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Venturing Out...

*A 'Step by Step' Guide for the Uniting
Church about reaching out to your
community*

UnitingCare Burnside seeks to encourage Uniting Church congregations to support disadvantaged children, young people and families in their local neighbourhoods. This publication is offered as a resource for congregations beginning the process of 'Venturing Out' ...

Jesus Christ calls his followers to live as he did, bringing 'good news to the poor...release to captives...recovery of sight to the blind...freedom to the oppressed'. The Uniting Church in Australia, in its Basis of Union, declares that all its members share in Christ's life and mission in the world. In the ministry of service, the church seeks to build community, and to reach out to those who are suffering or excluded from community life.

As it expresses this ministry, the church bears witness to the justice, peace and wholeness that God desires for the world. This is a ministry to which we all are called.

But how? Sometimes it can be hard to know what is the most appropriate help or support to offer. The following steps may be a useful way to begin...

The process of reaching out to the community involves looking at resources within your own congregation, and looking at your community's needs, and then seeing how resources and needs could match up. This guide is written as a series of steps. However, the process is never as simple as that. You will often need to go back to earlier steps.

Step One - Getting a group together

Having a group of people to work with is essential, however small at first.

As members of your group begin the process of discovering community needs, you will constantly need to keep each other informed, and to pass on information to the congregation.

Some people may already have an interest in a particular disadvantaged group that they know about and whom they want to support. If they do, it is often better to work with this, and grow their ideas, rather than trying to get people onto a completely different track.

Step Two - Looking at your congregation

Mission plan

What is your congregation's vision and priorities for the next few years? How does meeting community needs relate to your congregation's overall mission?

People

List all the activities in which people in your congregation are involved. You may find that there is already a strong level of involvement in the community. It may be that what is needed is better recognition and support for people's existing commitments. It may also be that there are people in the congregation who are keen to do something new.

Skills

What skills are available within your congregation that people are prepared to offer?

Are there people who would offer skills in trades, teaching, administration, music, working with people, bookkeeping, speaking other languages etc?

Money

Does your congregation have any cash or capital available, say, from a bequest?

Land

Do you have any spare land that is available for building? Are there any plans for its development? What is its present zoning and can this be changed for new uses?

Buildings

How many buildings do you have? What are they used for now? How often are they used? Get a list of the use made of all the church properties from the person who organises the bookings.



Step Three – Looking at your community

There are three sources of information about communities – people who provide services in the community, people who live in the community, and statistics about the community.

Service providers

Make face-to-face contact with people who provide community services, as well as people involved in local action (eg Neighbourhood Watch, Progress Association). Share the task with others in your group. A good place to start is your local council's Community Services Worker.

Some other places are:

- Neighbourhood Centre
- Community Health Centre
- Youth Centre, Refuge or other youth service
- Migrant Resource Centre
- Women's Refuge, or Resource Centre
- Family Support Service
- Child welfare services, such as UnitingCare Burnside, Wesley Dalmar
- Welfare services, such as Salvation Army, Lifeline, St Vincent de Paul
- Children's Services
- Services for people with disabilities
- Department of Community Services
- Other Government departments, such as the Ageing and Disability Department
- Schools
- Churches

People in these places will tell you what they do and give you their understanding of the needs of the area. Ring and make an appointment first. Ask for any written information about their service. After the interview write down the name of the person you spoke to, where they were from, their phone number, the date, and what they told you. Have questions ready to ask these people, such as:

1. What does your service or organisation do?
2. Are there disadvantaged people in the community whose needs are not being met?
3. What issues do these people face?
4. Do you have any ideas about how the local church could be involved in doing something about this?
5. Do you know about any new service developments being suggested by other groups?



Local residents

Talk to people who live in your community, both church members and non-church members. Ask them the same questions as those above, leaving out the first one. It is very important to listen to what people are telling you, even if what they are saying is not what you expected. Make sure you write down what they say.

Statistics

Statistics can seem a bit daunting, but they are a valuable way of finding out general information about your local community.

Remember, statistics represent real people who have their own lives and stories to tell.

All councils are now required by legislation to have a *Social Plan*. This will give you information on population (such as age, education, income of households, ethnic groups), local services, and unmet needs. Other helpful information can be gathered from more specific reports, booklets and brochures.

Another very useful source of information is the 'social profile' for your congregation's local area produced by the National Church Life Survey (ph: 02 8267 4394).

Some questions to have in mind when looking at statistics are:

- Who are the most significant groups of people in your community now, and who are they likely to be the next 5 – 10 years?
- Who are the 'minority' groups within your community?
- How is your local area different? Check how your local statistics compare with the rest of Australia for each of the measures.
- What are the trends? You may pick this up by comparing the latest figures with those taken at the previous census.
- How is your congregation different from the population profile of its local community?
- Are there particular geographic areas where there seems to be significant disadvantage?

Be prepared to think a bit laterally when looking at statistics. Bear in mind some of the information you found out from service providers and see if you can draw any conclusions about the lives and needs of people represented in the statistics.

Step Four – Reflection & probably more research

Share information, reflect, and pray about it with your group. With the resource list about your congregation you developed back at Step Two, and the issues and needs of your community you identified at Step Three, you have what you need to begin thinking about future action. You will now be looking for issues and needs that your congregation can do something about.

Questions to consider are:

- Have you talked to enough “ordinary” people, not just service providers?
- Are there any gaps in your information?
- What surprises are there in the information? And what excites you?

If one issue or need comes up over and over again, then it is likely to be important. But remember also the needs of smaller, less articulate groups.



When you compare the list of resources with the list of issues and needs, you will find that some are immediately ruled out, as you don't have the right resources to meet them. With those that are left, which ones match your resources best?

At this point you may need to go back to the community and do some more research. Having decided what issue or need your group would like to focus on, you will now need to find out more about it. Go back to service providers and local residents to find out just who else is doing something about this, and talk to them in more detail. Find out what they see as needing to be done, and whether they could assist you with your planning.

Think about the possibility of a joint project with another church or organisation. Partnerships between local groups are encouraged by funding bodies.

You may not need any new funds. You may be able to utilise people and resources already available in your congregation and community. On the other hand, you may feel you need additional funding.

The Uniting Church has some sources of funding. The '2% for Development Fund' is administered by UnitingCare NSW.ACT. Information on other sources of funding such as the ABC Appeal and the Stamp Committee can be obtained from the NSW Synod Board of Mission.

Funding from government and other bodies is regularly publicised in "LOCAL", the newsletter of the Local Community Services Association (LCSA). Your local neighbourhood or community aid centre should have copies of this. For information on funding sources, also see these websites:

www.communitybuilders.nsw.gov.au, and www.mapl.com.au.

Step Five – Decision Making

It is important to actually start doing something, rather than continuing to talk and gather information. Don't be afraid to start small and build to something bigger.

Make sure everyone knows exactly who's involved, where you're headed, why you're headed that way and how you're going to get there. You can do this by writing a Vision Statement, with aims and objectives, that describe what you want to achieve, why you want to achieve it and something about how you are going to achieve it. Establish a timeline to help to keep you on target.

You will need to build some form of evaluation into your project, so you know how it is going. In your timeline, plan to evaluate after 6 months, and then every twelve months.

To evaluate effectively, you will need to work out ways to get honest feedback from all those involved in the project. Once you have decided what you want to do, you will need to receive approval from necessary bodies, such as the Church Council.

There are certain requirements from the wider Church. New projects that involve a Funding Agreement need to be approved by UnitingCare NSW.ACT, then signed by the NSW Synod Property Trust.

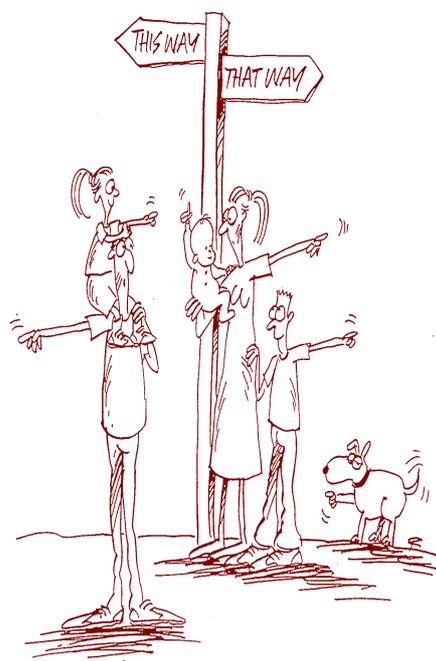
The Synod requires new Constitutions to be approved by the Synod Constitutions Committee. You will need to think about who will form the Management Committee for any new project – often a mixture of congregational members and members of the wider community works well. It is important to include representatives from your 'target group' (jargon for the people you aim to serve) on the Management Committee.

Model constitutions, policy and procedure manuals and staffing advice are available from the UnitingCare agencies.

It is likely that your project will involve people working as volunteers. UnitingCare NSW.ACT has policy material about the use of volunteers, which includes important information about matters like insurance cover.

When you know what action your group will be taking about the issues and needs you have identified in your community, tell the service providers and other people in the community you talked to earlier, so that they know about your plans and can support you.

As your plans develop, remember the need to keep community service connected to the worshipping life of your congregation.



Don't give up!

Being involved in the community is not easy, and it is not quick. It is, however, part of being a follower of Jesus Christ. It will often bring unexpected rewards!

Help is available...

For further ideas, information, support or resources, please contact the following UnitingCare agencies. If you are unsure who to talk to, any of these will refer you to the most appropriate person or agency within the Church.

UnitingCare Burnside's Social Justice, Partnerships and Communication Program for further assistance with planning projects, undertaking advocacy, and other help related to supporting children, young people and/or families. Ask for a copy of the 'Supporting Families Kit' – every congregation should have one!
Contact: (02) 9768 6860

UnitingCare NSW.ACT Community Services Manager for general assistance with the planning and development of new services, advice on constitutions, using volunteers, etc.
Contact: (02) 8267 4279

UnitingCare Ageing about planning aged services.
Contact: (02) 8267 4372

UnitingCare Children's Services Forum about government funded child care services.
Contact: (02) 8267 4372

UnitingCare Burnside is an agency of the NSW Synod of the Uniting Church in Australia
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