

Community group audit project

Final report

David Wain

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Table of contents

INTRODUCTION	5
AIM	5
BACKGROUND	5
SELECTION OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS FOR THE STUDY	7
PART ONE – A COUNT OF SELECTED CATEGORIES OF COMMUNITY GROUPS IN SELECTED LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS (LGAS) IN VICTORIA.....	9
METHODOLOGY	9
RESULTS FOR INDIVIDUAL GROUPS	11
<i>Playgroups</i>	11
<i>AFL teams</i>	11
<i>Netball players</i>	12
<i>Cricket teams</i>	12
<i>Lawn bowls clubs</i>	13
<i>Junior soccer players</i>	13
<i>Scout groups</i>	14
<i>Neighbourhood houses</i>	14
<i>Amateur theatre, drama and bands</i>	15
<i>Historical societies, local and family history groups</i>	15
<i>Ethnicity specific groups</i>	16
DISCUSSION.....	16
PART TWO – A STUDY OF THE FUNCTION OF PLAYGROUPS IN SELECTED LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS (LGAS) IN VICTORIA.	18
METHODOLOGY	18
RESULTS	19
<i>Membership</i>	19
<i>Governance</i>	19
<i>Funding</i>	20
<i>Culture</i>	21
DISCUSSION.....	21
CONCLUSION.....	23
REFERENCES	24
APPENDIX ONE – THE QUESTIONNAIRE.....	25
APPENDIX TWO – THE INFORMATION FOR PARTICIPANTS LETTER.....	28

Introduction

Participation in a community group confers a number of benefits, including support, practical help, contacts, positive community attitudes and norms, social integration and aiding the spread of information and innovation (Pope, 2006). Many of these benefits have a positive effect on mental and physical health. In studies conducted by the Department of Victorian Communities (2005) participation in community groups was found to be lower in areas of social disadvantage, with the implication that residents of these areas may be missing out on the benefits of community group participation, further compounding disadvantage. This may be the result of a number of factors, including a lack of community groups for people to join in these areas, or the groups may be smaller and less effective in attracting new members. No research currently exists on the differences between community groups in different socio economic areas, so this study is an attempt to conduct a preliminary exploration of this area.

Aim

The aim of this study is to explore any potential differences between the number of community groups in areas of social advantage and similar groups in areas of social disadvantage. This study will also aim to see if there are any patterns of difference in the way community groups operate in these two areas, to see if the experience of participation is similar in both.

Background

One of the key benefits arising from participation in community groups is the accumulation of social capital. Social capital is an ecological characteristic that arises from the relationship between people, rather than being invested in individuals or material goods. It exists above and beyond individuals, and it cannot be measured within them, as it belongs to communities and exerts its influence on individuals, affecting their behaviour as they enter or leave a community where it is in action (Berkman & Kawachi, 2000). Berkman and Kawachi go on to further define social capital as ‘those features of social structures – such as levels of interpersonal trust and norms of reciprocity and

mutual aid – which act as resources for individuals and facilitate collective action. Social capital thus forms a subset of the notion of social cohesion'. (p175) Social capital has the potential to protect individuals from isolation, and interference from the state, as well as encouraging active participation in the life of a community and the potential to meet needs that cannot be met by government services.

There are a number of direct health benefits arising from social capital. Quoting from Berkman and Kawachi again “over the last 20 years 13 large prospective cohort studies across a number of countries from the United States to Scandinavian countries to Japan have been conducted that show that people who are isolated or disconnected from others are at increased risk of dying prematurely ... the relative risks associated with social isolation were not centered in one cause of death; rather those who lacked social ties were at increased risk of dying from ischemic heart disease, cerebrovascular and circulatory disease, cancer, and from other causes in a final category that included respiratory, gastrointestinal, and all other causes of death.” (P159). Furthermore, the health benefits of social capital can also extend to better health promoting behaviours such as not smoking, healthy eating and regular exercise where these are the norms within a community.

The effects of social networks are not always beneficial, and are dependent on the state of the society exerting the influence. Just as healthy norms may have a positive influence, detrimental norms, such as acceptability of smoking, poor diet and the reduction of incidental exercise may exert a detrimental effect on the health of individuals within a community. Social networks also have the potential to play a negative role in the spread of infectious diseases, as studies of the spread of hepatitis C amongst injecting drug users and HIV amongst homosexually active men have demonstrated (Aitkins et al, 2007; Guy et al, 2007).

While the benefits of community participation are difficult to measure directly, and are potentially harmful as well as beneficial, they appear to be quite profound. While this study does not examine the specific workings of social capital, it does attempt to measure

any differences in the opportunities people may have to engage with social capital based on the geographic location in which they live.

The second part of this study consists of the evaluation of a set of community groups in order to determine any differences in how these groups function and if the benefit of participating in these groups is equal, regardless of the group. In order to do this, criteria were developed for evaluation of community groups. In a study of characteristics of empowering organisations, Spreitzer (1996) found that clearly defined roles, strong socio-political support, a participative environment and access to information were associated with perceptions of empowerment. In an analytical study of successful empowering community settings, Manton and Salem (1995) found that overt statements of expected ethics, a variety of roles for people to play and opportunities to take on leadership roles were all characteristics of health promoting organisations. These findings are further reinforced in a study conducted by Brown et al (2007), which found that the roles people play within an organisation effect the benefits they gain, and that performing a variety of roles is important to ensure maximum benefits to the maximum number of people. All of these factors were taken into consideration when designing a questionnaire to evaluate the function of a set of community groups. In addition further information was gathered on the size of the group, how well it was able to promote itself, processes and procedures for new members, governance structures and the resources available to the group.

Selection of Local Government Areas for the study.

Eight local government areas were chosen for the study to make up an overlapping combination of four disadvantaged and four advantaged, and two each of inner metro, outer metro, small shire and large shire. The LGAs and their designations are listed in table one.

Table one: LGAs by location and disadvantage score.

Location	Low disadvantage score	High Disadvantage score
Inner Metro	Bayside	Maribyrnong
Outer Metro	Yarra Ranges	Whittlesea
Small Shire	Alpine	Mount Alexander
Large Shire	Macedon Ranges	East Gippsland

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) ‘Socio Economic Indices for Small Areas’ (SEIFA) was used to determine the level of disadvantage in each LGA. The SEIFA index was developed by the ABS to allow ranking of regions/areas, providing a method of determining the level of social and economic well-being in that region. The disadvantage index is derived from attributes such as income, educational attainment, unemployment, and dwellings without motor vehicles. In particular it focuses on low income earners, relatively lower educational attainment and high unemployment.

The Victorian Grants Commission within the Department of Planning and Community Development classifies all LGAs in Victoria into either rural or metro before further dividing them. Metro LGAs are further classified into either inner metro or outer metro, while rural LGAs are classified into either regional cities, large shires or small shires, these being based on a combination of geographic size and population.

Inner metro, outer metro, small shire and large shire were included in this study, with regional cities being excluded due to time and resource constraints. Within each of these classifications, two LGAs were chosen, one with a high level of disadvantage and one with a low level of disadvantage in order to explore if the degree of disadvantage had an impact on the opportunities for participating in community groups, and also the nature of how community groups operate. A table listing all LGAs in Victoria with their grants commission classification and degree of disadvantage is contained in appendix one.

Part one – A count of selected categories of community groups in selected Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Victoria.

This section looks at the numbers of various types of community groups in the eight local government areas selected for this study. The groups were chosen on the basis of available information, and in an attempt to ensure as diverse a representation of people as possible. This was done by selecting groups that appeal to both genders and different ages and life stages, such as junior soccer, lawn bowls, netball and local history.

Methodology

Information was gathered about the following groups: playgroups, AFL football teams and players, cricket clubs, netball players, lawn bowls clubs and players, neighbourhood houses, scout groups, amateur theatre, drama, music, bands and choirs (as a single category), historical societies and local and family history groups (as one group) and ethnicity specific groups (also as one group). These groups were chosen after a survey of local government community directories. A large number of sporting groups were chosen as participation in organised sport is widespread and common in all areas, and these groups were also most likely to have comprehensive data available about the number of participants. There does, however, appear to be a gender bias with organised sports favouring males, meaning that women are likely to be under represented in the study, but they should be under represented equally in all LGAs studied. Scouts were included but not guides, as data about guides groups was inconsistent across the eight LGAs.

Data were collected from online community directories published on the relevant local government website. These listings may be limited or out of date in their coverage of the groups operating in local areas, and there may also be a bias towards long standing groups that are known about in the local community, larger groups that are more likely to attract attention, groups that attract people who are comfortable and familiar with

information technology and groups that are familiar with the resources that are available through their local council. However this was the most readily accessible resource that was consistent across all local government areas, as well as being specific to each LGA.

These data were further limited in that they gave no indication of how many members each group contained, nor how active or current the group is. In an attempt to overcome this bias, preference was given to community groups that were affiliated with state umbrella organisations as these organisations could often provide definitive lists of the numbers of groups in LGAs, and in some instances, the number of members. Where data about number of groups by LGA were available from umbrella groups, this was used in preference to LGA community directory data. However in the interests of including a broad range of groups, categories of community groups that do not have a state umbrella organisation were also included.

Basic demographic data about each LGA was also collected from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, including population by age, gender and country of birth. This data was then used to calculate a group to population ratio by dividing the total in order to give a sense of the number of people in a local government area that each group would be theoretically servicing. This ratio is an attempt to measure how accessible community groups are to their local populations, and to see if there are differences in availability in different geographic areas.

Where state umbrella organisations were able to provide total numbers of participants in each LGA, a participation rate was calculated. This consisted of the total number of actual participants divided by the total number of potential participants in each area. This rate is intended to give an indication of how widespread participation in community groups is in each LGA, again in order to see if there are any differences in participation in different geographic areas. Stata version 9 was used to calculate significance between different rates.

Results for individual groups

Playgroups

Data was supplied from Playgroups Victoria about the number of playgroup sessions per week in each of the eight LGAs. This ranged from seven in Alpine shire to 133 in Yarra Ranges. The ratio of groups to eligible children was consistent across the rural LGAs, being lower in the large shires (40 and 47 children aged 0-4 for each session in East Gippsland and Macedon Ranges respectively) and higher in the small shires (102 and 113 in Alpine and Mount Alexander respectively). The pattern was less consistent in the metro areas, with Maribyrnong having a lower ratio than Bayside (56 compared to 72), while Yarra Ranges had a lower ratio than Whittlesea (71 to 115).

The data from Playgroups Victoria also contained the number of children participating in groups in each LGA, which was then divided by the number of children aged 0 to 4 years to generate a participation rate. This is not an exact figure, as many of these children would not be eligible to participate in playgroups, but the method was applied consistently in order that comparisons could be made between LGAs, rather than making definitive statements about participation in each area. The participation rate varied from a low of 12.9% in Whittlesea to a high of 24.6% in Macedon Ranges. While the rate varied across the different locations, in each pairing of an advantaged and disadvantaged LGA in a comparable area the advantaged area had a higher participation rate.

AFL teams

The total number of registered AFL teams, both juniors and seniors, in each LGA was obtained from Football Victoria. The total number of males aged between 5 and 55 years was then divided by the number of teams to generate a ratio. The number of teams was then multiplied by 22 to give the approximate number of participants in each LGA so that a participation rate could be calculated.

The total number of AFL teams ranged from 18 in Alpine shire to 163 in Yarra Ranges. The team to potential players ratio was higher in all four of the rural LGAs (Alpine, 1:239, Mount Alexander, 1:231, Macedon Ranges, 1:226 and East Gippsland, 1:216) and

lower in the four metro LGAs (Bayside, 1:409, Maribyrnong, 1:636, Yarra Ranges, 1:320 and Whittlesea 1:673). The participation rates followed a similar pattern ranging from a consistent 9.2% to 10.2% across the four rural LGAs, to a more variable 3.3% to 6.9% in the four metro areas. Again the participation rate was lower in the disadvantaged areas.

Netball players

Data supplied by Netball Victoria made the distinction between associations and players for each LGA. As the number of associations was quite small, this unit was not used for analysis and a ratio was not calculated. Instead the number of netball players registered in each LGA was divided by the total female population aged 5 to 55 years for each LGA to generate a participation rate. The data supplied by Netball Victoria is inclusive of most, but not all formal netball associations in Victoria.

The participation rate varied from a high of 9.8% in Alpine shire to a low of 1.3% in Whittlesea, with Maribyrnong having no netball association, and hence no registered netball players. Participation was generally higher in country areas (6.8% to 9.8%) than metro areas (1.3% to 6.9%) but not entirely, with Yarra Ranges (6.9%) having a slightly higher rate than Mount Alexander (6.8%). While there was a difference between the paired advantaged and disadvantaged LGAs (Bayside 4.7%, Maribyrnong 0, and Yarra Ranges 6.9%, Whittlesea 1.3%) the picture was less clear cut in the rural areas, with disadvantaged area of East Gippsland having a higher rate than its twinned advantaged area of Macedon Ranges (9.1% c/f 7.4%), and the advantaged area of Alpine having a higher rate than its paired disadvantaged area of Mount Alexander (9.8% c/f 6.8%).

Cricket teams

The number of registered cricket players was not available, so the total male population aged 5 to 55 years was divided by the number of cricket clubs for each LGA to calculate a ratio. This ratio was much lower in country areas, ranging from 1:369 in Mount Alexander shire to 1:1,230 in East Gippsland, while in metro areas it ranged from 1:1,789 in Bayside to 1:5,223 in Yarra Ranges. In all but one instance, the disadvantaged LGA

had a lower ratio than the advantaged LGA, indicating that cricket clubs are more accessible in disadvantaged areas. The exception to this was Bayside, which had a ratio of 1:1,789 compared to a ratio of 1:1,909 for Maribyrnong.

Lawn bowls clubs

Data on the number of bowls clubs and the number of players registered in each club was available from the Royal Victorian Bowls Association. This enabled both the ratio and the rate to be calculated, using the total population aged 55 years or older for each LGA.

The ratio varied widely from a low of 1:683 in Alpine shire to a high of 1:11,552 in Whittlesea. In all cases the ratio in rural areas was lower than the ratio in metro areas, and the differences between advantaged and disadvantaged rural areas did not follow a consistent pattern. The pattern in metro areas was consistent and pronounced, with Bayside having a lower ratio than Maribyrnong (1:2,298 c/f 1:3,349) and Yarra Ranges having a lower ratio than Whittlesea (1:3,227 c/f 1:11,552) indicating that advantaged metro areas had better access to lawn bowls clubs than disadvantaged metro areas, but all rural areas had better access than all metro areas in the study.

The same pattern was also evident in the participation rate amongst those aged over 55, with rural areas having higher rates ranging from 3.6% in Alpine to 5.3% in Macedon Ranges and East Gippsland, and metro areas having lower rates, ranging from 1.2% in Whittlesea to 3.4% in Bayside. There was no notable difference in participation rates between each of the four sets of paired LGAs, with the exception of Yarra Ranges (2.8% and Whittlesea (1.2%).

Junior soccer players

The Football Federation of Victoria was able to supply the number of registered participants in junior soccer competitions in various LGAs for Victoria. Junior soccer is not played in all of the areas in the study, with only one of the rural LGAs having a competition (Macedon Ranges, with a participation rate amongst all those aged 5 to 19

years of 2.2%). All four of the metro LGAs had junior soccer competitions, and the participation rate ranged from a low of 0.7% in Maribyrnong to a high of 9.2% in Bayside. The difference between advantaged and disadvantaged areas was reversed in the outer metro areas, with Whittlesea having a participation rate of 3.3% compared to Yarra Ranges with a rate of 1.2%.

Scout groups

The Victorian branch of Scouts Australia supplied data on the number of scout groups in each of the local government areas in the study. This ranged from a low of three groups in Mount Alexander to a high of 29 groups in Yarra ranges. The total male population aged 10 to 19 years in each LGA was then used to calculate a ratio for each group. With the exception of Alpine having a particularly low ratio (1:162, indicating a relatively high level of accessibility), the ratio amongst the three remaining rural LGAs appears to be consistent, ranging between a low of 1:357 in the disadvantaged area of East Gippsland, and a high of 1:448 in the advantaged shire of Macedon Ranges. There was considerable difference between the advantaged and disadvantaged LGAs in the metro area, with Bayside and Yarra Ranges having substantially lower ratios (1:487 and 1:326) than the disadvantaged areas of Maribyrnong and Whittlesea (1:781 and 1:1,578), indicating higher levels of accessibility in the advantaged areas.

Neighbourhood houses

The number of Neighbourhood Houses in each LGA was determined from the Association of Neighbourhood Houses and Learning Centres. This ranged from a low of one in Alpine shire to a high of 11 in both East Gippsland and Yarra Ranges. A ratio was calculated using the total population of each of the LGAs divided by the number of neighbourhood houses in that LGA in order to determine the number of people potentially serviced by each house. With the exception of Alpine (1:13,142) all of the rural LGAs were better serviced by Neighbourhood Houses than the metro areas, although this does not take into account the distances people may have to travel to reach the houses. In the metro areas there was no consistent pattern, with the disadvantaged

area of Maribyrnong being better serviced than its advantaged pair Bayside (1:20,664 c/f 1:22,264), while the advantaged area of Yarra Ranges had the best ratio of the metro areas (1:12,995) and its disadvantaged pair Whittlesea had the worst (1:42,016).

Amateur theatre, drama and bands

The number of amateur theatre and drama groups and local volunteer bands, excluding professional musicians listed in each local government community directory was counted, and the total population of each LGA was divided by this number to determine the ratio of groups to population. As there is no central register or umbrella organisation for these groups, it is difficult to ascertain how inclusive and comprehensive these listings are. The number of groups listed ranged from three in Mount Alexander and Whittlesea to 12 in Bayside, with no groups being listed in East Gippsland. With the exception of East Gippsland, there did not appear to be consistent patterns of difference in the ratio between rural and metro areas, with Alpine having the lowest ratio (1:2,628), Mount Alexander, Bayside, Maribyrnong and Yarra Ranges all having ratios between 1:5,500 and 1:7,000. The ratio for Macedon Ranges was close to 1:10,000 (1:9,981), while the ratio for Whittlesea was substantially higher than all the others at 1:42,016.

Historical societies, local and family history groups

The number of historical societies, local and family history groups listed in each local government community directory was counted, and the total population of each LGA was divided by this number to determine the ratio of groups to population. As in the previous example it is difficult to ascertain how inclusive and comprehensive these listings are. The number of groups ranged from a low of two in Maribyrnong and Whittlesea, and a high of 13 in East Gippsland. This type of group was more accessible in the four rural areas in the study, with the ratios ranging from 1:564 in Mount Alexander to 1:4,991 in Macedon Ranges. Local history groups were less accessible in the metro areas, and particularly less so in the two disadvantaged LGAs, with Maribyrnong having a ratio of 1:30,966 and Whittlesea 1:63,024.

Ethnicity specific groups

The number of ethnicity specific groups listed in each local government community directory was counted, and the total overseas born population of each LGA was divided by this number to determine the ratio of groups to population. As in the previous example it is difficult to ascertain how inclusive and comprehensive these listings are. Only four of the LGAs in the study had this form of group listed, Alpine, Bayside, Maribyrnong and Whittlesea. Of these, Alpine had the lowest ratio (1:467) followed by Maribyrnong (1:532), Whittlesea (1:1,141) and Bayside (1:6,442).

Discussion

There are a number of limits to these data. As a result of using data that were readily accessible there is a strong bias towards traditional organised sport, and a bias away from less centrally coordinated groups. The methodology used is also unlikely to detect smaller groups that do not have a profile outside of their immediate community and who have little or no contact with local government or peak bodies. The particular activities examined may have a bias towards particular segments in the general population that may be over represented in some LGAs and underrepresented in others, and less so in others, painting a very particular view of what community group participation looks like.

The two main variables under consideration in this study are advantage/disadvantage and rural/metro. When examined in conjunction, it would appear that geographic location has a stronger impact than disadvantage in determining access to community groups, with groups in rural areas generally being much more accessible than those in metro areas. Within the rural areas there were no consistent differences between advantaged and disadvantaged areas, while in metro areas the patterns were consistent, with the advantaged areas having better access than the disadvantaged areas. Overall, rural areas generally had better access than even the advantaged metro areas.

The methodology of this study may have produced a particular bias in the results, but this bias is a reflection of a broader issue that has an effect on the ability of people to access community groups and their commensurate benefits. The fact that smaller, low profile

groups and activities are difficult to detect for the researcher is an indication that they may also be difficult to detect for local government area residents outside of an immediate small grouping. It may also be the case that the inability to detect community groups in some LGAs may actually be because those groups don't exist at all. The two local government areas in the study where community groups were least accessible, Whittlesea and Maribyrnong, are both areas with a high proportion of residents born overseas, and it is possible that this is having some impact on their ability to access community groups. This may be the result of language difficulties, or it may be a more complex cultural issue of the appropriateness or 'fit' with this particular style of community engagement. It is quite possible that many people arriving in Australia from other countries are coming from places with a strong, place based local culture of community inclusiveness and engagement that does not require formal group structures, and that the migration process has dislocated this sense of community, leaving them ill equipped to re-engage with community in a manner that is foreign to them. However these thoughts are speculation, and it is beyond the scope of this data to prove or deny such conjecture.

Part two – a study of the function of playgroups in selected Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Victoria.

The second part of the study consists of a survey of two play groups in each of the eight local government areas chosen for this study (see methodology section). The areas explored in this study include membership, governance, funding and culture. These areas were chosen based on a review of the literature around community groups and healthy function (Pope, 2006; Manton & Salem, 1995; Brown et al, 2007). Membership examines recruitment processes, membership turnover and induction. Governance examines board and committee structures and function, annual general meetings, and rules of association. Funding examines the scale, source and security of funding sources for the groups, while culture examines role opportunities, leadership opportunities, codes of conduct and social opportunities provided by the groups.

Methodology

As sampling a number of different types of groups is beyond the resources available to this study, it was decided to concentrate on a closer examination of one particular type of group that could be found in sufficient numbers in all of the local government areas in the study. Playgroups were chosen as there were a substantial number in each local government area and participation in playgroups cuts across a number of social and cultural divisions.

Playgroups Victoria, the umbrella group for playgroups in this state, was approached and agreed to participate in the study by contacting 24 of their regular members, passing on an information sheet (see appendix X) and inviting them to participate in the study. Once the participants had given their approval to Playgroups Victoria, they were then contacted by a researcher who conducted a ten minute phone interview. The data was then entered into a Microsoft Access database and examined to see if there were any patterns in the data that may be related to geographic location or level of advantage or disadvantage. As the scale of this study is limited, and it is difficult to obtain a definitive sample frame, the final results will be indicative rather than definitive.

Results

As a result of the timing of the study over the summer vacation period, only 12 playgroups were able to be contacted for the study. Of these, five from advantaged areas and seven from disadvantaged areas, and seven were from metro areas and five were from rural Victoria. Due to the small numbers the analysis was limited to comparing disadvantaged with advantaged areas in aggregate, and rural and metropolitan areas in aggregate.

Membership

For playgroups in the advantaged areas, the average size of the group was 49 children, (median = 18) and the groups had existed for an average of 7.4 years. In the disadvantaged areas the average number of children was 40 (median = 16), and the groups had existed for an average of 11 years. Playgroups in disadvantaged areas were less likely to promote themselves than groups in advantaged areas (57% c/f 80%), with respondents in these areas indicating that there was a high demand for free or low cost playgroups in these areas which meant that many remained fully subscribed without promotion.

When metropolitan and rural playgroups were compared, the metro groups had an average of 52 children (median = 15), and had existed for an average of six years, while the rural groups had an average of 32 children (median = 22) and had existed for an average of 13.8 years. Rural groups were more likely to promote themselves than metro groups (100% c/f 43%), using methods such as flyers in community health centres

Governance

Participants were asked about a number of areas related to governance, in order to gain a sense of the experience of governance that participants were being exposed to. The areas asked about included:

- did they have any induction process?

- Is there a board or committee?
- Do they have an annual general meeting (AGM)?
- Are there any rules of association?

There was little difference between the advantaged and disadvantaged groups, apart from two areas. The disadvantaged groups were less likely to have a board or committee (43% c/f 60%), and less likely to have rules of association (29% c/f 60%). When rural and metro areas were compared there were no differences of note, apart from more rural playgroups having a board or committee than metro groups (60% c/f 43%).

Funding

Participants were asked which of the following bands best described the total turnover for their group:

- \$0 to \$500
- \$501 to \$1,000
- \$1,001 to \$2,500
- more than \$2,500

A higher proportion of metropolitan groups had financial resources greater than \$2,500 than rural groups, with 43% of the metropolitan groups having a turnover of more than \$2,500, while only 20% of the rural groups had a turnover this high. When groups in advantaged and disadvantaged areas were compared, a higher proportion of groups in the disadvantaged area had a turnover greater than \$2,500 compared to groups in advantaged areas (43% c/f 20%).

When the source of funding was examined, a higher proportion of metropolitan playgroups were funded entirely by member fees compared to those in rural areas (71% c/f 20%), while rural groups were more likely to have diverse sources of funding. There was only one group that was fully funded by a recurrent local government grant, and this group was located in a disadvantaged metro area. All groups in advantaged areas were funded by members fees for 75% to 100% of their funding, while groups in

disadvantaged areas relied on more diverse sources of funding, including fundraising and local government recurrent funding.

Culture

The culture of the group was assessed through asking if the group had a code of conduct and a mission statement, as well as asking if the group offered different jobs or roles for people, the opportunity to move between jobs, and opportunities for leadership. The aim of these questions was to gain a sense of any differences in the experience of participating in the group.

Disadvantaged area groups were *less* likely to have a mission statement (29% c/f 80%), less likely to provide the opportunity for people to move between roles (60% c/f 86%), and less likely to offer leadership opportunities (60% c/f 86%). Playgroups in disadvantaged areas were *more* likely to have a code of conduct (57% c/f 20%), and were more likely to have different jobs or roles for participants to take on (86% c/f 40%). There was little difference between the rural and metro groups, with the exception of different jobs or roles for participants, with this being more likely to happen in rural areas than metro ones (80% c/f 57%).

Discussion

Due to the small sample size, the results from this section should be regarded with caution. Differences in formal governance processes were evident between groups in the advantaged and disadvantaged areas, with those in the advantaged areas more likely to have a board or committee, and written rules of association. These two features were chosen as an indicator of familiarity with organisational process and procedure, skills that arguably result in more effective function of a group or organisation, and ultimately a greater degree of empowerment through the ability to formulate effective action. It therefore comes as no surprise that they are more strongly associated with areas of

advantage, and the lack of this experience and skills may make a contribution to the perpetuation of disadvantage.

A more complex story was evident when looking at financial resources available to playgroups. Groups in advantaged areas were predominantly funded by member fees, not relying on outside funding, or having to conduct fundraising activities. Groups in rural areas were most likely to have diverse sources of funding, drawing on local communities and local government, particularly in disadvantaged rural areas. The only group that was run by a paid staff member was funded through a local government grant in a disadvantaged metropolitan area, which, while indicative of efforts being made to overcome disadvantage, is also indicative of an underlying disadvantage, and a deficit that needs to be rectified.

Differences were also evident in the cultural experience of participating in groups, dependent on the geographical location of the groups, with those in advantaged areas offering a different experience to those in disadvantaged areas. The presence of mission statements and opportunities for experience in different roles and leadership in groups in advantaged areas potentially results in skills and confidence gained that can be utilised in other areas of life and community involvement. However the higher proportion of groups from disadvantaged areas with codes of conduct is possibly indicative of effective dispute resolution processes, also a valuable skill.

It is important to keep in mind that many of the aspects of group functioning examined in this survey are not, in and of themselves, reproducing patterns of advantage or disadvantage, but they may serve as an indicator of broader patterns in particular areas, that in many subtle ways perpetuate patterns of disadvantage. A larger scale study of these patterns is warranted in order to ascertain if this thesis bears out across a broader cross section of community groups.

Conclusion

In the final week of this placement, an article was published in People and Place journal that reported on the findings of a study of census data that found rates of volunteerism were lower in areas where a high proportion of the population was born overseas. While details of the study were unavailable at the time of writing, preliminary reports of the findings appear to be consistent with the findings of this study, where the number of community groups, and the participation rates in community groups, were lowest in disadvantaged metropolitan areas with high rates of people born overseas.

While the first part of the study may have a bias towards larger, more organised groups, as well as high profile groups, it is these groups that, by virtue of their prominence, are most likely to have access to resources, as well as having more formal governance structures and participation cultures as a result of their relationship with overarching organisations and their governance frameworks. It is hard to see how a lack of access to these resources could be beneficial to groups that fell outside of the range of this study. This does not preclude the presence of other forms of community that do not exist around formalised groups, and instead follow other cultural models, but again, the lack of awareness and visibility of such patterns of community denies them access to material and human resources.

It appears that it is not disadvantage in and of itself that has an effect on the scale and nature of community groups in different locations, as community in homogenous disadvantaged rural areas appears to be stronger than in advantaged metro areas, indicating that there are more complex forces at play than simple disadvantage. Understanding the complexity of this relationship is beyond the scope of this study, which can do little more than indicate its presence. This complex relationship between rural and metropolitan, advantaged and disadvantaged is one that warrants further, detailed exploration in order to be better understood, in order that perpetuating cycles of disadvantage can be more effectively overcome.

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Appendix one – the questionnaire

Section one – The Basics	
1 What is the name of the group or organization?	
2 What is the principal activity of the group?	Playgroup
3 What is the LGA where group is located	
4 Approximately how many years has the group existed for?	
5 Approximately how many members does the group currently have?	
Section two – Membership	
6 What sort of people does the group target or attract?	
7 What proportion of your members have been there for more than 12 months?	
8 Have you done any promotional activity to attract new members in the last 12 months? (if yes) can you tell me a bit about what you've done?	Yes No
9 Do you have any induction processes for new members, things like information sessions or handbooks?	Yes No

Section three – Governance	
10 Do you have a board or a committee of management?	Yes No
11 (if yes) How often do they meet?	
12 (if yes) What is the process for people being accepted onto the board/committee?	
13 Do you have an annual general meeting?	Yes No
14 Do you have formal, written rules of association?	Yes No
Section four – Funding	
15 Which of the following categories would best describe your annual funding in a typical year?	1. \$0 to \$500 2. \$501 to \$1,000 3. \$1,001 to \$2,500 4. more than \$2,500
16 In a typical year, what proportion of your funds are derived directly from members?	
17 In a typical year, what proportion of your funds are derived from fundraising activities carried out by your members? (things like raffles or trivia nights)	
18 In a typical year, what proportion of your funding comes from regular, annual grants from some sort of funding body, such as local or state government?	
19 In a typical year, what proportion of your funding comes from one off grants from places like local government (just for the last 12 months)	

Section five – Culture	
20 How often does your group or organization have regular meetings and/or activities? (if the club is focused on seasonal activities, such as sport, then ask them to think of the frequency during a typical season)	1. more than weekly 2. weekly 3. several times a month 4. monthly 5. several times a year 6. once a year
21 Would your members usually have any sort of contact between meetings and/or events?	Yes No
22 Does your group or organization have a written code of conduct or ethics for members?	Yes No
23 Does your group or organization have a written mission or values statement?	Yes No
24 Does your group or organization have different sorts of roles or jobs for people to take on, or are all the roles much the same?	Yes No
25 Is there an opportunity for your members to move between different roles, or do people usually stay doing the same thing?	Yes No
26 Do people have the opportunity to take on leadership roles in your group or organization?	Yes No
Thank you for your time.	

Appendix two – the information for participants letter



The Our Community/La Trobe University Community Group Audit - a study about the role of community groups in health and wellbeing.

Our Community, in conjunction with La Trobe University, is conducting a study about community groups and the communities they come from.

The aims of the study are to look at the total number of groups that operate in a number of different local government areas in Victoria, some urban, some rural, and all covering a range of advantage and disadvantage to see if any of these factors might make a difference to the number of groups that exist. The study also aims to look at how a selection of clubs in different areas organise themselves, to see if there are any differences there.

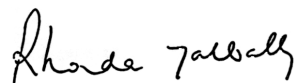
We have chosen your group at random either from a local government directory of community groups or a directory put out by the state peak body for your organisation.

The purpose of this letter is to invite your community group to participate in this study. Participation involves answering a set of questions about some of the general aspects of your group. The questions will be asked over the phone by a trained interviewer, and should take no more than fifteen minutes of your time. At no stage will you be asked to provide anybody's name, or any specific details about any of your members. A copy of the questions is attached to this letter, you do not need to fill this out, the interviewer will do this over the telephone.

An interviewer will contact your organisation by phone, using the number listed in the directory to arrange a time to conduct the interview. You are also under no obligation to participate in the study, and are free to say no, but your participation will assist us to better understand how valuable community organisations are to society, and how important their role is.

Thank you for taking the time to read this, and any assistance you can offer this project will be greatly appreciated.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rhonda Galbally". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

DR RHONDA GALBALLY AO
Chief Executive Officer