

Measuring impact: a key to community connection in Southwest Brisbane

The journey of Benarrawa's Strengthening Neighbourly Connections Project

Project Overview

"And then one day they [Benarrawa] knocked on my door. "Can we come in? can we talk to you?" It was a welcome thing to me that somebody knocked on my door to talk to me. I still get emotional when I remember how lonely and depressed, I was. I met with everybody and got involved a year and a half ago. It's not long. But the change has been significant. A lot. It's like I was living in a darkness of night and now it is light of day." – Asadeh (Resident)

As southwest Brisbane fell silent under the weight of the COVID-19 pandemic, a growing sense of isolation began to impact the community, leaving public housing residents particularly vulnerable. The Benarrawa Community Development Association, with nearly four decades of experience in community development, saw this issue firsthand. Recognising the urgent need to address social isolation, Benarrawa launched the "Strengthening Neighbourly Connections" project in 2021.

The project took a resident-centered, community development approach as the Benarrawa staff embarked on a series of door-knocking visits, aiming to listen deeply to residents' needs and concerns. This direct outreach created trust and provided an opportunity to offer

information and referrals. By empowering residents through genuine engagement, the project aimed to cultivate a sense of purpose and belonging.

Benarrawa wanted to ensure that the project had not only meaningful but also lasting outcomes. As a result, they collaborated with the previously existing Community Services Industry Alliance (CSIA) to develop a robust evaluation. This included a Theory of Change framework, which mapped project activities and elevated the voices, experiences and aspirations of the people involved - with doorstep outreach as the cornerstone - to the desired outcomes of reduced social isolation and a stronger sense of community.

The learnings from the project and subsequent evaluation were used to inform Benarrawa's disaster recovery, resilience & preparedness work, extending its door-knocking efforts in 2022 to flood-affected residents in the community. The insights gained from the evaluation have been woven into the fabric of Benarrawa's work moving forward ensuring a resident-centred approach remains at the core of all their initiatives, creating stronger, more resilient communities.

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This case study supports the delivery of the *Queensland Neighbourhood Centres Strategy for Disaster Resilience 2023-2026*. The full strategy is available for download from the NCQ website: ncq.org.au

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Scan to access Benarrawa's article *Beyond the Doorstep: Doorknocking the "old school style" of intentional community development*, published in the *New Community Journal*. Or visit benarrawa.org.au/resources

The Value of a Robust Evaluation Process

Finding the right partner

Choosing the right evaluation partner proved crucial. CSIA's expertise in developing the Theory of Change, coupled with their understanding of community development practices, ensured the evaluation process not only measured impact but also supported the project's mission of empowering residents.

Resident voices took centre stage

Storytelling interviews offered a powerful method for data collection. By elevating residents' experiences and voices, the evaluation created a sense of respect and inclusion. Residents felt their stories mattered and strengthening the relationship between Benarrawa and the community. The process became a two-way exchange of knowledge; residents shared their perspectives while Benarrawa gained valuable insights to inform future initiatives.

Evaluation outputs

The evaluation process became more than just collecting data. CSIA, leveraging their expertise in community development, designed a multifaceted approach. A detailed report provided a comprehensive picture for funders and stakeholders, while a "Vision River" visualisation offered a clear view of the project's intended impact pathway. Key results were presented in a concise "Snapshot of Achievements" for broader audiences and an article for publication in a relevant academic journal was planned to share the project's learnings and best practices with the wider community development field.

A ripple effect of unforeseen benefits

Residents, empowered to share their experiences, felt a sense of trust and ownership over the project. The CSIA report, documenting the project's successes, boosted staff morale and solidified their commitment whilst also increasing the Centre's visibility, leading to conference appearances and collaborations with other organisations.

Saved hours, amplified impact

The detailed report with its clear evidence streamlined future grant applications. The multiple fit-for-purpose documents developed through the evaluation explained and justified the project's approach and the effectiveness of doorstep outreach to various audiences, including participants, funders and partners.

Building disaster resilience

Leveraging the trust and methodologies developed during the initial project provided valuable lessons for disaster recovery, resilience and preparedness. Strong social connections and the provision of resources and opportunity to hear residents' aspirations, voices and experiences emerged as key factors in the Oxley/Corinda community's ability to move forward from the disaster. The initiative evolved further into the Oxley Creek Flood Action Group, focusing on disaster resilience, mitigation strategies and neighbourhood disaster plans, showcasing the adaptability and impact of the community-driven approach.

HOT TIP: Ensure your grant applications include funding for a comprehensive evaluation.



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Australian Government



Queensland Government



Neighbourhood Centres Queensland acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the traditional custodians of Country; we pay our respects to their Elders, Ancestors, land and seas. Sovereignty has never been ceded. It always was and always will be, Aboriginal land.