

Sustainability depends on confidence and trust.

Lisa Rudd Glenorchy City Council

Lisa Rudd is a Community Development Officer with Glenorchy City Council. She has recently researched and developed *The Safer Communities Framework 2019 -2029*, a valuable and practical collection of community engagement and participation principles. This resource is a result of community consultation focused on identifying what a safe community looks like for the people who live, work, study, create, volunteer, shop, visit, play or do business in the City of Glenorchy. The Framework was written to inform Council staff, Aldermen, stakeholders, community members and potential partners about community development. Anyone interested in effective community development and engagement will find it useful. This article explores some of the beliefs and principles that guide Lisa in her work.

The Framework was developed from what Lisa calls the “one simple question” of “what does a safe community look like for you?” That question was enough for people to reflect on what that meant for themselves and their families. Lisa noted that the 10-year Framework, based on that single question, was only possible due to informative and supportive data gathered previously through extensive consultations for the Glenorchy Community Plan 2015 to 2040. The 10-year framework cycle is not a straight predictable line of course. Lisa’s view is that a Community Development initiative “takes at least three years to eventually get to the stage where I ‘do myself out of a job’ - where I’m no longer needed - so I can withdraw and the initiative can keep going. Sometimes a project naturally come to an end and you’ve just got to say, well that’s okay”.

The sustainability that Lisa deliberately seeks to establish in initiatives comes from the way she works with people “if everyone involved has a great, positive, experience then potentially when offered other opportunities in the future they will have the confidence and trust to get involved again with something new.” Sustainability then rests with the community members’ willingness to become involved when working on new or different priorities – this is dependent on their confidence, trust and past experiences in relation to community development practices. This interpretation of sustainability is based on underlying fundamental principles and approaches.

Lisa sees some differences between how the concepts of ‘community development’ and ‘health and wellbeing’ relate to each other. The emphasis on the use of community is most important.

I see communities as the drivers of positive change - but this change needs to be identified and come from within communities. For example, say that it has been identified, by health professionals, that: ‘there’s an issue with obesity in the City of Glenorchy’ - how are we going to deal with it?” I feel that it is important to work with people so that they can identify the core issues, determine what their options are, and then seek solutions that suit their needs. After these needs are identified then health professionals can be brought in to provide support.

The term 'health and wellbeing' is more driven by people who come with that expertise and see the need for that change. People [without that expertise] don't think in those terms. They focus more on themselves and how they are feeling, are they happy and contented. They may be unhealthy, but they may not see themselves that way. If they're happy and life is going the way they want, then how do you address that change so it comes from them and they are not being pushed? Otherwise they will put up barriers because they are being pushed to think "I should not be content with who I am.

Lisa's experience is that naming something as 'health' can mean that people may back off. It is often more effective to name it as a project for action; for example, Good Neighbour Day instead of a mental health day. With the focus on positive actions that people can take and become involved in, the underlying messages can then be introduced in a gentle way that people can realise in their own time. Another example is the Little Street Library Project included in the Glenorchy's Safer Communities Implementation Plan. The underlying aim is to improve literacy, but this is being done in a fun and interactive manner that engages peoples' interest - communities have ownership, control and pride in the project creating their own libraries, increasing access to books, which leads to improved literacy. Actions that lead to positive change need to be informed and authentic. People can't be asked to make choices without knowing what their choices are. Lisa states that, "I want people to experience things so they can make informed choices, to have information to make decisions that are right for them".

At the core of Lisa's principles is the belief that "for change to happen it must come from the community, driven by the community, particularly with community champions. Anything that is truly amazing has come from the community where they take leadership". She has many real examples of community leaders emerging as opportunities arise. One woman grew from being unable to speak in public "to become someone who made things happen in the community and then stepped up as a leader". It's essential that these champions are sought out, to have their voices at the table and lead change from within communities.

Lisa offers a powerful vision of what 'place based', 'sustainability' and 'capacity building' mean when community members are the true starting point for making things happen in their communities - there are genuine celebrations and affirmations when a community owns and leads positive change.