Opportunities for Building Power Amongst Working People and Disadvantaged Communities in Australia by:

Prioritising Labour Organising in the Social and Community Services Industry;

Reorienting Community Work to Incorporate Community Organising Strategies;

and

Extending Labour Organising Outside the Workplace and into Communities;

Report by – KATE LEE

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report details the findings from a 2002/2 Churchill Fellowship that incorporated interviews with organisations and individuals in Thailand, England, Northern Ireland, Republic of Ireland, Norway, Canada, and the United States.

The main areas of study were:

- Industry-specific labour organising and campaigning in social and community services work;
- Community organising as a strategy for building power in disadvantaged communities;
- Joint campaigning between labour, communities and community organisations on both workplace and social justice issues.

I would like to acknowledge the assistance of the following people and organisations:

- The financial assistance of the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust of Australia;
- The Australian Services Union – the NSW & ACT Services Branch for providing me leave to undertake the project and the National Office for assistance with overseas union contacts;
- The ACTU Organising Centre for assistance with overseas union contacts;
- The many organisations and individuals I met with, their generosity and openness.

The views contained in this report are my own and not necessarily those of my employer, the Australian Services Union.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Project Objectives:

To investigate strategies used by trade unions and community organisations including community and workplace organising, coalition work, research and funding advocacy for the purposes of:

- industry campaigning and organising in the social and community services industry; and
- social, workplace and economic justice campaigning.

Project Highlights:

All individual and organisations I met with were generous and I very much valued the opportunity they provided me to discuss our shared work. For purposes of brevity, I have selected only a few highlights.

- Canadian Union of Public Employees [CUPE] National Convention – held in Quebec City bringing together 2,000 union delegates from Canada’s biggest union. Discussions with union activists and delegates from the social services industry during the course of the conference were significant in providing me with feedback about the union’s industry-wide campaigning.

- CUPE’s national industry-wide campaign work in the social services industry.

- Community organising in the U.S – exposure to the tradition of ‘community organising’ and discussion about its possible use in Australia. Discussions with Janice Fine and her assistance with providing documents and resources has proved invaluable.
• TELCO [The East London Community Organisation] project in East London – an opportunity to discuss the development and progress of the living wage campaign developed through the application of the U.S community organising strategies in the U.K context. Discussions with Deborah Littman [UNISON] and Jane Wills [University of London] assisted me here.

• Interfaith organising – as a strategy used across the U.S and more recently in East London. Discussions with Alexia Salvatierra [Clergy & Laity United for Economic Justice] were important in highlighting the premises upon which interfaith worker justice organising must be based.

• Budget Standards research - its use by unions in fair wage campaigning in the U.K. and possibilities for Australia’s budget standards work in living wage work in the social & community services industry.

• Workers rights as human rights – the tenacity of organisers in the struggle for human rights in Burma.

Project Findings:

There are opportunities for building power amongst working people and disadvantaged communities in NSW and in other parts of Australia based on the findings of this project. These opportunities include:

• A range of ways to undertake coordinated industry-wide campaigning in the non-government social & community services both nationally and on a state/territory basis;

• The utilisation of community organising strategies as a deliberate attempt to both strengthen opportunities for joint labour/community campaigning and to circumvent the attacks on the weakened role in advocacy of the community sector; and

• The union movement’s re-engagement with ‘community’, not just ‘industry’ as a key way to build unionism, and reclaim the legitimacy and power of working people in the name of workplace and social justice.
Implementing Project Recommendations:

1. Seminars with community workers to discuss community organising and possibilities for its use in NSW:
   - Liverpool – March 2004
   - Surry Hills – April 2004

2. Seminars with individual unions to present overseas models for joint labour/community campaign work – April-July 2004

3. Findings in ‘case study’ format to be submitted in a series of articles to on-line labour magazine in NSW – April-July 2004

4. ASU National Conference in October 2004 – presentation of all aspects of the study.

5. Investigation of possible funding source for U.S trainer in community organising to conduct a workshop in Sydney in second half of 2004.

6. Article for refereed journal on opportunities for community organising and joint labour/community campaigning to be finalised by December 2004.
PROGRAM

Bangkok: 2 September
Federated Trade Unions - Burma [FTUB]

Mae Sot: 3-4 September
FTUB
Federated Trade Unions - Karen [FTUK]
Yaung Chi Oo Workers Association [YCOWA]
Karen Women's Organisation [KWO]

London: 15-17 September
UNISON [public sector union]
University of London

Birmingham: 18 September
UNISON
Community & Youth Workers Union [CWYU]

Liverpool: 19-20 September
University of Liverpool

Belfast: 22-24 September
UNISON
CYWU
Terry Enright Foundation
Mulholland After Care Services

Dublin: 25-26 Dublin
Kerry Lawless, Consultant
Kevin O'Driscoll, former National Secretary, IMPACT
Community Workers Cooperative [CWC]
European Anti Poverty Network, Ireland

London: 30 September
Battersea & Wandsworth Trade Union Council
Oslo: 8 October
Campaign for the Welfare State

New York: 10-13 October
Association of Community Organisations for Reform Now [ACORN]
American Federation of State, County & Municipal Employees [AFSCME]

Washington: 15 October
AFSCME
AFL-CIO

Baltimore: 16 October
Baltimoreans United in Leadership Development [BUILD]

Ottawa: 20-21 October
Canadian Union of Public Employees [CUPE]
National Union of Public & General Employees [NUPGE]

Toronto: 23-24 October
Ontario Public Service Employees Union [OPSEU]
Ontario Health Coalition

Boston: 23-24 October
Janice Fine, former Executive Director, North East Action

Quebec: 26-30 October
CUPE National Convention

Vancouver: 12-14 November
British Colombia General & Service Employees Union [BCGEU]
Social Services collective bargaining negotiations
Vancouver & Districts Labor Council
British Columbia Health Coalition
Seattle: 17 November

Service Employees International Union [SEIU] Local 775

San Francisco, Oakland & Berkeley: 21-25 November

SEIU Local 616
East Bay Alliance for a Sustainable Economy [EBASE]
Vanessa Tait, Labour Researcher

Los Angeles: 15-18 December

Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy [LAANE]
SEIU Local 1877
ACORN
Clergy & Laity United for Economic Justice [CLUE]
UCLA Center for Labor Research & Education
Strategic Actions for a Just Economy [SAJE]
Liveable Places
SEIU Local 434b
United for Quality & Choice
4. MAJOR FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

In the last three years Australian unions have begun to reverse the decline of unionism by focusing on non-union industries, building more effective workplace union structures and skilling workplace delegates to take on the battles of job security, discrimination and protection of wages and conditions. However, achieving fairer wages and conditions becomes a tougher fight for unions as governments and private investors respond to global economic pressures by cutting government spending or claiming higher profit margins.

The challenge of any campaign is to win the hearts and minds and support of many. And particularly of those who previously didn’t care or whose support wasn’t there. Unions recognize this but the challenge is how to do it. While Australian unions work in coalition with community organisations in defense of social institutions like Medicare or launch sophisticated media campaigns to garner community support during industrial disputes such as the MUA dispute in 1998, long-term collaborative work in common cause with local communities is not a feature of our unions. Many would argue the future capacity of unions to defend workplace and social justice is weaker without it.

The Australian non-government social and community services industry has changed significantly over the last 20 years. A major change has been the increasing reliance by governments at all levels on the non-government sector for delivery of services, in part through contracting out of government services to non-government organisations. Some of the resulting impacts include the following:

- rapid growth in the industry and in the workforce;
- major shortages of skilled staff in some parts of the industry;
- increased focus on delivery of services and reduced focus on the role of the non-government sector in community development and advocacy;
- pressure by government as funders of services to restrict the public role of non-government services in speaking out on issues affecting service users and other low income and disadvantaged people.

The non-government social and community services industry in a range of countries [including Australia] has sought to articulate and clarify its relationship with government through negotiated agreements. Key questions for the current and future social service systems everywhere include: how a quality service system can be maintained/achieved, how to fund increasing demand for services and how to ensure social services successfully compete for funding [against for
example, defense and military funding] where governments restrict rather than expand the taxation base.

By focusing on service delivery for poor people, unemployed people, people with disabilities and elderly people, increasingly non-government services are removed from any role in working with people to support their own emancipation, and to influence governments to address their own issues of employment, housing, income support, care and safety in any real or meaningful way. Labour organising in the industry as well as trade union support for community organising provide crucial ways of addressing this.

Organising the workforce in the non-government social and community services industry faces challenges currently and into the future. In Australia, the workforce is predicted to increase by 500,000 by 2020 [ACOSS, 2004]. Currently the typical worker in the industry is female, over 45 years of age and working part-time [AIHW, 2001]. In NSW there are approximately 10,000 non-government organisations with at least two-thirds of these delivering social and community services with a predicted workforce of approximately 50,000. Workers often report that a commitment to caring for others drives their desire to work in this industry. This commitment, coupled with low wages often forces workers to work more than one job to meet living expenses. Workers in the non-government social and community services industry still earn considerably less than those local, state or federal government employees doing the same or comparable jobs. For example in NSW, a worker in a non-government service for people with disabilities will earn approximately $10,000 p.a. less than a counterpart doing exactly the same job in a government-run service.

My report below covers three main areas of investigation:

1. issues for the social and community services industry, in particular changes in the industry and impacts on the workforce and implications for labour organising;
2. community organising, and the potential of the use of these strategies in Australia and the implications for the non-government social and community service organisations; and
3. joint campaigning between labour and communities and community organisations, focusing on alternative ways of working beyond current practice.

4. 2 Labour Organising In The Non-Government Social And Community Services Industry

The rate of unionisation in the non-government social & community services industry in Australia is still below average unionization rates in Australia. Low
unionisation rates have a direct impact on capacity to secure living wages and decent conditions for the workforce. Industry campaigning by unions in the areas of occupational health & safety, staff/client ratios and wages and conditions also impacts upon the quality of service provision in the social and community services industry. There are a range of reasons for these low rates however this report will not discuss this debate in detail. However it would be fair to say that in general low unionisation rates are linked with: specific characteristics of the workforce; lack of recognition by unions in the industry as a growing one and one to be prioritised; relative recent history of recognition of the industry and of unionization in the industry; lack of public recognition of the industry and of the value of work done in the industry.

Below I have described the findings from my trip that provide the most relevant information for our debates in the Australian contexts. This is drawn from unions and organisations representing the non-government social & community services sector [or its equivalent] in England, Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, Canada, and the U.S.

**Comprehensive Industry Mapping**

The non-government social & community services industry has one of the features of many industries of the ‘new economy’ – small organisations, with few employees; disparate workplaces; workers with little contact with each other; organisations which may be there one day and be gone the next. The industry has never comprised of big shop floors where all workers can be contacted easily at the same place. Further it is only in recent years that the industry has gained some increasing recognition industrially, and some recognition of its importance both publicly and politically. Unions in this industry need access to better information in order to not just organise the workforce but plan and predict changes to service delivery and the impacts of change on the workforce.

UNISON in the UK, with 30,000 members in the equivalent of our non-government social & community services industry, still only represents a fraction of the industry. Recently the union has developed a database for mapping the industry, its employers, locations, staffing and funding levels. When matched against UNISON’s new bargaining database that includes information about both collective bargaining agreements across all industries and employers, as well as other company information, a comprehensive picture of issues, employers and people in the industry emerges.

Unions and other industry organisations in Australia need to develop a comprehensive database that maps industry-wide, the non-government sector in total. This should be done nationally or as a second option, on a state/territory basis. This would allow for unions in the industry to plan for and develop worker strength across the industry. It would also allow for better planning for industry-wide campaigning purposes.
Industry-wide campaigning, coordinated nationally

In Australia, the non-government social & community services industry is largely [but not wholly] segregated into state and territory groups by separate awards covering the workforce and differing funding bodies that fund services with different requirements. Despite these differences there is much scope for industry-wide national campaigning.

In Canada, the Canadian Union of Public Employees [CUPE] has coordinated national campaigns targeting key common issues across the industry – funding, occupational health & safety, decent wages and conditions, rights for service users – under the common campaign theme of RESPECT.

In the U.S. the Service Employees International Union [SEIU] has intentionally rolled back its targeted areas of coverage to focus more narrowly on specific industries [including home care workers] in order to build industry strength and power and in order to build campaigning momentum across states.

There is much scope within the Australian context for the ASU to run additional nationally focused industry campaigns, both in programs that are federally funded and on common issues across states and territories. There is also as yet untapped scope for unions across the social, community and human services to jointly campaign on key issues across the linked industries such as prioritizing funding in this area.

Parity with the public sector for wages and conditions

This is a key goal for unionists in the non-government social & community services industry in NSW and the ACT. It is also a goal of other comparable unions overseas but one that has not been reached or is viewed as unreachable.

The experience of social & community services workers in the province of British Columbia [B.C.] in Canada goes closest to a successful industry-wide campaign in this area. The B.C experience was developed through comprehensive work in the areas of competency comparison and pay equity, resulting in negotiations with a provincial government that was open to discussions. The negotiations ended with the election of a hostile provincial government.

Any campaign in our context should be premised on a forerunner campaign building strong community and worker support for parity [built on industry identity in the first instance] in order to ensure any campaign is not dependent on retaining a supportive government. Further in the context of NSW, there is no indication that either a Labor or Coalition government would support pay parity without the pressure of a strong community and worker campaign.
Responding to changes in service delivery

As the non-government social & community services industry has grown, change in models of service delivery as well as changes in the industry’s relationship with government has occurred. It is reasonable to expect this will continue to occur if the predictions of expansion of the industry in Australia over the next 15 years are correct.

By way of example of a change in service delivery in the U.S, some service provision, typically home care for people who have a disability or elderly people, is being delivered by a family member who receives a payment for doing so [as opposed to a worker employed by an agency or employed as an 'independent contractor']. With increasing pressure to restrain budgetary spending on care services, and with potential support from advocates and service users for greater flexibility and choice in service systems, unions must be on the front foot in responding to changes in service delivery.

It is critical that unionists in this context forge stronger alliances where possible with other industry players, with service users, with advocates and community supporters to negotiate these changes.

In recent years the non-government social & community services industry in the U.K, Canada and Australia have sought negotiated agreements with governments about the industry’s relationship with government. In the Republic of Ireland, the industry has a formal partnership with government known as the Community & Voluntary Pillar. A national agreement on issues such as social exclusion is negotiated every three years by the Community & Voluntary Pillar. Critics of this model argue that where sections of the industry have chosen not to participate or have been excluded from participating in the partnership, any other role they have in advocating for disadvantaged people is neutralised; only decisions of the members of the Community & Voluntary Pillar can affect government policy.

Working with service users or building a stronger people’s movement?

The U.S provides for some interesting examples of unions representing workers in social & community services and service users groups and advocates, working in coalition in their mutual interest, especially in the area of home care.

However by focusing on improved delivery of services and not on either advocating on behalf of communities or with them in support of their issues, it could be argued that unionists have lost their way in working for social justice for all. Indeed the first union in NSW to represent workers in the non-government social & community services industry, the Australian Social Welfare Workers Union, saw one of its key objectives [in the late 1970’s and early 1980’s] as the recognition of the industry and the rights of its workers as a campaign in parallel
with a campaign to eradicate poverty and disadvantage for the people that they worked with; an insistence that both move forward together.

While this could be regarded as an implicit position of unions representing workers in the non-government social & community services industry, unionists could bring on this debate in order to establish an explicit way forward on this issue.

Labour organising outside the workplace

Many unions are looking to ways of organising outside of the workplace in recognition of the importance that other communities and community organisations play in people’s lives. Unions also recognise that workers face increasing restrictions and often hostility in attempting to organise at the workplace.

A major union in the U.K employs organisers from specific migrant communities who are given broad reach to organise in methods beyond traditional avenues through the workplace. Although some unions in NSW have employed organisers from specific communities as an attempt to reach into these communities, more could be done in the form of multi-union groups or peak union bodies funding organisers from specific ethnic, migrant or religious communities to organise within these communities on behalf of a number of unions.

Using budget standards research

In the U.K budget standards research has been commissioned by unions or undertaken within universities within regional areas in order to support workplace and industry bargaining. While the industrial systems of Australia and the U.K differ, our own budget standards research could be better utilised by unions in the non-government social & community services industry to support bargaining and Award enhancement.

4.3 Community Organising

Community organising is a tradition of working with disadvantaged communities and neighbourhoods with one explicit goal – to build power in those communities.

In the countries visited as part of this project, this tradition was evident largely in the U.S where two networks of organisations ascribe to the practice of community organising - ACORN [Association of Community Organisations for Reform Now] and the IAF [Industrial Areas Foundation]. I visited examples of both traditions in the U.S. In London I also had an opportunity to discuss the use
of the U.S community organising tradition being used within a specific context in East London by the East London Community Organisation [TELCO].

Two models for community organising – ACORN and the IAF

Both ACORN and the IAF view ‘building power’ in disadvantaged communities as a primary objective and both each have very a specific but different approach in doing so.

ACORN was first established in 1970 in Arkansas but is now a national organisation with local ‘chapters’ based in cities, towns and neighbourhoods. While local organisations may determine local campaign objectives, networks of local groups may also work on state-wide or national campaigns. ACORN is a membership-based organisation with individuals or households in the locality where the group is based, joining for a monthly fee. All ACORN organisations are largely self-funded through membership fees and accept no government monies. In a very brief summary of the approach used by ACORN organisers working within a neighbourhood, a model approach is used which includes the following strategies: door-to-door visits of all people in the neighbourhood to discuss issues of concern to local people and what they think can be done to address the issues; identifying possible ‘community leaders’ who can play a larger role in any campaign developed; identifying ACORN as the key avenue for possible change in the neighbourhood; keeping accurate records of issues, views and of those people requiring further follow up; training and support of those identified local leaders; working on any issue which concerns the majority of local people no matter how small; employing specific tactics and strategies to ‘win’ on local issues in order to build both a sense of possibility and in effect ‘power’ amongst the people involved in the campaign.

The IAF is a network of organisations in the U.S bound by an approach rather than through a national organisation. This approach is based on the work of Saul Alinsky in the 1940’s in his organising work in the slums of Chicago, known as the “Back of the Yards” project. The IAF was formed by Alinsky during this period. In subsequent years, organisations linked to the IAF were established in cities around the U.S. Again in brief summary, the IAF approach involves establishing a new organisation in a community which works with existing organisations and their constituents with the objective of building power in the following way: organisations agree to join the IAF organisation on the understanding that their constituencies will be actively involved in any campaign work; IAF organisers interview a large proportion of the constituency of each organisation to determine issues, concerns and to identify potential ‘community leaders’; leaders are trained and supported in understanding how to motivate and engage other members in their community organisation; use of a variety of forms of ‘actions’ to draw public and political attention to their issues [including the use of rallies, public meetings with politicians etc]; processes of ‘accountability’ whereby leaders of organisation participate in evaluation meetings following each
action where the commitments to participation made by each organisation and the results delivered are scrutinized and discussed. A feature of many IAF-affiliated organisations is the involvement of religious organisations as members.

Although there are differences in approach between the community organising work of ACORN and the IAF, there are some distinct similarities which include: a prescriptive ‘model’ of working which is [seemingly] unfailingly adhered to; strong emphasis on finding within the ranks of communities or organisations, people with the willingness to ‘lead’ others; structures and training to support leadership development; willingness to engage in public actions of various kinds to meet the campaign goal; and processes for systematic follow up at all levels, from engagement with individuals to evaluating an action undertaken. Both approaches have demonstrated the very real capacity to win on such issues as affordable housing, legislation to protect low income tenants from eviction, safety in communities with serious drug issues, securing living wage laws and reversing the predatory lending practices of financial institutions on low income people.

**Constraints of the non-government community sector in Australia**

Arguably, there is no community organising tradition in Australia in the form described above. The non-government social and community services industry today, is primarily about the delivery of services, largely to low income or disadvantaged people and communities, as well as advocating on behalf of these people. Services rely almost exclusively on government funding and some governments [most notably in recent years, the federal government] restrict the role such organisations can play in advocating the needs of disadvantaged people through avenues such as the media. This restriction is imposed in various ways including in the written funding agreements of the organisations.

Inevitably this reality raises the issue of what power either community organisations or disadvantaged people and communities themselves have, to have political influence or to bring about change in their communities. In NSW for example, it could be argued that this lack of community or organisational power is evidenced by the inability of either to influence affordable housing availability in Sydney.

I would argue the industry’s ability to influence debates such as these is shrinking and that we need to engage some different ways of working to address the issues of social disadvantage in our communities, other than through service delivery or advocacy.

**Possibilities for community organising in our context**

Some may argue that the specific and historical traditions of politics and democracy in the United States has provided the context for community
organising which is not comparable or translatable to Australia’s tradition of social democracy and history of development of the social wage.

Policy across countries continue towards ‘smaller government’ [as it has from the 1980’s] and increasingly the exercise of corporate power in shaping policy agendas of governments is transnational. Similarly, the trend in social and public policy from the ‘provider’ state [via in-house or grant-aided service provision] to the ‘contract’ state [via competitive tendered service provision] as well as the shift from ‘universal’ to ‘targeted’ service provision is also international.

In response we have also witnesses worldwide social justice campaigning become ‘transnational’ [as evidenced for example in the annual World Social Forum, a meeting of social justice campaigners world-wide]. Sharing of strategy in support of building power for people in communities is on the increase within our new global context.

Current evidence in NSW shows the gap between rich and poor increasing [Vinson, 2004]. In part it can be argued this is due to the erosion of a quality system of health, education, employment opportunity, income support. International and internal pressures will continue to challenge Australia’s commitment to the social wage, one that while institutions may defend, increasingly requires its constituents and members to do likewise. We need additional strategies for doing so.

Evidence from the U.K demonstrates one possibility of the use of community organising strategies outside of the U.S and in a context with similarities to our own. In recent years, an organisation in London has been established called TELCO [The East London Community Organisation], that is directly using community organising strategies employed by an IAF-affiliate called BUILD {Baltimoreans United In Leadership Development}. Early indications are that the processes employed and outcomes achieved are regarded as successful.

In NSW, there are opportunities for community organising in metropolitan Sydney and in regional NSW. Unions, community organisations and other interested in supporting the use of these strategies need to have further discussions as to where and how community organising can take place in NSW.

4.4 Joint Campaigning Between Labour, Communities And Community Organisations

Introduction

Overseas labour unions – such as in Canada, Norway, U.S and U.K – are increasingly using strategies to build workplace and social justice by developing greater local campaigning links with communities and community organisations.
Cross-union councils at local and regional level are being revitalized as a key component, critical for labour unions that are often industry-based, not locality-based structures. Winning in the workplace by working directly with the community organisations which play an important role in people’s lives outside of work is another – for example with faith-based or ethnic-specific organisations. Finding new ways to make regional economic development work for local people, not against their interests has brought labour and community organisations together to expose the depth of government subsidy in private development and to make it locally accountable – for local jobs, affordable housing, more green spaces and social services.

By shifting the focus beyond industries, to communities, localities and regions, Australians unions can build deeper community relationships in support of campaigning and organising for social justice – both in and out of the workplace.

There is a significant literature and debate world-wide on how best to invigorate this joint campaign work. I have based my comments below primarily on discussions during my trip and on only some of the possibilities of how this could occur.

**Investing in local cross-union structures**

Australian unions organise primarily on an industry basis and most work across unions is based on industry issues. Cross-union work also occurs on specific issues or on issues affecting specific communities.

Cross-union structures where unionists come together in a locality on a local or regional geographical basis is rarer, particularly in metropolitan areas. In NSW, cross-union councils are active in the Hunter and the Illawarra areas, but virtually do not exist elsewhere. Community organisations of all types are very often locality based. Thus opportunities for cross-union campaign work and support is reduced where structures do not mirror common areas of interest or of membership.

In the U.K and the U.S unions are utilising local cross-union structures for campaigning purposes and to assist the work of unions with members in bounded localities. The Battersea and Wandsworth Trade Union Council in south London coordinates campaign work across unions, and plays an important role in doing initial organising work in non-union workplaces where unions have had little or no coverage, and also supports existing union workplace campaigns by developing links and drawing in others both within and outside of the labour movement. The Council’s organising staff is funded through its independent fundraising arm, the Workers Beer Company.

In the U.S under the banner of the AFL-CIO’s Union Cities program, locality-based labour councils are on the resurgence and are often the drivers of
changing ways of working between unions and communities. Some regional labour councils have been able to negotiate broad and cooperative working relationships as well as joint agendas for campaigning between unions and community organisations, addressing and winning on issues of major significance for low wage working people and local communities.

As demonstrated in California in the U.S, regional structures also provide for unions to join forces with communities in new ways particularly in the area of influencing regional economic development, not just on matters relating to employment and local jobs but on a whole range of related areas including affordable housing, green space, public transport and social service provision.

Unions in Australia should seek to look for opportunities to contextualise workplace and social justice campaigning at the geographic level. This can be done by unions committing to establish cross-union councils in certain regions.

A modified alternative to this approach could be establishing cross-union workplace and community campaigns in specific localities where individual unions can be identified as having a particular interest [for example, as determined by the types of jobs undertaken by local people]. The Stamford Organising Project in the U.S provides for a comparable example here where the project had significant wins including in the areas of effective community and interfaith organising work, increases in affordable housing provision for the predominantly low wage community, and living wage laws to ensure workers in the local area were paid above minimum wages. Individual unions or peak union bodies could assist in the mapping exercises required to determine areas where this type of project may be possible.

Labour-focused non-government organisations [NGOs]

NGOs that campaign for workers rights exist in countries all over the world. This is not new. These NGOs exist where unions are illegal or where unions don’t adequately address the issues of specific groups of workers. They can work cooperatively with unions or act independent of them.

In this section I discuss groups of U.S-based NGOs that have developed in recent years, particularly those on the West Coast responding to the rapid rise of the low wage service industry. I visited two of these organisations – LAANE and EBASE, and spoke with others about the role and impact of organisations such as these.

New groups of organisations have arisen in the context of the American labour movement’s difficulties in organising non-union workers and its decline in political and community influence. As described in interviews for this project, these organisations have arisen in the context of a need for “core work of bridge building [being done in] a more systematic and more effective way” in “building a
movement to end low wage poverty”. The strategies used by these organisations include strategic research [primarily in the areas of regional development, the labour market and the economy]; policy advocacy; leadership development [driven by campaign goals and within the context of a campaign] and coalition building between labour and community organisations with a membership base or constituency, such as those employing community organising strategies and religious groups with congregations.

Broadly speaking the current focus of organisations includes issues such as accountable economic development [challenging government decisions to take cash from developers with no returns or negative impacts on local people, services and environment]; direct support of collective bargaining; accountable public budget and fiscal reform; immigrant and civil rights.

Organisations such as these are funded primarily through private foundations in the U.S, of which there is no direct comparative system of funding here. Nevertheless this model is worth further investigation in our context.

Interfaith community organising

In the U.S and the U.K.. campaigning by unions and community organisations is supported by religious and faith-based communities and their leaders. This is most developed in the U.S where the National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice supports a network of over 50 local interfaith groups that support worker organising and respect and dignity at work.

This translates as a significant ally for workers in a myriad of ways. The ‘moral authority’ of religious groups can be powerful in influencing the actions of faith communities, and also in influencing the public sphere and in any private negotiations with employers. This religious authority is often viewed as neutral, and can lend public legitimacy to a cause, shaming of individuals or organisations which do not adhere to principles or laws of justice.

Inspiration and encouragement to workers on the front line or in deep dispute with their employer [even to those who are not believers!] has been witnessed as an important way in which leaders of faith have influenced worker strength and courage in difficult times. In addition the symbolic use of prayer, ritual and action in public places in support of workers struggles stretches the possibilities of their influence.

Mobilising faith communities [for example in letter writing, participating in picket or rallies, providing material assistance] in support of union campaigns and against worker injustice is also a key role of interfaith worker justice groups.

Pre-conditions exist for successful joint work between religious organisations and labour, as does recognition of differing ways of working and preparedness to
accommodate these differences. Despite this, it is clear that in the U.S experience, joint campaigning is successful and possible.

In Australia this type of joint campaigning does not commonly occur and there are no organised interfaith structures focused on worker justice to facilitate it. Peak union bodies would be well-placed to facilitate these links.

*Developing community organising to enable closer links between labour and community*

The organising strategies used by community organisers very much mirror strategies used by U.S labour organisers and increasingly over the last 10 years, of Australian labour organisers.

It in the course of this project, it appeared that this synergy of strategy greatly enhanced the capacity of both the labour movement and the community organising movement to work together. Barriers such as style of working were lessened. Mutual responsibility to a membership base was recognised. There were examples where organisers worked across both movements. Both movements are able to draw upon support across their membership bases in the campaign for workplace and social justice.

It is for these reasons that it is in the interests of the Australian union movement to foster community organising strategies.
RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of this project, recommendations are made in the following areas:

1. Industry-specific labour organising and campaigning in the non-government social and community services sector

   ➢ Development of a comprehensive database that maps industry-wide, the non-government sector in total, on either a national basis or on a state/territory basis. This would allow for unions in the industry to plan for and develop worker strength across the industry. It would also allow for better planning for industry-wide campaigning purposes.

   ➢ Nationally coordinated industry-wide campaigns, both in programs that are federally funded and on common issues across states and territories.

   ➢ Joint cross-union campaigning across the linked social, community and human services industries on key issues such as prioritizing funding in this area.

   ➢ A national campaign focusing on building a stronger sense of identity and respect amongst workers and within communities, as a forerunner to campaigns for parity.

   ➢ Build stronger alliances where possible with other industry players, with service users, with advocates and community supporters to negotiate changes in service delivery and impacts on the workforce.

   ➢ Debate amongst industry union members at all levels about the place of campaigning, and the resources dedicated to it, both for workers and the rights of poor people for the eradication of poverty.

   ➢ Debate amongst industry union members about priorities for state and national industry-wide campaigning.

   ➢ Industry unions investigate the use of budget standards research as evidence in cases for Award reform.
2. Community organising as a strategy for building power in disadvantaged communities

- Regional groups of workers as well as peak groups in the non-government social & community services sector discuss the opportunity for community organising in NSW.

- Meetings convened of interested activists, unionists and community workers to discuss both potential for community organising strategies and possible locations for the establishment of local/regional organisations implementing such strategies.

- Investigation of possible avenues and funding sources for providing community training opportunities in NSW.

3. Joint campaigning between labour, communities and community organisations in support of workplace and social justice

- NSW unions investigate opportunities for cross-union structures at the local and regional level.

- Opportunities investigated include peak union bodies funding projects modeled on the Stamford Organising Project or similar.

- Unions and community organisations re-evaluate their current levels of influence and leverage over issues of regional economic development, particularly in Sydney, and jointly discuss alternative models for increasing leverage.

- NSW unions investigate possible avenues for assisting the establishment of NGOs with a mandate to promote the eradication of low wage poverty through strategies such as community organising, strategic research and campaigning, developing direct links between labour and community groups.

- NSW unions and peak union bodies support the development of community organising in NSW.

- Peak union bodies develop a structure to facilitate interfaith worker justice support. Further that they look to the religious communities in Australia and the U.S for assistance in ways to do this.
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