

ANGLICAN ADVOCACY

A Community Organising
Pilot for Civic Participation and Advocacy

Introduction

In 2016 Anglican Advocacy undertook a community organising project in Christchurch as a pilot to see if this was a viable working model for our work. This report outlines the outcomes of the project and discusses the process.

Like community development, community organising seeks to bring a community together to address their own needs. However, a community development outcome might be project based such as setting up a toy library or shared garden. Community organising usually focuses on resolving a problem the solution to which involves influencing an external decision maker. Anglican Advocacy's primary goal for this project was not just the resolution of a problem identified by the community, but to increase civic participation and build community power to advocate for themselves.

The need for this sort of project was illustrated during the Christchurch earthquake when two schools were threatened with closure – one in a low socio-economic neighbourhood, one in a well-off neighbourhood. The difference in resources, pre-existing relationships with decision makers and professional advocacy skills that these two communities had access to was significant. It is this community capacity rather than just 'solving an issue' that community organising seeks to enhance.

This community organising project involved:

- Selecting a geographic area to pilot the project.
- Identify existing local community groups to work with.
- Identifying a community felt problem requiring external resolution
- Agree upon a solution
- Establish a core group of community members to lead the project
- Clarify a S.M.A.R.T goal
- Identifying the person or body able to deliver the solution
- Developing a strategy appropriate to the identified decision maker/s
- Action
- Reflection

All of these steps were done with two outcomes in mind. Firstly, accomplishing each step towards the goal. Secondly, ensuring that the way in which each step was accomplished engaged as many people as possible, developed local leadership, and built community capacity.

A Special thanks to Dove Charitable Trust who supported this project.

“It empowered us to be able to do it for ourselves next time.”

Community Member

Review of the project

To evaluate whether this way of operating was a good use of Anglican Advocacy's limited funding a community researcher (Sarah McKay) was engaged to assess the outcome of the project. Sarah worked with and supported Anglican Advocacy to develop a plan to assess the initiative right from the beginning and review it as it progressed.

Method

The methodology for the review largely consists of a modified form of self-review. An important aspect of self-review is the use of information gathered to inform the project as it progresses.

Because the overall aim of the project was not simply a successful outcome for the identified community problem, the review helped to move measures of success away from either 'pass' or 'fail', and included civic participation and sense of empowerment as part of the outcome.

The data gathered for this report consisted of interviews with Anglican Advocacy, a focus group and one-on-one interview with key people from the community involved in the project. The data was analysed using thematic analysis that allowed common themes to emerge.

Ethics statement

In line with the ethical practice of the key workers involved in this project, the dignity and worth of every individual, the integrity of families/ whānau, and the diversity of communities and cultures is respected throughout. Informed consent was sought from all participants in the focus groups and interviews. The researcher sent a draft write up of the data collected and gained their permission from those involved for this information to be published before it was included in the final report. The research component of this project was submitted to The New Zealand Ethics committee for ethical review before the research was conducted.

The Community Voice

The majority of this report consists of the comments from the community based on the questions asked in the focus groups and interviews. This includes information from a focus group with key community members involved in the project called the 'core group'. There is a small discussion from Anglican Advocacy at the end of the report outlining some of the issues encountered in the process of initiating and conducting the project.

How the community became involved?

When asked how they had heard about the community organising project participants said through the Bromley Community Centre committee, word of mouth and attending a community meeting about the project.

One participant commented that the Bromley Community Centre committee had welcomed the offer to take part in the community organising project.

“And we jumped on board because as a community centre we need to know what the people need but we haven't got the time or the money or the resources to go out there door knocking... or the process of how to do it...And that's where they [Anglican Advocacy] were great.”

Deciding on a community problem to address

Anglican Advocacy had conducted a door knocking exercise before a public meeting and came with some information about community problems that were important to people. Participants reported that there was significant discussion from community members about community problems and concerns at the meeting.

“We were probably thinking a bit small initially like fixing the playground and then it came up about safety, so we talked a lot about safety... our biggest problem is the children that are racing across Bromley road in between cars on their scooters because nobody stops for them... we have 360 kids in our school ... we threw ideas around, we talked a lot about the pedestrian crossing... we all got down to the stage that we would like to try for the crossing for the safety of the children and the elderly and the community...”

They were just so proud of themselves. Half of them have never been in town and they were like “what's that” and “what's that” and we took photos of the town hall and the civic rooms

School teacher part of the core group

Participants identified that the process of choosing a problem to address took time so that “everyone could have their say”. One participant noted that this was important as it is a community where people don't often speak up and they need to know that their voice matters. Participants said that at times people were frustrated in the decision making process as other very important problems such as housing were also identified as potential issues.

"...it took a couple of months to get there... [this was good] everyone having their say... I think it's important when you've got a community like ours where a lot of people don't speak up, they need to know that they have a voice in the world and in the community and even if they are not prepared to stand up, they are prepared to stand behind..."

"...we talked about [other issues] and I said that's probably not doable we wanted something that was doable and we could get a result [from], so that the people of the community knew that, 'hey this driving group and the petition that I signed has actually gone somewhere...' that was the thing because [Anglican Advocacy's] time with us was limited and you wanted something that you could get a result, you don't want a five-year project..."

"I think the hardest thing was initially working out what we could do and then the crossing idea took a while because you've got to be prepared to sit down and hear all the ideas..."

Was the project community led?

When asked about whether the community led nature of the initiative was communicated at the start of the project participants said yes. When asked why they thought that it is important for a project such as this to be community led participants said that the community 'are the best people to work out which issues are important', people need to 'step up and be accountable for what's happening in their area' and unless a project is community driven it will lose momentum.

"I think all of these things need to be community driven. They [Anglican Advocacy] were there to spike it but we need to get the community, the people, the parents, to actually support these things that are happening in the community because otherwise they will just die."

"...Unfortunately, we didn't have a lot who were volunteering to help but we did have a lot of people who had a lot to say."

"Although people seemed to be interested at the start, it sort of waned off as we went along... so it was quite hard to [keep people involved]."

"... because it's really hard to get the community [to be involved]. They are really interested but when it comes down to it honestly without [Anglican Advocacy] this would not have happened."

"This is a community where people don't often speak up and they need to know that their voice matters"

Community Member

Strategies that were employed by the core group to make community members aware of the project and involve them in it included:

- A community petition
- Talking to parents about the project at the school
- Putting up notices
- A children's colouring competition
- Promoting the project at a community fair
- Promoting the project at the Bromley Community Centre

- Keeping people updated about the project on an email list
- Inviting parents, children and other community members to the Hagley-Ferrymead Community Board deputation
- Taking children to do a presentation about the project to the Christchurch City Council

“...we went to the school and talked to parents... we went to the entrance and talked to people as they were coming out...”

“... [there was] a great idea of having a colouring competition and [the community organiser was] just trying to get everyone on board, not us doing it but the wider community doing it and asking ‘how do we get the community to do it?’ and so they had a colouring in competition and prizes were given out and that went into the paper. So that we could get lots of feedback.”

The community organising process

Participants noted the value of firstly identifying the steps that needed to be undertaken to address the issue and then following through on them. This included finding out about who was able to actually say yes to what was wanted, how to talk to them about it, and the process they needed to follow to do this. Gathering information about the issue such as counting traffic in the affected area was also important.

“... so then with [Anglican Advocacy’s] help we formed a small group...then we talked about roles and what we could all do like me putting up notices... and people going down and interviewing parents...and we [met regularly] and then just sticking to [the plan] ...”

“...and then I also did statistics of the traffic on the road I just sat out there and did that.”

A particularly powerful strategy that was employed was taking community members, including children from the local school, to the Community Board and City Council meeting to advocate for the issue.

“...so the children [from the school] and myself and a couple of community spokespeople we spoke to the council at the [Hagley-Ferrymead Community Board deputation]. We took our petition and we had letters from the children...and we’d done some surveys, I’d taken my class out the road we counted cars and trucks and we had all that graphed... that was awesome, that went really well...”

“It was great that the council lady came [to the school] because that exposed three classes to what she does... [she spoke about] what the process is and how you can take things to council ‘so if there’s something happening in the community and you don’t agree with it then you can have a voice’ and the kids asked questions.”

The role of the community organisers

Participants reflected positively on the information and support that was given to them from Anglican Advocacy. This included the importance of thinking about the steps that needed to happen for the chosen issue to be addressed, and the value of involving people from the community throughout the project. Participants commented on the value of Anglican Advocacy encouraging them to think

strategically They noted that at each stage of the process they were reminded to consider issues such as ‘what we wanted from each meeting’, ‘who was going to speak’, ‘what information we would need’, ‘what outcomes we wanted’ and ‘what were prepared to negotiate on’. This included slowing down the process at one point to ensure that they were well prepared for a key meeting with the community board.

“And [Anglican Advocacy] came along talked to us about the other parts of what you need going to council so he was really beneficial... he just gave us the process...and it was really well set out...Through a system of ‘what’s the best way to go?’, ‘who’s going to support you?’ [and] ‘who do you talk to?’. What steps you take before you take a deputation to the council... he was getting us to [think about] ‘right we need to get people on board, how are we going to get people on board’ ...”

“[The council process] was quite fast actually, that was extremely fast, that was hard... we actually postponed one [meeting] because we didn’t actually have enough information because it’s hard to get everyone together... because we wanted to win and there’s no way we wanted to go in unarmed.”

One participant commented that without (Anglican Advocacy staff members) ongoing commitment, encouragement and support the project ‘would not have happened.’ The way in which they supported the project rather than ‘doing it for the community’ was highly valued.

“It was done through the community centre and it was all done from here and [Anglican Advocacy] just sort of led it but at the same time didn’t take over it, it was always them putting it back to us...it was always offered not [imposed]...It was always us together.”

“...for me I wouldn’t have known where to start so it was good just having someone that we could all turn to...”

“And even when we were flagging they kept us going ...yeah I think it was the motivation, perhaps that would have been the hardest thing, to keep going.”

“...she was always emailing and texting and ringing, offering food at meetings.”

“I think [Anglican Advocacy staff] had fantastic communication skills to keep everyone informed and motivated so that was a big part of it.”

“It was
always
offered not
[imposed]...
It was
always us
together”

Core group
member

The outcome and impact of the project

The overall success of the project is reflected in the procurement of the safety crossing for the community within a shorter timeframe than was originally indicated.

“It’s finalised, they are going to have it done by the end of this year. So that got pushed forward because it was going to be in 2017 or 18... so they did agree to that.”

Participants noted the positive impact of the community rather than someone from outside of the community addressing the problem. They reflected on the importance of community ownership and empowerment that comes from this.

“It empowers us to be able to do it for ourselves next time.”

“I think it was great, it was really nice to see that these people were empowered enough to actually go and do that and to see the kids and people you know patting them on the back, being involved, because that’s what the [community] center is about.”

“Once its [the safety crossing] is up and running they will see our success and see that you can do it.”

In addition, participants identified a number of broader positive benefits that came from the project.

“There’s more people now particularly from the school who will be prepared to step up and be there for whatever we are fighting for next.”

“I think now from what this process has done its made the parents who go to the school aware that there are people out there prepared to fight for the community and they are most welcome to be on board with that.”

Participants commented that the project helped to add to the knowledge and capacity of those who undertook it, with some saying that ‘now they have the process, they would be able to undertake a similar project without assistance’.

“We know, we have a process and we were given (resources) with the steps of how to go about things now.”

“Knowing the council process it makes it a little less daunting now we know that it’s not really as bad as you think going to a deputation would be...”

“There’s more people... who will be prepared to step up and be there for whatever we are fighting for next”

Core group Member

Stronger ongoing connections between the community, community board and city council; and between the Bromley Community Centre and the local school were also identified.

“Yeah we had people like city councillors and now they’ve been coming to other things since that too.”

“I think the school knows who we are more now.”

“I don’t think this would have happened without the school because that really motivated [the project] - the safety of the children... rather than [just adults being involved].”

The impact of the children taking part in the project

Participants discussed the value of including children from the local primary school in the project with one participant saying that the children ‘were pretty excited about it.’

“We did the [colouring in completion] and with lots of kids we talked about “why do you think we need a crossing?” and we went out and we watched the cars and we tried to tell them when to cross and not to cross... it was also a teaching opportunity.”

“I think just giving the kids a voice as well from the school because usually it would just be parents or teachers but the kids had a lot of input.”

One participant reflected on the six children who attended and spoke about the safety crossing at a city council meeting. They discussed the positive impact that came from the children experiencing something new and being proud of themselves for their achievement.

“They were just so proud of themselves. Cos we were in town and cos half of them have never been in town and they were like “what’s that” and “what’s that” and we took photos of the town hall and the civic rooms... they got to speak and everyone said how well they’d done... they thought it was incredible and to see the mayor and she said that we should get a crossing, they were just so excited.”

“[The Mayor] said this is the most wonderful thing we’ve had at council for a very long time, a group of children speaking to us.”

This participant talked about the experience as an opportunity for the children to learn that there are processes that they can take part in to affect change in their community and that ‘their voice matters’. They noted that this experience also impacted other children as it was reported back to the whole school.

“...and these kids will live in this community most of them will probably never leave this community and its good for them to know that they can do it, they can get up there and voice their opinion ... I think their barriers are that they just don’t believe that they have the power and knowledge to do something like that... there’s lots of (socio economic issues) in the community.”

“They [came back from council] and they couldn’t stop talking to [the other children]... and then the children were interviewed by a What’s Up Bromley news reporter and then they got to be on a big screen at our assembly (with the interview with the reporter and photos from the council chambers)”

The future

Participants said that when they do another project it would be very important to have at least one person who was adequately resourced and had a recognised amount of time to do the administration for and support the project.

“You almost need a core person who can do all the secretarial administration work for it.”

“You do need a little bit of hierarchy I think with things like that and [this person] has to be committed to giving their time.”

“You do [need to be realistic about the level of participation you’re going to get] because I think the outer group was good, it’s just that inner core, that group that do all of the donkey work, that was lacking.”

Anglican Advocacy’s Reflections on the process:

The process of identifying a community to work in:

- Mapping existing social services to assess gaps.
- Identify active groups.
- Asking if a new project would be seen as adding to or detracting from the capacity of existing groups
- Asking if piloting this project would be welcomed by existing groups, and;
- Assessing how complicated existing relationships organisations were.

Discussing the project with as many people and groups as possible lead us to a greater understanding of the space, and made it clear the damage done by new groups initiating a project with insufficient consultation.

There were a number of significant things we heard consistently during this process, including:

- A sense of community group fatigue. Some reporting that they had tried similar collaborative initiatives without results.
- Organisations are still stretched providing post-earthquake support.
- Previous projects had struggled to get local people and groups working together to address community problems.
- Clear frustration was expressed with people or organisations who started projects without consulting existing groups.
- A recommendation to pilot in an area with fewer established community networks and therefore less community politics with fewer gatekeepers to navigate. This was largely because we only had funding to continue for one year.

Frustration was expressed with organisations that had started projects without consulting existing groups

Bromley was eventually chosen due to it being geographically discrete and underserved by community groups. Bromley was found to be boarded by a number of larger social services but only had one main community group that specifically served its needs, the Bromley Community Center.

Discussing the project, goals and methods with the Community Centre, as well as trying to connect with other organisations and businesses in Bromley took longer than expected. However, this phase of the project could not have been rushed as it laid the relational groundwork for everything that followed.

Key Learning: The absolute basics of one-on-one conversations with community groups and individuals is easy to rush or feel like it is wasted, but it is essential for every aspect of advocacy.

Identifying a community problem

Anglican Advocacy had a set criteria for this phase;

- Finding a community identified problem that people saw as directly affecting them (rather than an abstract problem)
- The identified problem needed to be one requiring a civic/political intervention. This was in keeping with our overall goal of increasing civic participation and building community power.
- The goal needed to be achievable with a 1 year timeframe.

Picking a large, complex problem can result in disillusionment and disempowerment. A small victory builds credibility and community power, giving rather than removing enthusiasm. This builds capacity to tackle a slightly bigger problem second time around. For this reason we were looking for problem that did not require central government intervention.

Through one on one conversations and door knocking 3 issues had emerged by the time a larger community meeting was called:

- The need for a crossing on Bromley Road
- St Johns intersection difficulty in entering traffic
- Hazard Report/ Flooding for Bromley area

Consensus eventually emerged that there is a problem with children getting to school safely. This was largely due to speed of traffic and an increase in big trucks since the earthquake. Although the conversation started with the idea of a crossing, a crossing is only one possible solution to the problem. The actual problem identified was the safety of children due to the speed of traffic and volume of trucks. A tunnel, rerouting the trucks, an overbridge, or a road patrol might also work. Research was required to find what solution was most realistic.

People were invited to form a core group to resolve the problem with assistance from the Bromley Community Centre and Anglican Advocacy. A group was formed.

Key Learning: It can be difficult to focus in on a problem. When someone names an issue, it is usually a blend of the underlying problem with a possible solution. From that point on it is too easy to collect information for that solution and remain reluctant to consider other research and possible solutions.

Identify a solution to the problem

Identifying a clear solution is vital as you cannot campaign about a problem, only a solution.

During ongoing community meetings and one-on-one conversations that the core group had in the community it was clear there was still disagreement about the problem being addressed. Was the problem the heavy traffic flow (that can be problematic in many ways) or was difficulty for children and other community members to cross the road because of the heavy traffic flow?

It also became clear that there had been prior attempts by the residents to contact the Council about the road to no avail. This provided an ongoing barrier to getting people involved. The prior failed attempts and failed phone-calls to discuss the issue with change-makers meant that some people had little belief that involvement in the project would be worth their time.

Throughout this time the core group was gathering information, including;

- Number of children crossing the road
- Volume and speed of trucks.
- Identifying the organisation/person with the ability to yes to the crossing. Community Board? LTNZ? Council?

After a month of discussion about the problem of the road there was a desire from some to increase the scope and try to solve multiple problems. Another community meeting was held to clarify that solving one clear problem was not the end, but was itself part of gaining the experience and power to address additional issues. And that if you try to tackle multiple issues at once you usually end out with nothing.

The slow time and the number of cups of coffee required to eventually settle on one clear solution to one problem was not wasted, although it was unsettling to be 5 months into a 1 year project having only just identified the issue being worked on.

Key learning: If you try to tackle multiple issues at once you usually end up with nothing.

Strategy and keeping the bigger goal in mind.

After a variety of phone conversations and emails the core groups decided that it was the council who had the ability to say yes to their crossing. The community board was identified as the best avenue of access to the council because although deputations to the council are possible a community deputation cannot bring a motion for a vote. The community board, however, can, and are more accessible than council.

At a Bromley Community Centre AGM the project was discussed and gained immediate support from attending members of the community board. A community board member asked the core group to bring a deputation to the community board and booked them in for the following week.

Anglican Advocacy recommended against this encouraging the core group to cancel the deputation in favour of going a month later.

This was to keep the larger goal of increasing participation and power in focus. If the core group went to the community board a success would only be celebrated by those few. The more people who take part in and have ownership over an action the better. Delaying a month allowed time to get more people excited to attend if possible, but at least have a stake in the outcome. This was done through more one on one conversation, flyers, and a community petition.

At the deputation the room was packed with community members and school kids; those who had experienced near misses on the road were identified. A letter of support from the wider community was presented.

We also encouraged the core group to be clear about the goal of the community board deputation. The deputation asked the community board to bring a motion to council to support the crossing, and advocate on their behalf. If the goal of approaching the community board had simply been to ask for the crossing the community board would likely have said a study was needed and that it would also need to go to council. A yes is more exciting than a partial yes, and builds people's enthusiasm.

Working with the school and bringing children to events became a practice throughout the project as they are among those most directly impacted by it.

Key Learning: It is important to constantly evaluate an action against your goals. It is easy to suffer mission drift or have the direction dictated by others - even allies can have a slightly different agenda.

The follow-through.

After the initial success and positive reception by the Community Board the road, the campaign gained momentum. The Community Board also commissioned a report on the road.

As a core team various actions were taken to keep the issue in front of the decision makers:

1. Regular emails to the Community Board updating them on the continued support of the community.
2. Inquiring about the dates that Council staff will be collecting data on the road
 - Going to meet these staff and talk with them/point out concerns
3. Inquiring when the report will be released
4. Continued to gather more allies in the community
 - Children's colouring competition
 - Announcing winners of competition at the annual Bromley Fair
 - Having Councillors choose the winners
 - Sending photos of the children's pictures to Community Board
 - Having ongoing meetings to keep the group discussing the direction of the project
 - Having a community member interviewed by a local paper and talk about the project pushing for the crossing

- Sending this article to the Community Board
- Continuing to gather the names/contacts on the letter of support

Because a key goal was about ensuring the success was shared by as many as possible, it was important to find ways to continue to engage people even when the project was just waiting on the outcome of a report. Purposeful actions kept people to engaged and ensured that the project was not lost in the many demands on council time. Communicating with everyone involved about the progress towards sign-off was an important aspect of this engagement even if the update was to let people know nothing had changed in the last week.

It should be noted that the community board were particularly helpful. They were fantastic in supporting the community project in a variety of ways.

Final reflection

Although the whole process took place with a community center, it is the hope of Anglican Advocacy to try the same community engagement approach with a church Parish. There seems to be a great deal of potential in a geographically located parish with no political or NGO alignment to draw a community together to overcome common problems. A Parish is also a membership based group with connections into the community that are diverse and wide.

Hopefully there would also be a positive benefit to the Parish. The community involved with this project said they had learnt important skills, that there had been an increase in community connectedness, and that 'now they have the process, they would be able to undertake a similar project without assistance'.

However, they identified that adequate resources, particularly in an administrative role, would need to be secured for them to conduct another community organising project. Many Parishes are busy with their day-to-day operations so it would be important for them to consider whether they could dedicate sufficient resources before beginning. Anglican Advocacy is available to talk through the possibilities and challenges if a Parish or Church community is interested.

The community voices in this report are a sample of the larger responses document. If you would like to read more of the community comments or find out more about the community organising or advocacy process please contact us at the below address.