

# Stories of working with community in Western Australia



Transcript

Interviewed and recorded by Dave Palmer and Jennie Buchanan

## Carey Drake Brockman

Dumas House

West Perth

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Carey Drake Brockman pictured at Dumas House West Perth WA on 14th April 2004

**DP** Hello and welcome to Carey Drake Brockman. Thank you Carey for agreeing to talk about your involvement in community development in Western Australia. Carey, could I start off by asking you to talk about your early days of involvement in community development?

**CDB** I did social work at Curtin and I was the second year through the course. 1968 was my first year and I didn't have a sense of it at the time, but I think our year of social work did have a bit of an interest in community development. So although the social work course was structured very much around case work and therapy and clinical practice and I remember all the texts about them there must have been enough in there about community development somehow or another, for that to have flavoured my sense of the sort of principles that I wanted to adopt in taking action in the world. So I guess the people who did social work wanted to make a difference. And very simply



throughout my career I have always had that sense that there are kind of two ways that you might make a difference in the world. One is in individual action, one to one, and the other is working with systems and structures and social change processes - and it is very easy to ricochet

between them. Basically because you can get enormously frustrated working one to one and sort of think, at this rate you are never going to get enough change and you want to get into the politics. I have had friends who have gone off and done law, and it doesn't seem to matter whichever part of the system you are operating in you always imagine that it is going to be easier to achieve, more change, more substantial impact, doing something else.

So probably in the earlier part of my career I did work more at the coal face, and I did do more community development work, and in the later part of my career I got into much more policy work and working closer to the political interface in the illusion that somehow or another that might achieve bigger, more substantial change. And I am afraid I am still after what I suspect now is an illusion, and still torn between those two things. Like sometimes I think that perhaps what I have achieved in my role as a parent, where you can actually very much see the impact that you have had on the lives of two incredibly precious and special individuals has been maybe as powerful as any major government policy that I you have managed to see or any community development programme that I you have been associated with. Perhaps I have to get even older and wiser before I can reflect back on that.

But basically, I graduated from social work and my very first job was with the Christian Welfare Centre as a Migrant Social Worker and that was a new development at the time. I think, within the scheme, it was called "Grant in and Aid Scheme" for Migrant Social Workers, there were only a few of us. I think there were three of us in Perth, and it was quite new, and I was considered to be hugely radical because I actually sug-

gested that maybe by employing more community development approaches I could reach a wider range than just on a case by case basis with migrants who weren't adjusting well to settling in Western Australia. Right in my very first two years, (and I started in 1971) and in July '71 the Lockridge Interdepartmental Committee was established - and that was my first major community development project I think. I will tell you a bit about that because I think it was quite interesting. And if I can just say, there was a little bit of history behind that too, as sometime during my course, and I can't recall the date of this, but the State Housing Commission had built Brownleigh Towers out at Bentley which was this major high rise "disaster". This group of social work students, (which I wasn't part of) but somewhere around that time, had done an analysis of American literature on slum development, and it basically produced a very powerful case to point out to State Housing that they should never do something as bad as that again and, on reflection, they haven't. We haven't actually created any other high rise State Housing developments! But they were creating Lockridge - and Lockridge was just the next cab off the rank in terms of specifically Housing Commission, housing development.

I think probably not too much longer after Lockridge they learnt the lesson that you shouldn't actually create entirely homogenous State Housing developments. That is not healthy either. You actually need a much broader mix of people. But they embarked on those lessons progressively and the problem with Lockridge was it was a completely new development with only Housing Commission residents in what was then "whoop-whoop" so there was nothing around it. There were no services whatsoever!. It was very poorly planned. There were roads separating where most of the young kids lived were from the primary school. There was no shop, there was no meeting centre and absolutely no facilities and about sixty five percent were rental accommodation. An enormous sense of transitoriness was discovered later, because we did a community survey and found that nobody that had been placed



there expected to remain there, so they didn't actually have a sense of building a community. They were just passing through. So it was a huge community development task really to actually look at how you built a sense of community there.

**DP Where were they passing through from?**

CDB Well I think most of them were just passing through on emergency housing lists. So basically they were placed in Lockridge because it was there. They were successful in getting off the emergency housing list and they took what was offered. So it wasn't so much that they were passing through the state but they were expecting, and hoping I think, to be located in a community, not put somewhere which was basically a sandpit. Because the time this committee was established it was probably half-way built - so it was about 2,500 heading to be about 5,000 people to be placed there. There was a Lockridge Residents Action Group and it was that group, probably the individual who was the president of it, (I have to say I don't know how much she was supported by people underneath her,) was just one exceptional individual, (as it often is) and she was identifying a very high rate of all sorts of social problems. She was particularly concerned about child welfare matters and so she went to the Welfare Department and it was actually Jo Goerirke, who was the supervisor of Midland Community Welfare (or whatever it was called at the time), who contacted a number of government agencies and welfare organisations and convened this interdepartmental committee. So it had health, or public health and education and the Welfare and it had mental health..., there was an education unit in. Mental Health Services that I will mention specifically because I remember that they were the people who had the most sense about community development. A woman called Roberta Tatum, who was an American. I don't know particularly where she came from, or where she eventually went to, but for three or four or five years, when she headed up

that unit, she was a very powerful force I think in community development understanding

**DP And that was situated within a State Government Department?**

CDB Yeah. It was part of Mental Health Services and it was called. I think it was called the Community Development Unit and it was located at Selby Street. And she had a team of people working with her and they did the very first sort of..., they ran groups out in the community like Parent Effectiveness Training and Assertion Training and those sorts of human relationships development courses basically. I think that is even what they called them. They had a range of them because, at that point it preceded learning centres and community centres and any of those places that eventually took up doing that kind of thing. But they did it, I don't know, out of child health clinics or whatever community facility they could find I think. But I just remember that she was quite a powerful force on this interdepartmental committee because, well she certainly influenced me - and I don't have a sense of anyone else on the committee being quite as knowledgeable about empowerment principles essentially, and so she educated lots of us.

So local government was involved. I was there from Christian Welfare Centre..., there must have been other non-government service providers, and none spring to mind at the moment, but the Housing Commission was represented, Main Roads (or whatever) was represented because the planning issues were as simple as the roads being in the wrong place. And the first thing we did was, we actually established a community information centre which we rostered. I went out there one day a week I think, and various other people did too, and this was not a success!! It was just an effort I suppose to begin to engage with the people, but what we deduced from it was that the level of disengagement and lack of identification, lack of really any working material to begin to create a sense of community from, was so pronounced. So that was when we



went on to do a community survey. Because people weren't turning up to our horrible little "prefabricated, something-in -the middle- of -a -sand- patch", to tell us their problems, or to tell us what we could do for them or whatever. , So strategy number one, was a ghastly fail-

ure. Strategy number two:, getting some information, was at least successful from that point of view and that was that we got out into the community. And we used Roberta Tatum's team of workers - I think because they were skilled interpersonally. They actually did the interviews to get the information for this community survey, and from that we discovered how very disengaged and alienated and everything else the community was.

From there we realised that we actually just had to take some direct action. Never mind this working from the bottom up and finding community. There was this Lockridge Community Action Group leader, because I really don't remember there being a crowd of people supporting her, I just remember the one woman, whose name I'm afraid I can't remember at the moment. And so we started getting services in there basically.

We got Playgrounds on Demand to come in, and what was the other? Children's Activity, Time Society, and we started talking about getting child care there. We started talking about family planning because there was a need for that, and I think a clinic came in occasionally. We talked to the roads people about changing the roads so the kids didn't have to cross a dangerous one to get to the primary school. And some non-government organizations started providing emergency relief facilities in the area, and a the youth group got involved, ...so lots of things.....

Now at that time I remember that, in terms of thinking about community development, the literature sort of talked about 'community organisation' as if it was a strand of community development. And that, I think, is probably in retrospect now,

what I would say that we were doing there. It wasn't really community development - it was putting services into a place so that perhaps some community development could happen later. And that was perhaps also what I learnt from Roberta Tatum because, in the end, the Interdepartmental Committee, it didn't take too long to do this but it did do itself in, I think by the end of '72. So we were only there for a year, eighteen months, something like that. We had done a whole lot of things. We had actually alerted all the government departments, "Hey you ought to be doing something." "You shouldn't be just dumping these people and neglecting them."

Services were beginning to come in and interestingly this was, I was very interested when I read my little report last night to remind myself of all this, (because I certainly didn't remember it otherwise), we decided to cease operating because we had actually identified a group of people who were interested in establishing a, they called it a "community school". The concept of community school, because an outline of it was attached to my report, was not the alternative schooling movement that probably started just a few years after that, but it was the notion of, "You shouldn't be establishing education facilities and only restricting them to the use of children and teachers. It ought to be an open community facility particularly in areas like this that have nothing." "The School Hall should be available for.....," it was all that sort of idea. When I saw this I kind of went, "Oh." Because it is like that sort of idea has been a constant ever since then for me. I still cannot believe that we build schools and lock them up just for the use of children and teachers from 9 to 5. It is a most astonishing waste.

And I have been associated with, over the last, how many?, twenty five years it is since then. (32 in fact) So many well-intentioned efforts to do something about that. I just read something on an email the other day from someone who was behaving as if they had thought it up for the first time.



“Wouldn’t it be a good idea?” So it is very interesting that that was the end of the Interdepartmental Committee. We decided it had done what it could do at that level - in terms of alerting big structures, because the people on that committee were quite senior people, and

they acknowledged that community development needed to occur at the level in the organisation that was closest to the community, so that it would be devolved. That there were then some people in place. There were some youth workers, and there was this energy around the establishment of a community school that did actually have a few more community people associated with it, and that would be a good finishing point. Now you and I would say that was actually the beginning point to community development rather than the finishing point - but it was the point at which I must have got on with some other things.

So for me it was the beginning, perhaps not because of anything very, I mean I think what was done there was significant in its time if you like, but it wasn’t what I would consider now to represent community development work because it wasn’t quite ‘grass rootsyie’ enough. But I have to tell you there wasn’t the material - , it needed what we did to actually to begin to identify and build enough community for community development to occur afterwards. I think and I don’t know whether, I don’t have a sense of whether Lockridge wound up by being any better or worse than any of those similar areas in the end, but I think there were lots of lessons learned along the way by the Housing Commission in terms of social planning and facility development and all of those things which are clearly very important lessons. So that was my earliest community development experience.

**DP And so you stayed with that organisation for some time?**

CDB With Christian Welfare. I was there for only three years, and then I did the great overland trip. I went traveling for a couple

of years and when I came back. . . ., it is very hard for me to think about the next phase, the sort of mid-seventies phase, separate to the most enormous shift that I was reflecting on that occurred in social consciousness around that time. I suppose because there were so many things that happened that changed the way we were thinking about everything. And you have to look at that in relation to what happened about community development. Because, for me, if community development is fundamentally about empowering people at the local level to be able to do whatever they need to have a good life and be fully developed, and in charge, and all those things, then the development of all of the ideologies that were about empowerment, were just going off all over the place basically.

So I was thinking of the very early seventies, I think of what we were reading:, Germaine Greer and Betty Friedan, so it was- all of the Feminists. There was also the beginning of the consumer movement:, Ralph Nader, and it was the beginning of the environmental movement:, Schumaker and ‘Small is Beautiful’ and Paul Eirlich -, we were all only having one child so that we didn’t overpopulate the world. I remember we were reading Paulo Friere’s ‘Pedagogy of the Oppressed’ so our consciousness about empowerment was just blossoming basically. Absolutely flooded across all of those things.

It was enormously enriching. I think the fact that every book you picked up at that time. . . ., from what I recall, I was just being totally over stimulated! Such that there has been no other period in my life that has resembled that. So of course I often try to reflect back, “Is that because of the age I was?” and there is a certain age when everything excites you, or has there really not been a similar blossoming of what appeared to be totally new ideas since then? Because it was a real, real bonanza at that time!.



When I came back from my travels ... (I think I was always quite feminist. I went to a girls school and I didn't have the sort of experiences that led me to ever consider that I was secondary to males, or had limited horizons or whatever.) But I think it was when I got back from my sort of 'round the world' travels that I first got into a consciousness raising group, and I became involved with a group called The Women's Centre Action Group. It ran as a collective, - it was a very strongly feminist collective and it developed the Women's Refuge 'Nadine', and it was behind the Women's Health and Community Centre and we started the first Rape Crisis Centre. So I was a volunteer in the Rape Crisis Centre and in the Women's Health and Community Centre, probably before I got back into paid employment. And I was there at a very difficult time where government funding was withdrawn, and we had these wonderfully ineffective collective meetings!. They had to last all night because we all had to agree. Things had to be achieved by consensus, and it was very difficult under crisis to achieve things by consensus without staying up all night talking.

But the principles that the Women's Centre Action Group Collective worked under, and the Collective that specifically ran the Women's Health Centre, was so strongly rooted in those principles about empowerment that I would say they were the best lessons, the strongest lessons I ever learnt about community development. was 'The personal is political'. You have to experience it yourself! And it was, once again, a very intellectually rich time because we were all grappling with these concepts. You know we were reading papers called 'The Tyranny of Structurelessness' explaining to us why we were having so much difficulty with making a collective work. But we were still grappling through it and meanwhile we were running a service for women that was about empowering them to take more control in relation to their own bodies. So this was a time of people doing self-inspection, (we had groups teaching them to inspect their cervixes and breast self-examination) and

getting people to question the absolute paternalism of obstetrics and gynecology.

So they were really important principles about empowerment and for me, all that stuff was absolutely community development too. It was happening perhaps more at the individual level - but anywhere where you are learning about helping people to take control of their own lives... and I think, because it is really important to think before all those movements, how enormously constrained and un-empowered everyone was!. Consumers didn't feel entitled to complain about shoddy products. Women were subservient to men in so many ways. People didn't feel they were entitled to question their doctors or to even put their politicians under the, you know, their elders or betters or figures of authority whatever. I mean it was enormously embedded in the whole way the community operated. So I don't think you could get the kind of community development that we think of now, without having had those sorts of shifts.

I mean when I mention Paulo Friere, talking about that level of empowerment of the extremely oppressed in South American countries, we are talking about a totally different social system, and yet that resonated for us. Absolutely resonated, because the issue of freedom to express yourself, and to be responsible for yourself, and to be heard, were only really emerging kinds of concepts.

**DP Who were the people involved and how many of them were there?**

CDB Involved in the Women's Centre Action Group?

**DP Do you remember any of the women's names?**

CDB I do remember a few names because a few people I still associate with and a few of the people I would still recoil in terror from because, occasionally, some of the stuff that went on there was a bit vicious. So Diana Warnock that you would know of, was involved at the time. Lyn McGuiriggon whom I work with now was involved in the Women's Centre Action Group. I think Helen Creed was involved, and the more terrifying women I would prefer not to name really. (laughter) But when the intellectual argument got tough a few people got personal and nasty, and it was around about the time where, (within the, well it wasn't around, it was exactly the time within the Women's Movement) that there was a group of women who adopted Lesbian Separatism. And some of them did become very judgement and critical towards those who didn't see that as the next obvious, logical, necessary step to take in relation to Women's Liberation. So there was a bit of viciousness around that was unfortunate. Not from all of that camp but from some of it. So I am not sure that that is entirely relevant.....



DP **Do you recall anything unique about West Australia that was shaping these conditions, that was shaping the emergence of movements towards the sorts of things that you described?**

CDB It is hard to say because we were enormously influenced by external trends. I know, I remember we had the Boston Women's Health Centre, 'Our Bodies Ourselves' the literature was sort of... a lot of it did come out of America...so 'The Whole Earth Catalogue' which taught us how to make everything from hash cookies to candles and soap. And there were models. I think we did feel a bit novice, you know that the models we drew from, even in relation to the Women's Centre, there was Leichardt in Sydney, which developed before ours. So we were aware about that, and later on when I became involved with the whole development of neighbourhood houses and community centres, and things like that, the history of that

in Victoria was so rich that we were drawing from there. So I think we had a sense of being probably a bit backward and needing to...., Added to that, all the literature we were reading wasn't exactly local, West Australian literature. I don't know enough about the developments elsewhere to know if it was the same -where all that fusion of feminism and environmentalism and social activism and, you know, it all seemed to be going on together amongst the same group of people. I would have to say that that same group of people would have been an educated elite by and large. Within the Women's Centre Action Group you asked who was in it. There were a couple of women whose social histories and backgrounds were not privileged, or educated. There was a woman who had been a victim of domestic violence and had come to a recognition and understanding of it that was quite a powerful. She had probably been helped by her sisters to come to a very powerful, political understanding about that and boy did she teach the rest of us!!.

So it wasn't just a cosy little educated elite by any means, and I guess the Health and Community Centre itself, through reaching out to women in the community, people would become involved in activities and would start maybe taking self-examination groups themselves, or volunteering in the library, or becoming a member of the collective. So, for me, once again, because I had come from an educated elitist background, it was my first experience of working alongside what I might have been educated to think of as clients, but working alongside, as colleagues and having that much more egalitarian kind of relationship and having a sense that people were entitled to have absolutely equal power in decision making. Hence the collectives that went on all night. (Because we really did believe that we needed to come to some agreement and that everybody's opinion and vote was equal and that we had to somehow or another talk our way through to consensus). It is damn hard but it is a fantastic discipline as well to



have done it and to have had that experience because in 1976, shall I just go on with my account?

**DP Yes. Please do.**

**CDB** OK. Well in '76 the job that I got, which was just a fantastic opportunity, was to establish a service for lone parent families in Fremantle: the Fremantle One Parent Centre. The model that I developed was a kind of neighbourhood house model, and the principle behind it, the funding programme that we got the money from was Alternative Residential Care. So there was this sort of tenuous link that lone parent families with pre-school children were under more stress than the rest of the community. They were potentially at more risk of their children winding up in substitute care arrangements and that we would provide parent education services, and a range of support services, and child care and all this stuff to actually enrich and support that parent/child relationship so that that didn't happen. That was the principle.

We used non-professional workers that were like 'homemakers'. so the Welfare Department had developed this Homemaker Scheme, over a number of years beforehand. I think it had started in the sixties and it started in a rather offensive kind of, "We will teach you how to keep your houses clean." actually. So a quite paternalistic sort of way. But at the beginning of the seventies it had had a revamp, a rethink and had been informed by community development practices. It became much more about getting alongside people and working with them so it was that ethos that we embarked on the One Parent's Centre with.

So the women, (and initially they were all women, but they weren't always all women), workers were recruited from the community. They were given a special training programme about early childhood development basically, and the sorts of things that they would need to impart to the people who used the centre to improve the parent/child relationships. And so it

was an action-learning project. It did have a big research component because it was done as a pilot project. We even had controls in another geographic area so it was quite closely monitored for the first three years. But what I had learnt at the Women's Centre Action Group was enormously influential to me in how I set up and ran that Centre. I suppose because I had learnt enough about the tyranny of structurelessness, not to run it as a collective! And, it was run under the auspices of the government. I had also learnt enough about the situation in which the Women's Health Centre lost its funding that there are some accountability issues and some demands of bureaucracy and reasonable managerial practices. So there are tensions that you actually have to put alongside your principles about empowerment.

So my staff thought I was wonderful because I was very egalitarian. Because we did actually run within the staff group in a very equal kind of way and they found that very different from their expectations about leadership.

**DP How many staff did you have? And where was it in Fremantle?**

**CDB** It was in Stirling Street Fremantle. It was an old house. Very old house, which the people who used it really liked. It had a really lovely homely kind of feeling. We were licensed as an Occasional Care Centre so people could come and drop the kids off to us. We didn't make any judgements about what they were doing or where they were going. We had lots of activities that occurred within the centre that were facilitated by the homemaker kind of people.

One of the things about lone parents is that they cut across all socio-economic groups and that was one of the great strengths of the centre that it drew from the very broader Fremantle region but it had some people who were single parents who



came from moderately advantaged backgrounds, and some who came from extremely disadvantaged backgrounds and it provided the opportunity for lots of self help and lots of pairing up. Lots of people sharing their skills, and lots of friendships between unlikely combina-

tions of people who live near each other, people who had transport, people who didn't, people who'd arrange baby sitting, (because we weren't open in the evening and so they would arrange, and we would encourage that, arrange baby sitting things amongst themselves).

At least two, three, (that I can think of in the time that I was there anyway,) of the women, (and in fact one was a fellow I think), he came through the centre and actually went on to do social work. So their experience of being empowered caused them to actually go and take it on as a career. At least three that I can think of! And it was a fantastic service actually. You know, eventually, (and it was after I left,) it was done in by a government funding cut decision. I suppose one of the testimonies to what had been created was the fact that a single parent action group started up afterwards. They fought long and hard to keep it and they kept a support service among themselves going in the Fremantle area for a number of years afterwards.

**DP What period was that?**

CDB I was actually there for a decade. It started in '76, 76 to '86 was the time that I was involved. I had my own children in that time.

**DP And it was resourced through the Homemaker Service or it was shaped by that tradition?**

CDB It was shaped by that tradition - and I related closely to the Homemaker Service because it was originally, the funding was Commonwealth funding but it was channelled through the

State Welfare Department, and it was established in liaison with the Fremantle City Council. While I was there I actually got it transferred to the Fremantle City Council because I thought it would be safer there. And I was right, because it was only when it got transferred back that it got done in.

Of course, as you would be aware, over that time Fremantle was a very 'happening' place in terms of community development. It was definitely the local government authority with the..., that was most active in social service provision. Very active in the area of children's services and over the time that I was involved with it, apart from running that centre, I was actually involved in quite a few 'outreache' sorts of things. So we had a Fremantle Emergency Relief Committee. We had a Fremantle Social Development Committee. We had children's services, quite a big Children Services Network because I think there was -, Fremantle had occasional care, it had after school care, and it had a Children's Festival and all sorts of things happened around that time.

They're probably back in, Still thinking about community organisation versus development. That kind of service delivery, building the fabric of the community. In a bit more top down kind of way rather than building it from the bottom up. But I think what we did in the Lone Parent Centre was more of the other, because it was much more building those support networks amongst people.

And we also had strong links with the Pine View Pre-school, which was in Coolbellup, and that was a, quite an exceptional pre-school because it had, it was at the vanguard of doing more than just providing a pre-school programme. I think it used to run breakfast programmes. It was a disadvantaged area. It ran breakfast programmes for the kids and it put a lot of things around the pre-school. A lot more engagement with,



and a lot more integration with other community services including ourselves because we had lots of people who came in from Coolbellup to our centre.

Fremantle was probably the earliest to have a Social Work Department and they had also established another Neighbourhood Centre, The Meeting Place down in South Fremantle. We worked closely with The Meeting Place so that, they were developed simultaneously, same sort of point in time I think. So yes there was quite a lot going on. A lot of interaction with other agencies and people and things in Fremantle over that time.

**DP So that was 76 to 86?**

CDB '76 to '86 that was my paid employment, from '76 to '86. There were some other things that I was involved with that weren't to do with my paid employment, as is the way, and a number of those were related to community development I think. Around about, just before, during my pregnancy, my children were born in '83, '84 and during that year I was involved in efforts to get a child care co-operative going. And it was just a group of women who were all pregnant or had children and we knew exactly what kind of child care we wanted for ourselves thank you, and it wasn't available so we set about trying to create it.

**DP Where was this?**

CDB Some of them were from Fremantle. I don't know how we got together. I have no idea. Some of them were 'Fremantley' people and some of them were more, I lived in Swanbourne so it was somewhere between Fremantle and Claremont/Swanbourne. This is where I think it is, if we just hark back to that notion of 'the personal is the political' and all those themes that were going on at the time. There was so much that we were doing in our private lives that resonated with all those things. In the late seventies and the early eighties, you know,

you were forever talking to people who were seeking to establish a commune or were going off to one. I had good friends who brought a big tract of land together and who started the Family School and we were in food co-ops. We used to go off to people's garages to get our bags of lentils or whatever. I mean these were things that you did at the time and, because there weren't the sort of health food shops around at the time.

So it was partially, it did come out of a community-building sort of sense, that this was a good thing to do. That you would all combine together and one person would go off and do the shopping at the markets (and hygienically it was probably dreadful with those things in bags of lentils in people's grubby old garages!). But we were doing all of that, so that the child care co-operative thing was just part of all that really. It was what you assumed you needed to do. If you wanted childcare you just go out and establish it yourself.

There was quite a lot of, of spirit of communalism I suppose. We shared a lawn mower and a lemon tree and a trailer with our neighbours and, I didn't ever go and live communally, but we all fantasised about it. Because I didn't actually want to go and live in the country you see, so everyone who did that could only afford real estate in the country. I wanted to live in the city and we kept strategising about how we were going to buy four houses together in some lovely upmarket suburb where we wanted to live but it didn't quite happen....!

The childcare co-operative didn't quite happen either. We went through all the whose-a-me-jigs to investigate it and got all sorts of information but in the end a couple of us became involved with the Cottesloe Day Care Centre, because that is in the end where my children went. And we were involved in that community committee there.



Meanwhile I'd got involved with the Social Welfare Action Group and I think that was set up in late, let me think, I would have thought the late seventies, early eighties., And that was a group of social workers who were challenged by someone from the Social Wel-

fare Union at an AASW (Australian Association of Social Workers) Conference. We were challenged, "What were we doing about social action?" and, you know, basically prodded our consciences, and so some of those people that I mentioned before that were part of the Women's Centre Action Group, Helen Creed and the Lynne McGuirrigaon and Pat Creevedy and Terri Coughlan and myself and a few other people, I can't quite remember. There wasn't a huge number of us. Probably ten set up that.

So that was the 'social action' era of community development or for me. So that was about identifying social injustice and taking some action.... more often at the political action level, I suppose. So we did heaps of submissions on all sorts of issues: to the Law Reform Commission on a couple of things, and to the Housing Commission on security needs of tenants and .....heaps of them. I can't quite recall them all now but I do have them in my cellar!. They are in my cellar, the submissions, still, because I got left with the collective records of SWAG when it stopped functioning. And I have to say, we all thought that we were non-party political. We were all in deep enmity against Bill Hassell who was the Minister for Community Welfare at the time, and he was doing dreadful things, we thought. So of course we did have a bit of an alliance with the Opposition at the time because...., as you do when you are speaking out against these dreadful things that he was doing. Then when the government changed we were a bit challenged because you kind of have to give them a bit of a chance to do better..... so we were a bit compromised.

**DP Which government changed?**

**CDB** This, the West Australian government. Local, WA Government. So we sort of went quiet for a while - and then we never really recovered - which leads in retrospect, for us to conclude that perhaps we weren't so apolitical after all. But we thought we were. We thought that we would give it to any government.

**DP So can you tell me some more about SWAG.**

**CDB** Social Workers. They were all social workers.

**DP Members of the Union?**

**CDB** I think a couple of them were members of the union. We weren't all members of the union. The challenge was issued to us at a professional association, AASW conference about doing this and we did all feel a bit guilty that we weren't out there kind of enough in the political arena.

**DP This was the late seventies?**

**CDB** This was the late 70's, so there is was already Women's Electoral Lobby you know was well and truly established as a model, and probably all of us would have been members of WEL. I have been a member of WEL ever since it was established so we did have that understanding about how to go about influencing political processes to achieve your outcomes.

**DP Were some working in state instrumentalities, some working in community and non-government organisations?**

**CDB** Yes. I mean you have to be a bit careful about, in those sorts of circumstances, I remember us getting all very clear about what people's obligations and responsibilities were, those that were public servants.



**DP** So was it a forum of people working for state government departments to engage in social action outside of the constraints of their workplace?

CDB Yes, and what they would do is they would focus on, particularly in terms of public face, they would focus on areas that were nothing to do with their area of responsibility. So of course you could share information. People who worked in Community Welfare were aware of injustices or poor practices occurring there then they would certainly tell us about it at a meeting but it would be someone else would take the running on it. So we worked through sub-groups investigating particular issues, developing reports, developing submissions, making, putting delegations to go and see ministers or heads of departments telling them what ought to change and why. So I think the methods we used predominantly were:, we did the occasional media release, we certainly had delegations, we certainly did submissions.

**DP** Who was the minister at the time?

CDB Bill Hassell.

**DP** And there were things that he was doing that were not what the group thought was good policy practice?

CDB I remember us feeling such vehemence against it and I will have to struggle to remember the detail I am afraid. It wasn't just him. There were some things, I think it was the time where there was, maybe he was Minister for Police as well?. I remember there was the issue about more than three people gathered together being a

**DP** Section 54.

CDB Yes. You know, civil disobedience, and so we had to take action against that. That was certainly one of the things we were taking action against.

**DP** Was this the period of Nookanbah conflict?

CDB Yeah

**DP** In the Kimberley, Aboriginal people and workers were being moved on because they were supporting work against the interests of the government?

CDB Yes, I mean that was whether we are talking about exactly the same year or time, but that was the general context and the administration of the Department at that time. I mean lots of ideals had been unleashed about community development. There had been the Welfare and Community Services Review which I think might have reported about '83 or '84.

**DP** That was Carter's review?

CDB Yeah that is right. And I mean that, you know that was suggesting an entirely different, more community focussed way of going about service delivery. But leading up to it, I guess the couple of years beforehand there had been a great ferment of debate and discussion, you know that was part of that review. Lots of people were involved in working groups trying to work out, and there were all sorts of beliefs about central versus regional, whether you needed to resource people more at the ground level or whether you needed to have specialist training unit. And so in the Child Protection area for example, there was a great debate on whether you needed more skilled people out in the field on, or whether you actually needed a core group of people to support those in the field, and some of those debates were like elastic I think. We would just go from one extreme to the other, backwards and forwards over time,



so I lose track of where we are up to on that particular debate because I guess we need both and we never seem to get both. We always seem to get one or the other.

**DP When did the Burke Labor Government come into power? That was about the period that SWAG sort of folded?**

CDB It would have been '83 I think.

CDB The only other thing I wanted to say about SWAG is just, you know how one step leads to another step, to another step and one of the things that I was charged with doing in SWAG was developing a submission on child care to the National Women's Advisory Council. I think it was. And it was the beginning of me becoming 'an expert' if you like, on child care. So that would have been about, probably 1980 I think that I was involved in that and that led me to connecting with people.

I worked with like Jill Cameron, who headed up the Lady Gowrie Child Care Centre, which was the first kind of multi-functional child-care centre really. I mean apart from at the One Parent Centre, but it was specifically established as a child care centre with a whole range of children's services in Karawara. And Jill and I worked on this submission together. And we connected up with people nationally who were involved in the whole community child-care movement, which I think was a very big community development movement basically. Because it was about developing facilities that met the immediate needs of women, that were run by the people who used them and in the creation of that network of child related services I think community networks and structures were being built that are really important.

I mean a very important group to start with in any community is the women with young kids, because they are actually the

ones who have some time. Who perhaps are not working full time and are available to put energy into community facilities, and whose energy for their children sort of spills over into wanting to.... So they are the ones walking their kids to school, you know, you meet your neighbours much more when you have got young kids, you meet the parents of your children's friends at the school gate, you go onto to run sporting groups and things with them. Your life is just very much more, (community oriented) you are on the tuck-shop committee, all of those sorts of things create the connections that build the flavour of community, and I think the whole community childcare movement was important in that.

Other things that sprung out of that would be Neighbourhood Watch and Safety Houses and things like that. I am not sure how late they happened. I think it would have been late eighties but it is part of what I am talking about I suppose.

But anyway through becoming a full bottle, through writing a submission and then going on to participate in a national conference that we impudently called 'Child-care is a Political Issue' (because it wasn't a political issue at the time at all). We were very determined to make it a federal political issue and we were actually successful in doing that. There was some cost benefit analysis that was done that demonstrated that if you had child care more readily available, and women we were able to participate in the workforce, that there would be these economic flow ons. And I think that was reasonably influential in the federal government investing more in a National Child Care Program and so from that Jill and I convened the WA Branch of NACBACS, (National Association of Community Based Children's Services). I was involved with that for, I don't know, three or four or five years, something.

It was a number of years and that NACBCS was really an advocacy group for childcare and it was part of a national network so we did various politically things about child care. Just raised the flag wherever we could about getting increased



government investment in childcare, and we also did developmental things for the sectors. So we ran a number of seminars. We got people..., we got nice political people like Eva Cox over to kind of radicalise our sector. Because the childcare sector was not very profes-

sional. It was dominated by women who had got into providing child care because they just loved kids. And it has always been disadvantaged as far as that is concerned. It has improved a bit since then, but until that time it really had been probably abused as a sector because it didn't stand up for itself very well. So we did what we could to fix that.

That was quite a trap:, once you get kind of identified and acknowledged as having some expertise it is quite hard to escape. It took me ages to unpin myself from childcare once I had decided I wanted to move onto other things

I think it was just very similar to WEL and any of those sorts of advocacy organisations. As I said we ran conferences, we put out media releases, we lobbied politicians, we did things locally. Oh I know one of the things that resulted in a formal role was I became the Chair of the Child Care Planning Committee, which was the predominantly a commonwealth/state planning mechanism. It was a first attempt to do some serious social planning in relation to the provision of child care services. Because once the government had invested a significant amount of money in an expansion of the child care programme they decided they ought to have a needs based planning process to identify where they were going to put all these new centres and things. So this Child Care Planning Committee was established and I think Jill Cameron was the Chair of it for a while and I was the chair of it for a while, Moira Rainer was the chair of it for a while

**DP This was a Commonwealth committee?**

**CDB** It was a commonwealth committee but it did involve some state representatives and we were all chair of it because we were ... neutral at that stage, because we were not seen as government employees and so they wanted to have a neutral chair. So it was basically a planning mechanism. We developed a few quite straight forward planning principles about identifying where the services were, and where the children were, and what the trajectory was in terms of the needs of the localities.

We had this many centres to pop around the metropolitan area so we determined the basis on which we were doing it and we also developed the argument for, and achieved, an Ethnic Child Care Resource Unit too and also the Disability one. So, as part of not just increasing the number of child care places, we recognised there were some special needs that needed to be catered for and developed. These put the case for and got the funding for special services to address those needs so that was quite an interesting little time. It was just another couple of years in my life that were around about that time about '84 I would say. (Note added later: I also worked with the Committee's secretariat for a 6 month period during which we were joined by Tim Muirhead in, I think, his first job in WA)

In that time, when I finished working at the One Parent's Centre, I went freelance for a couple of years and so in that time I was able to do things like be the Chair of the Child Care Planning Committee. Because I was just an independent. I did a range of things. I did some sort of case work kind of things. Something else we established was the Register of Independent Advisors. I did that with Moira Raynor who was the chair of that. It was an organisation called Child-Right. And it was about enhancing children's rights in the community, and one particular thing that we identified that needed doing was that you needed independent advocates for children in legal proceedings. Particularly in Family Law proceedings. And so we developed a register of social workers and others who were in a position to actually go out and do independent as-



assessments that could be presented to the court to represent the child's position in these proceedings. Of course we were also taking the political position that said, "This ought to be provided by the State and there ought to be a mechanism for ensuring that children were always independently represented." So that was me and Moira and Shaun Boyle. Shaun was at the Youth Legal Services at the time.

**DP** So this was late eighties, eighty six, eighty seven?

**CDB** Ah yes. I'd say eighty-six, eighty seven. Yes. Probably about '84 to '87 I'd say around about that period because the other thing I did whilst I was doing this freelance stuff, was, and you will know these women people they are in community development as well. I did an evaluation of low cost food centres and I did it with Jim Ife and Christine Choo. That movement, that: food co-op/, food centre/, Second Harvest/, all that had sprung up during the early eighties I suppose. And that is why I mentioned earlier about being in a food co-op myself. Because what you did personally, you could then see the advantage, what could be gained by people in more disadvantaged communities, profiting from such things. But of course they didn't necessarily have the skills to actually be able to run the centres themselves and so a little continuum of "food centre sorts of things" came about. They ranged from those where there was a fair bit of user control and direction and ownership through to things that were basically food distribution centres or basically charitable organisations who just got food near its use-by date and distributed it as a form of emergency relief. Anyway we did an evaluation of that sort of movement together, so that was quite interesting. And I was only reminded the other day that Patrick McClure now heads up Mission Australia. Patrick was at Second Harvest, he was kind of the client we were doing it for really. So, those people are still around.

**DP** So there is that sort of short period of doing a multitude of things as a free-lance person?

**CDB** Yeah the other significant community development related thing that I did in that period was, I did a report for the Welfare Department on planning, co-ordination and funding of Neighbourhood Centres. So I had a little departmental reference group and I was a consultant who pulled that report together. That meant looking at what was happening internationally, nationally and locally in the development of Neighbourhood Centres. And of course that was a great passion of mine having essentially developed what was a real model Neighbourhood Centre if you like at The One Parent Centre. I mean while I was there I was visited (every week I suppose) by groups of students who thought what I was doing was terrific and people who came to, look. I still meet people these days who say, "I remember I came and visited you at the One Parent Centre."

So it is just worth remembering at that point in history there were hardly any of those sorts of things around! , People's minds were being expanded about what was possible just by getting people together and allowing good things to happen really. Didn't have to be hugely scientific, although I think people like to overlay it with all sorts of academic sciences. But I think the best things that happened there didn't have a huge cognitive base around them. They were more what I said about, really the self-help stuff I suppose, and the very gently giving people information, connections, access to a better network, where to go. And doing that in a non-paternalistic, open, egalitarian sort of environment.

So I was deeply committed to that and keen to use any opportunity to lobby the Department to increase its commitments there. So it had committed to Community Houses following the Welfare and Community Services Review, and that was a slightly stiff model I think because it was a bit like "we will create a couple of 'u-beaut' quite well resourced places", I



think they started off with six or something like that. (It might have only been four), widely distributed - and what they didn't have was a real framework for developing this, basically what we idealistically wanted was that every neighbourhood should have one. Every

neighbourhood should have something, and so DCD had committed to community houses.

Meanwhile the Community Learning Centre movement had got going. That had got going probably from about the beginning of the, certainly eighties, end of the seventies, early eighties I think - so that had come out of a totally different movement. That was about people learning skills, but it had created a whole network of learning centres, and my view has always been, and is still, that you just need a centre in every community that can provide a hub of activity where learning activities can take place. Where childcare can be provided, where people can meet each other, where you can have youth groups. And it would be good if it was a school really. It would be good if we just created one kind of big central area, as local as possible and invested significant public infrastructure in it. So I still believe in that. It feels like a very seventies idea still, but community planning still doesn't seem to be doing it, doesn't seem to be doing it that way.

**DP Can you describe what that was like?**

CDB What that was. Yeah I do remember it happening here quite clearly because it happened at a Women's Electoral Lobby conference. A woman called Gwen Wehisson came from Victoria I think, where they must have already had a Community Learning Centre movement because she came and talked about it and everybody at the WEL conference got terribly excited and said, "We want some of that." And I don't know where the first one was, it might have been Kalamunda or you know ...sort of Kalamunda, Tresillian some of those sorts of places started fairly early.

They did tend to attract non-working women because they were about luring people out and developing skills and confidence. They tended to be very women dominated and I think they ranged from book clubs to sewing classes to the sort of thing that I mentioned, the human relationships training stuff as well. and I mean I thought they were terrific. Obviously I borrowed from that sort of model in terms of the kind of activity programme that we had within the One Parent centre too.

**DP When did they begin to emerge?**

CDB Throughout the eighties I think they just grew from the very beginning of the eighties onwards.

**DP How were they resourced?**

CDB So I suppose I was already occupied with my centre at that time so. Ah now how were they resourced? I think they got local government to give them their buildings. I think they were all volunteer run, they may have covered some of their own costs if some of the groups and some of the activities might have been run for, well not for profit, but for fees.

TAFE put money into some of them. I think that was because they saw themselves, they related to the education sector basically and so eventually the community colleges and TAFE got into doing the sorts of things that those community learning centres were doing but they weren't doing them beforehand so

**DP Was the Meeting Place in Fremantle an example of one of those or a slightly different era?**

CDB The Meeting Place didn't come out of, it wasn't established as a Community Learning Centre but it was the same sort of thing. So the Meeting Place was definitely a Council created initiative that I think came from the first social worker there (who incidentally, was Helen Cattalini, and was a colleague of



mine. We did social work in the same year Helen and I so she would also have been part of our little community development enthused group of graduates.) But the only other, apart from the links to education and TAFE (and the fact that they would have got some funding

through there, but it wasn't generous), and local government backing, the other development that informed that was the Community Arts movement and because I wasn't really part of that.

I just know that there were a few Community Arts Officers appointed. I think Jenny Beahan was community arts officer out Kalamunda way for a number of years. She would have worked very closely with The Learning Centre so I think they were symbiotic relationships basically. They came out of slightly different places but they were informed by the same thinking and trying to do the same things and would have worked together.

So certainly those community learning centres did lots of arty things, and always have, so that is all I know really. I mainly had an awareness, I mean they came and visited me in Fremantle so there was a lot of cross-fertilization in terms of the sorts of activities and enrichment things, but they did cater more for middle-class educated women and that wasn't so much the market I had at Fremantle. So we weren't doing a lot of patchwork or water colours down in Fremantle. Not that I have any problem about doing them, but it wasn't that kind of group!!

**DP Can you think of anyone who may have been around during that year involved in community learning centres that I might be able to talk with?**

**CDB** I would think, if she is still around and could be found, Mabs McDougall would be a good person to locate because Mabs McDougall was involved, as I recall, with Roberta Tatum right

back, I mentioned earlier at that mental health centre and doing that sort of stuff. I think she went on into that sort of area so she would be a great thread to follow. I think she was also involved with WIRE you know the Women's Information Referral Exchange.

**DP OK. Back to the mid to late eighties.**

**CDB** Mid to late eighties, yeah, so I was talking Neighbourhood Centres and wanting to escalate the Departments commitment to Neighbourhood Centres and to the notion of....., I suppose, my dream was to find a mechanism to fund the creation of very variable community centres. Like a place where a variety of those sorts of things could happen. I thought, and I still do think, it is probably a bit wasteful to have these divisions. , Developments have been going on in silos. You get a certain number of things funded over here out of the Residential Care Program, the Commonwealth Government and the Department can commit to a few things here. It had its Homemaker Centres, which would have drawn from that Community Learning Centre thing, and then you had these Community Learning Centres that were trying to squeeze a little bit of money out of TAFE over here, and a bit of money out of community arts, and then you would have had youth centres sort of happening differently and happening at a different point of the day. And community health, you know the Child Health Clinics and stuff that Community Health sisters did around that, which is so good. I mean that is one of the great losses I think of the nineties and 2000's as I say it think we have allowed that network and that system to erode. That was, I don't know the stats now, but back in the seventies, 99.99999 new mothers were visited and had access to a child (health sister) and they were important people. They provided support and they did provide an opportunity to meet with other mothers. We should have built on that, not let it run down in any shape or form. And they even had tiny little clinics in every little neighbourhood that they did it from. If we had invested a little bit more so that whatever that was built for them was big enough for other things to happen- that would have been terrific.



They were really just little one-room things and they often used to try and use community halls and things like that. So I do think the fact that those developments have occurred in silos is unfortunate because there has always been a problem about facilities. Every-

body has always struggled for facilities, and what we just haven't got clever enough about is the sharing, is the organising facilities in a way that enables that sharing and joint usage of spaces to occur better. I mean of course it has always gone on. You will always find occasions where the after-school programme is occurring in a school classroom, but they are always exceptions to the rule. We haven't actually established our whole social system to work that way and I am sure there would be a lot of resource saving if we did.

So neighbourhood centres, because I was a consultant I really just did what I could do in terms of developing a report and framing up recommendations and the next time I tuned back in, (because I was, as I said, it has been a bit of a passion of mine), was when I went to work for the Office of Family and that was in, must have got up to seventy, no, gosh, eighty nine now I think.

**DP This was the State Office of the Family?**

CDB State Office of the Family. That was created to profile the state government's commitment to doing family related things basically. It only existed for maybe three years or so. It was eventually absorbed into the Welfare Department, whatever it was called then.

**DP This was around Peter Dowding's era?**

CDB That was Dowding and Lawrence's era. Carmen Lawrence was the Minister for the Family, and the Premier, which was showing how much profile was to actually given to that com-

mitment to families. The reason I mention it now is there were two things that we did there that were very community development focussed. One was that we actually had carriage of what was then called The Family Centre Program. And that was building on the neighbourhood centre development that the government had made a commitment to provide. It was responding to the pressure for four year old programs and instead of just providing four year old programs it provided them within family centres. And Family Centres were community neighbourhood centres basically which offered a four year old program. The Office of Family co-ordinated that program which was a capital works program. I think it built twenty-six or something in the first two years of the program so it was quite a big program.

**DP Who were some of the others involved?**

CDB Welfare, Education, Community Kindergartens and ourselves I think that was what was involved in it. Ooh! and Local Government. Because Local Government provided the land, the and the State Government put a brand spanking new, purpose-designed facility on it, which had this four year old programme and space for other community activities. So really, that was the biggest expansion of the neighbourhood centres sort of movement that the state government ever invested in, was that Family Centres Program.

**DP Very short.**

CDB Quite a short period of time. Well I just mentioned that I know that the program itself would have probably gone for three or four years I think. But I just remembered it was a figure of about twenty six or something in the first two years so it probably built, might have built, fifty altogether in that time. Someone must know that.

**DP And what was your role in the Office of Family?**



CDB I was a Manager of Policy. We had basically two sides of the office I suppose. One was the Family Foundation side and the other was the side in which we had the Children's Advisory Council, and what we called the Family Development Program. So the Family Centre Program was there. We did a whole lot of parent education; we established a review of parent education services and produced a whole raft of recommendations about where that ought to go. Eventually when the Youth Affairs Bureau, (which had existed as a separate unit), that was established abolished and its functions were incorporated into our office. And so we had The Children's Advisory Council, we had the Youth Affairs set up... and that feels about enough. And the other side of the office was, as I said, the Family Foundation.

I also rue the loss of the Family Foundation because that was an absolutely outstanding funding mechanism for community development activities basically. It was very small-scale community grants. Nobody has done it before and nobody has done it since but, during the life of the Office of Family, we had a trust fund and the government allocated a significant number of \$\$, I think initially it was \$13 million to that -so within one year we were able to actually give out \$1 million worth of small scale community grants. We had a system devised whereby if you just wanted \$1,000 or \$2,000 it was a very small efficient one page application process, no funding round, apply any time. So people all over the community were of course applying for grants to run little courses like here.... Little parenting courses. Because one of the biggest stumbling blocks for people trying to do locally based community based activities is getting a little bit of lubricating money. Just something to be able to hire the hall or get a facilitator in or you know.... I don't think we gave any money for equipment and those sorts of things because Lotteries was available for that. It always has been, you know, if you needed a computer or whatever, send people off to Lotteries, but for actual activity funds -it was amazing!. I still think about that. But when

it was absorbed into the Department it evaporated. Disappeared! And I imagine that today its loss would still be quite a drawback. If you think of something that has been established much more recently like Streets Alive, which is that 'promoting street parties kind of thing.'

Well that is exactly it!! If you don't have any sort of history of having a street party in your area, and you just want to do a leaflet drop, and you are in a disadvantaged community, well who is going to pay for it?. All those sorts of things. Not everyone can take it to work and run it off on their work photocopier, or hire the hall to have a BBQ on Anzac Day or something. I mean those are important community building activities! So I think the availability of a little lubricating fund was very constructive. The grants and they were just wonderful. I can't remember them all now, it is just wonderful to read through the sort of ideas that people had, the things that people were doing. It was very, very enriching to see it.

So I am just about getting up to contemporary times.

**DP Can you sweep us through the 90s?**

CDB The nineties yeah. What happened to community development? .

**DP What sort of things were you involved in?**

CDB You sort of wonder whether to what extent it is a response to the environment or the fact that people embark on different personal trajectories. Like you expect that there is going to be other people coming up behind maybe who might be following with the flag. But clearly lots of organisations have found that that is not the case.

So when I think of all the women's organisations that I have been part of., National Council of Women, Women's Electoral Lobby. I mean each of those organisations has been an organi-



sation of its age group if you like. The National Council of Women has been, and I have had a lot to do with it because I went on to work at the Women's Policy Office. I think of them as an organisation of the generation of my Mother, and the Women's Electoral Lobby is my

generation, and there isn't one for my daughter's generation, and there may never be one. I don't know, but both those organisations have fought really hard to get younger women through and there has been a bit of ruining of, "What has sort of happened to activism?" and it is really hard to answer because I think everything has its own time and place. I am not worried about the National Council of Women closing up, or WEL closing up. I have decided it is time they do, and that you actually probably need a few more things to die off in order to make space for something totally new to be created with new energy and a feeling of its time.

I mean if I was twenty I wouldn't want to join Women's Electoral Lobby, and I certainly wouldn't join National Council of Women. It is just not your contemporaries. It is not people who think the same way that you do and maybe they (younger people) won't have another organisation. That is the bit that we don't know about. Just because we did things through those sorts of organisational structures, even though we played with them, played with them you know with collectives and those sorts of things, perhaps another form of organisation will emerge that isn't like that.

**DP It seems to me that community development is on the rise again in places like Western Australia.**

CDB Yeah it has got some new language around it, 'community engagement' and 'capacity building' and new rhetoric.

**DP Have you got any observations to make about some of the shifts or changes in the kind of community development that we are seeing now?**

CDB Well I think we have to remember that community development has never been mainstream, so that is a start. So even for those of us who were involved with it, and it has always been a bit battling for recognition on the fringes. So that in the state Welfare Department I think there has been this sort of history of occasions where committees have been convened and reports have been produced and they have all been arguing for more community development. There have been these like waves or washes that have gone through the Department.

There was an occasion when they, after the Welfare and Community Services Review, they actually had a bit of a community development kind of directorate under Dot Goodrich and they actually had some community development people out there. Previously there had only been Dot and someone else, and then they expanded it, they probably had a whole six or eight community development workers.

So if you were optimistic and on the community development side, you could have seen that as being in the ascendancy if you like. But still the majority of the Department's resources would have been going into child protection or individual work. It was still... it was just a more favourable time... and then things change and it fades away a bit - or those resources get sent off somewhere else. So it is more a case of: every now and again the wave builds up a bit more momentum. What we are seeing now wouldn't be anything more or different or greater I don't think than it would have been at its peak before. It is still not exactly dominant, because it is not really integrated into the way people think.

So there is still resistance I suspect even now. And I am sure that Jane Brazier in that department is trying to change the culture so that it is (more conducive to community development), but I know how hard that is ... and I think it is very hard because it runs counter to lots of trends in the community. It is still, like I said, it is not mainstream!. It is still fringe!.



People are still very, (on the whole, extremely) paternalistic about their child rearing practices. People still believe that parents have the right to hit their children, you know, many people still believe that?. It is still a controversial thing to suggest that is anti-child and

abusive (to hit).

There is still such a strong ‘law and order’ theme in the community so I just think you have to look around and say, “Well to what extent is the whole community ready to embrace ideas about empowerment and equal rights and those sorts of things?” And I would say that all those exciting ideas that we talked about in the early seventies, a number of them have permeated through to popular culture so that we are much environmentally aware and we are much more consumer aware and we are much more gender aware but we are still quite paternalistic in lots and lots of ways.

Community development, for me anyway, the core principle about that is about empowerment and about belief in equal rights and providing a community that allows, or that enables people to control their own lives. And, I am going clumsily here, I lack the familiarity with the community development texts probably.

**DP I suspect not.**

**CDB** That fundamental respect (for the person) is still something that is lacking in lots of areas I think and so, perhaps for me it does come back to your child rearing. If we are not absolutely respectful in our child rearing practices no wonder we are not raising a community that is deeply respectful of each other. For me that is a very important principle and I would see it as an underpinning in relation to community development. If you don’t have a really respectful attitude to the people that you are working alongside then of course all this stuff about ‘doing things for’ rather than ‘doing things with’ start creeping

into the equation. Most of our community facilities and services are still based on somewhat paternalistic notions, including the whole welfare system.

So it is a huge cultural mountain that we would have to change. To that extent I think that ‘capacity building’ and that new language is just new language for sort of concepts that were maybe firming up perhaps. It is never fair in my view to sort of say that when a wheel comes around again it is exactly the same as how it was before. It is never exactly the same. Everyone has moved on a bit in some regards, and they see it a little bit differently, and things are labelled more clearly, so I would always see it as an advance. I am sure what is happening now is an advance but it is not that revolutionary. It is probably a 10% advance and or 90% of the old stuff. So the big question really is, “How we actually, if we are we going to get, the same quest that we have been at before, how are we actually going to get it to keep going?” rather than slip and slide back again.

**DP Are there any of the ingredients of the old that are missing or perhaps not so readily identifiable in this new talk and new practice about community development? Anything that you were involved in the late sixties and early seventies that we don’t seem to be talking about or we don’t seem to be applying our energies to now?**

**CDB** Oh that is a good question. It might need a fair bit of thinking. I think there might have been something around that issue of the personal integrity of the person doing the work, and the integrity in the sense of walking the talk, practicing what you preach, that sort of integrity. There were a lot of people around in the seventies, maybe not in the most constructive way, who would kind of shoot you down if you were advancing ideas that you weren’t actually embodying in your life. I think there were nicer ways of doing it than were often done but I think to have that break, and self-questioning, going on is probably very healthy.



I am not sure that I hear any of that at the moment, bear in mind that I don't feel actively engaged. Probably if I was working in DCD at the moment I'd be more connected with whatever it is that they are trying to do, and how they are trying to do it, and I am not. But my

sense before I left the department, and I was in the Women's Policy Officer, which was absorbed into that department. So immediately prior to where I working now, that is where I was.

And they were trying to re-discover community development principles, but it did feel more like text book application rather than that level of personal engagement.

And I would be a bit suspicious of that when you are actually in the community, on the ground working with people. That is exactly what ruins relationships, you see people feel that they are having some techniques and methods applied to them rather than learning together and working out how to do this together. That much more genuine comradeship of how we work out where we are going and how we are going to get there.

So that was, that spirit was a very important part of the seventies I think. And I mean mistakes, huge mistakes were being made all the time, because there were lots of people that were inappropriately speaking out of their class or their gender or their whatever. But they were genuinely trying to get past it, and I suspect there might be almost a glibness about it now as if we all know all that stuff, "We all know about how to respect other cultures and other perspectives and genders and so on." when really we have just got a lot more glib with it.

**DP** You talked a number of times about, used the term 'radical' and you talk a number of times about 'social action'. Do you think that is a feature of community development work of the present?

**CDB** It certainly wasn't in the nineties. I mean clearly the whole non-government community services sector has been castrated, basically. Lots of the smaller organisations have ceased to exist. We have only got a few major, predominantly church providers. , So it started when people suspected that they were going to be de-funded if they were politically active, and has wound up really with the recent controversy over tax deductible status and the suspicion that you might even lose tax deductible status if you became politically unacceptable. So I mean there just aren't organisations at the moment that are acting in that way. They are very cautious not to be seen as party political, They are very, very cautious about how they frame anything. I mean the organisation I work with at the moment needs to be very, very careful not to identify with one side or the other.

**DP** Is it imaginable that in 2004 or 5 that we could see a re-emergence of the SWAG like group, a social welfare action group?

**CDB** We've not ever seen the complete disappearance of social action groups so that is one encouraging thing. They are very much specific issue things - so we will take action about Leighton Beach, and we will take action about the forests, and we will take action about Rottnest, and perhaps we will take action around social issues as well, I think. I mean certainly the woman in Queensland who has precipitated their kind of Crime and Corruption Commission I think around child abuse. There are still activists out there who mobilise around a particular issue that they feel passionate about and pull people in. I am not sure about the generic groups like WEL and SWAG and things like that which were kind of committed to doing a whole range of things about the status of women or social injustice. And maybe that is too hard to sustain a broad commitment to doing good across a range of fronts. I think probably we will just continue to see more specific issue actions.



**DP** Interesting observation. Any other observations about the shifts that you have seen in community development over the years?

**CDB** I don't know if these are just to do with ones' own narrow circles that you move in and the people that you know and so on.

**DP** It sounds to me that your circles are very diverse.

**CDB** Well what I was going to observe is that I am not aware of this sort of younger generation of community developers moving through. Now it does seem to me that there would be plenty of workplaces in which that could be occurring. In the same way that I wasn't employed to do community development when I went and worked at Christian Welfare Centre. Nobody at the Christian Welfare Centre had any idea what it was about. The Grant in and Aid Scheme Immigration of the Immigration Department who paid my salary had no idea what it was about. They were all fascinated. They were ready to be informed. So, to that extent there are way more jobs out there in the whole community services sector than there every were in 1970.

As far as I can see, there is way more potential for people to be doing things, exploring doing things differently. So I'm not sure whether there is as much innovation out there as I would expect and hope to see, and I suppose that is what it comes down to. I am not looking for some special ideology to be rolled out the way it was in the seventies, not in any shape or form, I would just hope that what is out there is the energy for people to rethink about what they are doing and to think of different ways and what they can learn from people in other countries and other places and try some different things. See you have to do that don't you? You have to fire them up. That is your job.

**DP** Yes. Indeed it is. I knock around with some people who are a bit younger than I am and I'm actually very optimistic. Perhaps on that note, is there anything that you might want to say to inspire or to energise a younger novice?

**CDB** I think I'd say focus on the small things. I think probably, and I indicated that right at the beginning of our discussion that you tend to want to make big changes. There is so much that needs to be done that you tend to be wanting to have the most impact, and it is very easy to underestimate the enormity of quite small interventions. So with one person if you really are able to help someone get the skills and the contacts and the network to be able to make changes in their own lives that will actually ricochet around them and that can be huge. And in the same way, small things at the community level can be quite big too. Whereas, on the other hand, some of the big policy changes that you might go for, and I have done that as well and I have been successful in some areas in getting things onto the agenda that were quite important to me and they have just been...., the government changes and they go again.... (laughter) So sometimes the big scale things aren't as sustainable and don't endure as much as the little things.

I suppose the thing I would say is, "Keep an eye to sustainability into what you do. And actually, even developing the learning that occurs in one person, yourself or someone else, is more likely to last than a rotten government policy!"

**DP** Any other insights or suggestions for the novice?

**CDB** I suppose I'd say 'network'. Make sure you actually build something around you because, in each of the things that I have talked about, there has been a few other key individuals, or a whole group, where your ideas were sparking off each other and you have got people to share and reflect back and



reflect on the learning's, and I think that is probably really important. I mean even the old consciousness-raising group!, I still have a women's group that I meet with on Sundays, once a month, and some of the things we discuss connect to all of this. There has always

been something like that for me probably through my life, and I would recommend that, to have your own little support group.

**DP One of the things that is striking in the talk this morning is the extent to which you are and have been connected to so many different community drive initiatives and also so many different community workers.**

CDB That you know about. Yes.

**DP So your accounts are a lovely model of the importance of being connected.**

CDB Everything is connected. Yes.

**DP On that note can I thank you ever so much and can I thank you on behalf of those, hopefully of another generation of community development workers. It has been a real pleasure.**

End of interview