creation of virtual communities, often in a way that adds a new depth to bonding relationships, overcoming the separation of space. As these electronic communications enhance pre-existing bonding relationships, they may help to reinforce a sense of belonging.

One of the challenges, however, from the perspective of those wishing to strengthen communities, is that some of these electronic forms of communication, such as email, tend to link people with similar interests, rather than to extend links to people from different

backgrounds and with different interests. Academics work even closer to academics of their own very specialised interests, rather than engaging with a variety of people who would bring quite different perspectives. People communicate increasingly with people of the same age group, the same socio-economic background, the same interests, rather than establishing ties with a wide variety of people. Thus, Internet communities are 'more likely to be communities based on the sharing of a single concern rather than networks that bind people together across many areas of activity' (Delanty 2003: 180).

For the wellbeing of the wider society, it is important that there also be links between people who have different backgrounds and interests. Since the immigration that followed World War II, the ethnic and cultural plurality of Australian cities has increased markedly. In places like Sydney and Melbourne, up to one third of the population has been born overseas and some of these speak a language other than English at home. Strengthening community means finding ways in which these various immigrant groups can interact with each other and with other Australians. It may be through music and the arts, through food and festivals, or as people learn each other's languages. Interaction may occur because of religious similarities or differences, through sporting groups or exercise activities. Finding ways of linking people across these cultures and helping people to understand each other is essential to building a harmonious society.

GLOBAL COMMUNITY

The greatest challenge of the world today is the creation of global community. Global travel has become commonplace for people on average Australian incomes. Human beings are becoming increasingly dependent on each other at a global level.

Many businesses have become global enterprises. While some companies trade from one place to another, many businesses have specific expression in a variety of locations around the globe. The manufacture of a car, for example, will often involve the assembly of parts from several different countries. Worldwide co-operation and international trade are essential to maintain the 'supply chain' for many of the goods that fill Australian homes.

Further, human beings have become so numerous and their technologies so powerful, that they are having profound impacts on the nature of the earth's environment. Global warming is a prime example which is already contributing to disastrous impacts on communities. Such issues can only be dealt with through worldwide co-operation.

Nevertheless, at the global level there are also deep fissures and cultural divides. Terrorism is a major contemporary concern in various countries. Underlying terrorism are tensions between major segments of the global community. The divisions may be variously described. On one view, they reflect a 'clash of civilisations' with different religious underpinnings. From a slightly different perspective, they reflect the differences between Western liberal cultures and the more structured and authoritarian Middle Eastern cultures, particularly in regard to family life, sexuality and attitudes towards women. To some extent, the tensions also reflect different economic bases. It is not insignificant that al-Qaeda has some of its roots in one of the poorest nations on earth, Afghanistan, and that it has been at war with the wealthiest nation, the United States of America. The problems are exacerbated by the huge imbalances of power.

The terrorists themselves may be relatively few in number. They are extreme, both in their cultural and religious attitudes and in the paths they choose in order to address what they consider to be global problems. At the same time, simply seeking to annihilate the terrorists themselves will not address the large global factors which contribute to their support and the success they have experienced.

The global tensions must be addressed in terms of creating global community, in building trust and goodwill on a global scale. The solution lies in some of the same factors identified as important in more localised communities. Education is vital; it is essential that people understand each other, understand the differences in values and backgrounds, differences in history and contemporary culture and religion.

One of the greatest signs of hope for global community is the non-government organisations that are working for stronger communities on a global scale. It is here that people are most effectively addressing global challenges. Organisations such as Greenpeace in relation to the environment, Amnesty International in relation to individual rights,

and a wide range of aid organisations are mobilising people, raising money and bringing real solutions in local situations. Beyond education, motivating people and engaging them in such worldwide movements is one major way in which global communities are strengthened.

The Internet is one factor that is contributing to global community. It allows people to connect with each other throughout the world, often at a cost as cheap as a local phone call. As with any forms of communication and interaction, the Internet can be used for antisocial purposes. The fact that it is hard to control is good for democracy and the free flow of information. On the other hand, it means that people with the intent to take advantage of others are also able to use it with ease and impunity. Wise use of the Internet and the materials and opinions that are available on it is needed, as is also the case with any other media. The advantage of the Internet over other sources of information is the great variety of information that is available, and the fact that information is not controlled by a few powerful individuals or corporations, as is the case with most television, for example.

As global interaction increases, and the global effects of human activity are ever more evident such as in global warming, the formation of global community becomes increasingly critical. As Lester Kurtz (1995: 240) concludes in his book, *Gods in the Global Village*, 'we must learn to live together as brothers and sisters, or we shall die together as fools.'

Questions for reflection

1   In the various interest- and task-oriented groups in which you are involved, have deliberate attempts been made to 'strengthen community'? How have these attempts affected the functioning of the group and the outcomes that it has achieved? What are the most effective ways of building stronger communities in the context of communities of interest?

2   In your experience, how has the Internet contributed to and/or diminished social capital?

3   What do you think has been the impact of the widespread use of mobile phones in relation to strengthening community?

4   In what ways do you feel part of a global community? What do you see as signs of hope in the development of global community?

CHAPTER 13

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Neo-liberal government policies have stressed individual responsibility and the importance of markets, and have resulted in a downsizing of the government sector. Nevertheless, governments can play a significant role in facilitating the strengthening of communities. Businesses also have a role and will experience benefits as they contribute. Community will continue to be experienced in a diverse range of activities and relationships, some being based on locality and others on more dispersed networks. In all these settings, community can be strengthened. Strengthening community will involve the enhancement of social bonds, the strengthening of social bridges, and the development of effective linkages. Community will be strengthened as people are motivated to be involved, skilled in contributing, and effectively engaged in the life of communities.

This chapter will briefly summarise the main conclusions of the book and consider their implications for governments, businesses, community organisations and individual citizens. In so doing, it will refer back to previous chapters where more detail can be found. Before discussing implications, it is necessary to examine recent trends in public policy.

THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENTS IN STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES

Neo-liberalism and communities

In recent decades, governments in Australia and other English-speaking countries have been heavily influenced by the philosophies of neo-liberalism (McKnight 2005). Neo-liberalism emphasises the rights and responsibilities of the individual. It presupposes that private sector institutions and market mechanisms are generally the best instruments for allocating resources, promoting economic growth and maximising people's wellbeing (Wiseman 2005). Consequently, neo-liberals advocate only a very limited role for the public sector, except in core areas such as defence, administration of justice, some public-good infrastructure such as basic educational institutions, and perhaps some forms of assistance relating to health and welfare. Even in the areas of education, health and welfare, neo-liberalism tends to prefer the use of non-government institutions and market mechanisms wherever possible. In brief, according to Peck (2001: 445), neo-liberalism seeks to: 'purge the system of obstacles to the functioning of free markets; restrain public expenditure and any form of collective initiative; celebrate the virtues of individualism, competitiveness, and economic self-sufficiency; abolish or weaken social transfer [income redistribution] programs while actively fostering the "inclusion" of the poor and marginalized into the labor market, on the market's terms'. In the 1980s and 1990s, some elements of neo-liberalism were evident in the policies of the Hawke and Keating governments (Beeson & Firth 1998; McKnight, 2005; Pusey 1991). The Howard Government has moved even further in this direction (Everingham 2003; McKnight 2005; Pusey 2003).

Neo-liberalism has also influenced public policy at state and territory levels in Australia, although in varying degrees depending on the political complexions of their governments. For example, many public utilities that were previously part of the public sector have been privatised. Various government departments have been downsized and some activities that had been undertaken within departments have been outsourced to the private sector. Agricultural advisory services that had been freely available to farmers have been reduced in scope. 'User pays'

has increasingly been applied by various government departments. The language has changed too. Instead of referring to people as citizens or members of the public, some departments describe them as customers. Trends such as these were most strongly evident when the Kennett Government was in power in Victoria, but they have also manifested themselves elsewhere.

The question might be asked: where do communities fit into the neo-liberal vision? Although there are some differences of emphasis among various exponents of neo-liberalism, there have been several recurring themes in answers to this question. One of these relates to the role of families and communities in the formation of people's attitudes, values and behaviours. Neo-liberals generally call for families, schools and communities to play a positive role in instilling and upholding virtues such as honesty, diligence, trustworthiness and the like, all of which contribute not only to individual success and business efficiency but also to community wellbeing.

Secondly, many neo-liberals speak of the importance of mutual obligation. At least for people who are of an age when they could be expected to be in the workforce, policies of mutual obligation seek to overcome the social problems associated with poverty and unemployment by requiring that those who receive welfare payments should meet certain behavioural criteria in exchange for their welfare benefit. As Lawrence Mead (1997: 2), one of the chief exponents of policies based on the principle of mutual obligation, put it: 'These measures assume that the people concerned need assistance, but they also need direction if they are to live constructively.' In Australia, similar sentiments were contained in the recommendations of the McClure report on welfare reform (Reference Group on Welfare Reform 2000). Notions of mutual obligation also lie behind the Shared Responsibility Agreements (SRAs) signed in recent years between governments and Indigenous communities, mainly in non-metropolitan locations. These SRAs spell out what all parties to the agreements – communities, governments and others – undertake to do. As governments allocate money for special programs in those communities, Indigenous people are required to accept and fulfil specified responsibilities in return.

A third tendency in neo-liberalism is for governments to rely on

non-government organisations to administer some social welfare or workfare programs. This is illustrated in Australia by the abolition of the Commonwealth Employment Service and the transfer of its functions to various commercial, community or charitable organisations. Furthermore, as the relative size of the government sector has been reduced, families and communities have been expected to fill gaps in service provision. Neo-liberal commentators such as Andrew Norton (1998) generally put a positive spin on this, arguing, for example, that families, community organisations and charitable bodies are more effective than large government bureaucracies in providing individualised care and attention. Whether or not that claim is accurate, some other commentators see the policy as being driven partly by a desire to relieve governments of the burden of responsibility for difficult social problems (Bryson & Mowbray 1981, 2005; Dibden & Cheshire 2005; Everingham 2003). For a similar analysis in another country, see Seibel (1989).

It is important to note that some welfare organisations are operating in situations where the needs are more voluminous and deep-seated than in others. Resourcing needs to match the task. Where community organisations have received government funding for their programs, there has sometimes been a written requirement or an unwritten expectation that these organisations do not criticise government policy. Such constraints may suit governments but they are inconsistent with robust democratic principles. A robust democracy is one in which citizens and community groups are free to express public criticism of governments. Community groups should not be prevented from doing so by improper constraints on their freedom of speech. Of course, such freedom should be exercised in ways that respect the rights of others.

Other aspects of public policy

While governments have been interested in strengthening communities so that communities can take fuller responsibility for their own needs, neo-liberal thinking has been tempered by the ideal of the safety net, the widespread social expectation that government should provide help for the most needy. All three levels of government – federal, state and local – have seen the strengthening of communities as a way of assisting

those people with the highest levels of need. The Australian Department of Family and Community Services, for example, tried to identify the most needy communities for the projects it sponsored as part of the Family and Community Networks Initiative between 1998 and 2005. Other community-based projects have been sponsored as part of the 'Local Answers' Program within the Australian Government's Stronger Families and Communities Strategy.

Several state governments have departments or programs that focus on strengthening communities. The New South Wales Government, for example, has maintained a website which has helpful materials on building communities, volunteering, community assistance and community activities (<http://www.nsw.gov.au/building.asp>). Many local governments have community activity officers who have the responsibility of initiating and facilitating community activities. The various levels of government have also been aware of the possibility of ethnic and religious tensions developing and have sponsored community-based programs to contribute to social harmony.

The tasks that some governments encourage communities to perform are not limited to those carried out by formally constituted community organisations. For instance, at a neighbourhood level, Neighbourhood Watch generally operates more like an informal network than a formally constituted organisation. Such informal systems of surveillance and crime prevention need to be backed up by more formal systems of policing when a serious crime occurs. Although Neighbourhood Watch might reduce the rate of crime, it seldom eliminates the need for police services altogether (Foster 1995). Likewise, informal systems of care and support for people who are ill need to be backed up by good quality hospital and medical services for those with more serious illnesses. In other words, the emphasis on building stronger communities should not be used as a pretext for failure to ensure that essential services are accessible to all.

In recent years, governments have required that environmental impact assessments be included in some types of development applications or policy proposals. Some commentators have advocated that family impact assessments should be required before policies that could affect families are adopted. Somewhat similarly, Cox and Caldwell

(2000: 70) have put forward a checklist of 'initial questions' to help policy makers assess impacts on social capital. These questions are:

- Does the policy increase people's skills to engage in social activities with people they do not know – their sociability?
- Does the policy target some groups at the expense of others, or create feelings of scapegoating or exclusion?
- Do the proposed forms of service delivery allow the building of informal relationships and trust with all stakeholders?
- Does the project help extend networks, confidence and optimism among participants?
- Do participants increase their capacity to deal with conflict and diversity?
- Does the program evaluation include the social as well as financial and individual aspects of outputs and outcomes?
- Does the auspice [the organisation administering the program or project] itself affect the way people see the programs? For example, do they feel that it is their right or an act of charity for which they should be grateful?
- What messages does the program offer to people about their own values and roles?
- What impact does the program have on attitudes to formal institutions of governance?

Undoubtedly the checklist could be refined and extended to cover other impacts on communities. For example, one could ask about the ways in which the policy or program contributes to capacity building, empowerment, participation, resilience, sustainability and social justice within communities.

A further issue relates to the periods of time for which community-strengthening initiatives receive funding. Up to now, most grants in Australia have been for very short periods of time, rarely beyond three years, and often for only one year. A longer timeframe is necessary for initiatives in highly disadvantaged communities. Much can be done in a year, but usually communities change only slowly. In fractured or dispirited communities, it takes time to build networks of trust and co-operative endeavour. Even in relatively active and harmonious communities, regeneration projects usually need many years to reach full fruition (Hastings et al. 1996; Alcock et al. 1998; cited in Taylor 2003: 188). Funding frameworks up to at least five years should be considered.

Nevertheless, it is important to try to get some quick runs on the board to give all parties confidence that a longer term investment of effort and money is likely to be worthwhile (Taylor 2003: 188).

In many instances, governments have waited for community organisations to apply for grants for community-strengthening projects. This has sometimes meant that the most disadvantaged communities have not received assistance. They may not have had people with the necessary skills and experience to prepare convincing applications and implement projects. It is necessary, then, in some circumstances, for governments to take the initiative in identifying communities most at need and introducing skilled facilitators who can assist these communities to plan and undertake appropriate initiatives. A primary requirement is that there is a desire from within a community to seek constructive ways forward for the community and its people. Early steps in the process may involve convening community workshops to formulate responses to questions such as the following:

- Who are we? – what do we value, what are our guiding principles and what are the issues that need response?
- What do we have? – what are our assets, resources, strengths and capacities that we can build upon?
- Where do we want to go? – what is our preferred future in, say, five years' time?
- How do we get there? – what are possible strategies, actions and resources to achieve our preferred future?
- How will we know when we have got there? – what performance indicators will we use to gauge success?

Further work is likely to be needed in order to develop detailed action plans aimed at achieving the objectives that have been identified. This work is often best undertaken by smaller groups of people who meet to formulate plans that could then be discussed more widely at a community forum. The plans should outline proposed strategies and actions, identify who would implement these, and list what resources are available or would need to be found to enable this. When these plans are being endorsed or modified, agreement should also be sought on ways of monitoring progress. This should be an ongoing process as the action plan is implemented.

It should not be assumed that the approach described above would always be plain sailing. Sometimes there are deep divisions within a community, and these need to be bridged. Sometimes endemic problems are so entrenched that people despair of overcoming them. Sometimes the economic base of the community is so limited that there seem to be few opportunities for advancement. Sometimes community health is so poor that the prospect for significant improvement seems very distant. Despite conditions such as these, there are always some things that can be done to improve a community's situation. Identifying and acting on those things should be one of the first steps in a process of community renewal.

THE ROLE OF BUSINESS IN STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES

At various points in this book it has been noted that business enterprises can have an impact on the strength of communities and vice versa. Business obviously has an important role in providing employment and supplying goods and services needed by community members. In chapter 6 it was observed that if a community is too heavily dependent on one major employer, this can affect community resilience, particularly if that employer decides to close the business or relocate its operations. Such vulnerability can arise, for example, if the main employer is involved in mining and the natural resource base becomes exhausted. A similar situation can occur if the main employer is involved in manufacturing and decides to relocate its operations to another country. The effects of such decisions are likely to be most acute in non-metropolitan locations, especially if there are few prospects for alternative employment nearby.

In chapter 5 it was noted that consumer organisations and regulatory agencies can play a vital role in monitoring the activities of business enterprises to ensure that they deal fairly with employees and customers, that the goods and services they provide are reliable and safe, and that their business operations are environmentally friendly. Where these criteria are not met, various formal and informal sanctions can be applied. An individual's decision to buy or not to buy a company's products or its shares might not, by itself, have much effect on the company's policies and practices. However, when employees or members

of the public take lawful joint action in response to a company's policies or practices, this can sometimes result in socially desirable changes in the company's behaviour.

Many businesses recognise that they need to be good corporate citizens. In some cases, this is interpreted to mean simply that they maintain high standards of business ethics. In other cases, businesses go further than this and make a deliberate effort to provide direct or indirect support to community organisations. One reason for giving such support may be because it boosts the company's reputation within the community and generates goodwill that is beneficial to the company's operations. In this case, the motivation would, at least in part, be enlightened self-interest. Sometimes the reasons may be more altruistic (Centre for Corporate Public Affairs & Business Council of Australia 2000; Lyons 2001).

Business analysts Michael Porter and Mark Kramer (2002) have argued that there is no inherent contradiction for a business between improving its competitive position and making a genuine commitment to bettering society. Indeed, they have suggested that involvement in areas of philanthropy that have social benefit and converge with business interests can contribute significantly to the competitive advantage of businesses.

As noted in chapter 9, the forms of business support to community organisations can be quite diverse. They may include donations of money, goods or services. They may involve named sponsorships or the creation of strategic alliances (Centre for Corporate Public Affairs & Business Council of Australia 2000). Such activities have the potential to contribute positively to community strength, provided they are not accompanied by other activities that are socially detrimental.

COMMUNITY WITHIN THE FRAGMENTS

Australians cannot expect to revert to a form of society in which most people live wholly within self-contained, geographically defined communities. Rather, people will continue to experience community in diverse and fragmented ways. They will continue to engage with a variety of people – often in small groups quite distinct from each other and without awareness of each other's existence. Indeed, as has been

discussed in previous chapters, the association between community and locality has been supplemented, and to some extent replaced, as email and mobile phones have become major ways in which people link with each other.

This fragmented experience of community will be satisfactory for many people, as long as there are some stable bonding relationships or other ways of providing personal support when the need arises. It has been suggested that the bonding relationships between family members and close friends may, in fact, be deepened by mobile phones and email. But there is much to do in encouraging the values that will contribute to commitment and dependability in such relationships. In most instances among adults, these relationships no longer revolve around traditional expectations about roles, nor are they sustained by economic interdependence. They depend on the fulfilment that people find in each other. In that regard, the skills and motivations of relating become all the more important.

The fragmented forms of community through a range of associations based on common characteristics, tasks or interests provide experiences of great diversity and richness for many people. Indeed, the greater the number of diverse groups and networks to which people belong, the greater the chance of connecting with people who are different in age, interest, educational level, socio-economic background and even ethnicity. It is certainly desirable within the multicultural context of Australian cities to intentionally develop networks and forms of association that bring people together across such boundaries.

Due to their health, their age, or other factors that inhibit their mobility, some people are tied to locality and to the communities or networks that they can access from there. In the fragmentation of contemporary community life, it is easy for people to fall through the cracks, to find themselves without connections, lacking a sense of belonging. Consequently, it is important to find ways in which such people can develop appropriate links with others. Both place-based and other forms of community can contribute to this process.

Within each of the fragments of community, the quality of relationships can be strengthened. Just providing opportunities for people to get to know each other in a social way extends the sense of

community beyond the particular interest, task or activity which brings people together. This, in turn, allows new agendas, interests and visions to arise. It opens up the possibility of developing networks of people taking action together in new ways.

BALANCES IN STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES

The task of building stronger communities requires that due attention be given to a range of important considerations, some of which may be in tension with one another. These include the tensions between cohesion and diversity, between universalism and particularism, between representative democracy and participatory democracy, between 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' approaches, between flexibility and public accountability, between sociability and privacy (Taylor 2003: 54, 228–31). What is involved in each of these tensions and how should they be handled?

There at least two sources of *the tension between cohesion and diversity.* The first is that although most people wish to have some sense of social connectedness, they are also wary of being too dependent on each other. They want a balance between personal freedom and community, between individual autonomy and interdependence. A second source of the tension between cohesion and diversity arises from the fragmented nature of modern societies. This was examined extensively in chapters 1 and 2. There are now many different types of communities of interest as well as geographically defined communities of various sizes. Fragmentary though they may be, each of these types of community can contribute to people's experience of connectedness and their sense of belonging. Participation in multiple communities helps to protect the individual from the excessive demands for conformity that have sometimes characterised tightly knit communities in the past. Nevertheless, respect for a core set of basic human values is important for social cohesion within and between various types of community. Chapter 7 gave examples of these common values and outlined ways in which they can be fostered and expressed. These themes were further developed in other parts of the book, especially chapters 8, 9 and 10.

Another tension is between universalism and particularism. On the one hand, governments have a responsibility to deal fairly with all citizens. On the

other hand, policies based on the premise that 'one size fits all' might not always be the most efficient and most effective. Furthermore, markets may not always be the best way to allocate resources, because some citizens (especially, but not only, children), through no fault of their own, do not have access to the resources necessary to compete in markets. Although it may be appropriate for governments to engage community organisations to administer some welfare or workfare programs and for these programs to be tailored for specific localities or specific categories of people, governments also have a moral responsibility to ensure that similar or worse situations in other localities are not neglected. Here again, resourcing must be adequate for the task.

The tension between representative democracy and participatory democracy can take several forms. Governments at national, state and local levels are elected and held accountable by systems of representative democracy. However, active citizens do more than simply elect representatives. They may engage in a wide range of activities such as contributing to public discussion of issues affecting communities or the public at large, monitoring the performance of public officials, and lobbying for changes in legislation or public policy. Various mechanisms have been developed to give citizens an opportunity to influence policy. These include user satisfaction surveys, opinion polls, interactive websites, citizen panels, advisory committees, and the like. While these mechanisms can be useful, they also have limitations. At best, they give citizens an opportunity to be heard and to have some form of representation in decision-making; at worst they are little more than token attempts to give citizens the feeling that they have been heard (Arnstein 1969; Burns et al. 1994; Chandler 2001).

The tension between representative democracy and participatory democracy can also arise within community renewal initiatives. To achieve their full potential, such initiatives need to draw on the skills and energies of a wide range of people (Kretzmann & McKnight 1993). As well as encouraging 'social entrepreneurs' (Dees 1998) and formally designated leaders, these activities should seek ways of involving people who do not necessarily occupy positions of formal leadership. This requires responsive and accountable structures that enjoy the confidence of all segments of the community and encourage various forms of participation. Leadership has been discussed in more detail in chapter 10.

A contrast is sometimes drawn between *'top-down' and 'bottom-up' approaches* to community renewal. Wilkinson and Appleby (1999) and Taylor (2003) argue for an approach that goes beyond this polarity and seeks a new middle ground where all the skills, resources and insights that are available are brought together. This is likely to require collaboration between various government agencies, businesses and community organisations, rather than buck passing and denial of responsibility. In some cases, coalitions between place-based communities and communities based on some other shared interest are also required in order to tackle important social issues. Nevertheless, initiatives that contribute to the building of stronger communities can begin on a relatively small scale by actions of individuals, households, community groups and networks. Experience gained in these activities can pave the way for larger initiatives involving a wider range of participants.

There are various aspects of *the tension between flexibility and public accountability*. While recognising the importance of public accountability for funds contributed by governments to capacity building or community renewal projects, Taylor (2003: 229) notes the need for a degree of flexibility in the administration of these projects as participants learn to think and act in new ways. There should nevertheless be transparency in all resource allocation and expenditures. Government agencies, too, should be accountable to communities as well as vice versa.

The tension between sociability and privacy arises in various contexts. For example, some people are keen to socialise with work colleagues and business associates, while others prefer not to do so. This does not necessarily mean that people in the latter category are antisocial. It may mean simply that they prefer to express their sociability in other settings such as the family or close friendship network. The neighbourhood is another context in which the tension between sociability and privacy can arise. British research indicates that different degrees or forms of support and help are generally expected of neighbours, close friends and relatives respectively. In most cases, intimate caring is restricted to kinsfolk. Provided that one knows a neighbour reasonably well – which is not always the case – neighbourliness is typically expressed in activities involving a relatively low level of intimacy, such as lending tools or collecting mail from the letterbox when asked to do so during the neighbour's absence. In other words, neighbourliness generally involves

a balance between co-operation and privacy, between helpfulness and non-interference (Taylor 2003: 54). Of course, in some cases neighbours may be close friends, in which case the relationship may involve a wider range of helpful activities. Australian evidence presented in chapter 3 indicates that having someone on whom one can rely for help if needed correlates significantly with people's overall satisfaction with life.

IN CONCLUSION

In many small rural or remote communities, the maintenance of community life depends, among other things, on giving attention to means of employment. A viable local economy is essential for community wellbeing. Without denying the importance of the economic and ecological aspects of community life, these have not been the primary focus of this book. These aspects of rural communities have been examined in another recent publication (Cocklin & Dibden 2005). By contrast, the main focus of the present book has been on the social dimensions of community, and our examination has not been confined to rural or remote locations. In all segments of Australian society, major challenges involved in strengthening communities include:

- The enhancement of the quality of bonding relationships, in which people provide long-term support to each other, including the care of the more vulnerable members of society – children and the aged; and, where necessary, supplementing such relationships by means of community structures offering personal care.
- The strengthening of bridging and linkage relationships that are inclusive and transcend the barriers of ethnicity, age, gender and social class, generating trust, trustworthiness and active goodwill within and between communities.
- The encouragement of a variety of groups and networks through which the organisations and socio-technical systems of contemporary society are held accountable to society, which check on their performance and their transparency, including the ways in which they deal both with employees and with those who depend on their services.

There are three major processes through which communities can be strengthened:

- Through enhancing people's personal and social skills and their capacity to contribute to community life. In particular, the development of leadership skills is critical.
- Through motivating people to participate in community life, through the promotion of pro-social values and by demonstrating how communal involvement can contribute to the wellbeing of individuals and communities.
- Through engaging people in community organisations and interpersonal networks in such a way that they become active and socially responsible citizens.

The fragments of society will never be perfectly united into one whole. Indeed, there is some truth in Zygmunt Bauman's (2001: 17) comment that those who seek the ideal community are bound to be disappointed – the tensions between the desire for security and the desire for freedom can never be fully resolved. There will always be tensions between the desire to protect and enhance personal wellbeing and the desire to act for the common good. Greed and the desire for power over others have always been part of the human story.

Yet, it is the glimpses of community, the times when communication and co-operation occur for the common good, when active goodwill is found in relationships, that continue to give hope. Through attention to the processes described above, the quality of community life can be strengthened, even in the context of its fragments. Through the variety of fragments, it is possible to create and enhance trust, trustworthiness and goodwill, and to enjoy the benefits of a caring and fulfilling society.

Questions for reflection

1 What contributions should each of the levels of government – local, state and federal – be making in strengthening communities?

2 What roles can businesses play in strengthening communities? What might motivate them to play such roles?

3 What do you consider to be the advantages and disadvantages of the fragmentation of contemporary experiences of community?

4 What gives you the most hope for the future of Australian community life?

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Building Stronger Communities is a practical book that looks at ways Australian communities can be made stronger. Written in an accessible style for a wide audience, it offers useful principles and pointers for students, community workers, community leaders, policy makers and ordinary citizens.

The book is underpinned by recent Australian research, including two major surveys, as well as the authors' many years of experience working with different types of communities in a variety of settings, including directly with community groups and social agencies as well as in academia. It is distinguished from comparable volumes by its extensive consideration of communities of interest and not just communities based on locality.

Each chapter begins with a brief introductory overview and concludes with a set of review questions for reflection that will be useful for the reader and those using the work as a coursebook.

The authors provide the principles and practical examples of ways of building all sorts of communities, as well as the sense of community as experienced in the many relationships and networks that constitute contemporary Australian society.