

6 Opening doors

Creating and sustaining community leadership for promoting social inclusion

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Introduction

Opening Doors gave me a platform to work towards the goals that I wanted to achieve in my life. That was to create happiness amongst people, to join them together and probably fill the gap in their life that they had formed as a result of either isolation or their circumstances they were in.

(2015 graduate, quoted in Naccarella 2016: 26)

This quote, taken from a recent external evaluation of the *Opening Doors* programme, encapsulates the programme's aim, preparing community leaders to stimulate positive community change. Social exclusion, with its well-recognised negative health impacts (Popay et al. 2008), has been a priority concern of public health practitioners when addressing the social determinants of health (Brooks and Kendall 2013; Ottmann et al. 2006). This has led to establishment of asset-based community development (ABCD) approaches to promote social inclusion (Brooks 2009). One such programme is the *Opening Doors* programme, initiated in 2009 by organisations in the Inner East Primary Care Partnership (IEPCP). The IEPCP is one of Victoria's 28 primary-care partnerships which were established in 2002. It includes the inner Eastern Metropolitan Region of Melbourne comprising the local government areas of the cities of Boroondara, Monash, Manningham, and Whitehorse. In 2007, IEPCP recognised social exclusion in older people as its priority health concern since many people in the catchment of inner Eastern Metropolitan Region of Melbourne were identified as being isolated due to frailty, disability, low income, or cultural background and depression had the largest burden of disease in the catchment's population profile. There was a deliberate choice at this point to take a leadership and capacity-building approach rather than fund short-term projects for specific groups. The aim was to build grassroots leadership. In order to combat social isolation, *Opening Doors* Community Leadership Programme was launched in 2009 under the Inner East Social Inclusion Initiative. In later years, the scope of the programme broadened to focus on other groups in the community who were experiencing social exclusion. The leadership programme runs annually and is currently delivered as one of the ongoing

programmes offered by Link Health and Community, a community health provider in Melbourne, Australia.

The recruitment stage, discussed under key elements later, is crucial—aiming to engage with grassroots leaders not necessarily agency workers, although their participation in small numbers has also been valuable. The programme itself is delivered over six months. It begins with a three-day intensive retreat (delivered in partnership with Global Leadership Foundation, based in Melbourne). This focuses on raising participants' awareness about their own leadership styles, introducing strengths-based community development approaches, and maintaining emotional health. During the programme, participants learn how to plan, fund, and implement initiatives to promote social inclusion. They also learn about barriers to inclusion, creating consensus and co-designing, managing challenging behaviours, self-care, social media, advocacy, public speaking, effective promotion strategies, and sustainability. They start work on a community initiative that plays to their own particular background and passions. The programme content is progressively developed over the years with input from community members and graduates.

As at the beginning of 2018, over 100 community initiatives to promote social inclusion have been led by the 190 graduates of the programme, leading to over 15,000 community members who are now engaged with their communities in new and positive ways and a network of over 150 different organisations, businesses, and groups supporting the *Opening Doors* Program. The *Opening Doors* graduates represent more than 50 cultural and religious backgrounds and bring passions as diverse as mental health, disability, LGBTIQ rights, positive aging, interfaith dialogue, and many, many more. The initiatives are extremely diverse, including,

- Universities of the Third Age (U3A)—three have commenced thus far;
- TransFamily—a peer support group for parents, siblings, extended family, and friends of trans people;
- The Black Dog community art exhibition—exploring the lived experiences and stigmas of mental health in our community;
- Pathways for Carers—monthly walks which connect people in caring roles with each other and services which can better support them (now running across six local government areas);
- Numerous new community associations, including Bangladeshi Senior Citizens Victoria, Afghan Women's Welfare Association, and Rohingya Women's Association;
- Bringing together groups of people with a shared interest to produce books (e.g. 'Good for you: celebrating the stories of our Chinese Seniors' and 'With The Light' promoting understanding and awareness of autism in the Chinese community through a graphic novel series);
- Bene Connect: Bringing people of all faiths (and none) together to connect, collaborate, and discuss important issues in the Manningham community, supported by Benevolence Australia;

- Different journeys: monthly dinners for teens and young adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), their families, friends, and carers;
- The Respect Community Soccer Tournament: Bringing youth from all major faith and cultural groups in Manningham together to promote respect for diversity and inclusion through sport; and
- Grow: A social enterprise bringing women from diverse backgrounds together to collaborate, creating art, craft, clothing, and other garments and empowering them to share their stories.

In this chapter, the origins of the programme are first explored followed by a discussion of the impact and outcomes from the programme, exploring both overall programme achievements and the achievements of the community initiatives started by programme graduates. The chapter then considers the key elements in the *Opening Doors* model. Throughout we discuss the key elements in the *Opening Doors* model that underlie its success as a sustainable model for promoting social inclusion.

Origins

The Inner East Social Inclusion Initiative (IESII) partnership developed in 2006 with a shared vision to reduce social isolation for older residents in the four municipalities of the Inner East Metropolitan Region of Melbourne: Boorondara, Monash, Manningham, and Whitehorse (Held 2011b). A literature review was commissioned (Ottmann et al. 2006). This proposed a ‘three tiered approach to health promotion, that not only integrates the personal, relational as well as collective sphere but is also capable of drawing on the benefits of a strength-based methodology’ (Ottmann et al. 2006: 44) and discussed the benefit of ABCD in this context. In 2007, a group of key strategic partners came together under this initiative to examine and address the issue of social isolation in the creation of the Inner-East Social Inclusion Initiative working group. In 2009, following extensive consultation and best practice research, the *Opening Doors* Community Leadership Programme was born as one of two programmes of the Inner East Social Inclusion Initiative aimed at tackling social isolation in the community. The programme was modelled on the successful Leadership Victoria ‘Williamson Program’ (Held 2011a).

In 2009, *Opening Doors* focussed on potentially isolated older people and then in 2010 broadened its scope to include other vulnerable groups, such as people with disabilities, young mothers, youth, and people on low incomes (Held 2011a). Initially the programme attempted to focus its participant recruitment on areas of disadvantage as identified by Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data; however this produced limited success, so recruitment used a wider range of methods to reach out through the whole of the four local government areas. The original aim was to have a mixture of people from the community, local agencies, and businesses so the resources could be pooled to support projects. However, recruitment

of those from the private sector was lacking and also problematic where businesses were seeking to use the engagement as an opportunity to promote themselves rather than sponsoring projects or sharing resources.

The Inner East Social Inclusion Initiative was externally evaluated in 2009 (Teshuva and Reid 2010) which examined the first year of the *Opening Doors* programme. Two internal evaluations of the *Opening Doors* programme were produced based on its first two years. One examined the impact of the programme on its graduates and the community projects generated (Held 2011a), and the other focussed on the lessons learnt about successful partnerships for promoting health (Held 2011b). A further external evaluation of *Opening Doors* was undertaken in 2015–2016 (Naccarella 2016). The impact of two of the projects initiated by *Opening Doors* graduates was examined in a master's thesis undertaken by a Deakin University student (Asghar 2017). This last study is the only one based on the views of the participants in the initiatives started by *Opening Doors* graduates.

Outcomes and impacts

Through the various evaluations, both internal and external, efforts have been made to document the outcomes and impact of the *Opening Doors* programme. It is important to acknowledge that only a partial picture can be presented, only some of the outcomes and impacts on programme participants, their communities, and beyond have been documented. In this section, we consider first the programme participants themselves and then the various initiatives that they led.

Building community leadership capacity

Opening Doors gave me insight into how I can contribute. It helped me to focus on my strengths and see a different way to attract people to become involved.

(2009 graduate, quoted in Held 2011a: 19)

The first type of outcomes and impacts from the programme were the effects on the participants themselves. The external evaluation carried out of the first year of programme delivery (Teshuva and Reid 2010) as well as the internal evaluation carried out on the first two years of programme delivery (Held 2011a) demonstrated the success of the programme in building leadership capacity in its participants and graduates. Using both quantitative and qualitative measures, participants' leadership knowledge, skills, and confidence all increased. Some quotes from the graduates in the first two years of the programme illustrate what was achieved.

There were a lot of ordinary people passionate about what they wanted to do. Once we knew where to go and how to network things happened, it all came together.

(2010 graduate, quoted in Held 2011a: 32)

The program changed the way I think about myself, I learnt that ordinary people can do extraordinary things.

(2010 graduate, quoted in Held 2011a: 32)

The program made me more aware of how important community leaders are, to empower and inspire others, to lead by example, to delegate and to step back and encourage others to take a more active role.

(2010 graduate, quoted in Held 2011a: 35)

I learnt a lot from that program, most importantly how to listen.

(2010 graduate, quoted in Held 2011a: 35)

The course helped me to put a finger on what I could do. I am now taking leadership and loving it.

(2010 graduate, quoted in Held 2011a: 36)

I learnt that a leader can be anyone who responds to the need of the community—they don't have to be known as a leader. . . . The Community Leadership program provided the self-management skills as well as diverse pathways for social inclusion for myself and community around me. The program developed the clear transition from self-isolation to social inclusion that has created the self-confidence.

(recent migrant and 2010 graduate, quoted in Held 2011a: 36)

As these quotes also illustrate, the graduates considered they gained a lot personally from the programme. One graduate from the first programme talked about the most important aspect being 'learning that we can all be leaders' (graduate 2009, quoted in Held 2011a: 26). These early findings have been reinforced in later years of programme delivery and are echoed in the findings of Naccarella's external evaluation (Naccarella 2016). One 2015 graduate expressed it as follows:

Opening Doors was a safe environment. They nurtured my confidence and my strengths. The strengths-based teaching was really significant for me and I've used that with my clients. I do work on that way. It's had a real ripple effect on my clients. So it's built their confidence. I didn't know I could publicly speak until I . . . was on the course.

(Naccarella 2016: 26)

The leadership skills gained by the graduates and their use of these skills are also evident in the recognition received by graduates, for example, Nopporn Ganthavee's 2015 award as Boroondara Young Citizen of The Year, following her graduation from *Opening Doors* in 2014. 2011 graduate Krishna Aurora received an Order of Australia Medal in 2013. Judy Cox, who graduated from *Opening Doors* in 2013, received accolades at the Victorian Premier's Volunteer Awards in 2017 for her founding of the Wheeler's Hill University of the Third Age (U3A).

In 2014, Opening Doors coordinator Alex Mills was one of four Australians shortlisted for the Tony Fitzgerald Memorial Community Award by the Australian Human Rights Commission.

Initiatives that make a difference

The second important set of outcomes and impacts arises in different communities through the community initiatives that graduates led, contributing to increased social inclusion. With over 100 community initiatives started since 2009, it is obviously impossible to document them each in detail. Instead, first we draw on the one study (Asgar 2017) that has talked directly to participants in two of the initiatives: U3As, one long-standing, created as a result of the first year of the programme in 2009, and the other set up more recently in 2015. Following that, we bring together in tabular presentation some examples of different initiatives, their impacts, and outcomes into the community, drawing on Naccarella (2016) and the different bulletins produced by the programme coordinator.

Asgar (2017) interviewed 21 participants in two U3As: ten from Wheelers Hill, launched in 2015, and eleven from Deepdene, launched in 2009. The older U3A, Deepdene, has a larger membership and more programmes on offer than the younger U3A. Despite these differences, the impacts of involvement as perceived by the participants in the two U3As were similar and fell under the same four themes: keeping active (both physically and mentally); lifelong learning; social connections; and sense of belonging.

Participants in both U3As identified physical and mental stimulation as a major benefit of involvement in their U3A. Participants from both the U3As have been involved in classes aimed at improving physical health in an engaging environment such as strength training, yoga, and dancing classes. Participants commented on the physical courses being an opportunity to get involved in physical activity at a much cheaper price than the local gyms. The walking programmes have been attended by many participants in both the U3As and have been identified as not only promoting physical activity but also providing a prospective hub of social interaction where they can leave their homes and walk around historic places or parks and carry out conversations with other members while enjoying the surrounding environment. Participants from both the U3As recognise the benefit of walking groups as both physically and mentally stimulating and conducive to healthy ageing because of social as well as health benefits.

Lifelong learning was identified by majority of participants from both the U3As as their motivation for joining U3A, and the huge wealth of knowledge possessed by U3A members was considered an invaluable asset. Learning through peer-supported and peer-led programmes was identified as particularly helpful in learning new skills such as use of smart phones, playing guitar, or learning patchwork and knitting. When such learning is carried out in supportive groups, as in the U3A, there is an additional benefit of social engagement because there is a non-competitive environment aimed at learning for self-fulfilment rather than formal qualification.

Both the U3As promoted social connections through diverse avenues including physical training and peer-education groups. The majority of participants from both the U3As, men and women alike, recognised U3A as a platform that has enabled them to connect with like-minded people from their local community which they would not have had a chance to meet otherwise because of the differences in their ethnic and professional backgrounds. Participants particularly perceive U3As as all-embracing and welcoming of sociocultural differences and includes people from all walks of life based on their similarities of vision, their interests of pursuing knowledge, their need to find purpose, and their desire to engage in meaningful activities. This all-inclusive framework of U3As is perceived as an enabler in engaging older people who feel lonely and isolated facing retirement or bereavement due to loss of friends or family, which is commonly seen among older adults. One Deepdene member explained,

My husband passed away and . . . then it was that U3A figured into my life . . . because there was just this huge void . . . it was just my husband and me, and I needed to have structure to my day and to, I think, build more of a social network . . . it just provided such a fulfilling part of my life after such a traumatic change.

(Deepdene U3A member, quoted in Asghar 2017: 31)

The majority of Deepdene U3A participants had been associated with their U3A for longer duration and reported a sense of belonging to their U3A, while in Wheelers Hill U3A, with shorter lengths of association, this was reported by a few, for example:

As a group of ladies that dance together, we do yoga together I feel a sisterhood. I feel warm, I feel friendship . . . I feel I'm not lonely because I don't have any family, any friends here. I live(d) in the States for 41 years, all my friends, my kids are there and I'm alone here but when I go to U3A I don't feel that way.

(Wheelers Hill U3A member, quoted in Asghar 2017: 36)

The participants identified U3A as the place where they feel genuinely welcomed, where they know people and are known by them. They are aware that although they do not share very close friendships with all the other members, there are people who are willing to lend a listening ear and support if they ask for it, that is, being supportive in a non-intrusive way. Some of the retirees regarded U3A as an important constituent of their lives, which allowed them to contribute back to the community in a way where their volunteering was not only beneficial for the community but also for themselves, as they gained the physical and psychosocial benefits of involvement in a diverse range of activities and at the same time felt being part of the wider multicultural community.

The repetition of these impacts among participants from both the U3As suggest that these two community-based initiatives have been able to engage older people

from diverse backgrounds in activities that not only promote social connectedness but also promote healthy and active ageing as perceived by the participants. The inclusive nature of these groups can be linked to insights gained as part of the *Opening Doors* programme.

Turning now to some of the other community initiatives led by *Opening Doors* graduates, Table 6.1 summarises important outcomes and impacts as reported by the graduates.

Table 6.1 Community initiatives, their outcomes, and impacts

<i>Initiative</i>	<i>Effects on participants</i>	<i>Wider community effects</i>
Broadband access for Seniors programme	Improved access to computers for older residents	Increased respect for elders Increased confidence of community members Shared stories Increased networks and connections to address social isolation
Celebrate the stories of Chinese seniors in our communities	Empowerment for individuals in relating stories	Wider appreciation of different immigrant journeys and experiences
Established parent support groups	Increased connections amongst parents who may be at risk of social isolation	Increased networks and connections to address social isolation
Black Dog Community Art Exhibition	Empowered and increased self-esteem of people with anxiety and depression to be heard, informed, and have a voice	Empowered and inspired people with anxiety and depression through art Reduced stigma for people with mental ill health Built leadership capacity, empowering people living with anxiety and depression Increased opportunities to employment for people living with anxiety and depression
Welcome dinners for migrants and refugees	Connected newly arrived migrants and refugees with established Australians	Increased connections between migrants and refugees and Australians in the local community Increased awareness of local community leaders about the value of welcome dinners as a way to promote social inclusion
Created a neighbourhood information resource about local services and businesses	Increased knowledge of new families about how to access local services and businesses	Increasing local community know-how about accessing local community services and businesses Increased feeling of belonging in the local community

<i>Initiative</i>	<i>Effects on participants</i>	<i>Wider community effects</i>
Facilitated Indian Senior Citizens Association to connect and work more collaboratively to promote social inclusion	Increased awareness amongst Indian Senior Citizens about social isolation and ways to promote social inclusion Increased knowledge and connections between the Indian Senior Citizens Association and other senior organisations from other cultures Built connections amongst a community of like-minded people who are passionate about social inclusion	Built networks and connections between local community organisations Creating opportunities to connect Senior organisations from all cultures Increased knowledge and skills
Working with those affected by gambling, using multiple methods: dancing groups, a drumming circle, creating mandalas and other crafts, storytelling, and performing scenes 'Different Journeys' ASD (autism spectrum disorder) support group Parent support group	Healing individuals from the harms caused by gambling Empowering people to find their voice on the journey to recovery and to become advocates for change Empower young people with ASD (by providing them with a social platform that fosters an environment for them to create positive connections and feeling of inclusion Linking families with services and support.	An increase in the depth of understanding of the risks of gambling, as well as the challenges and stigmas faced by those who have experienced harm from pokies Increased knowledge, understanding and acceptance of parent of children with ASD and carer issues Empowered parents of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and carers Gave parents of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) hope Increased volunteering in the community Existing and emerging community leaders feel empowered, educated, and connected

Sources: Derived from Naccarella (2016) and Opening Doors Bulletins November 2014, August 2015, December 2017

The table illustrates the diversity of initiatives led by graduates and the breadth of their influence. Naccarella (2016: 35) summarises this in terms of eight different domains of change in the broader community:

- 1 Increasing the awareness and knowledge of factors that contribute to social isolation, social exclusion, and those factors that promote social inclusion;

- 2 Increasing the quality and number of relationships, connections, networks, and collaborations;
- 3 Increasing ideas, viewpoints, mind-sets, and ways of thinking about social inclusion using asset-based community development approaches;
- 4 Increasing the leadership capabilities—increased empowerment, confidence, and advocacy;
- 5 Increasing the level of participation and engagement of marginalised local communities;
- 6 Increasing the level of respect and acceptance of people who are marginalised and socially excluded from society;
- 7 Increasing the level of belonging and decreasing the level of loneliness of marginalised communities; and
- 8 Increasing the level of volunteering, generosity, goodwill, and benevolence—giving back to others.

Key elements in the *Opening Doors* model

Naccarella (2016) identified three different ‘key ingredients for success’. The first of these was a particular type of programme coordinator: benevolent; non-judgmental; honest; open; goodwill; reliable; accepting and personable; well-connected; and with lived experience of both the *Opening Doors* programme and using ABCD. The second of these was in terms of features of the programme itself: free; structured; pragmatic and practical content, especially ABCD; supported, both financially and in other ways, and authorised by a diversity of health, human, and social service organisations; and its focus on building community leaders and leadership. The third ingredient was the post-programme strategy to support graduates with social and skill-based opportunities. Six features instrumental in these results are expanded on below using information from all the different evaluations.

Interview process

A key component of the selection process for the *Opening Doors* programme is a group interview. Three to five applicants participated in each interview which was structured as a discussion with the programme coordinator, a Steering Committee representative, and an independent stakeholder when possible. The discussion was constructed to promote conversations as opposed to strict question-and-answer format. Relevant topics such as: teamwork, leadership, and personal strengths were explored, and this provided opportunity for applicants to demonstrate their ability to engage with others and to meet with potential fellow group participants. A visioning exercise was also included using Baker’s (2004) picture book *Belonging* as an example of how a socially inclusive community can develop over time. Applicants were encouraged to draw or describe the transformation of their own local community to a socially inclusive one and then to explore the commonalities

of their vision with the other group members. People were finally selected based on their passion and ability to work with others in the programme.

Opening retreat

Evaluations from the 2010 programme (Held 2011a) for the initial live-in retreat emphasises its importance in the leadership journey, and this was reinforced by Naccarella (2016) as one important aspect of the programme's structure, providing a safe environment for building relationships. Expansion in the length of the retreat, from two to three days, early on in the life of the programme was important in ensuring this outcome. Here's how one of the graduates expressed their views:

I have so many strong memories. The opening retreat was a wonderful experience; to be able to come together and get to know such an amazing group of people. Formalising past learnings was excellent too.

(graduate 2013 quoted in December 2106 *Bulletin*)

ABCD—Asset-Based Community Development

The programme has a core focus on ABCD, a strengths-based approach to community development. Following the opening retreat, the first two full-day sessions of the programme are dedicated to exploring this approach. Participants are provided with a theoretical framework as well as many tangible examples of the approach in practice. Distinctions are drawn between a 'needs based' approach—seeing people as clients in a service system with problems to be solved—and the asset-based approach, which sees all individuals as equal and participating members of their community, with gifts, talents, and assets to be shared. Participants are strongly encouraged to think about individuals and groups who have been 'needs assessed out of community', defined by their challenges and deficits. These sessions emphasise the important of working from an ABCD framework as the most effective and sustainable way to bring about lasting change in communities and to empower new and emerging community leaders. The ABCD approach also explicitly challenges models which reinforce entrenched notions of dependency—communities which are free from reliance on external 'experts' will thrive and achieve self-determination in contrast to needs and charity-based models of intervention.

The Asset Based Community Development approach underpinning the *Opening Doors* model was first outlined by John P. Kretzmann and John L. McKnight (1993) in their book *Building Communities From The Inside Out: a path towards finding and mobilising a community's assets*. These principles were further explored in Robert Putnam's (2000) *Bowling Alone: the collapse and revival of American community* and *ABCD: when people care enough to act* (Green et al. 2006).

Opening Doors has worked closely with global leaders active in the ABCD field, including Peter Kenyon (Bank of Ideas, Australia), Cormac Russell (Nurture Development, Ireland), Jim Diers (Neighbour Power, USA), and Ted Smeaton (Australia), the latter two of which have delivered several workshops directly to *Opening Doors* participants and alumni.

From the earliest years of the programme, graduates talked of the value of ABCD to them:

Exposure to ABCD theory in the program cemented my ability to identify community resources and the strengths of individuals in the implementation of a project. Exposure to different spaces in the community laid down the foundation to explore community resources as well.

(graduate 2009, quoted in Held 2011a: 18)

Naccarella (2016) reports that *Opening Doors* graduates overwhelmingly valued the ABCD approach to community development, regarding it as a key enabler to the success of *Opening Doors*.

Peer support

From the initial interview process through the intensive opening retreat of the programme and then through the interactive workshops during the rest of the programme, a web of strong and enduring supportive relationships are built between programme participants and also includes the programme coordinator. These nurture participants through the design and implementation of their project, both throughout the programme and after their graduation from it when they continue to work on their community initiatives as alumni. In discussing peer support, graduates often mention gaining from the diversity in the programme participants.

Never have I been part of such a diverse group of individuals. This eclectic mix of culture, age, gender, faith and interest has created a community that is incredibly honest and supportive. I will hold onto the lessons from this community for the rest of my life.

(graduate 2015, from reflection delivered at graduation ceremony)

Intersectional learning

Beyond the individual session content, a key strength of the *Opening Doors* model is the opportunity to bring leaders from diverse backgrounds and lived experiences together. Through sharing exercises and informal interactions, participants are frequently exposed to perspectives, cultures, religions, and lived experiences they may not have encountered outside of the programme environment. In addition to deepening the learning experience for participants, this also leads to collaboration opportunities beyond the participants' existing networks and/or community. Leaders from new and emerging cultural communities are exposed to

issues facing the LGBTIQ community, whilst leaders from senior citizens groups are connected with younger disability advocates. This formal and informal sharing of knowledge and lived experiences greatly enriches the learning environment and enables participants to share this knowledge with peers in their own communities. As one participant put it,

I was exposed to so many new perspectives and experiences. . . . People who I never would have met outside of the program. To be sharing this journey with people who have just arrived in Australia, through to LGBTQ advocates . . . People in their 20s through to their 70s. It's so rare to learn and grow in an environment where everyone's lived experiences are honoured and valued, and we are all richer for it.

(graduate, 2017, from reflection delivered at graduation ceremony)

Network of linked organisations

The extensive network of organisations linked to the programme provides participants and alumni with access to resources to individuals with specific expertise, to venues, to funding or suggestions as to funding sources, and to support in gaining them. The importance of this was emphasised in both external evaluations (Naccarella 2016; Teshuva and Reid 2010) and the internal evaluation (Held 2011b). The role of the programme coordinator is key here in linking people out to other organisations, but the participants themselves also play an important role in linking their peers out to their own contacts and networks. As one programme graduate expressed it,

it's the networking processes which have really stuck with me. I think sometimes it might take people a while for that to sink in . . . But it's so critical. When something works because you know someone, that's incredible. It was also really powerful to visit the different locations at each session. It was great to visit Monash and Manningham Councils, the Blackburn Sikh Temple, Mulgrave Neighbourhood House . . . The whole experience was just incredible. It's opened so many new pathways for me, and honestly, it's one of the best models for community engagement and leadership I've ever encountered.

(2013 graduate, quoted in December 2016 bulletin)

Building sustainability

Looking around the world, all of the best practice examples show communities building on their strengths: starting with what is strong and the things that are assets and continuing to build from there. With the support of Global Leadership Foundation, Leadership Victoria, and a group of passionate social and community health agencies, it was in this spirit that the *Opening Doors Leadership Programme* was born. By the time of writing in 2018, *Opening Doors* has a vibrant

and thriving alumni group, with its graduates mobilising to organise workshops, social events, and opportunities to further their leadership journeys and ultimately support each other in their visions. The programme looks forward to welcoming future graduates into this ever-growing community and continuing to promote a society which is socially inclusive for all.

The financial sustainability of programmes that produce significant positive social outcomes, that cannot always be quantified, is always difficult to achieve. Link Health and Community supports the programme over and above the funding made available through grants, as it sees it as a worthy and justifiable component of its community charter within a social model of health. However, the constant struggle to find more and more funds means that the project coordination role has to contend with spending time finding appropriate funding, and writing applications, rather than working directly on the programme. In 2011, a prospectus was developed to elicit corporate sponsorship; however it was not successful. Additionally other strategies have included connecting with fundraising organisations, which again has not elicited much funding. The difficulty, as always with poorly funded programmes, is managing the competing demands of needing to find new funding all the time, managing the expectations of the current funders, along with managing the day-to-day operations of the programme annually. Additionally, maintaining a salary level that is commensurate with the skills and expertise of the project coordinator is also fundamental to sustaining and stabilising the project. By Link Health and Community taking on the programme as one of its 'standing' programmes means that at least there is back-end support for the role and more opportunities for exposure to the communities of interest.

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