

PRESIDENT'S REPORT JULY 2003

INTRODUCTION

This has been my second term as president of the Local Government Community Services Association of Australia (LGCSAA) and I have been in the position for a period of five years. It has been a very fruitful and rewarding period for the Association and much has been achieved.

However, prior to talking about the achievements of the LGCSAA, I would like to tell you about its structure as many of you would not be aware of it.

The LGCSAA is a federation comprised of representatives from every state local government community services association and, in the case of Victoria, LG Pro, an association representing all local government professionals. The president of the Association must be a member of the state association, however he or she does not represent the state association but is selected by the LGCSAA from nominations called for biennially. The Association meets approximately twice per year, usually in the state where the future conference is to be held. The Association does not have a secretariat as most of the policy and the strategic and administrative work is done by the executive.

During the past decade, the LGCSAA has demonstrated its commitment to a strong and viable local government sector through:

- Involvement with the federal organisations of local government in the development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander policies and staff positions within local government;
- Development of a strategic alliance with the Australia Council for the Arts on cultural development and funding programs;
- Advocacy for increased employment and training opportunities for young people by utilising the resources of local government;
- Arguing that local government should be involved with the state and commonwealth governments in planning how social and community development programs are to be funded and developed within local communities;
- Provision of comment on the social impact of declining rural communities and services; the social outcomes of economic rationalism; the urgency on issues of rural health; the need for family and neighbourhood support programs and innovative national housing policy.
- Recent times have brought together staff from councils across Australia to particularly focus on furthering our understanding of good practice and benchmarking in community services and community development.

The Association has been active in the last two years in a number of areas which I will outline below.

THE CONFERENCE 2003

The conference, *Just and Vibrant Communities*, for which you are all here, promises to be excellent and I am sure you, like myself, look forward to it.

The Local Government Community Services Association of Queensland was selected at the last biennial meeting in 2001 to organize the national community development conference in Queensland on behalf of the LGCSAA. For the first time, the national conference is to be held outside a capital city. It is very appropriate that the conference be held in Townsville as it was one of the first local governments in Queensland to employ community development and community services staff. Townsville has taken a very active role in hosting this conference and during the next three days I am sure all of you will enjoy the creativity and vitality of the city and the warmth of your hosts.

Both the national and state associations have collaboratively determined major themes of the conference to reflect on changes and emerging trends and the re-emergence of community development, sometimes known as community building or capacity building, as central to achieving well-being outcomes for our local communities. In the past three years, the Association has particularly focused on good community integrated planning that is concerned with all community dimensions affecting physical, social, emotional and spiritual quality of life. The conference themes are:

- Is integrated community planning a foundation for sustainable communities?
- Social capital – what are the benefits for local communities?
- How does the contribution of arts, culture and diversity assist in building vibrant communities?
- How can local communities strengthen just outcomes and human rights?
- Is the emphasis on efficiency and corporatisation impacting on local democracy, community development and community services?

We want to engage delegates in current dialogue and knowledge about innovative ways of practising community development and integrated triple or quadruple bottom line community planning. We also want to offer opportunities for delegates to share their good practice and learn from each other. At this conference we want to particularly explore the place of arts and culture in building social capital and contributing to convivial, equitable and vital communities. We have, therefore, consulted with the Australia Council of the Arts and the Commonwealth Department of Communications, Technology and the Arts in putting together the agenda.

You will note there are a number of speakers who will talk about culture and arts practice in developing just and vibrant communities.

As part of the conference Townsville Council, will make an enormous contribution by sponsoring the bookshop, which gives delegates access to a wealth of good practice strategic planning, community development and arts publications. I would like to express the Association's appreciation to Townsville for continuing to organize the bookshop, which has proved to be a great success at other biennial conferences.

On behalf of the LGCSAA, I would like to express appreciation to the Local Government Community Services Association of Queensland, to Townsville City Council, to the Local Government Association of Queensland and to members of the Association's executive who have worked in true partnership to present what we hope will be an extremely successful conference. Last but not least, I would like to acknowledge our supporters who I will name individually for their funding support and invaluable advice in planning for the conference:

The Commonwealth Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts

The Commonwealth Department of Transport and Regional Services, Territories and Local Government Division

The Australia Council of the Arts

Commonwealth Department of Local Government Planning

The Department of Family and Community Services

JENNY SLADE SCHOLARSHIP

The Jenny Slade Scholarship Trust Fund awards a scholarship of up to \$4,000. This is the second time the Association has been involved in awarding the scholarship, which is to be announced at this conference.

The scholarship has been funded through donations from the Slade Family, Municipal Association of Victoria, various municipalities including the City of Greater Dandenong, the Local Government Community Services Association of Australia and individuals.

The scholarship is in memory and recognition of the contribution of Jenny Slade to innovation and the establishment and promotion of networks within the local government community services field. Jenny was Manager of Community Services of the former City of Springvale in Victoria from 1984 until her untimely death in 1990.

Applications were sought from officers employed for a minimum of two years in local government community services anywhere in the Commonwealth of Australia to: -

- Undertake further education;
- Attend a conference or forum;
- Participate in an officer exchange program; or
- Undertake a study tour

at the state, national or international level.

The scholarship is for the betterment of local government community services in Australia and covers topics such as integrated community planning, community participation models, community indicators and best practice benchmarking, service innovation, advocacy, etc. This is the second time that the scholarship will be awarded on a national level, with the involvement of the LGCSAA in selection and funding.

The scholarship, awarded at the Rapids of Change in 2001 went to Linda Campbell to undertake a study tour to examine structures and practices supporting active citizenship in local government in North Western USA. The 2003 awardee will be announced at the conclusion of "Just and Vibrant Communities".

CONFERENCE 2005

LG Pro, the Victorian state association that includes community services and community development officers, has been invited to co-host the next local government community development conference with the LGCSAA and a coalition of other interested parties. At this point in time, we are unable to say whether LG Pro will accept this invitation, however it is more than likely the conference will be held in Victoria, given it is apparent that it is their turn.

SPONSORSHIP

At the last Annual General meeting I mentioned that we would no longer be seeking sponsorship from the National Bank under its Community Links Program and that the Association had resolved to seek sponsorship from the communications sector. Unfortunately the Association has not been successful in seeking a primary sponsor, however it has been very successful in gaining support for its conference from various Commonwealth and State Government departments. For the next conference we will again seek this level of support and continue to look for an appropriate primary sponsor.

PROJECTS AND GOOD PRACTICE BENCHMARKING AND INDICATOR DEVELOPMENT

The LGCSAA commissioned Jenny Wills, former director of social policy at the Municipal Association of Victoria, and a former Fellow of Public Policy at Melbourne University, to provide a framework for local governments to develop just, vibrant and sustainable communities. This project has had a complementary relationship with the Local Democracy project of Mike Salvaris and other indicator measurement work that has been undertaken nationally and in Victoria. On behalf of the LGCSAA Victoria had carriage of the project and developed a reference network of councils, associations and other relevant organizations to assist it in the development of concepts and to comment on ideas. The publication, *Just, Vibrant and Sustainable Communities: A Framework for Progressing and Measuring Community Well-being* was published at the end of 2001 and has been widely distributed to local governments throughout Australia. I know from my own state that the book was positively received and has influenced health and community planning frameworks and indicator development at our local councils.

Jenny Wills' publication followed an earlier publication, *Working Together to Develop our Communities: Good Practice and Benchmarking in Local Government Community Development and Community Services*, which was completed by the LGCSAA in 1999. Both publications are for sale at the bookshop during this conference.

I would like to take this opportunity to again thank Townsville City Council for assuming an enormous administrative role in distributing both the LGCSAA's publications. As the Association doesn't have a secretariat we need and appreciate the contributions of Councils such as Townsville in ensuring the success of the Association

As a third stage of the LGCSAA's well-being and indicator work, workshops conducted by Jenny Wills and Kate Nash were organized to assist participants to utilize the framework and develop indicators. In the process the framework has undergone some refinement. Workshops have been held in most states.

THE LGCSAA WEBSITE

The LGCSAA reviewed its website and has revamped it to ensure that good practice in local policy and community development could be shared nationally. The website is now much more inter-active and is resourced by the City of Swan in Western Australia. This website enables access to documentation and ideas that would otherwise not be shared and will incorporate papers from the conference.

THE STRATEGIC PLAN

The Strategic plan was reviewed in the last two years to reflect changes in the Local Government Community Development field and the changing context of social policy and planning and our strategic alliances.

THE LGCSAA EXECUTIVE AND FRIENDS

Members of the executive have contributed much to the achievements and vision of the LGCSAA. They have reviewed the Strategic Plan, promoted the Association's publication and workshops, jointly planned the form and content of the conference with our partners and will be here in Townsville ensuring the smooth running of the conference. Unfortunately, the Association has struggled for representation from Tasmania because the Local Government Community Services Association was dissolved. I understand South Australia is soon to review its future.

I must thank Lyn Buckley the former Queensland representative and treasurer, Tom Pavlos the Perth representative who has bravely and ably assumed the treasurer's role, Jean Andrews the Victorian representative who always offers to take the minutes, Eric Moes the current Queensland representative who provided the leadership in collaboratively working with the LGCSAA to make the conference happen, Stuart Gibb from NSW who is a real contributor and Kevin Sharp from South Australia who recently joined us.

The LGCSAA also has a number of very good friends whose contribution and commitment has been unstinting. Special mention must be made of Frank Hornby, who retired from the role of President of the Association a number of years ago but who nevertheless has worked with us in all its endeavors – finding sponsors, organizing the conference, sponsoring the bookshop, providing intellectual input into the LGCSAA's publications, and distributing the publications. Accolades also go to Jenny Wills, the author of *Just Vibrant and Sustainable Communities*, who wrote the book for the LGCSAA largely on an honorary basis. What would we do without our good friends?

WHAT OF THE FUTURE?

For the past five years, there has been a real shift in relationships with the national local government association (ALGA) and changes in the membership of the local government community services associations. As has already been mentioned the Tasmanian Community Services Association no longer exists and South Australia is considering its future.

In terms of the Australian Local Government Association of Australia (ALGA), social policy considerations have not been resourced to the same extent as in the past. In fact, despite some effort, ALGA has not initiated and maintained contact with the LGCSAA. As a consequence, other relationships have been forged. It is important now to build on the links that have been developed with the Australia Council for the Arts and the Commonwealth Departments, particularly with the Commonwealth Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts and the Commonwealth Department of Transport and Regional Services, Territories and Local Government Division. It is also important that the LGCSAA has close alliances with universities, which share the Association's agenda of furthering community planning and community development to achieve just, fair, vibrant and creative outcomes.

In view of the above factors and the changes that are occurring in the State Community Services Associations that comprise the LGCSAA federation it is timely to review the constitution and structure of the Association. . In the next two years the LGCSAA will look at options that will best enable it to achieve its objectives, articulated in the strategic plan. The next biennial meeting will consider and hopefully endorse the new structure proposed by the LGCSAA executive.

On a personal note, I have really enjoyed the challenges and opportunities of both my terms as President of the LGCSAA. If I am reappointed the President, I will work with the executive and the Victorian conference committee to again present a successful conference, develop alliances nationally to influence policy outcomes and propose a new structure for the Association to ensure its viable future.