

COMMUNITY STORIES

VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCES FROM OUR COLLECTIVE IMPACT INITIATIVE



Community aspirations and public knowledge have shaped the Connecting Community for Kids (CCK) platform and pathway for social change.

Following 825 community conversations in 2016 and 2017, CCK energised the communities of Cockburn and Kwinana to act and improve early intervention for child health, champion peer to peer support, build connected communities and create pride in culture.

In 2018 seven action teams were formed, and 80 community members were engaged to commence this journey with us. Over the course of the year we held 54 action meetings linking community members and agencies together to jointly progress the initiative's road-map for change.

Not only have community members contributed their voice and local knowledge to our Action and Joint Leadership Teams, they were actively involved in 18 neighbourhood and community events - providing more than 720 hours of direct community engagement and volunteering.

Additionally, many volunteers received training and are now Community Mothers supporting at risk mums to gain strength in the community.

During 2018 community members represented almost half of those involved in our decision making and action teams. Community champions contribute to meetings, co-design programs, engage with community at events and influence and motivate the community as a whole to work together to help children thrive.

CCK Community Champions are mainly parents of young children living in the local area. A few have already raised their families and are now giving back to the community. Some have experienced anxiety around parenting, changes to their socio-economic circumstances since having children, adverse life experiences and social isolation in the community. Some have enjoyed positive parenting experiences and stability in their life and wish to support others in this journey.

We interviewed 13 of our Community Champions to find out more about the experiences they have had during their time with CCK.

“The success of collective impact depends on genuine ownership by the larger community, and that starts with placing value on both expert knowledge and public knowledge, which can come only from authentically engaging the community.”

Rick Harwood (2014)
Stanford Social Innovation Review

“Communities used to work together to raise children. Now everyone is going it alone. So if you can get involved in a community project like this, then why not - only good things can come of it.”

Connecting Community for Kids
Community Champion



WHY DID YOU GET INVOLVED?

For many, the involvement as a Community Champion started through meeting CCK at a community event, participating in an advertised community engagement workshop or via an invitation from a group or service they were already connected with. This first contact often came at a time where they were seeking more social connections.

Community spirit was strong

"I wanted to be more connected with the community."

"I become involved to make a difference in my community."

"My father showed me community work and now I am showing my children"

"After I had my second child it was really difficult for me. I got post-natal depression and it was really hard to know that was what was happening and then seek help for it. I finally did and it was amazing. Now I wanted to be able to do that for someone else."

Some were looking for a new work/life balance.

"Your life changes after children. I don't want to work long hours. I have a different point of view now. I don't know where this will take me, it is good for now".

For some volunteering was a new experience.

"I never thought I would be a volunteer. It was something I had not looked at before."

CCK offered something a little bit different.

"There was nothing else like it in Cockburn: creche, my friends, coffee, food, not having to prepare anything. Initially I thought it was good to help, but then it changed from just coming along as a volunteer to getting some really amazing training."

"I could see CCK was about having a practical impact and really doing something for the community."



WHAT CHANGES HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED AS A RESULT?

Community Champions were asked "What changes have resulted from your involvement?" They were prompted to consider this from three perspectives: themselves, their families and the community. In the changes described we see evidence of a range of protective factors important for positive early childhood development:

- Individual capacity building;
- Creation of social networks and increased social capital;
- Building of positive family environments; and
- Increased social cohesion and cultural connection within communities.

As a result of being involved with Connecting Community for Kids, Community Champions have felt empowered to contribute to social change, have built their confidence and self-esteem and improved their social networks.

Improved social connections

With a strong focus on bringing families and children from different walks of life together and encouraging and supporting families to participate in community activities, CCK has made a difference to people experiencing social isolation. Strong friendships have formed.

"I am going out to meet a lady through the Community Mothers.....it is helping her and helping me. It is giving me a reason to go out and my daughter comes with me so it is helping me with social connections and getting back into community life."

"We never really spoke to our neighbours very much. Now I know, through involvement and through kids, loads of people who live in my suburb."

A greater sense of place and belonging

A sense of place and belonging is an important value that can build individual resilience and strong communities. The place-based approach has linked Community Champions to their own community.

"I am more motivated to share and contribute to my community."

Workforce Participation

As a result of more confidence, motivation, new social connections and personal growth we have seen Community Champions gain employment or become more prepared for participation in the workforce. One community member attributes her new employment opportunity to the connections CCK gave her with local government.

"I used the experiences from being involved to make myself more attractive in the job market."

"Given the opportunity to see other women flourish has helped me build confidence and desire to get back into the workplace".



Improved parenting and child outcomes

A significant impact for Community Champions is the reflection on their own home and parenting.

CCK makes it possible for parents of young children to volunteer as we provide a family friendly environment, as well as crèche and activities where children are involved in the collective action.

"Since being involved in CCK, I have seen lots of different parenting, heard different stories. Seeing people who are doing it really tough has opened my eyes and been quite confronting to see - to know it is what a lot of people are dealing with every day. This has also opened my eyes to how I could be a better as a parent."

"Caring for the future and the community in which my child is growing up is important. My daughter sees mum involved in something and I am showing her what it is to be part of a community"

"I have spoken to my daughter about what I am doing. She is 6. For her to know that mummy is going out and helping another mummy is good for. Even from an early age, it is good to know to help others and motherhood is a difficult thing."

Increased confidence and feeling valued

Community Champions have gained confidence and feelings of self-worth from seeing positive change in the community.

"I get to walk around and say I'm a CCK volunteer. I am not just a mum that stays at home, I have a purpose of doing something that benefits other mums and women."

"Being a part of CCK has made us feel valued. Normally people just judge us on our skin colour. They don't give us the time to speak and try to understand us. It is important for our culture/people to feel valued, listened to, included and connected."

New skills and ideas to apply in other settings

Community Champions have been able to make positive changes in other settings as a result of changed mindsets and new skills. This has contributed to greater participation in community life with many of our Community Champions also involved in advisory groups, community groups and other volunteer roles.

"I have some friends in difficult relationships and now I listen to them and guide them to think about their own situations using the skills I learnt at training."

"One of the things I got out of it was inward thinking versus outward thinking....that changed the way I thought about community, it took me out of my experiences and to look at things more broadly."

Better knowledge of the local area, activities and services

There's a lot happening across Cockburn and Kwinana - activities for family and children, playgroups, parenting courses, services available and groups to join. It may be hard to navigate on-line information, have the language skills or social networks to get involved.

"Through CCK I have been able to find out what is going on in the community a little more."

"I have received lots of information about what is going on in Kwinana, keeping informed and it has helped me to connect to more people in the right areas."



WHAT DIFFERENCE IS THIS MAKING?

Our Community Champions are seeing changes in their community.

"Things are becoming more joined up with everyone getting involved."

"CCK has been one of the contributing things behind the growth of the Chinese Community Association. It has grown. They do many activities for the children and now the Chinese Community is starting a Chinese story time at the library"

"It's created partnerships in the community"

Sometimes, they feel the change has not yet reached their big aspirations.

"I want to see all people coming together. Those who come along and get involved are the same people. New people are not coming. We really need to talk to people door by door. It is hard, but I think we will get the result from this."

"I would like to see continuation of That was My Home, building it into community and involving diverse groups a multicultural festival continued into the next generation."

Community leaders are emerging. The way Community Champions speak about their involvement and explain how they are connecting with others shows the unassuming way volunteers emerge as champions and leaders in the community. For many, the way they are now seen through the eyes of their children, family and friends is carried with pride and humbleness.

"My family have seen me dedicate myself to something."



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HOW HAVE THESE CHANGES COME ABOUT?

The process and the way in which the collective impact initiative engages the community and brings people together is important. From our Community Champions perspective this includes:

- Looking at things from different perspectives
- Having a welcoming environment
- The opportunity to speak and connect with other people
- Accepting all people and supporting every-one from different cultures and languages
- Authenticity
- Involvement in design of projects (co-design)
- Bringing different people together

COMMUNITY ARE DRIVING CHANGE THROUGH 5 APPROACHES FOR IMPROVED CHILDHOOD OUTCOMES



THE VOICE OF
COMMUNITY IS
BEING HEARD

CHILDREN & FAMILIES
ARE GETTING MORE
INVOLVED IN THE
COMMUNITY

STRONGER COMMUNITIES
ARE SUPPORTING
CHILDREN TO GROW &
DEVELOP



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