

AI++: Innovations in AI through the Lens of Australia and New Zealand

Guest Editors: **Sallie Lee and Dayle O'Brien**

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Many Voices, One Purpose

Innovations in New Zealand in AI Practice for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect

ABSTRACT

What does it take to activate and grow community involvement so that helping each other is a normal part of community life and families are well supported to raise their children safely? Through innovations in Appreciative Inquiry practice that draw on community development and social marketing methodologies, local communities are discovering, believing in and growing their own capacity to ensure the protection and nurturing of their children.

Releasing community resourcefulness

On Sunday, 17th October, 2010, a unique community event took place in New Zealand's North Island coastal town of Thames. Over sixty people, from different parts of the Thames community, shared stories that revealed the wealth of their personal experience of what works best to get alongside children and families in positive and useful ways to promote safe, thriving children and flourishing families. Together, they identified patterns of supportive behaviour that consistently produced positive and helpful outcomes and concluded that if these patterns could be embedded into everyone's everyday life in Thames, all local children and families would grow up safe and nurtured.

The participants in this community-based conversation have now become the champions of a new social movement in their town. They are at the forefront of new thinking that is gaining traction within and beyond New Zealand, based on the premise that the solution to our unacceptably high rates of child abuse and neglect is already inherent within our communities.

Until now we have relied on helping professionals, social service organisations and government systems to find a solution for what has been an intractable issue. This conventional paradigm is now shifting. While professional expertise will always be valued and needed when challenges arise, we have come to understand that families and communities themselves have the greatest capability for looking after their most vulnerable members, once they have had the opportunity to appreciatively reveal their own expertise and resourcefulness and re-claim that responsibility. That's what the people of Thames began to do last October.

As a leading and entrepreneurial national New Zealand not-for-profit organisation, Jigsaw has chosen to champion this paradigm shift through a national social change strategy called Many Voices One Purpose. This strategy is

Jigsaw seeks to coordinate opportunities for local communities to discover, believe in and grow their own capacity to ensure the protection and nurturing of their children.

based on the belief that 'when we bring together our collective ideas, influence and wisdom, the impossible becomes the possible'. As an agency with a dual purpose – preventing child abuse and family violence, and promoting the safety and well being of children, their families and communities – Jigsaw seeks to coordinate opportunities for local communities to discover, believe in and grow their own capacity to ensure the protection and nurturing of their children.

The transformational conversation that took place in Thames launched the pilot for 'Many Voices One Purpose', branded locally as 'Thames Linking Communities' (TLC). This leading edge initiative is funded through a partnership between Jigsaw and The Todd Foundation, a respected and innovative New Zealand philanthropic trust.

Innovating through interconnected methodologies

'Many Voices One Purpose' is based on Appreciative Inquiry methodology. It is founded on the assumption that once people experience an appreciative conversation, hear stories validating their own and others' successful experiences and absorb the wisdom and skills inherent within these stories, they are more likely to consciously and confidently initiate helpful interactions with others.

The propensity for strengthening and sustaining these new helping behaviours over time is further heightened when the appreciative conversation takes place within a community development context, and is combined with a social marketing communications strategy specifically designed to inform and inspire people in ways that promote positive changes in their behaviour towards others. While Jigsaw has worked with each of these three methodologies over the past five years, this is the first time we have purposefully combined them within one integrated project. Early results suggest this innovation has produced a potent catalyst for social change.

Table 1 on page 20 illustrates the way that the three methodologies interconnect with ease. They have similar core principles, which in combination strengthen, extend and create. Most importantly from Jigsaw's perspective, they are all whole-system oriented, inclusive, empowering and facilitative, and match well with the fundamental assumption that drives Many Voices One Purpose: that all communities are inherently capable entities. We believe that once communities reveal their own resourcefulness and discover that change is both desirable and possible, through the evidence of their own stories, they will take action to bring their own dreams to life, producing their own social entrepreneurs and forging their own pathway to social transformation.

Jigsaw's relationship with Maori as our indigenous people

Jigsaw's organisational infrastructure, values and practices reflect the special relationship that was established between Maori (as the indigenous people of our land) and the English Crown, through the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840. While historical debates about the meaning of the Treaty provisions continue today, its three foundation principles embody the Treaty's spirit and intent, and shape the relationships between Maori and Tauwiwi (people who have arrived here since 1840) within Jigsaw. Table 2 on page 21 illustrates principal values that guide Jigsaw's relationships with Maori.

Table 1: Combined methodologies: a potent mix for innovation in child abuse prevention



Appreciative Inquiry	CommunityDevelopment	Social marketing
In every society, organisation or group, something works	Just about everyone wants what's best for their community	People change their behaviour because they discover, co-create and chose alternatives that add greater value
What we focus on becomes our reality	Once people understand others' circumstances they're usually willing to help	People do things because they acquire information or skills they did not previously have
Reality is created in the moment and there are multiple realities	If people are treated with respect, they usually respond the same way	Change is more effective and sustained when people are collaborators, pollinators and participants within their own change process
People have more confidence and comfort to journey to the future (the unknown) when they carry forward parts of the past (the known)	People have to believe something is possible before they'll work to make it happen	Change happens most powerfully when people are enabled to become heroes of their own stories
If we carry forward parts of the past, they should be what is best about the past	People working together are better off and more successful than people working alone	Communities are the most effective place for change to happen, with community leadership and support
It is important to value differences	Our differences can enrich the resourcefulness of our communities	Respecting, acknowledging and combining our different strengths provides powerful leverage for change
(Hammond, The Thin Book of AI)	(The Community Tool Box)	(National Social Marketing Centre UK)

Table 2: Working together within Jigsaw

Treaty principles	Treaty principles in action	Jigsaw's Vision and Values
<p>Tika - doing the right thing</p> <p>Pono - doing it with integrity</p> <p>Aroha - driving it with sincerity</p>	<p>Partnership - We share decision-making power at all levels within our organisation and its activities.</p> <p>Protection - We work together to protect our indigenous treasures, including Maori mythology, knowledge, values, stories and traditions, Maori language, our shared natural environment and our people.</p> <p>Participation - We partner within our organisation, seeking equality of opportunity and outcomes.</p>	<p>Vision - Spark the dream – thriving children, flourishing families</p> <p>Values - We value all people and act with generosity and integrity. We are inclusive, transparent and collaborative, seeking always to promote genuine, respectful relationships and to provide outstanding service.</p>

'It's like an octopus: a body of people who are at the centre driving the new ideas, and then new tentacles growing out into every corner of our community.' member of the Thames community

The Thames Linking Communities [TLC] rollout

We chose Thames as the pilot location because, as a compact service town of only 6,000 people, it is a discrete entity. This made it realistic to design a community development initiative which, over time, would touch the life of everyone living there. It was an additional bonus for the TLC pilot that our national project manager Sally Christie lives there, so she could immediately access a wide range of networks across the local community.

With any community based initiative, Jigsaw always works in relationship with its local partner agency so the readiness of CAPS Hauraki to warmly welcome the initiative and the immediate support offered by Kaye Smith, in her role as the local child advocate for child witnesses of family violence, were both vital success factors for community trust and engagement.

As 'Many Voices One Purpose' has been implemented in Thames through TLC, we have brought our strengths together for the same cause: the safety and well being of our children. This has involved:

- Engaging with *mana whenua* (local Maori tribal leaders and their representatives) from the outset;
- Seeking their mandate and blessing so that all local people, both Maori and Taiwi, feel fully welcome and able to participate;
- Involving a bi-cultural team in the design of the TLC launch day and conversation design and creating a conversation that enables everyone's voice to be heard;
- Inviting *mana whenua* to open the day with a Maori process of welcome;
- Strengthening local cultural understanding and relationships and seeking to ensure that Maori cultural concepts, values and protocols become embedded into every aspect of the initiative's design and delivery.

Working together in this way has been an essential element in ensuring that Maori living in Thames can experience TLC as inviting, inclusive, strength-based and beneficial for their *tamariki* (children) and *whanau* (extended families).

During one of Sally's earliest local conversations about 'Many Voices One Purpose', a member of the Thames community, who had no prior experience with child abuse or professional service delivery, summed up the initiative in one sentence: 'It's like an octopus: a body of people who are at the centre driving the new ideas, and then new tentacles growing out into every corner of our community.'

'Imagine that every day in our community every family had someone to call on to share their hopes, their good times and their hard times. Lead the change. Together we have the skills to make this happen.'

As this concept of the 'octopus' caught on, a small local coordinating group quickly emerged, engaged strongly with the concept of community ownership and leadership, and excited by the sense of local empowerment and the hope for change this initiative engendered. They organised the launch event for what came to be called TLC and publicised it widely with an inspiring

BE PART OF A THAMES CHANGING EVENT

Imagine that every day in our community every family had someone to call on to share their hopes, their good times and their hard times.

LEAD THE CHANGE

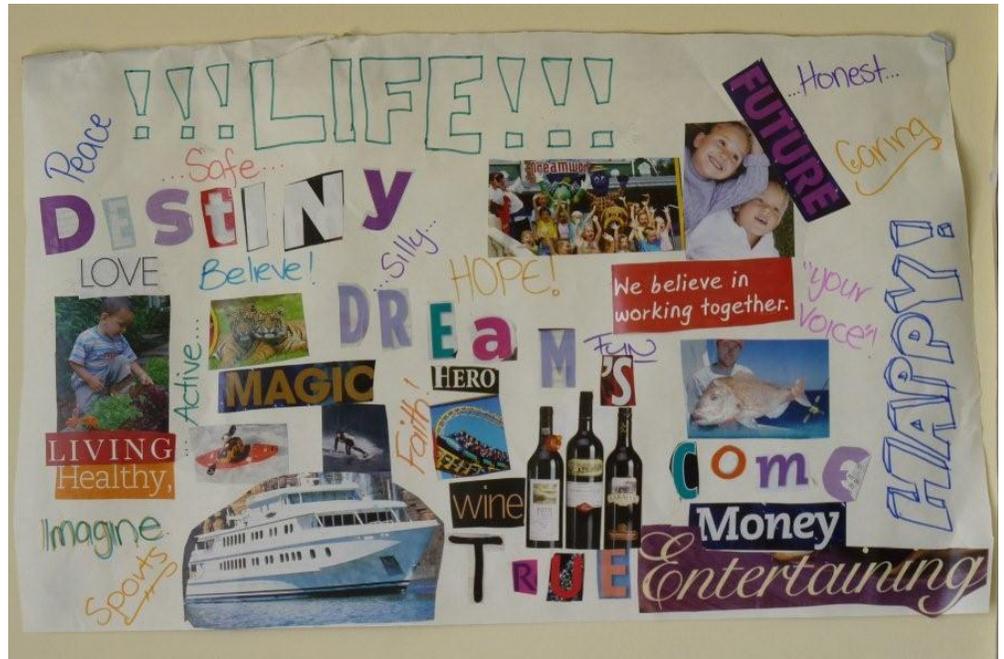
Be part of a fun, entertaining and inspiring event where together we will discover ways to support families and children.
TLC is a movement to inspire every person in our community to accept the responsibility for and right to ensure that our children and families thrive as part of every day life in Thames.

TOGETHER WE HAVE THE SKILLS TO MAKE THIS HAPPEN!

"There is no power greater than a community discovering what it cares about"
- Margaret Wheatley

TLC - Thames Linking Communities

Collage created by TLC community



postcard, utilising social marketing language to promote the benefits of personal responsibility and invite 'every person in our community' to 'accept responsibility' for actively supporting the families and children of Thames.

The bi-cultural conversation design team included Sally and Kaye on behalf of the local coordinating group, with Tau Huirama and Liz Kinley from Jigsaw. At first, we struggled to discover the question that would most perfectly engage participant's hearts and minds in purposeful story telling and conversation. Then Tau created a breakthrough by taking it back to his own personal experience, recalling positive memories of large whanau Christmas gatherings at his aunt's home: the deliciousness of her homegrown strawberries and the way this memory has sustained his life-long sense that abundance is possible even in the simplest of life styles. Within moments we had our central question:

'Can you tell me about a time when something someone did for you or your family created a good experience that has had a lasting and positive effect on your life?'

Signs of positive impact in Thames: where to from here?

Unsolicited feedback received throughout and immediately after the TLC launch day reflected participants' excitement about being part of a meaningful change initiative for their community. As one participant wrote to the coordinating group:

'What can I say? What a tremendous opportunity it was to really connect with each other. After the first round of "really meeting" with another person I was hooked. And the day just got better.'

'It was a delight and a pleasure to hear the round up of the ideas that had emerged from the process. What couldn't we achieve, if we took the time more often to really listen?'

'It was a delight and a pleasure to hear the round up of the ideas that had emerged from the process. What couldn't we achieve, if we took the time more often to really listen?' participant in TLC launch

It's clear that an abundance of goodwill, curiosity and commitment has been awakened in Thames and is ready to provide a robust community-owned platform for the next phase of TLC development. A further community event in March, 2011 has now increased the size and spread of people involved and agreed the next set of actions for generating and spreading new helping behaviour through all parts of the community. A DVD of the highlights of the original conversation has proved to be a valuable resource for enhancing and mobilising further action at both personal and community agency levels.

Community members attending recounted stories that illustrated their own personal behaviour changes in relation to helping others. Their comments demonstrated significantly increased levels of self-reflection and intentionality. For example: 'I now listen much more'; 'I find being consciously present when someone is with me makes a huge difference'; 'I make a point of acknowledging strangers'. Community agency representatives also reported agency-based behaviour changes, with many who have traditionally worked 'in silos' now coming together to share resources.

Beyond the boundaries of Thames, other communities where Jigsaw has partner agencies are eagerly exploring options for their own involvement. Some of these are geographical locations, while others are communities of interest such as sporting networks and large community-based workplaces.

In the words of one group of TLC community participants:

'It is about the rebuilding and weaving of the fabric of our community into a cloak that fits us all'.

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