



CASE STUDY

AGE CONCERN NEW ZEALAND :: RESPONDING COOPERATIVELY TO OLDER PEOPLE'S NEEDS

AUGUST 2012 FUNDING ROUND

Age Concern exists to serve older people by providing services, information and general advocacy. Their national office and 33 separate incorporated societies across New Zealand ideally position them to raise awareness and advise Government agencies on issues effecting older people. Age Concern provides specialist elder abuse and social isolation prevention services as part of its portfolio.

In 2012, Age Concern's Revenue & Development Manager, Robert Ross, applied to the Working Together More Fund (WTMF) seeking funding for the initiative '*Responding Cooperatively to Older People's Needs*'. Advice given to Age Concern by the Strategic Leadership forum, recommended it "develop a strategy that would be used by the entire organisation." Historically, each local Age Concern would complete its own strategic planning. The WTMF saw the benefits of local Age Concerns coming together and supported the idea that all would have input into the strategic plan. They granted \$2,500.00 towards the total cost of hosting a one-day workshop in Wellington to help them achieve this outcome. This was in follow-up to a successful workshop held earlier in the year. Mr Ross said the goal was to "bring together governors and managers to complete a strategic plan that would enable Age Concern to collectively respond to the needs of older people in the future".

The national Age Concern office had strong existing relationships with local Age Concerns around New Zealand. "The opportunity to come together to work on a combined strategic plan has served to enhance and strengthen our ability to work cooperatively towards meeting the needs of older people."

Using an external facilitator, the aim was to develop a new strategic plan to "be more effective and focused at meeting the needs of an increasing number of older people". By prioritising needs, they were able to identify a clear direction and determine the future focus of their work. The group discussed income stream development and shared ideas on local initiatives that might be effective in other parts of the country. Of particular focus, was exploring new ways for Age Concerns to collaborate and increase operational efficiency. This would help ensure resources were channelled towards the greatest needs and that together they were achieving the greatest outcomes for older people.

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Mr Ross considers the group-work to be an effective collaboration technique providing a valuable mixture of thought. "There was a good exchange of views and ideas, with all members splitting into groups of no more than eight and working together. It was stressed that every member of the group should be encouraged to participate as all had a something of value to share. The opportunity for robust discussion enabled all parts of the organisation to express their thoughts and ideas. From this discussion, the main aspects of the strategic plan were formed. While agreement at times was not unanimous, it did allow for wide decision on what could be achieved for both older people and Age Concern by working cooperatively."

Working with the facilitator, the wider group would "come to an agreement on each priority so that by the end of the day, a list of draft strategic outcomes were identified and agreed upon."

Mr Ross said "considerable effort and time has been expended in bringing the plan to conclusion. Further consultation has been carried out with Age Concern Boards to reach agreement on the new Strategic Plan. It is pleasing to confirm that the Strategic Plan for the next 3-5 years has been produced and is being adopted by the national office and Age Concerns as their existing plans expire.



Preparation is key to developing effective collaboration and maximise the effectiveness of the time spent together. Mr Ross said "pre-meeting work helped prepare and involve local contribution."

The grant from the WTMF meant Age Concern was able to "engage the services of an outside facilitator who worked to place all attendees on a level playing ground. It dispelled any idea of a hidden agenda being promoted by any one part of the organisation. It also gave all parts of the organisation opportunity to participate in the discussion. The process to obtain that funding went very smoothly and everyone was very helpful and accommodating. The application form was not complicated so made answering the questions reasonably easy."

The value of this exercise has been massive. "Having a strategic plan that encompasses the whole of Age Concern and makes the most of the organisation's ability to serve the needs of older people - in a collaborative way - strengthens our organisation. This will be reflected in the way we approach our response to working for older people and making them aware of the services available to them. It means we can together strive to achieve common goals that concentrate on the big issues, while still meeting the local needs.

In summary, "the most important steps in the process are first identifying clear goals followed by timely preparation, communication, inclusiveness, and inviting outside facilitation. We would like to thank the team at Working Together More for enabling us to undergo a process that will take our organisation into the future."

Further information on Age Concern:

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