

John Stansfield, Head of Department of Social Practice, Unitec

Address to the AGM of ADCOSS May 2015

Good afternoon,

Thank you for inviting me to be with you this afternoon and share some of my excitement about the future for community development.

My name is John Stansfield I'm currently the Head of Department of Social Practice at Unitec where I lead a team involved in educating some 350 students in counselling social work and community development. I have had a life sentence in the community sector with no time or for good behaviour and precious little evidence of it. My interest in community development began at high school and it is a discipline which is much influenced my life largely for the better.

Many of you have been part of that journey and I acknowledge David Haigh, I was a student on placement with David in 1980 at the ARC and I later worked with him and Joan Lardner when I went on to the local government union in the office next door.

Gavin Rennie and I were both community workers in South Auckland in the early 80s and I had the good fortune of working with Richard Northey at the Problem Gambling Foundation for a fantastic five years. I remember particularly one time going to a Parliamentary select committee with Richard, essentially to support the regulator the Department of Internal Affairs who were being quizzed by the regulations review committee about their attempts to rein in the excesses of the gambling industry. We entered a room with a couple of dozen lawyers from New Zealand and overseas representing the gambling industry, the couple of officials from the Department, the select committee and ourselves. The secret weapon of course which none of the lawyers knew that we had was in fact Richard Northey, who I think had previously chaired the committee and certainly knew a new a great deal more than anyone else in the room about how it functions and its precedent decisions. Real David and Goliath stuff and we won.

These days I live on Waiheke Island where for the last 20 odd years I have been involved in community development and quite involved in local politics. I chair the Waiheke Resources Trust a charity that I founded almost 18 years ago.

So to the heart of the matter

Community Development, where are we going and where have we been.

I spent a week driving around much of the North Island and this was to give me a wonderful opportunity to reflect on community development and its current context.

When you're as green as me you don't get to do a lot of driving round great Green land, it's a great place to contemplating. In my travels I called in and visited with my good friend Wendy Craig who in 1983 published the seminal text "A community work perspective", about her adventures as a community development worker in Palmerston North. Wendy is now in her 70s and sadly has Parkinson's but still has a sharp and critical eye on the community sector and politics in general.

My own journey in community development began in the halcyon and days of the mid 70s in the various student movements of the time. By 1976 I had headed off to the newly independent Papua New Guinea, to work in community development projects in what was then the West Sepik province. After 18 months of roaming the bush I returned to New Zealand and began a Bachelor of Social Work at Massey University in Palmerston North majoring in Community Development.

These were wonderful days, there were no fees, I got paid to go to university, I got paid even more as I was living away from my parents, there were plentiful part-time jobs, they were unionised and had penal rates and the government work schemes had not yet been abandoned.

There was some very progressive work happening within solid and well funded mainstream agencies. Community Volunteers inc had several hundred people involved, church agencies were involved in some highly innovative community development projects. Territorial local authorities had strong and well funded community development departments beginning to emerge. Community development was a researched and discussed discipline that was debated in the universities richly influenced by Paulo Friere and the liberation theologians, Marxism, anarchism and critics like Ivan Illich.

The student unions were large, compulsory, well funded and had tremendous potential. In 1980 I was elected the first full time President of the Massey University Students Association. Fresh from my lectures by Ian Shirley and the case studies from Saul Alinsky we set out to forge strong relations with the trade unions. We began programs like the consumers resistance movement where we joined with pensioner groups to monitor pricing and supermarkets in stores across the city. Denied coverage via a media fearful of the retail advertisers we published our results every week pasted up on lampposts. We were stalked in the stores and one pensioner assaulted by a supermarket manager. This made us famous overnight.

We built cyclists communities and researched and agitated for the safe cycle lanes. We stood with the homeless and vulnerable tenants building a tenants union, occupying empty council houses and driving up debate about the right to adequate shelter.

We built the first commercial FM radio station and use the resources of the union to bring over 500 houses under management for our members. We built a thriving food cooperative that massively slashed the costs of fruit and vegetables in our communities.

And we did all these things because we didn't know we couldn't. We were emboldened by the stories of community development from around the world

And then gradually the sky began to fall in as the country entered what I think of as its greedy period, it was the mad neoliberal experiment. As politics began to embrace Maggie Thatcher's view that there is no such thing as Society. Community Development began to be stripped from site, stripped from the language until none dared mention its name the accountabilities of new public management and

managerialism moved control away from communities and into an ever fearful and compliant to power bureaucracy.

Agencies began to wither and some quite large ones just died. The Hui, the gatherings, the conferences that we had had where the stories were shared and practice critically examined, became fewer and fewer. An increasingly conservative bureaucracy began to fund in a much more risk averse and prescriptive manner. The movement away from a grant-in-aid or provision of key worker salaries towards the new contractualism saw the noose tighten. Local Government Community Development departments were downsized, reorganised, demoralised and then amalgamated up with facilities in community safety and a whole lot of other depoliticised activities.

In some remote corners community development refused to die and decided to soldier on. Ignoring the fact that he had no associated programme my mate Dr Love Chile continued to research and publish. That wily diplomat Gavin Rennie continued a major in community development within the social work degree when it had all but atrophied elsewhere..

New shoots are sometimes hard to spot. I became aware of a renaissance of community development thinking, if not community development language when then Social Development Minister Steve Maharey engaged a group of luminaries including the late Sir Paul Reeves, former Waitakere deputy Mayor Dorothy Wilson and others including myself in an honest appraisal of the relationship between the community and voluntary sector and government. Community it seems was beginning to make it back into the language of government. This was followed by some flirtations with social enterprise. The grinding bureaucracy of the charities commission began to retreat from its self-determined role as the shaper of the community sector.

Community development language began to appear again in local government plans. The remnants of community development thinking began to inform how councils approached intractable problems and yet something was missing.

What was missing was the intellectual space to retell the stories and celebrate community achievement, slowly and modestly this began to reappear with initiatives such as Inspiring Communities which while it was never going to produce the Revolutionary Guard was beginning to reclaim the space for telling the stories.

What decided me on a return to Unitec was a sense that our day would soon come again. When I saw community development staff and methodologies being included in the solid waste team in the new Auckland Council I became convinced that there was opportunity and so returned to the Department of Social Practice as a base from which to conspire.

The first real evidence that I might have been on track was the response, initially of my colleagues, and then from the sector at large to the 2015 Community Development conference. Brothers and sisters, we sold out tickets to the conference a month before it started. There was tremendous interest from a truly remarkable range of people both throughout New Zealand and from overseas. And for those of

you fortunate enough to attend there was an incredibly strong buzz running through the conference as old friendships were renewed and new ones begun.

This however was a new time, a new community development, in a new New Zealand. Maori, Pacific, Asian, African, the new migrant community the young and the old all engaged. We had papers on the impact of new technology on community development, on how to develop in the digital space. We had a rich stream of work which included environmentalism. Diversity that embraced differences were celebrated histories were shared and the young people taught us how to take selfies.

The next thing that happened was that we started to hear about jobs, employers specifically looking for people with community development skills and experience. Cheryll Martin from Volunteering Auckland phoned me about one this morning so if you are looking for a half-time CD job give Cheryll call.

The third harbinger was the production in record time of Whanake the Pacific Journal of Community Development which was launched on 1-5-15 is currently free online and we hope to have a second edition out in the spring. I'm deeply grateful to Dr Helen Gremillion who sacrificed her family and health to ensure we got that one over the line.

Something else is happening which may present us with a real opportunity. We have a mayor who is clearly not going to be re-elected who is pushing for a devolution of community development to communities and community organisations.

Now we can approach this with our eyes wide open, there is no doubt Council will see this as an opportunity to downsize the resources going to community development to try and get communities to do more with less. I'm not deeply challenged by that notion to be honest I think communities can do more with just some of the resources that are currently spent in our name. There are some great people working in community development in government and local government but by crikey they are up against it. Trying to conduct community development from a bureaucracy results in such a clash of cultures that most of the resources are spent spinning wheels appeasing that bureaucracy.

I'm optimistic because there really isn't any other choice!.