STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF PARTNERSHIPS

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I first started hanging around with blackfellas in 1970 and for the first twelve years or so, most of my experience was in rural NSW and a few other places where I actually worked with Fred and Gabby Hollows. Then in 1983 I went to the Pitjantjatjara lands and helped establish the health council. I have had an association with them ever since. Most of my association with philanthropic bodies is in the last ten years or so with that organisation.

There are a whole lot of things that are similar in Indigenous communities around the country, but there are also some differences between places that are an important issue for service delivery and for policy development. It's probably important for philanthropic bodies to realise that there will be some differences that will be very important.

Community development and empowerment are things that we all want to happen, but there is another level of stuff that happens that can contribute to development and that is small projects. That is important because one of the things that we really need in the Aboriginal scene is some "wins". We need things to go well and communities need to get a few wins up even if they are not big picture issues. This increases peoples' self-confidence and allows them to think that they can actually make change. When you get down to this level, I want to make two points. Firstly, the detail is what matters and secondly, you need technical input into programs. It is appropriate to make that because Fred Hollows is probably the person above all else who managed to utilise technical input to community development and he saw that very clearly as a philosophical and practical objective. It is still an important issue for us today.

At the project level, you are generally dealing with organisations and essentially, it hangs on what do the organisations want from the philanthropic bodies. They want lots of things; many of them have been mentioned today so I will drop them off my slide. I think it is important to recognise that we want the money, that's very important without getting to philosophical we clearly want the money of the philanthropic bodies. That is usually the primary purpose of the initial meeting. The second thing that I think you want is transparent negotiations where it is important for both sides to put up what they want out of this deal. And the third thing that I think they want is professional administrative work. Now again, just going back to my first point, I'm talking particularly around remote communities which is where I have done most of my work back in the recent years and what I say may not apply everywhere but I think professional administrative work is important. What I mean by that is competent administration; so if we have a communication with you, we get a reply back. One of the problems in

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government is the demand for Aboriginal governments to report, to give some indication of performance and to show what they are doing with their money, which is absolutely appropriate. Government has not kept pace with that in terms of the competency of managing that reporting. What happens is that you will send a funding submission or you will send a letter about some program and you will not get a reply for a year or you will get a reply which makes it clear that no one at the other end has read the letter that you sent and this happens a lot in government now. It probably happens more because there has been this explosion of reporting requirements and so there are huge numbers of offices filled with people who are involved in this process but it has not gotten more efficient. And it has very little technical input. So, in the organizations in government, which are responsible for overseeing public utility delivery in health and housing and so on, there is not much expertise. The response of those organisations is often slow and technically incompetent. So, we want professional competent administrative work from you. I think that is one of the advantages that Mick is talking about, what can the private sector offer, and I think it can get over some of those problems.

There are some special needs. There is the question about philanthropic bodies where do you put your money? There is an issue about equity and need so you could put your money anywhere and it would be a reasonable thing to do because this is a very poor population. So there is a lot of need, the question is do you do that. Do you divide thing up equally or do you put the money where it is likely to get an output? I think the latter. That is tough on places where they do not have sufficient infrastructure, they don't have the resources to do it but putting in program money to those places is not going to make things better. They need longer term capacity building and until that happens they won't be able to utilise your funds so I think that a hard nosed but reasonable way to go is to put money into places where you think you are going to get an outcome. Because on the Aboriginal side we need some wins and you need to get some value for your money.

The second point I want to make is about realistic outcome objectives. Everybody wants to have the sorts of things that have been talked about today but not every single project is going to deliver those things. There is a problem about unrealistic outcome expectations starting to get into all aspects of Aboriginal health so that funding bodies, both government and non-government, want a whole lot of things. A representative or a prominent funding body philanthropic organization said to me today 'well look what our directors really want is to put some money in to a project which is going to increase community development, enhance skills within the community, have a sustainable major benefit which is going to improve education, social welfare and the health of a nation for fifty years to come.' Well do not we all, I mean we all want that but we have to be realistic about what a project might do. The difficulty with this is that everybody starts to share in the expectations and the Aboriginal community are as guilty of this as anyone. I have written some things myself that when I look back on them was

guilty of falling into that trap. I think it is good for both sides if we have realistic objectives. What might this project do and if it has as positive outcome then it will have a contribution to the bigger picture but lets not ask too much of it because when it does not deliver that, everybody get disappointed.

The third thing is that everybody also wants to fund a model project. This is incredibly fashionable in government at the moment. You get funding to do something so that it can be done in three hundred places around the country and of course, in principle, no one here would disagree with that but there are significant differences between communities. It is a very hetro-genius scene so something that works well in one place is likely to be applicable to some other places but its probably not going to be some recipe for how to do that everywhere in the country. I think it is important to realise that there are some limits to that model idea.

Duration of funding, it has been said about three times already, in general fund fewer projects for longer rather than more projects for shorter. That is the principle. No one has a project, which is going to do something in a big way in a year. Not that I have met in thirty years, its going to take longer than that. And in the areas that we work, things take longer than that and we have got to be thinking about three and five year or ten year funding support for organizations. That is a sensible thing to do for both parties and the outcomes will be better. That does not mean that you do not need to be reporting on progress but it allows you to get a win when something may fall over. My organizations have guess one relatively long-term association with the Potter Foundation and that was initially around a malnutrition project in kids. Our initial proposal for that was probably a little ambitious and it stumbled for the reason that ninety-nine percent of remote area stuff fumbles because of a work force issue. We lost a person, the project stumbled, and that happened at about the ten to eleven month mark. So, in a one year project, we would have been dead in the water and so would the money from the foundation. We put to them that we wanted to back off, have a smaller project to spend the money that had been allocated in a slower fashion over a longer period of time and they were happy to run with that. We have done that and we have got some more modest but much more sustainable gains out of it. So that is a practical example of how if you have a longer-term view it allows you to be a bit more flexible. A one-year project does not allow anyone to be flexible but a longer project does and both parties come out of it with a win.

The fifth thing that I wanted to say is that I have done some work in developing countries and I think the thing that strike you are the differences not the similarities. I shudder when I hear someone get off a plane from an organisation who says what I used to do in developing countries is this because I know where we are going to end up by the end of the day. I think that there are so many things that are different. The politics are different, the cost of things are different, I mean the sort of costs with running projects in Australia are logarithmically greater than they are in developing countries because we pay

people wages which you get in Australia and its not going to be different. We are not going to pay people a dollar a week to run projects. They are not going to work, you have got to have somewhere for them to live. There are all sorts of practical differences that mean doing development work in developing countries is going to be quite different than in this country and I know that there are some lessons which are going to apply in both places but by in large I think there are quite a few organizations who's background has been in developing countries who've come into Aboriginal health and they have stumbled and fallen over, despite having been told about the problems. So, it is not likely that government would do that. They ought to contribute to development but given that constraint that I mentioned about not being too ambitious about solving all the problems in the world. Ideally, they should not fund stuff that is core government business. The problem is that what most of us in the organisations consider core government business is not what the government is not what government considers core government business. So that is difficult and so sometimes we will end up coming to philanthropic bodies and saying 'look this is a good project, it really is pretty much central to our program, we can't get it funded and we want to progress it. I think that you need to consider that even though you may have a view that this is something that government is doing. I guess ideally both parties try and develop a strategy for how the government might take that over during a period of time. Now that is not always easy and I do not have any smart ideas on that. There are really big problems and I think issues around leadership, issues around substance abuse in communities, issues around economic problems in remote communities, and of course the massive, horrendous education deficit that young Aboriginal people are burdened with, these are big problems so anybody that has a smart idea we should be listening to and we should be thinking radically and running with a few adventurous things. On the other hand there are sometimes relatively much smaller problems that exist in a particular region to which there may be some pretty good evidence about how you can fix the problem given some funding over a year or two or three. If that is the case, you can sometimes get a win up for that community and I think that those sorts of smaller projects also have a role in community development. I think they help communities to actually see that they can get some wins up, that they can do some things and they go on to try and tackle some bigger problems.

Detail Consideration.

You can be big picture but still have focussed objectives and I think that objectives of projects should be focussed and this is something that applies to us a swell as the philanthropic bodies. In the health scene you try to do something for which there is some evidence base, has this been looked at elsewhere in the world? Almost everything has. Is there any evidence about the approach that has been taken that might suggest it is going to work? Another way of saying that for when

you branch out of the health sector is saying what is the technical basis for the project. Have we got some information on this? Has it been done anywhere else? What works elsewhere? What doesn't work elsewhere? What is the technical basis and is it sound? And that is often where you need advice. Sometimes the information in that area is pretty limited and if it is a big project and it is worthwhile, you still might run with it. It is important for organisation as well as the philanthropic bodies to think about outcomes, about process measurement. In remote areas you need to sort out whether the workforce exists. Most projects in remote areas fall over because of workforce problems. If you are not clear about any of those things at the top, at the end of the day you might go with the track record, is this a group of people or an organization that has been performed before? Do they look like people who know what they are doing? At the end of the day the only thing that you may have a feeling for is that, but I think you should go through the top process to start with.

Funding Bodies.

There have been lots of statements about this and I will not repeat them all. I think that it is particularly important to give time at the front end of projects. Often people have a good idea about what needs to be done but they do not have the details worked out and they often need technical advice about the detail. It is at the front end of projects where you have to put that time in and not decide to start until people are ready. That is also a problem with government funding, money becomes available, you have got to have it by next week and you have to use it by the end of the year. Often it might take a few months to get those issues sorted out. So front-end time is important. I think it is important for organizations to be transparent about their requirements; it is sometimes difficult in remote communities for things to happen that you might think reasonable. You might think that you should be able to do a visit next week and you cannot see why that is not possible but if an organisation tells you it cannot happen there is probably a good reason.

Realistic Reporting Requirements and Simplified Funding Processes.

I think on our side we should not pretend to deliver what we cannot. We should get clear what the requirements of the funding bodies are and we should make it clear whether or not we are going to be able to address those needs. There is also this question about dependence on time limited funding. If you really are only going to get funding for two years have you got any strategy at all about how you are going to continue that project after that two years, that is a tough problem to sort out.

Importance of Technical Input

For the last fifteen or so years I have been involved with some other people working around environmental health. We have been particularly interested in if you live in remote areas what do you need to keep yourself and your family healthy. You need to be able to do these things. We are interested in the health hardware that is a term taken straight form Fred Hollows mouth, the health hardware necessary to deliver, the ability to do those things. So, we got interested in measuring whether that could happen and seeing how you fixed it. This work has gone on in quite a few places in a small way. This is an example. If you want to be able to wash yourself, wash your kids, what do you need? You need to get water in, hot and cold, is the hot water temperature okay? Do the taps work? Do the showers work? Can you get the water away? So, you can test places to see if the house, the infrastructure can deliver this. Especially in the last two years with some commonwealth assistance from ATSIC these projects are starting to get up in a lot of places. A couple of little bits of information so that the approach in these communities is to go in and look at how the houses perform, can they deliver this hardware? To fix it while they are there during that week with a team of people. This Is data on about eight hundred houses, you can see that in about a third of those places and wash your kids and after the fix, six months later you are getting up to about three quarters and this is less than a thousand dollars per house spent on actually fixing but eighty five percent of that total budget from this project went into direct fixing of housing. So there were two things. Firstly, most Aboriginal housing does not deliver this stuff. Secondly, you can make a difference to it with a fix program. There are a whole lot of health hardware indices along the bottom there. The red is before and the green is after the first fix. So, these projects can make a difference. If you look at the very end there you will see 'ability to store and prepare and cook a meal in Aboriginal houses mostly in remote areas. Absolutely horrendous performance at any level and with the sort of money that we are putting into these projects we are not making much difference at that end. It shows bad health hardware but it can be improved. Eighty percent of people in these projects are Aboriginal people form the communities, not with pretending jobs but with real jobs doing the monitoring and doing the fixing in these communities. There is a whole lot of Aboriginal involvement in this project at the community level and some subsequent spin offs. But at the same time, this project has been based very much on technical input deciding what has the hardware got to deliver, how does it do it? Getting technical advice plus about how to measure it and how to fix it. So, both things are needed for success in programs.