

***“Seeing Further, Listening More,
and Asking Questions”***

**Developing ‘Grassroots’ Leadership
for Community Action**

**A Report to the Warilla Neighbourhood Centre on
The Warilla Community Action Project**

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Acknowledgement:

This report to the Warilla Neighbourhood Centre Management Committee describes the outcome of an eight-week Community Action Project undertaken by a group of local residents coordinated by Petre Goode, the Warilla Community Advocate - a project funded by the NSW Premier's Community Solutions program).

The role of the Centre for Popular Education at UTS was to provide action-research training to the project participants, and to assist this group with the analysis of the results of a series of 'action conversations' with community stakeholders and the development of its own plan for action based on this research. In evaluating this Community Action Project we have sought to present a view that is not merely an objective assessment of the outcome but an indication of the process by which this has been achieved - so that other communities might benefit from this as a pilot or model for similar community-led research into the issues that affect them - and, importantly, the way they might develop plans for action to effectively intervene and break the cycles that reproduce these issues across the generations.

More than this however we have sought to present the report in a way that reflects the views of the people who have undertaken this research and to do so as far as possible using the language they used as the story unfolded. As such we believe these people have an equal claim to being 'authors' of the report. In particular we would like to acknowledge:

- Silvia Nyrhinen, Kathryn Rose, Micael Talbot, Aileen Pollock, Bill Pollock, and Cecily Driscoll - who undertook the majority of the action-conversations and emerged as the core of what looks to be an ongoing action group - and the other community workers and residents who also contributed to various stages to the leadership-development workshops and the research program.
- Marlene Calleja, Coordinator of the Warilla Neighbourhood Centre who shared from her wealth of experience of work in the Warilla Community in the introductory and closing workshops.
- Darren Palamara, Project Assistant, Community Welfare Workplace Learning Placement, Illawarra Institute of Technology - whose detailed note-taking contributed to the quality of the data that describes, in a level of detail not often available as a legacy of such projects, how it unfolded.
- And last but not least Petre Goode, the Warilla Community Advocate, who had the vision to commission us to collaborate with her on this project, and who coordinated the series of workshops, action group meetings, the action conversations with local stakeholders, and the liaison between the Centre for Popular Education, the Neighbourhood Centre, key community stakeholders and the local activist group.

We are grateful for the contribution to this report from these people and the encouraging feedback suggesting that it does indeed reflect much that they would say about the project at this stage in its development. However, any errors that remain are our responsibility

Tony Webb
Centre for Popular Education. August 2005.

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Summary

A report on an eight-week leadership development program, facilitated by the Centre for Popular Education (CPE) at UTS, as part of the Warilla Community Advocate project; a project funded by the NSW Premier's Department Community Solutions Program, in partnership with the Warilla Neighbourhood Centre.

This report outlines the planning and delivery of a series of Community Education workshops designed to educate and support a small group of residents from the community to undertake their own 'action-survey' to identify some of the key issues of concern to the community and ideas for how these might be tackled. It documents the major stages the Warilla Community Action Project (WCAP) group went through in developing their 'action conversations' with community stakeholders and how they analysed the information gleaned from the views of, effectively, a 1% sample of the community.

It also documents in the language of these 'grassroots' resident social action-researchers the growth of: their awareness of the diversity of community perspectives; their confidence in their ability to stimulate curiosity and interest among community stakeholders; their capacity for leadership in the process of social change so vitally important to the community. In the words of one of the participants, chosen for the title of this report:

"My biggest shift personally is being able to see further, listen more and ask questions"

It provides further evidence of personal change among the people who participated in the project from the results of an interactive evaluation tool developed by the CPE for measuring community strength. Comparison of the responses from before and after the eight-week program suggests significant change in the five indicators amenable to change as a result of a short-term intervention notably:

- growth in the group's capacity for learning in terms of :
 - technical learning - of knowledge and skills
 - interpretive learning - understanding of the views of others
 - and transformative learning - valuing self-knowledge and the capacity to challenge power and authority
- growth in the group's capacity for
 - community leadership
 - community ownership of initiatives.

In terms of community social action, what the WCAP group have identified is that, beneath the more obvious range of social issues that affect this community, there are two more fundamental issues that affect the social climate - and the capacity of the community to respond to issues and crises. These are:

- A disconnection, referred to as "oppositional stories" between the conversations of community service providers and the residents who are clients of these services - with the attendant need to create a new dialogue between these groups and their clients.
- A lack of incentives for, and stigma and stereotyping of groups within the community; creating a negative image of the whole community as a consequence -

with the attendant need to work on turning this around to create a more positive image.

Together, these suggest that the core problem is how the community sees itself rather than any of the specific social problems it faces.

The WCAP group has gone further than simply analyse the 'problem'. They have begun to compile a 'menu' of ideas gleaned from the community for how this problem of community pride can be addressed. They have begun to explore creative ways that could be used to stimulate a community-wide conversation about how these might turn around the negative 'social climate' and be turned into action projects involving diverse groups of stakeholders within the community.

Conclusions:

The report concludes that the outcomes of this project contribute to the fundamentals of what we call community development. They are not new but they do need to be renewed over and over within communities in each generation. Ideally each renewal leaves behind enough leadership to stimulate and support the next growth.

This project has been about encouraging this new growth. It is to the credit of the staff, and management committee of the Warilla Neighbourhood Centre (and evidence of leadership among this earlier generation of Community Development workers) that they have lent their wholehearted support to the project - and through it perhaps the development of what may be the next generation of 'grassroots' community leaders.

The project has indicated considerable potential. It is now however at a critical stage. The action group is clearly keen to move forward. It has defined a short-range plan of action and has begun to lay the foundations for the medium to longer term. Up to this point it has received intensive support from the Warilla Community Advocate, a TAFE student and (at arms length for much of the program) from the CPE at UTS. Support at this level of intensity cannot be maintained in the long term. However, in the short to medium term there is a strong case to be made for support to

- Assist the group to maintain its focus and carry out some of its action plans;
- Provide a base for the ongoing project;
- Help with contacts to other agencies in the community;
- Assist the group to raise funds to continue this work in the longer term and provide the 'auspice' so often needed for small groups to access and administer funds from grant making bodies;
- Help in the organising of future workshops and training as needed by the group.

With this kind of support there is every reason to believe that the group will continue to develop leadership skills and, in the longer term, become less reliant on worker-support and other resources from the Neighbourhood Centre

Recommendation:

We strongly urge the Warilla Neighbourhood Centre Management Committee to consider supporting the group to continue the work begun with this project and to carry out the short-term plan of action it has identified.

Background

In December 2004 the Centre for Popular Education at the University of Technology Sydney (CPE/UTS) was approached by Petre Goode, the Community Advocate based at the Warilla Neighbourhood Centre. The initial idea was to facilitate a series of community education workshops with the aim of developing leadership capacity in the Warilla Community. These were to be run parallel with other workshops to develop advocacy skills facilitated by the Public Interest Advocacy Centre.

Discussions in March 2005 between the Warilla Community Advocate and Prof. Rick Flowers and Dr Tony Webb at the CPE refined the initial idea, giving it a popular-education and action-research training focus. It was decided to create an opportunity for people in the community to develop leadership through undertaking some practical action research. The project would assist in the formation of a social action group, provide training in PopEd action-research skills, and support this group in: undertaking their own exploration of issues of concern to the community, making an analysis of the results and planning how they might influence the 'social-action climate' in the community.

Following these discussions CPE/UTS was contracted to provide

- Three workshops -
 - An introductory one for potential participants in the program
 - A workshop to develop participatory action-research skills that participants would use to develop a local social action project
 - A workshop to draw together this work and develop plans for possible ongoing work
- Ongoing telephone, e-mail and, as needed, face-to face support by Tony Webb to the Advocate and the action group
- A summary report on the project to the Warilla Neighbourhood Centre.

It was decided that the workshop program would use specific tools from the Social Action 'toolbox' being developed by CPE at UTS (For details see the CPE website: www.cpe.uts.edu.au , or go direct to the toolbox at: <http://www.cpe.uts.edu.au/publications/toolbox.html>). In particular the program would introduce participants, recruited by the Advocate for leadership development, to two tools from the CPE social action toolbox.

The first of these is an interactive evaluation tool titled *Can we measure the Strength of a community?* This tool is designed to assist a group to explore the criteria by which they can and do make judgements about community strength. It invites people interested in community development to explore a set of four criteria: engagement of different types of community residents; aspects of social capital - 'bonding capital', pride in cultural identity, and 'bridging capital'; different types of community learning through action - 'technical learning', 'interpretive learning', and 'transformative learning'; and measures of community capacity building - leadership development and community ownership of projects and initiatives. These measures can be used to (a) evaluate the 'social climate' for community action, (b) identify critical features needing attention and (c) provide a measure of progress if used before and after an intervention program. In particular the tool can assist a group to focus attention on those issues where intervention might lead to

long-term community capacity building outcomes rather than short-term relief of social problems.

It was decided to use this tool as part of the introductory workshop and again in the concluding workshop - thus providing a rough 'before-and-after' evaluation of changes in the perception of the participants in the social action group as a result of the program.

However, the main objective of the introductory workshop was to explore and stimulate interest in a small group of local community residents and/or community professionals in exploring what could be done about some issues identified as of concern to the community. Subsequent workshops and on-the-ground work by the social action group so formed would develop the participants' social action / action research / social action planning skills and support the group in making their own analysis of the social climate and proposals for future action

The second tool is titled: ***Action conversations - asking strategic questions in conversational style as tool for development of community/social action and its evaluation.*** This tool invites people sharing a variety of concerns about community/ social issues to identify the range of community stakeholders for these concerns and systematically explore with these stakeholders how they see the issues, what is being and needs to be done, and the scope for community-based collective action. It was decided to use this in the second workshop effectively training the action group in the rationale for, and skills of, asking open questions to uncover the real views of others who have a stake in the issues of concern.

Following this workshop the social action group would be supported in undertaking their own action conversations - effectively interviewing a cross-section of the community to identify how various stakeholder groups viewed the issues of concern, what was currently being done, ideas for what is needed, obstacles to and opportunities for social action led from within the community.

This practical on-ground work by the social action group would be coordinated by the Community Advocate and assisted by a TAFE student on placement who would be trained to take detailed notes on the process and, particularly, the evolving thinking of the group members during the workshops and the weekly project meetings evidenced by the language used in the conversations and group discussions. The aim would be to track the evolving language through which people described themselves, their activities, perceptions of others, their growing commitment to and understanding of social change processes and sense of their own capacity to influence change and assist others. This 'narrative' approach has been found to be a useful way of evaluating the growth of people's leadership capacity. Early on the Program established the practice of a round of initial comments from all participants that identified their initial concerns and orientation - and then a similar round of comments at the close of each meeting. These comments provide a running record of the progress of the project - and the way that each meeting built enthusiasm, awareness, understanding and confidence in the validity of what the group was uncovering. These project notes (See annexe for list of these on file at the

Neighbourhood Centre) provide a wealth of detailed data on the process of building leadership for social action among a group of community residents. Below we summarise some of the major elements of this leadership development process.

The Introductory workshop

This afternoon workshop was held on 28th April, attracting a group of ten people including the Advocate, the Coordinator of the Warilla Neighbourhood Centre and a member of the management Committee, a local Youth worker, TAFE student and five local residents. As noted above, this explored the idea of measuring the strength of the community and identified the initial perspective of the group on the key social issues of concern to local people.

Participants

It is noteworthy that this workshop included a mixture of community professionals and local residents. It is particularly noteworthy that half of the residents were drawn from the client base of the Neighbourhood centre, particularly people who had previously approached the Community advocate with personal crises. The value of these personal relationships with the Advocate and the kind of trust and rapport established through this work can be said to have contributed significantly to the success of the program. Several of the more active people who stayed the course and emerged as a functioning action group came from this former 'client' base. A noticeable feature of the initial comments of this group when asked what had attracted them to the program were: the personal connection with the Advocate, their desire to continue the progress they had made in overcoming their own personal crisis and the desire to put something back into the community - to help others in situations similar to those they had recently experienced.

Viz:

- *I'm 'just a tenant' - a single parent – had to deal with a lot of anti-social behaviour . . . neighbourhood/street trouble where I was harassed. The neighbourhood centre helped me with what rights I do have and avenues and access to departments – who I speak to if I need help.*
- *I'm a single parent - have a 15 year-old son and am looking after my nephew ... he's had a tumultuous childhood and schooling, . . . I came to see the Advocate after being bounced around . . . I want to get more information. If I can pay back a bit to the community, why not'.*
- *I'm divorced with no children – came down from Sydney to resettle here. In Department of Housing. The Advocate has been a great help to me. I had to endure dreadful vilification and harassment. . . . It's like hitting your head against a brick wall - they don't want you to get out of the poverty cycle. I feel I've nothing to lose and want to get more involved in the community.*
- *I want to help myself and others. . . . looking at how people work and think and feel – their lives run by emotions - and learning experience. I'm interested in the personal side of how people think, feel. . My issue took 9 months to solve, many doors closing doors. The Advocate re-opened a door for me and gave me the option to look and learn about keeping doors open. It has been a big learning experience.*

How strong is the Warilla Community?

The workshop explored how these participants viewed the 'strength' of the Warilla Community. The initial responses to the question indicated a wide range of opinions. Having people stand on a line (zero to ten) and then discuss this with people in both similar and very different positions helped clarify that people had different opinions based on different knowledge and experience of people in the community and different criteria for judging strength. The CPE tool - *Can we measure the strength of the Warilla Community* allowed the group to explore some of these criteria. The report (see Annexe) details how this tool was used in the workshop and participants' responses. Of note was the response of the group to three outcomes:

- Where the consensus response to an indicator was that community strength was low-medium they suggested that this indicated work was needed on this aspect of community building;
- Where the collective response was medium or medium-high they suggested that the community was doing reasonably well - and work on this was not a high priority
- Where there was no clear consensus they suggested that there was a need for more conversation about this aspect of community building to find out why - what did others know - or what particular criteria were they using that were different.

What issues should we be working on?

The group then explored personal and collective ideas about the key issues affecting the community where work would be most helpful in building community strength.

These clustered around three broad themes of: (a) specific social/community infrastructure - housing employment, entertainment, transport etc. (b) effects of issues on relationships - family, youth, single parent support, teen pregnancy etc. and (c) understanding of others - issues such as racism, new residents, anti-social behaviour, community identity, safety, values etc. The initial idea was expressed that work around youth drugs and alcohol might provide a focus for many of these concerns.

Commitment to action?

The introductory workshop initially recruited all of the local residents who in turn undertook to recruit others to participate in the second workshop to be held on 9th May. The aim of the workshop would be to establish a group of people for Warilla Community Action Project (WCAP). This would start with the group exploring some tools that can be used by people concerned about community development to develop community-based action. It would then involve the group in working together on some practical projects using these tools.

Evaluation of the introductory meeting?

The closing round of comments responding to the question: 'What are you taking from today?' included the following:

- *I'm seeking community engagement and this has been very helpful.*

- *It's exactly what I have been after - 100% - and the way people are thinking about what can be done*
- *The importance of listening to the opinions of others*
- *I gained an appreciation from local residents of Warilla and how passionate they are. It changed some of my perceptions I had about the area, before.*
- *I'm more enthusiastic . . . I see great things . . . also some negative things but I'm seeing some changes.*
- *I feel more involved in the community*
- *I'm happy. I see the possibility of hope from distress/stress and moving to coping without stress*
- *The community has a future if the community does things like this.*
- *I feel very inspired - can stand on a line and have hope.*
- *A renewed sense of enthusiasm of what we are trying to do and that other people feel the same way as I do and are willing to do anything to spread that sense of community.*

We think that these comments are significant. They indicate a view, consistent with our experience working with a wide range of community groups, that people who have themselves weathered crises can be the strength of the community - given the opportunity to step up to the mark and take leadership and know that they can help others do the same. This is about developing leadership from within the community rather than relying on outside resources and professional help.

Details of the processes used and the responses to the nine questions about different aspects of community strength can be found in the reports on this workshop (see Annex 1). We will revisit these in more detail later when we compare the initial responses of this group with those of the WCAP group at the end of this phase of the project.

Action Conversations - the second workshop

This was a full-day workshop held on May 9th to build on the initial discussions by providing a simple 'action-research' framework for exploring the views of the wider community on social issues and the scope for action. Following the introductory workshop a group of 13 people (three professional and ten 'residents') was recruited for the second workshop and, potentially, for ongoing work through the WCAP. (Annex 1 points to details of the 'plain language' statements and consent forms signed by project participants in the project)

The workshop invited participants to explore three aspects of community development / capacity building:

- The Know Why – why we need to engage people at the sharp-end of issues in working out what needs to be done and how
- The Know What – what do people who need to be involved in this process think
 - About the problem?
 - About what is being done?
 - About what needs to be done?

- About what stops it happening?
- About where we go from here?
- The Know How – How do we ask really open-ended questions to draw this out and in the process draw people into the search for appropriate action.

Developing questions - to find out the views of others?

The report of the workshop (see Annex 1) provides details of the ‘Action Conversations’ Tool and how this was used in the workshop. In essence the aim is to provide both rationale for, and skills in, asking open-ended questions - as a way of engaging a wider network of community ‘stakeholders’ in a process of defining the issues of concern that affect the community and the community’s capacity to tackle these.

The process involves four stages:

- The concern - where people in the group identify their own ideas about issues of concern
- The pre-survey - where they explore what a sample of other stakeholders think about these concerns. Here the emphasis is on finding the right questions to get at the heart of the concern and allow them to make an assessment of the ‘social climate’ for action.
- The main survey - where, when they have found the right questions and have a fair idea about what is needed, they use creative ways to stimulate a community-wide conversation about these.
- Action - which flows out of the broad base of community support built in the previous stages

The aim of this short-term project was to support the WCAP through the first two stages to the point where they could make their own analysis of the issues, the climate, and the potential for action.

The outcome of the workshop was a series of practical starting points - ideas for relevant questions, and a matrix of stakeholders with whom the group would start to have conversations.

Again the closing round of comments from participants is valuable.

Residents

- *... great, almost inspired*
- *... talking to others. I think I will be able to talk to a stranger!*
- *I'm willing to go out and have a go*
- *... very interested, I needn't be shy and withdrawn*
- *I'm feeling little bit more positive*

Professionals

- *I got quite a bit out of it. I've done Community Development and surveys before – they're time consuming; I'm working and on call 24/7 + volunteering + studying so I can't spend a lot of hours – maybe next year . . .*
- *I'm more enlightened - it's good to know how to ask the right questions*
- *We left out a whole section – what do we do about people having problems*

Using the process of lining up (on a scale of 0-10 as before) people were asked how confident they were about going out and doing this process. The response showed several at '1', one at '2', another at '5', and one at '9'. Asked how willing they were to go out and do this process - all stood at either '8' or '9'

The WCAP group meetings

Seven meetings were convened by the Warilla Advocate and/or the TAFE student with the group over an eight-week period to review progress and explore what was emerging from the action conversations. The initial focus of the project was on Youth Drugs and Alcohol. Significantly, the second meeting saw the group reject this focus and in so doing take ownership of the project. This meeting to be described in more detail below was a significant turning point for the project.

The comments from participants (described in detail in the project notes - see Annex 1) chart the evolving confidence of the group in their own leadership ability

Meeting 1 - May 16th

Nine residents participated - opening the meeting with comments that included the following reflections on the workshop:

- *"I'm now aware that I can do something, interested to get involved in an area of concern and gain an understanding of community in general."*
- *"It teaches us how to talk to people and get some commonsense – liked and enjoyed listening to other people's concerns."*
- *"There are gaps in our society; people need something before they get to breakdown. Address various issues and how to do it. How to ask the right questions, give the ability to network the information - {overcome the} fragmentation in society."*
- *"Interesting and helpful – I want to learn more to address concerns in society that affect all – feel it is a starting point – legitimate concerns – increase education – to let people know that they are not alone – address issues before breakdown – stop people in distress feeling useless."*
- *"Interesting – great ideas – knowledge within the group – good way to benefit others. Concepts difficult to grasp on first hearing."*
- *"Get a lot out of talking to people in the group and discussing community problems – opened my eyes. Community to help themselves – back to grass roots, get community interested, government bodies unable to help – wonderful information."*
- *"See how you can work together – more knowledge."*
- *"Interesting – those comments - {by the workshop facilitator} about younger people looking for solutions themselves, acting for prevention before crisis."*

Some group members had already commenced 'interviews' with stakeholders such as the Police, teenage school girls - others had produced more detailed 'self-reflections' on the issues and questions. The outcome of this meeting was a more detailed matrix of stakeholders and commitments to undertake conversations with some of these before the next meeting.

What emerges from the notes on this meeting is the 'learning' - particularly what was discussed in the introductory workshop as 'interpretive learning' - understanding the views of others viz.:

- *"Everyone in the group is thinking along same lines"*.
- *"I'm happy that people in our community want to do something/make changes"*.
- *"Common threads – we all recognize there are problems"*.
- *"All from different backgrounds – all think very similar"*.

Evaluations from the day included comments that it was: *"good to get more specific information today about what the project involves"*; *"Very informative - learned some new big words!!"*; *"Gained more knowledge"* *"We're coming together as a unit – it's empowering"* *"Things are developing within the group"* (several people commented on this) *"It's good to do more things in the community"*

Clearly the group was growing in strength, coming to know one another, identifying the skills and individual strengths that each person brings, developing trust and group cohesiveness and its own 'community capital'. The other common theme running through people's conversations was that of people reclaiming their right to claim the community as their community – *"the government can't do everything"*.

Meeting 2 - May 26th

As noted above this was a highly significant meeting. The Advocate/coordinator was absent and the meeting was facilitated by the TAFE student. People reported on their conversations with stakeholders but the group rebelled - initially over a suggestion on how to process the emerging perceptions - and then over the narrow focus on drugs and alcohol. The group felt that there were many other issues, and that there needed to be a more open approach to finding out what the community thought. Despite, perhaps because of this 'blow-up' the interest in the process remained high.

Meeting 3 - June 2nd

The issues raised by the previous meeting were addressed through a SWOT analysis - 'Strengths', 'Weaknesses', 'Opportunities' and 'Threats'. Negatives included: a sense that the focus (drugs & alcohol) was too narrow with the participants seeing the process as coercion or manipulation. Positives were that the group was working towards a common objective, building personal and community strength, mobilising people to action, moving from apathy to a new focus. The vision was that of developing a group of trained people from the community who can then train others – creating a chain reaction. Despite lack of experience there was a sense of learning to be more professional facilitators strengthening the capacity of the Warilla community. The consensus resolution was to use a more open-ended initial question - to invite people to identify what they thought were the most important issues then to explore these issues that stakeholders felt were important.

Meeting 4 - June 9th

This broader focus clearly worked. The comments on the action conversations over the previous week included: “*Amazed*”, “*stunned*” and “*overwhelmed*”; “*somewhat difficult*”, “*interesting new experience*” and “*revealing*”; “*overwhelmed*”, “*not surprised*”, “*interesting*”; “*encouraging*”, “*cooperation*” and “*good information*”

The notes reveal greater knowledge of the qualities of other group members and a growing awareness of some of the issues that would emerge as significant in the analysis: the sense of hopelessness and the image of Warilla as a ‘problem’ community.

Meeting 5 - June 16th

Again the reflection on the conversations showed further growth in the positive feelings - tempered by realism viz: *Encouraging, Intense and Informative; Informative, Impressed; Informative, Puzzling and “Eager to help”*; *Conflicting, Knowledgeable, Enlightening and Disheartening*. Exploration of “*conflicting*” led to a discussion of “*oppositional stories*” - a mismatch between the views of community welfare stakeholders and residents/clients.

The other theme emerging in the discussion of the conversations was the problem of the ‘*stereotyping*’ of some groups and ‘*stigmatising*’ of these community stakeholders and the way this led to stereotyping of the ‘image’ of the whole Warilla area. The need to improve the image of the area was emerging as a major focus for community action: “*Warilla needs a better image, there is discrimination of the 2528 postcode*”. The discussion developed the image of an ‘iceberg’ - with a large hidden set of issues/problems beneath those more visible above the surface.

The group began an analysis of the data from the conversations. The focussing questions for this analysis were:

- *What issues are emerging that we could work on that would strengthen the Warilla Community? and*
- *What ideas do we have from the Action Conversations for a social action focus in the future?*

The group then developed a template for tabulating these in terms of: “*Building relationships*” “*Values*” and the social “*Infrastructure*” issues reminiscent of the clustering of significant issues identified in the introductory workshop.

Preliminary analysis of the action conversations data

Phone and e-mail discussions between the Warilla Advocate and the UTS facilitator in June had focussed on the ways that the group might make their analysis. The WCAP group were encouraged to continue the process they had begun to use - drawing out and tabulating the key points from their conversations. They were also encouraged to now read and be prepared to comment on the outstanding features of the conversations of other group members. In parallel with this the UTS facilitator undertook an independent analysis - identifying key features, developing a basic coding system and producing a preliminary analysis. The results of these two approaches then combined into a preliminary analysis that was given to the Group for comment and criticism.

The full report on this preliminary analysis can be found in Annex 2

Meeting 6 - June 23rd

The main focus of this meeting was developing the analysis of the Action Conversations. There was a sense of ‘finding common threads in so many interviews’ and emerging from this a stronger sense that the underlying or root problem was the ‘stereotyping’ of the community - mainly by outsiders. The Group also reported a sense of achievement and satisfaction:

“ . . . a sense of achievement – we’re doing something, a sense of satisfaction.” “ It is thought-provoking . . . a small sense of achievement, and the discussions (about stereotyping) of Warilla . . . ”

“It’s light-hearted (but) conversations are on topics that are just not on the TV. . . very positive.”

“We’ve learned from these conversations - the issues are mind-boggling . . . and there’s some frustration.”

“ . . . expanded scenario of ideas, and we’re more cohesive as a group.”

Meeting 7 - June 29th

The initial comments reflecting on the most recent action conversations and a review of the earlier ones indicated that the group had reached the stage where there were now some clear patterns emerging, and the pre-survey phase was coming to completion. For example: *“Nothing changed – there were no more surprises”*; *“It was reaffirming/going over them very informative”*

They also indicate growing understanding of the perspective of others, for example: (Speaking of a family) *“you are a drug addict and . . . sometimes, you are yelled at/judged in the same way as someone who is homosexual/lesbian. You choose a life of drugs and they have chosen their way of life. So why direct so much homophobia at them when you have your own which is different.*

Discussion of the preliminary analysis (see above) indicated a focus on a number of the ‘underlying’ social issues and possible solutions:

“ . . . there are actually a lot of services but people don’t know about it. Action for future: get the message to the services that they need to educate/create better awareness of their services.

“ . . . There needs to be more emphasis on disseminating information – billboards/advertising to increase awareness of services.

There was also a strong sense of ownership of the process:

“{I feel} pretty good – but I’m cynical – I hope it doesn’t just turn out to be words. I’m glad that Petre is involved. Pleased that Tony did not control the process and that Petre and us have had an impact.

The meeting on 26th May when the TAFE student facilitated the group was seen as a ‘pivotal’, ‘transformative’ and ‘enlightening’ turning point.

The group decided that three main themes emerged from the data –

- Warilla is stereotyped as a disadvantaged community.
- Reality – Warilla is disadvantaged etc.
- There are some people in the middle that have never had any problems - but don't get involved.

The group did a further analysis of the conversations to see if a more positive thread could emerge. The group concluded: *“We did not ask the positive question that would have drawn out this theme from the community”*. This is a possible action for future.

Ideas for Future Action included having more conversations that draw out the positive in Warilla for example:

- Knowledge about local businesses that sponsor events in the community.
- Talking with other stakeholders apart from those with a traditional nurturing relationship towards youth
- Volunteers – backbone of community – but is reliance on volunteers a good thing?
- How life goes on - people busy surviving
- The Enthusiasm and dedication of teachers and schools.
- People with disabilities

Again the concluding comments are telling in terms of the changes in the lives of the participants: When asked how they would rate the value of inclusiveness in the community (scale 0-10) people replied:

- *“Before it was 6. Now it is 8. I'm more open-minded, a blank slate when starting. Now more in-depth insight. Impressed by people's spontaneity to cooperate with us and bare their souls with difficult stuff. Teasing out what's happening in the community.”*
- *“Before 4. Now 7. I had preconceptions that Warilla was a 'hole'. The stigma, stereotypes . . . brought into focus the battle that Warilla people face. I now have a greater appreciation and can understand better and am more tolerant.”*
- *“I'm normally an inclusive person but awareness of community has improved.”*
- *I'm now less tolerant towards people who are bigoted.*

And they have applied the idea of action conversations to family and friends.

- *“It's started to become a natural part of my life and created an enhanced relationship with my children and created more rewarding interactions with others.*
- *“My daughter was pinged off at first. Then she was more insistent to talk and have a conversation with me. So now if they reply “nothing much” then I dig a bit more!*

Report back workshop

This was a full-day workshop held on 7th July involving the Advocate, TAFE student, CPE/UTS facilitator and the six residents who remained the core of the WCAP group. (See the Annex 1 for details on the report on this workshop)

The aim was to explore:

1. What have we discovered through the action conversations process
2. A second look at the evaluation tool - How “strong” is the community?
3. Where do we go from here?
4. What we have learned from the process.

The initial comments are worth comparing with those at the start of the program for example:

- *“Based on observation and experience there’s great hope for future ... much more now than at the start. A lot of people can make changes ... more positive ... generate more support in community ... We know how to generate interest ... talk to ... community groups.”*
- *“I Agree ... how much there is going on. A lot of people are already involved in the community and doing things ... very positive ... some can’t think ... so much happening in their life ... lives full and lack of information. People who are working in community don’t know what is happening. Whom do you talk to?”*
- *“... a lot of people are interested in what is going on. We have the ability to look at a broad range of issues. People we speak to actually listen to us. Interested in spreading ‘the light at the end of the tunnel’ - and it is not so dim ... we’re starting to get people to listen.”*
- *“We’ve been laying the ground work.”*
- *“I’m proud to be involved ... initially going up to people who didn’t want to be involved – very pleased to see people wanted to say something and interviewers were really skilful ... powerful ... we can move forward - make some changes ... an action plan for where we go from here.”*
- *“I was surprised to be told Warilla is disadvantaged. People are very keen and pleased that we are asking their opinion. I hope something comes of it. Would like it to go forward and help community.”*
- *“It’s been very positive talking to people ... Looking at recommendations and an action plan and who is going to be involved - the action plan needs to involve youth - It’s the input that we want.”*
- *“A lot of conversations ... a lot of words both negative and positive and a lot of frustration. ... the community having to deal with a mismatch between what community/residents and service providers say. ... I walked away head spinning ... it’s like we are taking on two worlds (service providers/individuals). I think I can make a change”.*
- *“... there are people doing things and we didn’t ask what **good** things are going on in Warilla. People are doing stuff ... people surprised me as being connected to activities that I didn’t think they would be into. Because we didn’t ask that question we missed out on a lot”.*

What are the core issues affecting the community?

Participants were asked to list three things that stood out as the most important that they had discovered, and then underline the most important. These were then collected using a white board. What emerged was two distinct clusters:

- A concern that there were ‘oppositional stories’ - disconnected conversations going on among the community service providers, and among the ordinary residents, their clients - with the attendant need to create a new dialogue between these groups.
- A concern over the lack of incentives for, and stigma and stereotyping of groups within the community and as a consequence creating a negative image of the whole community - with the attendant need to work on turning this around into something more positive.

Together these suggest that **the core problem is how the community sees itself** rather than any of the traditional views of the community’s social problems.

Where are we on the ‘action conversations road map?’

Seen in the context of the action conversations framework, the group has completed the pre-survey stage.

- They have organised structured action conversations with a wide cross section of community stakeholders - effectively talking to 1% of the local community
- They have developed a clear analysis of the core underlying issues that affect the social climate
- They have a sense of ownership of the process, pride in their own ability to stimulate others to think about and generate ideas for what is needed and a desire to continue this process to the next stage - initiating a wider community consultation about the underlying issues (values and relationships) and the ways that the community might begin to tackle these in the process of engaging stakeholders in the surface issues (infrastructure) in conversations about what the community needs to do to turn around the issues of stigma and shame into a sense of community pride - as one of the group put it “ *‘Rilla Pride!’*” .

Stimulating a community wide conversation

The group also has the beginnings of an action plan for how to stimulate this wider community conversation. Including:

- Extending the action conversations to a wider range of stakeholders
- Asking more targeted questions about what these stakeholders see as positive images and stories of positive things that are happening in Warilla
- Instead of just having conversations with individuals, now to start having conversations with groups - going to their meetings, raising curiosity, getting people to think
- Building bridges between groups, encouraging them to talk to each other
- Organising roundtable meetings

The workshop explored some of the creative ways that the group could do this including:

- PhotoVoice - asking stakeholders to take pictures that show their world and their ideas for what needs to be done, and using the pictures as starting points for action conversations and picture/story exhibitions that make these ideas visible to the wider community,
- Hypotheticals and brains trust meetings with panels of community stakeholders exploring the questions found to be relevant from the pre-survey

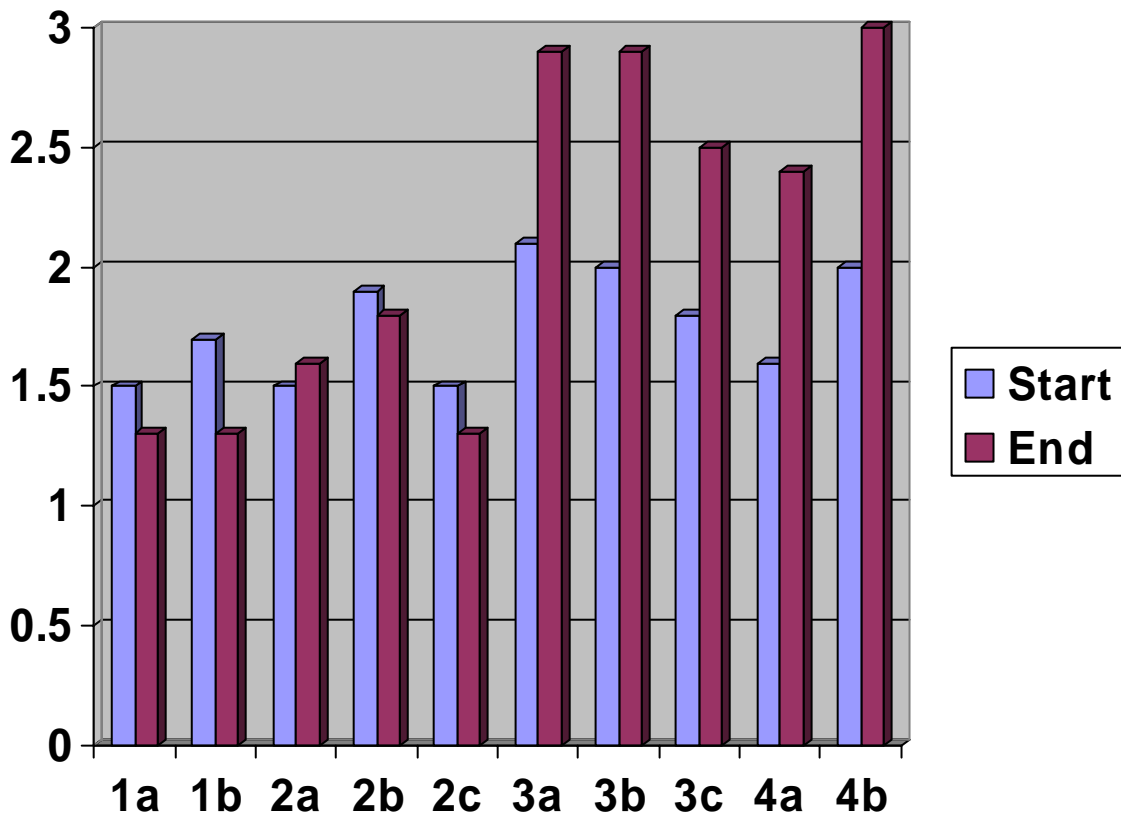
- Developing community history projects
- Using playback Theatre - where people’s stories are ‘played back’ by actors to stimulate further discussion about the community, its issues and its ideas for change.
- Youth art projects - a Wheelie Bins – Multimedia Art Project for youth employment
- Developing a community festival

How strong is the Warilla Community?

This was the question posed in the introductory workshop. Here it was asked again and the group responses collected to the key indicators - in the light of their work over the eight-week project

Figure 1 below shows the comparison between the evaluation in this workshop and the one at the beginning of the project.

Figure 1. WCAP group’s perception of strength of the community against nine indicators at start and end of the program



Key to Figure 1

1. Measures of Community involvement in activities
 - 1a Community Engagement
 - 1b Engagement of people who feel powerless to influence change
2. Measures of Social Capital
 - 2a Bonding social capital
 - 2b Pride in community and cultural identity
 - 2c Bridging social capital
3. Measures of Learning as result of activity
 - 3a Technical Learning
 - 3b Interpretive learning
 - 3c Transformative learning
4. Measures of capacity building
 - 4a Community Leadership
 - 4b Community Ownership

What stands out from this ‘before and after’ evaluation is the marked change on the three indicators of ‘learning’ and the two of ‘capacity building’. This needs care in interpreting as some people at the start were not in the group at the finish and new members had joined. Also the group in this final workshop interpreted these questions in the light of their own experiences and capacities (and their ability to pass these on to others) rather than in terms of the wider community. Nevertheless the relatively unchanged indications of the ‘involvement’ and ‘social capital’ indicators that would be unaffected by a short term program of this nature - compared to the significant difference on the learning and capacity building (which were the specific targets of the program) is a positive indication of change. It can be argued that, alongside the evolving narrative we have charted above, this interactive evaluation tool suggests that the program was successful in developing:

- growth in the group’s capacity for learning in terms of :
 - technical learning - of knowledge and skills
 - interpretive learning - understanding of the views of others
 - and transformative learning - valuing self-knowledge and the capacity to challenge power and authority
- growth in the group’s capacity for
 - community leadership
 - community ownership of initiatives.

Where do we go from here?

These outcomes are reinforced again by the closing comments from the group. Asked what they hoped to achieve in the future as a result of the action-research they have undertaken the group said:

- *“Our long-term goal has to be that Warilla is no longer seen as a special need community.”*
- *“I have been so enriched in so many different ways. How we’ve been able to come together with ideas and bounce them off one another and I’ve caught this enthusiasm and gotten over being shy and inadequate. It has been so invigorating and inspiring*

with people who don't know one another from Adam. Little groups of people can come together with a common goal and make it grow."

Facilitator: "What would you need to be able to do that for others to get that enthusiasm to achieve?"

"More information on how to put it together in a cohesive way. A few more tools to draw things together and be able to go out there and show others how to do it ... how to find or focus on the purpose you can use the framework for.

- *"I'm for helping the community where I can – I've found that I am not alone and that we can work together; use the fragmentation to our advantage. I am starting to see how this sort of thing can be useful. Getting some meaning from it. This is teaching me how to get the ideas across to someone else so they can do it. Little scenarios where I can use this."*

Facilitator: "One thing you'd like to see out of this in 12 months time?"

All the Wheelie Bins in Warilla saying we are proud of our area would be good!

- *"... a lot of skills we can use in working at the school, ... At the club ... it is in need of rebuilding. I explained elements happening {in this project} to our club by not being the boss but by being the influence. A lot of things that I can contribute especially with young people and drugs."*
- *"That it really can be done. People from the community have the power and desire to do well."*
- *"I have been excited by this project. It has really been useful for my studies and I am going to use Action Conversations in a new Research activity I am doing this semester looking at tenants in public housing. Normally I would have taken the path of using Q/A surveys with a tick the box approach but I have found the qualitative approach to be much more in depth and useful. I am more confident now in using this approach after participating in this project."*
- *"Learning is the only thing I can do well. I've been surprised how we all have the same ideas but different ways of going about it. My concern is the empowerment of young people and that Warilla has a better name."*
- *"This has been fantastic. We didn't know each other at the start - now I think we can get together looking at better service outcomes for youth and improving the name of Warilla."*
- *"In 12 months? ... I would like to see in the **next month** - that we get in touch with these groups we've mentioned today and get together and put the plan in action. I would like the next generation coming up in Warilla and saying, "This is a great place to live!"*
- *"My biggest shift personally is being able to see further, listen more and ask questions"*

Perhaps this last comment sums it up - we are surely making progress if, as a result of the action-learning / action-research leadership development program, people can be helped to: ***"See further, Listen more, and Ask Questions"***

The Action group's plan for the future

Following the workshop and preparation of a rough draft of this report the action group met again on July 28th. The meeting endorsed the content and narrative approach adopted by the report, made some helpful comments and suggestions for changes to details and went on to develop a short-range action plan for continuation of the action-research project. This plan included:

- 1) Using action conversations to:
 - a) find out what is happening in Warilla that is 'positive' and that might address the problem of the negative image
 - b) recruit more people to the action-research process
- 2) Continuation of the weekly action group meetings:
 - a) for motivation;
 - b) for support from the Advocate in terms of:
 - i) project coordination;
 - ii) knowledge, experience and connections to community agencies, and networks;
 - iii) "helping to keep the group on the right track" – by "playing the devil's advocate" to ideas that emerge.
- 3) Developing a more detailed plan for what the next stage of the project will look like.
- 4) Using the report as a 'case study' of the group's Action Conversations approach - as a way of introducing the next phase of project to the community - and in particular:
 - a) Working with the Neighbourhood Centre to Organise a Launch of the Report inviting a wide range of stakeholders, particularly those interviewed already, to discuss its findings and the way forward.
 - b) Using the local Newspaper and community updates to promote the emerging positive ideas to the community
- 5) Seeking funds for continuation of the project - particularly to fund further workshops to explore additional 'social action' tools that have been developed by CPE at UTS.
- 6) Participation of the group in the 'telling our stories' session of the in the Action Learning, Action Research, Process Management (ALARPM) conference being organised at UTS Sept 30th to Oct 2nd 2005.

Conclusions and recommendations

This report has indicated some of the progress made in developing leadership skills and capacities among a small group of community residents. It is our view that this is the raw material from which what we call community development evolves. It is not new, though some of the ways we might achieve it can be different. But it is something that needs to be renewed over and over within communities in each generation.

Ideally each renewal leaves behind enough leadership to stimulate and support the next growth. The resources and wholehearted support for this project provided by the Warilla Neighbourhood Centre is evidence of leadership among an earlier generation of Community Development workers.

The project has indicated considerable potential. It is now however at a critical stage. The action group is clearly keen to move forward. It appears to be keen to do this and has is developing detailed and practical action plans to do this. Up to this point it has

received intensive support from the Warilla Community Advocate, a TAFE student and (at arms length for much of the program) from the CPE at UTS. It may be difficult to maintain support at this level of intensity in the long-term. In the short-term however there is a strong case to be made for continuation of the non-controlling support that has been provided through this first phase - gradually reducing the level of intensity and commitment of resources as the group's leadership skills continue to develop. As indicated above this support might include:

- Providing a base for the ongoing project - particularly a base for those involved to meet as a 'volunteer' group and helping with contacts to other agencies in the community;
- Providing ongoing 'coordination', hopefully via the Warilla Advocate who has developed the relationship of trust with the group to assist those involved to maintain the high level of motivation and focus, and thus carry out some of its current action plans;
- Assisting the group to raise funds to continue this work in the longer term and provide the 'auspice' so often needed for small groups to access and administer funds from grant making bodies;
- Help in the organising of future workshops and training as needed by the group.

We strongly urge the Warilla Neighbourhood Centre to consider supporting the group to continue the work begun with this project along the lines outlined above.

Dr Tony Webb
Visiting Research Fellow
Centre for Popular Education at UTS
August 2005.

Annexes to the report

Annex 1 List of documents that detail the development of leadership through the Warilla Community Action Project ¹

1. **Information statements and Consent forms provided to participants in the Community Action Project**
 - 1a. WCAP Participant Info Statement.
 - 1b. WCAP Consent Form .
 - 1c. WCAP Consent re Personal Information.
 - 1d. WCAP Registration form .
2. **Papers & reports from the Introductory Workshop held 28th April 2005.**
 - 2a Can we measure strength of the Warilla community .
The version of the CPE interactive evaluation tool used for this workshop
 - 2b Data - Measuring Warilla Community Strength .
The responses of the workshop participants to the key indicators of community strength
 - 2c Report on Introductory workshop
Details on how this tool was used in the workshop, participants' responses, and the initial identification of social issues of concern to the community that would address the need to reinforce and build community strength.
3. **Papers and reports from the second workshop held 9th May 2005.**
 - 3a Report on 2nd Workshop .
Detailing the process of exploring the idea of action conversations as a tool for identifying scope for community action and the initial preparations for use of this by the WCAP group.
 - 3b Action Conversations .
Copy of the Action Conversations tool from the CPE social action Toolbox
4. **Meetings of the Warilla Community Action Project Group**
Detailing the progress of the group in undertaking their own 'action-survey' conversations.
 - 4a WCAP Group 16th May.
 - 4b WCAP Group 26th May.
 - 4c WCAP Group 2nd June.
 - 4d WCAP Group 9th June.
 - 4e WCAP Group 16th June.
 - 4g WCAP Group 23rd June
 - 4f WCAP Group 29th June.
5. **Preliminary Analysis of the data from the Action Conversations**
 - 5a WCAP Analysis of 53 Action Conversations.
The analysis of issues, stakeholders and ideas for action made by the group with assistance from the WCAP coordinator and TAFE student over a period of several weeks
 - 5b Preliminary CPE Analysis WCAP data.
The summary analysis made initially independently by CPE (based on 80% of the interviews) - combined with the WCAP group analysis showing the emerging perspective on the social climate and scope for action
6. **The Third Workshop held 7th July 2005.**
 - 6a Report back Workshop 7th July.
Detailing the processes used to explore the WCAP group perspective on the key, underlying issues affecting the community and the group's ideas for ongoing action
7. **A full set of detailed Notes on the 53 Interviews is also held at the Neighbourhood Centre**

¹ Documents (listed by file name) on disc at the Warilla Neighbourhood Centre and at CPE/UTS

Annex 2

Preliminary Analysis of WCAP Action Conversations (4 July 2005)

Contents

Background

The Pre-Survey

Analysing the data from the pre-survey

WCAP group analysis of responses from action conversations:

Table of responses classified by relevance to:

‘Building Relationships’, ‘Values’, or Developing Community ‘Infrastructure’

WCAP group Ideas for Action

CPE/UTS researcher/facilitator’s analysis of responses from action conversations:

Issues of concern affecting the community?

How did stakeholders see / think / feel about the issue of youth drugs and alcohol?

What was being done – and how effectively?

What could the community do?

Questions about what was needed produced similar responses

Where to from here?

Conclusion

Background

The group has undertaken some 50 action conversations spread across the matrix of community stakeholders seen to be relevant to some key issues of concern to the community. The initial perception was that the youth drugs and alcohol issue was perhaps the most significant of these issues.

This issue was thus initially selected as a ‘touchstone’ issue – one that linked a range of concerns identified by the group including:

- Recognisable social/community development issues such as
 - Unemployment / and need for employment opportunities
 - Community infrastructure / urban decay issues especially
 - Housing
 - Transport
 - Entertainment
 - Community services for various problems/concerns:
 - Early intervention / parenting programs
 - Rehab services
 - Youth services
- Underlying relationship issues and need for support systems including:
 - Family support systems
 - Youth support
 - Single parents
 - Female/male support
 - Teen pregnancy
- Issues to do with developing community understanding of others around:
 - The diverse community
 - Old and new residents
 - Racism
 - Community safety
 - Anti social behaviours
 - Changing the identity/image of the community
 - Recognising skills in the community
 - Valuing The arts

However, two weeks after commencing this community consultation process, discussion within the group led to a consensus on broadening the focus – to identify what the diverse community stakeholders perceived to be the critical issues facing the Warilla community and their ideas for what needed to be done about these on a much broader front.

The Pre survey

Following a workshop on the ‘action conversations’ approach to finding out what action might be supported by the community on issues of social concern, the group has sought to clarify

1. **What are the issues/ the major issues that concern the different stakeholders?**²

² Note: The early action conversations explored a variety of ‘opening questions’ and, initially, focussed on the impact of drugs and alcohol on youth. Later, as this was seen to be too narrow, stakeholders were asked what they saw as the most critical issue(s) facing the Warilla Community and what could be done about these?.

2. **What people thought./felt about / how did they see these issues?**
3. **What they knew/thought about what is being done about them?**
4. **What they thought could be done about it as a community?**
5. **What needs to be done** - with (as appropriate) further prompts asking
 - a. What people thought was absolutely necessary to be done?
 - b. What they thought about specific ideas (their own or suggestions from the interviewers)
 - c. Who else should we talk to?

Analysing the data from the pre-survey

Researchers attempting to analyse the data from this kind of semi-structured ‘action-conversations type pre-survey face a dilemma – that of providing enough structure to permit the identification of the key issues and ideas that emerge from the community – without ‘forcing’ the data to conform to pre-conceived ideas. The approach taken here was to start with a minimum structure – defined largely by the questions and encourage the group to identify patterns emerging from the data by organising regular meetings to discuss progress.

The group initially reviewed the evidence emerging from the field in terms of:

- The responses to the objective questions (whether people gave answers to a different question or found the question irrelevant or difficult). This allowed people in the group to refine their own ways of asking the questions, develop their own supplementary questions, stimulate real conversations around the issues and master the skills of recording the results.
- Their subjective observations on the conversation and the person being interviewed

Weekly group meetings to discuss the progress of the survey and the emerging data allowed additional information to emerge, and be explored. Gradually some of the key community perspectives on the issues emerged. In particular the group began to focus attention on the underlying ‘social climate’ affecting the community - within which the specific issues like the initial concern about youth, drugs and alcohol, needed to be located - as a symptom of a deeper malaise.. In part, many of these ‘problems’ could be seen as a response of a section of the community to this deeper malaise – something that needed to be tackled if there was to be any long-term change on a range of community concerns. This is, in a sense, a return to the starting point for the group - see comment on the initial workshop above – but with perhaps a much deeper understanding of the issue as seen through the eyes of a cross section of the whole community

To draw this perspective together a workshop is to be convened to look more deeply into the data emerging from the survey and to develop plans for the next steps that might be taken.

Two separate analyses were initially made of the data from the action conversations. The first and most important was made by the action group who reviewed and discussed the emerging results of the action conversations at the weekly meetings. This led to a table that summarised the comments of each of the stakeholders - with the comments grouped according to whether they relate to issues of: ‘building relationships’, ‘values’ or community ‘infrastructure’. This analysis allows us to see in some detail how individual stakeholders defined the issues. This analysis of the issues was then followed by a list of ideas for possible action drawn from all the conversations.

The second analysis was made by the UTS researcher / workshop facilitator using only the primary data from the written notes on the action conversations. This was made by similarly reviewing the primary data and highlighting the ‘standout’ issues and comments that indicated concerns or ideas for action. These highlights were then mapped onto the initial framework for the issues of concern to the community identified in the initial workshop – and then re-mapped onto the framework of the six key questions asked by the group in the action conversations. This analysis does not separate the issues and ideas for action according to particular stakeholder groups. Instead it provides an overview or summary of the issues, community perceptions and ideas for action emerging from the action conversations as a whole.

These two analyses are presented below. Using different systems for coding, sorting and evaluating the data they yield a remarkably consistent picture of the ‘social climate’ of the community.

WCAP group analysis of responses from action conversations:

Below is the summary analysis made by the Warilla Community Action Project Group of Responses to 53 Action Conversations conducted between May, June, July 2005

Building Relationships	Values	Infrastructure
YOUTH Lack of Education – Sex, Alcohol and other Drugs Talk to the youth – find out what they want.	SOCIETY Deteriorating Attitudes from people in power to the community – seen as a threat (to power) – RESPECT is lacking	Places to Go for u18’s e.g. Youth Centres, Youth friendly parks more private meeting places for youth to congregate in safety and without harassment, outdoor activities (just indoor at Youth Centres), evening activities.
Lack of community leadership	Image of the community	
Low self esteem/confidence/communication skills		Youth Services not widely advertised
Underage access drink/cigarettes/tattoos		Warilla is a disadvantaged area
Lack of Family Communication + responsibility	Should Dob in known dealers (helps authorities)	Lack of Council concern i.e. unequal distribution of resources and development e.g. Foreshore vs. Queen/King St. especially local parks
Peer pressure (identity)	Cigarettes – legalise	Police under resourced – police need to be more visible
Homelessness – as a result of ‘coming out’ to family	Decriminalisation of all drugs	
Easy access to drugs – alcohol + tobacco (under age), heroin, marijuana, speed etc.	Discrimination experienced by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● people in Recovery over 40’s (employment) 	Support for high/special need children in the education system and at home support.
More rapport-building approach in dealing with youth (Security Guard – Warilla Grove)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 	More counselling and AOD/Mental Health services - Health hazards - syringes/need more accessible needle exchange places.
Truancy – no where to go for truants/young people who are		Life Skill Education from a young age i.e. primary school through to

suspended from school		high school
Youth Gangs		
AoD use and consequences anti-social behaviour and affects life choices e.g. teenage pregnancy	Alienation	Health Department Parenting Skills
Greater youth involvement in decision-making (activities)	Media devalues human beings	Professional involvement in parent support groups
Youth Crime	Police/security guard harassment of youth without cause	“Job Talk” – Vocational Counselling should be more available through schools and community
	‘Bad kids’ getting rewards alienates some other kids and parents	Apprenticeships (programs) Vocational training for early skill leavers.
	Irresponsible Young Drivers (Driver Safety)	UNEMPLOYMENT, POVERTY, INEQUALITY
	Rebel against authority	CRIME, Vandalism, Drink driving
		TRANSPORT
FAMILIES Domestic Violence – not only with families living together but ongoing after the violent partner has left.	EDUCATION COMMUNICATION PARTICIPATION	Police DVLO’s – Domestic Violence Liaison Officers need better training and a consistency of response to DV issues and AVO Breaches. (Relates to both DV & LDV & GDV)
Lesbian & Gay DV		
Neighbourhood Violence		SAFETY for people of all ages
Some families live within a ‘Circle of Violence’ – both within their family and outside of the family (neighbourhood violence) (often caused by Centrelink breaches)		
Need Better Family Support + support for various family types – sole, nuclear, same-sex and extended	Encourage Empowerment	Parents as Teachers Programs need to be extended to other schools (WPS)
Dads in distress – men’s issues –		
Families in crisis - not in position to help themselves – feel helpless and hopeless	Community Building –	People not aware of services that exist
Kids with learning disabilities ‘labelled’		
Alcohol & Other Drugs Issues – often intergenerational	Build social capital between neighbours	Schools have few resources to help kids with learning disabilities
Children born with foetal	Stronger Laws – More Punitive	Health Services not widespread for

alcohol syndrome – children in danger of self harm	measures	males
Disadvantage of Aboriginal children -		
Parental control and discipline in developing trusting relationships with children	Lack of Parenting Skills and responsibility i.e. children left unsupervised	Depression – untreated mental illnesses (males)
Depression – untreated mental illnesses (males)	Value judgments Tolerance/Intolerance	More counselling/AOD + Mental Health services + Foetal alcohol services for children/young people
Importance of skilling 0-3 year-olds	Family values gone by wayside	Cemetery Shellharbour (full) – having to travel to gravesites affects people’s capacity to grieve and impacts on depression
Parents with special need children feel victimised		
No activities available for people with mental illness/dual diagnosis	Welfare mentality	
Volunteers not trained to deal with people with AOD/Mental Health/Homeless Issues		
Many people with complex issues in survival mode – we need to give ultimate respect to them		
Building Relationships	Values	Infrastructure
The whole of the community - building Democracy/Citizenship		
Heart of Warilla – where is it?	Apathy; Alienation Stereotype/stigma (particularly towards Department of Housing residents) – “The haves and the have nots”.	Skills shortage Unemployment - Lack of apprenticeships Lack of library facilities
Lack of Community Leadership Volunteering – backbone of Australia	Warilla is a depressed area Failure Community cohesion Materialism – does money matters!	POVERTY UNEMPLOYMENT
Disenfranchisement of the Warilla residents – Us & Them Mentality – Angry women, men & children	CRIME – Queen Street/vandalism	SAFETY
Stigma image of Warilla		Council Rates – people are financially disadvantaged
Intolerance towards ‘difference’ – no multicultural and cross cultural perspectives – both with established and	Lesbophobia, Homophobia – Young Gays & Lesbians do not feel safe in this community.	

new and emerging communities.		
Lack of Intergenerational and cross cultural understanding	Community does not recognize diversity - guilt	
Nothing happening for lesbian issues – we are invisible.		
Juvenile justice Lack of family support for young offenders Koori community require support with juvenile justice Lack of resources for citizen advocates		

The issues above are based on the following Action Conversation participants:

Gender	Age	Role/Background	WCAP
Male	21	Working male administration	1
Male	40+	Police on desk Warilla Police Station	2
Female	40+	Youth Worker, Warilla Neighbourhood Centre	3
Female	65	Senior Citizen	4
Female	40+	Married mother of 4 children	5
Female	50+	Warilla Women’s Refuge Worker Salvation Army Citizen Advocate, Compeer Volunteer	6
Female	20	Single parent	7
Male	40+	Manager, Shellharbour Youth Services	8
Female	20	Teacher’s Aid Warilla High School	9
Male	40+	Shop owner – Millenium Tattoos/parent of teenagers	10
Male	20	Working male, customer service	11
Female	28	Married mother 2 children	12
Female	30	Sole Parent 3 children	13
Female	50+	Youth Worker Warilla Neighbourhood Centre	14
Female	22	Parent	16
Female	20	Parent	17
Female	21	Parent	18
Female	40+	Parents as Teachers’ Consultant, Warilla Primary School	19
Female	68	Community Leader (Dental Action Group), unions, systemic advocacy	20
Female	60+	Community volunteer, grandparent raising teenage grandson	21
Female	50+	Community volunteer	22
Male	22	Young working male	23
Male	18	Student	24
Female	19	Young person	25
Male	40+	Head Teacher Welfare, Warilla High School	26
Female	45	Mother of 5	27
Female	40+	Parents as Teachers Consultant - Warilla Primary School – 2 nd interview	28
Female	70	Volunteer Warilla North Community Centre	29
Female	30	Centre Manager, Warilla North Community Centre	30

Males	61/56	Community volunteers Warilla Neighbourhood Centre	31
Female	17	Young person	32
Female	50+	Community Worker, Warilla Neighbourhood Centre	33
Female	40+	Community Worker Illawarra Women's Health Centre	34
Female	35	Mother of 3 children, works full time	35
Female	45	Sole parent of 5, kids with learning difficulties and anti-social behaviour	36
Female	37	Co Manager Warilla Hotel 18 months	37
Male	39	Security Officer – Warilla Grove - Turkish	38
Female	49	Warilla Community Advocate	39
Male	30+	Manager, Pharmacist, Warilla Day/Night Chemist Warilla	40
Female	30+	Volunteer, Social Action Centre, St. Vincent de Paul + Sole parent 2 children	41
Female	40+	Lesbian Health Project Worker, Illawarra Women's Health Centre, Warilla	42
Female	19	Young person	43
Male	21	Young person	44
Female	30+	2 nd Mum to lesbian partner's children	45
Female	17	Young person (with parent)	46
Male	18	Young person	47
Male	40+	Social Worker, Centrelink, Shellharbour	48
Female	43	Single parent – lived in Warilla 30 years (Portugal)	49
Female	43	Single parent boy 16; girl 17 also carer; works fulltime	50
Female	35+	Safer Warilla Project Worker, Shellharbour City Council	51
Female	65+	Indigenous Elder & Warilla Neighbourhood Centre Treasurer	52
Male	22	Youth Diploma Worker	53

WCAP group Ideas for Action

- Bridge building projects
- Photovoice project including Storytelling workshop + Public forum
- Community leadership
- Build resilience
- Build the image of the community and a 'sense of community' – focus on the positives
- Community Advocacy Project built on model of Illawarra Citizen Advocacy Build/create the heart of Warilla – WNC, Library, senior citizens, indoor/outdoor spaces – Community Garden
- Find the 'treasures' in the community – those with great strengths – community members
- Those with a history in AoD be encouraged to become positive role models for young people on how to overcome obstacles.
- Life Skills
- Youth mentoring skateboard/bike maintenance
- Community to be more tolerant – Anti-homophobia/lesbophobia campaign in schools; recognition of diversity and cross-cultural issues
- Lesbian DV Support Groups
- Lesbian support/social groups – create more awareness of groups that exist
- Defensive driving courses – youth via school
- Anti-Bullying programs (WNPS)
- Community outreach workers - pubs – shopping centres
- Evening programs for youth + separately for those affected by D&A
- Youth leadership

- Programs for youth particularly those who are suspended or truants
- Buddy System at schools.
- Build Parenting Skills – including Men’s parenting skills (single parent dads)
- Men’s Shed – Contact: Shellharbour Council Beth Moon – in planning phase
- Mentoring, children’s buddy;
- More rapport-building approach in dealing with youth (Security Guard – Warilla Grove)
- Greater youth involvement in decision-making (activities)
- Koori community support for young involved with Juvenile Justice
- Police need appropriate training specifically interacting with youth
- Activities for people of all ages
- Vocational skills training for early school leavers
- Community newsletter (WNC planning)
- Community noticeboard
- Lobby for more mental health services – clinical services + leisure activities – Living Skills Centre
- Services need cultural sensitivity training and multicultural awareness training.
- Employment Incentive Scheme for Local Employers to generate employment of 17-19 year olds.
- Ageism of employers towards those over 40
- Support groups for the unemployed (specifically in age groups: youth; over 40’s.
- Friendship support groups
- Mentoring + ‘Planning for employment workshops’ for youth – business/community/school partnerships
- Build awareness of services that exist
- Address social isolation of seniors and those who live alone
- Schools need more resources for the needs of children 0-8
- Continuation of funding for the programs that work e.g., Warilla Community Advocate, Youth Centres/Workers, Plan IT Youth, PCYC; Rainbow Youth – projects that are proactive.
- Build better relationships between schools and parents (particularly those with children learning disabilities)
- The Warilla Neighbourhood Centre as ‘The Heart of Warilla’
- Community Newsletter – (Safer Warilla/Warilla Pride)
- Bridging social capital – WNC to work with Aboriginal, Ethnic, Youth & Seniors Communities – e.g. Art Projects, Community Garden, Open Days, Forums.
- To create a generational knitting of experience (AC 48)
- Lobby campaign to have additional space dedicated for the Shellharbour Cemetery at Shellharbour (the land where the old golf links could be used to extend the cemetery).

CPE/UTS researcher/facilitator’s analysis of the responses from the action conversations:

In approaching the concluding workshop of this phase of the program the UTS researcher / facilitator made the following preliminary analysis of the data. This was based on the notes on some of the early notes on the action conversations (43 interviews) from group members and the notes on the weekly review discussions made by the project organisers.³

- 1. Issues of concern affecting the community?⁴**
 - a. The data suggests that while the initial concern about youth drugs and alcohol was high on the list of concerns many of the community stakeholders saw other issues as of equal or greater importance.
 - b. Many mentioned unemployment, lack of facilities, services, opportunities, activities for the community in general and youth in particular as critical – and that these deficits in the community infrastructure led to a sense of boredom, hopelessness, helplessness etc.
 - c. Many also mentioned that the AoD issues were a problem as much in terms of the crime and anti-social behaviour that appeared to result from substance use/abuse as the effect on the people using these drugs.
 - d. Overall there was a consistent and recurring mention of the ‘image’ of the community – as being in decline, affecting how the community was seen by outsiders and by people (specifically community ‘leaders’), and affecting the general morale. It was felt that there was a negative stereotype of the community and little being done to turn this around and few examples or role models for a different stereotype.
 - e. The stigma {sense of being shamed} was also a recurring theme. The notes also touch on the ambivalent responses within the community to this stigmatisation – people reacting to this with anger and increased anti-social behaviour (counter culture) or a sense of shame but felt hopelessness to turn it around.⁵
 - f. Within this there was also a strong sense of (external and internal) stigmatisation .
 - i. This was expressed often as *a failure of leadership - a lack of respect from people who were seen as ‘community leaders’ for ‘ordinary people’*. This view was shared by some stakeholders in leadership positions – *“if the local community is not respected by community leaders the community won’t respect us”*

³ The notes here are a first stage synthesis of the picture emerging from the data. It has been arrived at by (1) reading and highlighting what are seen by the Researcher to be significant and recurring comments in the notes from the 40+ interviews and project review meetings of Warilla Project team. (2) listing the essence of each of these ‘significant’ points and underlining where these recur. (3) grouping the various comments and mapping them (a) with reference to the initial mapping of the community concerns from the first workshop and then (b) in the form below with reference to the key questions asked by the survey team. The raw data is, of necessity confidential to the project, and no attempt has been made at this stage to identify individual or group stakeholders views. For more information on the detailed comments of individual stakeholders see the analysis by the action group above – or contact the Community Advocate via the Warilla Neighbourhood Centre.

⁴ This analysis draws together questions 1 and 2 of the survey – what the stakeholders saw as the issues and how they perceived these issues affecting the community

⁵ One aspect of the follow up work might be to explore this issue of the personal and social responses to shame and guilt (shaming). The CPE is currently including this work on ‘the compass of shame’ as part of a ‘tools for social action course offered at UTS – elements of which can be offered as stand-alone workshops for community groups.

- ii. It was also expressed as *'intolerance'* – of different sections of the community – coupled with fear of crime and community safety issues
 - iii. But it was also seen as being internalised by some sections of the community – seeing themselves as being stigmatised, disrespected by others
 - iv. And felt by the whole community – a sense of being seen as *a community with problems* – and these *getting worse over the years*
 - g. By and large the data confirms the view outlined by the action group in the first workshop that AoD issues are one among many issues that can be seen in terms of
 - i. Traditional community development / **infrastructure** / services issues (housing, employment transport, welfare provision etc.)
 - ii. AND family **relationship** issues and the need to strengthen these
 - iii. AND issues of community capacity / social capital building and community **values** -especially the need to develop understanding of the concerns of others within a diverse community
- 2. How did stakeholders see / think / feel about the issue of youth drugs and alcohol?⁶**
- a. As noted above there was concern for the impact on
 - i. Crime
 - ii. Community safety
 - iii. The effect on young people and their physical/mental and social development
 - iv. Teen pregnancy
 - b. There was also concern over the ease of access to drugs and/or alcohol – particularly for the young and that the community was unable to intervene (dob in drug dealers) and over lack of action by police
- 3. What was being done – and how effectively?**
- a. Overall there was little knowledge in the community about what was being done and less hope in its effectiveness
 - b. Evidence emerged for a wide range of initiatives within the school system attempting to tackle the issue(s) . The community response among those aware of these initiatives and their effectiveness was very ambivalent.
 - c. There was a tendency evident in the data for a section of the community to respond to this question more in terms of the next one – to suggest that a greater criminal justice response was needed
- 4. What could the community do?**
- a. Overall responses to this question highlighted the prevailing sense of hopelessness and helplessness.
 - b. Many residents/community members responded personally – that they didn't feel able to do anything
 - c. Or they responded by suggesting that others needed to do something – notably: the police, parents (take more responsibility), schools, or the young people themselves
- 5. Questions about what was needed produced similar responses**
- a. If anything, more about what *others* should do
 - b. But within this a small but consistent call for a community-wide conversation about (and an acceptance by young people of) a balance between 'rights' and 'responsibilities'
 - c. This was frequently coupled with either:
 - i. The need for increased parental responsibility
 - ii. Or the need for greater provision of opportunities for young people – and this latter was expressed as much in terms of opportunity for responsibility –

⁶ As noted above this was the initial touchstone issue – but abandoned as the focus for the survey in favour of exploring the wider range of issues identified by the stakeholders

including chances to help or serve others in the community as the provision of facilities . services *for* young people

- d. This area of questioning also indicated a link in stakeholders minds with the core/root problem of the image /stereotype of the Warilla Community. **A number of people suggested that there was a need for initiatives to tackle the negative image and the stigma attached to either the whole or sections of the community (sometimes geographical pockets within it). The comments focussed on ways of stimulating a community-wide consultation or conversation about how to change this image.** The language here includes:
- *“To challenge the negative stereotypes and build a positive image of Warilla - highlight the positive” ;*
 - *“Build pride in our community – show a community working together”*
 - *“We need to have some way of developing community cohesion – a sense of identity – give the community something to be proud of – there are no ‘today’s’ heroes”*
 - *“Beautifying the visual image of the community is being done – what about the social image” .*

6. Where to from here?

Overall this last point about countering the negative stereotypes of the community provided a focus for what may emerge as the most positive outcome of this stage of the survey. The conversations that probed for ideas on how to do this yielded a significant range of creative suggestions for the way forward including:

- a. Roundtable meetings of different groups of stakeholders for example between:
 - i. Community agencies, to better understand what each is doing and how to work together;
 - ii. Police/community meetings to discuss criminal justice and harm minimisation strategies
 - iii. Direct stakeholders (Youth, AoD users, families etc) and ‘indirect’ community stakeholders (agencies, community leaders, affected residents etc)
- b. Work with the media to change the image of the community
- c. Initiatives involving community leaders – particularly helping them understand better the life/situation/needs/issues affecting people seen as the ‘problem’ – to *“see them as people” – “value them as people” – “demonstrate leadership in terms of caring and human values”*
- d. Initiatives to showcase the positive role models in the community – and initiatives that provide opportunity for people whose lives have been affected by issues to talk about how they and others have been affected – the aim here seemed to be to focus on building self-esteem / self-respect through developing and showcasing skills, attitudes and values of groups of people who are currently being stigmatised – and showing that they are respected within the community
- e. Developing a community-wide conversation on rights and responsibilities – as one stakeholder put it: *“talk to all ages – get the whole picture - and how things can change”*
- f. Perhaps included within this rights and responsibilities debate, developing a community-wide debate about the merits of and balance between criminal justice and harm minimisation responses to AoD use in the community.
- g. Giving space for the voice of people who want action now on issues like:
 - i. bottle shop action – to ensure age/ID checking
 - ii. Police action to crack down on dealers

- iii. rehab/recovery services for people affected
 - iv. needle disposal and needle exchange services
- h. Organising ‘peer education’ and ‘mentoring projects’ – within the schools and within the wider community
- i. Involving parents and community leaders and people with experience of drug/alcohol and other issues (direct stakeholders) in High School education programs
- j. Organising ‘cause and effect’ programs for young people, and parents and guardians of ‘underage D&A abusers’ to be better armed with tools to help young people in crisis.
- k. Training of community youth outreach workers to engage young people in defining and arguing for what they want in this field.
- l. Story-telling workshops /projects to make the voice of different sections of the community visible
- m. PhotoVoice projects – to allow the perspective of marginalised/ silenced/ stigmatised groups to be seen and heard.
- n. Some longer term ideas for ‘solutions’ to the problems faced by youth included:
 - i. Decriminalisation of drugs
 - ii. Tackling ‘police corruption and harassment’
 - iii. Tackling housing issues
 - iv. Creating employment in the area – real employment not just ‘volunteering’ or ‘work for the dole’ – *“opportunities for volunteering just keep us on the dole”*
 - v. Improving transport
 - vi. More services and more money for youth services and schools
 - vii. Hiring/training better teachers and encouraging teachers to stay in the area longer

Conclusion

Overall it can be seen that these two analyses arrive at broadly similar conclusions. The specific issues (whether regarding youth drugs alcohol or any other starting point for inquiry) all need to be seen as embedded in a wider network of issues of social concern and a deeper malaise affecting the social climate for effective action by the community for the community.

Countering the sense of helplessness, hopelessness and overall negative image of the community – both from outside and within it – needs work on building more positive images (and role models) and respect for diversity such that there can be pride and self esteem in being seen to be part of this community.

At the same time the conversations indicate that there is a wealth of good ideas that could in different ways start this process. What is lacking is leadership – not from the front but from within that can start to bring together the various stakeholders not just as individuals but in groups to initiate a community-wide conversation about the root problems identified here and practical initiatives that can begin to make a difference.

The action group that has undertaken this initial pre-survey and analysis is well placed to carry this process of community leadership forward.

Tony Webb
June 2005.