

Bridges Evaluation Report

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Prepared By



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Introduction

This Evaluation Report provides a snapshot of the key outcomes to date of the Bridges Network Approach (BNA). In many ways it is an interim report detailing the work of an organisation in transition and evaluating a model of operation for community organisations that is still taking shape. While it includes relevant information regarding operational and specific service delivery issues, the brief for this Evaluation Report is clearly focused on the Bridges Network Approach (BNA). All of the information gathered as part of the evaluation process is framed by an analysis of how the BNA has taken shape, how it has been operationalised at Bridges, its impacts from the perspective of clients, external stakeholders and staff, and a number of broader implications and challenges for the approach and for Bridges further development of it into the future.

While this approach, the BNA, has been developing over a number of years in different forms, it has been intentionally applied to and shaped in the context of this particular organisation, Bridges, over the past 3 years. Indeed, in 2008, the organisation formerly known as Blacktown Alcohol and other Drugs Family Service (B.A.D.F.S.) and before that as Drink in Family Support Services (D.I.F.S.S.), changed its name to Bridges and signified its intent to publicly work from and promote the BNA as a central focus.

This Evaluation Report examines a range of data available about:

- ◆ How the BNA has achieved outcomes for individuals and families who use Bridges services,
- ◆ How this approach has impacted on the broader community in Blacktown and further afield,
- ◆ The role of BNA in collaboration and partnerships between Bridges and other organisations
- ◆ How BNA has produced innovation and exercised leadership in the community sector
- ◆ How the model might develop further in the future at Bridges and in other organisations

Background and Context

Bridges (then known as D.I.F.S.S.) was established in 1978 and incorporated in 1987. It provides a range of services in the Blacktown Local Government Area (LGA) of Sydney, focused on the impacts that the abuse of alcohol and other drugs has on local families.

It provides individual and family counselling, support and therapeutic groups, community and cultural development activities that address the social impacts of alcohol and other drug abuse in a way that accounts for the complex contexts in which these impacts are felt.

Bridges has also played a key role in demonstrating and advocating for the unique and effective place of small non-government organisations in the community sector. Through Voice for SONG (Small Organisations Non Government), Bridges has joined with a number of smaller non government organisations and advocacy bodies such as the Western Sydney Community Forum, to examine and put a case for small organisations in a funding context that tends to utilise a lead agency model which advantages larger organisations over smaller ones in designing and implementing programs and services.

In 2010 Bridges employs 7 staff in a range of counselling, groupwork, community development and management roles. Many of the staff undertake a combination of roles in each of these areas. Bridges is managed by a community based board and is funded by 7 different bodies to deliver its range of services and projects. Between July 2008 and June 2009, Bridges made 239 new client contacts and completed 173 instances of service delivery.

Bridges receives funding from 7 different sources with much of this funding organised on a time limited basis. This has resulted in ongoing uncertainty for Bridges with regard to its long term viability. It is within this context, however, that Bridges has undertaken its work and developed innovative approaches to that work.

Both the history of Bridges (formerly B.A.D.F.S.) and its focus on social innovation has been well documented since its inception and an analysis of a range of reports, discussion papers and evaluations that have been produced by and for the organisation are included in the current evaluation report.

Bridges provides a range of services and activities assisting and supporting individuals, families and communities in the Blacktown local government area. The summary below sourced from Bridges client data and annual reports outlines both the number of people receiving a service from Bridges and the types of services received between 2007 and 2009.

2007-8

Activity	Description	Partnerships
Individual and Family Counselling	<p>175 substance users and family members were supported through face to face counselling and therapeutic groupwork throughout the year at Bridges and through outreach.</p> <p>In addition Bridges provided information, referral and telephone counselling and informal face to face contact and support.</p>	<p>Outreach counselling was provided at:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holy Family Centre, • Riverstone Neighbourhood Centre • and Aboriginal Medical Service (AMS) Western Sydney
Healing Addictions Group	29 participants in the Healing Addictions Group which ran on a weekly basis throughout the year	Referrals from a range of agencies
What helps Kids Grow Strong – Groups for Parents at other Centres	<p>Resilience-based parenting program</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 14 parents at Doonside Community Health (6 sessions) • 6 parents at AMS Western Sydney (3 sessions) <p>Promotion, registration and venues were organised by our partners.</p>	<p>Doonside Community Health</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AMS Western Sydney
What helps Kids Grow Strong – Training for workers	<p>Training in resilience-based interventions for staff working in community and government sectors. Bridges provided several workshops for each group below. The maximum number in attendance at any given session is detailed below.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 23 Family, Youth and Health Workers at Doonside • 13 Aboriginal Workers at AMS Western Sydney 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Doonside Community Health, • Marist Youth Care • AMS Western Sydney • Doonside Public School

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 22 Workers at Marist Youth Care • 22 Teachers and Staff at Doonside Public School Promotion, registration and venues were organised by our partners. 	
Children's Therapeutic Groups	This year 6 children affected by substance use in their family were interviewed for therapeutic groupwork to commence in the next financial year.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holyoake will facilitate groupwork for Bridges clients. • Bridges will support Holyoake.
Children – Kids Club	70 Children enrolled in activities for seven weekly sessions for social engagement and recreation group. This included children who come from diverse backgrounds where there is social disadvantage. As well as assisting in the running of the sessions, Bridges supported Doonside Hub in running the Kids Club for children attending Doonside Public School. Bridges sponsored the artwork program and the children's art exhibition to which their parents were invited.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Doonside Hub • Doonside Public School
Indigenous Photovoice Project	<p>15 Indigenous children participated in a photovoice project where they learnt photography skills and took photos to fit with the theme "Willmot is the best place to be." This involved weekly sessions over a term and also two outings. Bridges published a booklet to showcase the work of the students. The booklet will be posted on the website.</p> <p>Willmot Public School held a launch of the booklet with 150 students, parents and teachers in attendance.</p>	Bridges ran sessions with children attending Mt Druitt Indigenous Church and Willmot Public School
Discovery Challenge Film Project	Approximately 60 young people were involved in the filming of the DVD that included voices of young people from diverse cultures discussing thoughts and experiences related to family, Blacktown, war, sport, friendships and their dreams. One of the aims of the project was to build empathy between different cultural groups. The film was produced by	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blacktown Migrant Resource Centre • Liverpool PCYC. • Doonside High • Mt Druitt Mission Australia • Blacktown City Council

	Blacktown Migrant Resource Centre in association with Bridges, supported by Liverpool PCYC. Blacktown Migrant Resource Centre organised a launch of the film. This film is on the Bridges Website.	
Shalvey High Film Project	A resilience-based project where 9 students created a script which described a contemporary dilemma related to drug use. They then acted in the film production. Shalvey High organised a launch of the film in front of other students in the school.	Bridges contracted Short Black Films to work with students from Shalvey High.
Training Day – “There’s more to Drug Use than Drugs”	40 people attended Training on Bridges Approach to addressing Drug and Alcohol Issues. Speakers – Peter Slattery (Resilience) Catherine Spooner (Social Determinants of Drug Use), Kylie Frazer and Amanda Howard (Assets-Based Community Development), Robert Peckham (AMS Western Sydney), Susan Vogels (Blacktown Migrant Resource Centre) plus Bridges workers.	Family Worker Training and Development Program promoted the event and coordinated registrations, venue and evaluation
Presentations	Presentations on Bridges approach were provided at were provided at:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seven Hills/Toongabbie Interagency Planning Workshop • Workshop at Network of Alcohol and Drug Agencies Annual Conference • Workshop at Blacktown Conference 	Acknowledgement of partnerships at workshops
Blokes Day	Over 100 people attended this event which was coordinated by Doonside Hub. This was an event for men and their families from diverse cultural backgrounds to gain health information and connect with others in the community, including service providers. This event was jointly sponsored by Bridges and Community Drug Action Team. The event would not have been possible without this sponsorship.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Doonside Hub • Community Drug Action Team
Website	4,070 unique visitors with 71,083 hits on website in total for the year.	Partners and partnership projects are promoted on this website.

The website is maintained and updated with our projects, resources and links.

2008-9

Activity	Description	Partners
Individual, couples and family counselling	<p>242 substance users and family members were supported through face to face counselling and therapeutic group work throughout the year at Bridges onsite and through outreach. Total face to face contact for counselling, casework and group work attendance was 1387.</p> <p>In addition Bridges provided information, referral and telephone counselling and informal face to face contact and support.</p>	<p>Outreach counselling was provided to the following organisations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Holy Family Centre Riverstone Neighbourhood Centre Aboriginal Medical Centre(AMS) Western Sydney Mount Druitt Indigenous Church
Living With Addictions	<p>103 participants in the healing addictions group which ran on a weekly basis throughout the year.</p>	<p>Referrals for this group came from client self referrals and a variety of different agencies.</p>
Communication Skills and Managing Conflict and Anger Group	<p>This is a new group for Bridges. This group was established in response to clients within the service and other stakeholders expression of interest. There were 11 participants in this group.</p>	<p>Referrals for this group came from client self referrals, Probation and Parole and other agencies.</p>
What helps Kids Grow Strong	<p>Resilience -based parenting program</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5 parents 12 Parents/workers from Mount Druitt Indigenous Church 9 teachers and staff from Doonside Public School 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mount Druitt Indigenous Church Doonside Public School
Kaleidoscope Children's Therapeutic Groups	<p>During the year 12 children affected by substance use in their family participated in a therapeutic group which</p>	<p>Conducted in association with Holyoake.</p>

	<p>Bridges conducted in association with Holyoake. There was a total of 15 sessions.</p> <p>Bridges also provided counselling to some of the parents of the children attending the children's group work program.</p>	
Workshops for Young People.	<p>72 Students from Bidwill school attended 4 workshops. These workshops focused on risk and protective factors around drug and alcohol use in the lives of young people.</p>	Bidwill School
Children's Indigenous PhotoVoice Project	<p>Willmot PhotoVoice certificate presentation and present giving. 13 children and 1 worker participated. This event was in recognition of participation of those involved in a photographic skills project that resulted in the creation of the booklet, "Willmot is the place to Be."</p>	Willmot Public School Mount Druitt Indigenous Church
Promotion of Bridges Resources.	<p>"Willmot is the place to Be" Photovoice booklet, Shalvey High DVD and Discovery Challenge DVD.</p> <p>These resources were previously developed in partnership with other organisations. During this year they were promoted on Bridges website.</p> <p>They were also shown by stakeholders to their client groups at various events.</p>	Willmot School Shalvey High School Blacktown Migrant Resource Centre Liverpool PCYC Doonside High Mt Druitt Mission Australia
Indigenous Youth Leadership project	<p>Consultation meetings in preparation for project work with the Mount Druitt Indigenous Church youth and community leaders groups- 20 in attendance.</p>	Mount Druitt Indigenous Church
Narrative Community Stories Project	<p>Bridges has worked with clients using narrative storying</p>	Clients involved are self referred

	<p>techniques. These clients are now sharing their stories with others to reduce isolation. One Indigenous client is now bringing together other Indigenous people with similar issues to provide support and ways of learning from each other's experience.</p>	
Students	<p>Bridges supported a student in her student placement and another with case work training and supervision.</p>	<p>Australian Institute of Counselling Nirimba TAFE</p>
Presentations	<p>Presentations by Bridges were provided at the following events</p> <p>“Partnerships and collaboration” convened by Western Sydney Community Forum</p> <p>- Mount Druitt Speakout. This event was convened by Mount Druitt Community Leadership Group to assist the local community that is being impacted by problematic drug and alcohol use. Bridges gave a presentation on the ways in which it works on drug and alcohol issues in a broader context and encourages communities to work together to create more positive outcomes for all those affected.</p> <p>- Working with Families Workshop, convened by NADA</p> <p>- Bridges Event Bridges provided training on the approach we use.</p> <p>Bridges also presented at a number of other informal and formal settings.</p>	<p>Western Sydney Community Forum</p> <p>Mount Druitt Community Leadership Group</p> <p>Network of Alcohol and other Drug Agencies</p>
Bridges as Case Study in publications	<p>Bridges provided a case study for the:</p> <p>- Council of Social Services of</p>	<p>NSW Council of Social Services(NCOSS) Network of Alcohol and Other</p>

	NSW (NCOSS) Partnerships Resources kit. - Network of Alcohol and Other drug Agencies (NADA) Family and Carer Tool Kit.	Drug Agencies(NADA)
Bridges Website	Last year there were 5153 unique visitors and 81,301 hits on our website. The website is maintained and updated with our projects, resources and links.	Partners and partnership projects are promoted on this website.
Development of Tools for sharing the Bridges Network Approach	Bridges began development of our new updated Bridges Website and report entitled "The Bridges Network Approach. These tools will be launched and published in the 2009/10 financial year.	Many partners have contributed to the development and implementation of this approach.

Source: Bridges Annual Report 2007/8 and 2008/9

The Bridges Network Approach (BNA)

Over time Bridges has developed an approach for working with its clients, with other organisations and with the community more broadly, based on:

- Utilising a systems approach when working on issues related to alcohol and other drugs
- Sharing and maximising resources between organisations to make the most of individual contributions to projects and activities
- Integrating individual, family and community focus in addressing issues related to alcohol and other drugs
- Developing strong and ongoing relationships between Bridges and other organisations (large and small), government departments, community and cultural groups
- Building on strengths in all its work
- Developing an array of decentralised networks that work effectively in a local context but can be co-ordinated to influence broader policy directions of state and federal governments.
- Exploring and advocating for the role of small organisations as essential players in the service system.

The Bridges Network Approach (BNA) has taken shape over the past 10 years but is still in its early stages of development. It has developed within a complex and uncertain context experienced by many small non-government organisations that juggle the sometimes inconsistent service delivery requirements of different funding bodies, and the continual challenge of working with short term project based funding.

Evaluation Process and this Report

This Report outlines an evaluation process undertaken for Bridges that is focused on the Bridges Network Approach. Key questions for the evaluation process have been:

- ◆ How has the BNA been demonstrated in the work of Bridges?
- ◆ What is the evidence for the success of the BNA so far?
- ◆ Where have there been challenges in putting the BNA into practice?
- ◆ How have those challenges been addressed?
- ◆ What has been learned about the impacts of the BNA to date?
- ◆ What are the key areas for improvement and development with regard to the BNA?
- ◆ Challenges and promising directions for Bridges in developing the BNA into the future.

Methodology

The methodology for this evaluation uses a range of qualitative and some quantitative data to examine the way in which the BNA has been put into practice at Bridges. The methodology uses the following strategies for the collection and analysis of data:

- Review of Australian and international literature on alcohol and other drugs service approaches, the social determinants of health, social innovation, the role of small organisations in the community sector, resilience and systems change.
- Review of Bridges documents including annual reports, policy documents, strategic planning, statistical reports and past evaluation reports.
- Internal evaluation process of activities and projects gathering data from staff regarding the BNA and how it has been in operation across individual program areas and the organisations as a whole.
- Client survey – clients completed a survey regarding their experiences and observations of the BNA. A total of 11 surveys were completed and returned over the month of November 2009.
- External stakeholder interviews – 17 external stakeholders who had worked with Bridges in the past or currently work with the organisation were interviewed by phone with regard to their experiences, observations and reflections of the BNA in action.

All data was analysed for key themes drawn out from the evaluation questions listed above.

Literature Review

Key stated elements of the BNA are focussed on systems thinking, social innovation, the social determinants of health (and drug use in particular), social and organisational change. A recent Report outlining the BNA summarises its major tenets:

The Bridges Network Approach is a philosophy for social change and a working paradigm with strategies, rather than a set of techniques. As well as systems thinking it emphasises understanding, care and cooperation at individual, community and organisational levels...The [BNA] is a social innovation – a new way for addressing pressing social issues.

(Suhood, T. 2009. The Draft Bridges Network Approach Report Executive Summary. pp. 2 – 7).

In light of this, a brief review of some recent literature in these areas assists in contextualising the work of Bridges and the development of the BNA as a model that is linked with broader research and policy both in Australia and internationally. This review only briefly outlines key themes that are in evidence as part of the BNA emerging from both documentation about the approach and evaluation data collected for this Report.

Systems Thinking and the Social Determinants of Drug Use

Pennie,G., Foster-Fishman, Nowell,B. And Yang,H. (2007) define systems change in a social context in the following way:

In these efforts, systems change refers to an intentional process designed to alter the status quo by shifting and realigning the form and function of a targeted system. Organizations, service delivery networks, poor neighborhoods, and even whole communities are often the systems targeted in these efforts. In most system change endeavors, the underlying structures and supporting mechanisms that operate within a system are altered, such as the policies, routines, relationships, resources, power structures, and values (Foster-Fishman, 2002).

The BNA draws on systems thinking in a number of ways. Using this approach, individuals are seen as part of and interacting with larger and complex systems comprising immediate and extended family, neighbourhood, workplace, services, community, and wider social and economic processes. Bridges as an organisation is also conceived as small but networked in its operations. The BNA promotes the idea that organisations can stay small, which enables them to interact at a local level but bring its ideas and influence to a broader context in its area of expertise. This model of working runs largely against recent trends in policy and funding which promotes a dominant role for larger organisations over smaller ones in a range of human service delivery areas. The use of systems thinking in designing and implementing all aspects of Bridges work is supported by a range of literature focused on addressing a range of health and social issues.

Emshoff,J., Adam, J., Darnell,A., Darnell,D., Erickson,S., Schneider,S. and Hudgins,R. (2007) outline the importance of systems thinking in addressing issues in a health context when they write:

Ecological theory suggests that the causes and solutions to health problems include forces outside the individual. Consequently, there is an increased call to think about risk, protection, and resiliency as community level variables (Wagenaar & Perry, 1994). Secondly, systems theory points to the interdependence of the individual entities that make up the system. In his argument for community level health interventions, Holder (2002) advocates a systems approach that includes the modification of structures, environments and contexts. (p. 255-256. 2007)

The BNA draws heavily on this understanding of drug and alcohol issues and how individuals and families work through them. At an organisational level, the work of Staggs, S., White, M., Schewe.,

Davis, E., and Dill, E. (2007) using what they call the “incubation approach to systems change” (p.365) to address children's exposure to violence, sheds further light on how systems theory can create change across different organisations in a system to achieve better social outcomes. They write:

The project's approach to systems change was to work with influential and motivated individuals in target systems to create within this individuals a personal commitment to becoming 'personal incubators' for change in their systems.” (p.367)

This attention to the role of advocates or 'incubators' for change across organisations within a system and the importance of relationships in this process, reflect the similar focus found in the BNA. Rather than growing the organisation so that it becomes the provider of all assistance, there is strong evidence that Bridges has intentionally remained small in size and concentrated on developing strong and diverse relationships, partnerships and networks with other organisations of varying sizes that have a capacity to complement the works Bridges undertakes.

In terms of the specific drug and alcohol focus of Bridges, the work of Spooner, C. and Hetherington, K (2004) on the Social Determinants of Drug Use in using a systems approach in developing an understanding of drug use has been particularly influential in the formulation of the BNA. They draw attention to the multiple systems shaping and impacting on drug use for individuals including family, socio-economic factors, education, cultural factors and the influence of the early years of childhood in relation to a number of developmental outcomes. The work of Spooner and Hetherington has provided a clear impetus for Bridges to focus its work away from a medical or treatment oriented approach centred on individual change towards an approach that works with individuals and the various systems in which they live, simultaneously.

Social Innovation

Social innovation is a newly emerging field that describes a diverse range of ideas, processes, structures, organisations and projects. It is defined well by Geoff Mulgan:

Innovation is often given complex definitions. We prefer the simple one: 'new ideas that work.' (Geoff Mulgan, Young Foundation)

The influence of ideas coming from the literature on social innovation on the BNA are closely related to those of systems theory in that the BNA is focused on understanding and working with the complexities of drug and alcohol use, and the critical role played by creative or lateral thinking in working with individuals, families and communities to address these issues. Kasper, G and Klohesy, S (2008) provide a succinct summary of the contribution social innovation makes to work such as that of Bridges:

Every day, individuals, social entrepreneurs, and organizations create ingenious solutions to some of the world's thorniest problems, yet many of the innovations are never realized or scaled, and fail to achieve their transformative potential. Piecemeal funding, under-resourced organizations, trailing-edge technology, and structures that are set up for services and advocacy rather than for discovery and scaling are all fundamental elements of a social sector landscape that often limits the impact of breakthrough innovations. (p. 2)

It is this landscape that clearly reflects the context in which the BNA has been developed and the role played by social innovation ideas in making space for this different way of working to take shape.

Tonya Surman's (2009) work through the Toronto based Centre for Social Innovation also illustrates a number of themes that have been central to the development of the BNA to date. She proposes

what she calls a “constellation model” for organisations working together which pays close attention to the relationships and partnerships between organisations in working on issues rather than one organisation taking the lead and growing with others following or taking subsidiary roles. She writes:

The Constellation model is a complexity inspired governance framework for multi-organizational collaboration. It is a way of organising a group of interested parties to meet a need without having to create a new organization to 'hold' the issue. It is a tool to help us recognize and become conscious designers in a complex ecosystems of organizational collaboration. (p.1)

This type of model provides both an overall vision and step by step program for organisations to engage with each other in new relationships and networked approach to addressing issues and problems. It reflects the BNA's focus on staying small, working collaboratively with other organisations, the importance of relationships and networks in addressing drug and alcohol issues holistically, and the development of new ideas and approaches both inside and outside a service system paradigm.

The complexities and operations of power between organisations, in implementing this kind of networked approach are also relevant to the experiences of Bridges that emerged from the evaluation data. Heranz, J (2007) draws attention to some of the tensions and impacts of various approaches to engaging in and managing networks across sectors. The tensions, decision making structures and power that all form part of network approaches such as the BNA, particularly in networks with participants across sectors is of particular relevance. Heranz writes:

A generalized network approach that under emphasizes sectoral differences may mask important differences in such networks that are otherwise highlighted when framed by sector-based strategic orientations. The strategic orientation framework provides an analytical approach that helps identify the characteristics and trade-offs of distinct dynamic network management strategies in mixed-sector networked environments. Given the escalation in blurred public/non-profit networked initiatives, it is helpful for managers to better understand their options regarding network coordination approaches and network service delivery processes. (2007. p.28)

The burgeoning literature in the area of social innovation provides both encouragement and cautionary reflection for the BNA, with both of these themes emerging throughout the evaluation process. There are clear connections between the networked strategies advocated in much social innovation literature that are the basis of the BNA, however, the imperative in this literature of 'scaling up' innovative approaches appears somewhat contradictory to the unique and localised context in which many of the socially innovative ideas (including the BNA) have been shaped. The BNA's focus on organisations staying small is a key tenet of the approach and one that promotes a diversity of players rather than one innovator who sets the standards for all. The evaluation data revealed a strong theme regarding the potential for the BNA to have a wider application across services and agencies. The process and implications of what this kind of 'scaling up' might mean and how it takes shape will be important for Bridges to consider in future plans for the BNA.

Social and Organisational Change

Literature on social and organisational change is the final area that critically informs the development of the BNA and shapes the evaluative questions and challenges that this report begins to draw out.

The policy and funding context in which Bridges has operated over the last decade has been characterised by a change in the way governments have viewed and worked with non-government organisations. There has been a parallel growth in policy and funding frameworks which emphasise both collaboration and competition simultaneously, accompanied by an increase in short term project funding and contractual arrangements both between government and non-government organisations, as well as more recently, larger non-government organisations and smaller organisations placed in the role of subcontractors for a range of program areas. The work of Bridges through Voice for SONG (Small Organisations Non-Government) has provided an illustration of how the landscape of social and organisational change in Australia has changed. This is critical in establishing the context in which the BNA has been developed and operates.

In the UK a similar change in the policy and funding context has taken place. Milbourne (2009) highlights the contradictions that emerge for non-government organisations in this context asking:

Whether policy driven arrangements for planning services and selecting providers are undermining the stated aims of the changes: of creating better, more responsive local services and improved collaboration. (p.278)

She emphasises the importance of locally developed and designed approaches to social issues and the difficulties experienced by small organisations in undertaking this work under one size fits all government funding and policy initiatives. She writes:

Competitive funding regimes, generic targets, broad planning criteria and more sophisticated bidding processes all favour bigger, better-resourced organisations, while concealing the advantages that smaller organisations offer. They also shape their priorities robbing them of power over the changing nature of their activities. This raises questions about the extent to which competitively allocated contracts, and planning framed by common, nationally driven targets, can accommodate the diverse approaches, and community oriented, locally designed services, identified as necessary to achieving improved outcomes in deprived areas. (p.290).

This tension is an important component of the context in which Bridges does its work, and in which the BNA has developed to date. Ongoing sustainability of the organisation and the BNA itself in the funding environment is a consistent theme emerging from the evaluation data and one that Bridges is continually faced with as it develops the BNA further.

This very brief overview of some recent literature in key areas connected with the BNA and Bridges development overall provides some context in which the evaluative data gathered and reported on here can be understood. The literature reflects an international context of rapid change, uncertainty and the development of new ideas, approaches and even paradigms in which social issues and organisations are taking shape. Understanding the BNA in this context assists in making sense of the history of the approach, the way in which it is currently operating and some promising directions for the future of this approach.

Review of Bridges Internal Documents and Documents Linked with the Bridges Network Approach (BNA)

Over the past decade B.A.D.F.S and then Bridges has undertaken a regular and comprehensive process of documentation and evaluation of its work and the development of the BNA. A range of key documents from this rich history were reviewed as part of this Evaluation. These documents reveal a number of important themes relevant for the Evaluation of the BNA to date. These themes include:

- *Scope, Complexity and Adaptation:* The ambitious nature of the BNA in its various guises over time and the way in which the BNA has evolved from the Bridges Project in an adaptive and consultative way is a key theme throughout the documentation. Tracking the development of the BNA from its early stages as an interagency strategy through to a well developed model or approach which has been taken up and pioneered by Bridges reveals a robust and flexible process that has reflected times and circumstances for Bridges and the community sector over the past decade.
- *Advocacy and a Strategic Approach:* A review of the documentation produced for and by Bridges over the history of the BNA's development demonstrates a sustained program of advocacy and strategic thinking regarding both the complexity of drug use and the role of small non-government organisations as innovators and policy shapers. Evidence from the evaluation and other documents reveals the critical role of long term planning and advocacy, gathering information and developing strategies over time in both of these areas.
- *Leadership:* There is clear evidence from the documentation that Bridges has provided strong, sustained and collaborative leadership in the areas of both drug and alcohol and effective policy and service provision in the community sector. Bridges has engaged a range of other organisations and peak bodies in the process, which has been critical in shaping and driving the development of the BNA.
- *Sustainability:* The uncertainty regarding funding experienced by Bridges currently is revealed in the documentation as an ongoing challenge that the organisation has faced for over a decade. The time taken in seeking and securing a range of short term funding, staff turnover due to project based funding and the ongoing uncertainty experienced by Bridges due to a lack of funding is a theme that is consistent through all of the evaluative and reporting documentation reviewed for this evaluation. The capacity of Bridges to develop the BNA in this context is quite remarkable and begs the question, what may have been possible to date with this approach if ongoing funding had not been such an overwhelming concern. As the data in this process reveals, this same question remains one of the most significant challenges for Bridges and for the further development of the BNA.
- *Understanding and Communication of the BNA:* Previous evaluations reviewed here raise a number of concerns about how well the BNA (or an earlier manifestation of it) had been understood by those outside Bridges, as well as the ownership and understanding of the approach internally. Again this evidence points to an evolving approach and the often complex processes involved in communicating and consulting as it develops. This perspective provides important historical information and taken with the data for the current evaluation reveals that considerable work has been done in this area since earlier evaluations were completed. Evidence from external stakeholders and staff during this evaluation process outlined a program of proactive communication, consultation and inclusion of

suggestions and changes to the BNA over the past 3 years. A high level of staff 'buy-in' was in evidence and a good understanding by external stakeholders of the approach. Critical to the evaluation here is that there is strong evidence that Bridges has taken on board and followed through with feedback and recommendations from previous reports resulting in a more inclusive and rigorous BNA in 2010.

Overall, the range and detail of documentation tracking the history and development of the BNA is comprehensive. This is a crucial data set in terms of both current and future evaluative strategies. Bridges' attention to documentation over time is a major strength and it is recommended that this continue into the future as the BNA moves to its next stage. The documentation describes how a small and specialised organisation undertaking its complex work in a context of ongoing uncertainty, can pursue a strategic and policy agenda that has impacts at a broad level. It reveals that a change in approach such as this takes time and is subject to a range of tensions and opportunities involving individuals, staffing and team structures, community sector history and relationships, the political and funding landscape, trends in policy and service design.

Bridges documents that were reviewed as part of the evaluation were:

- ◆ Suhood, T. (2009) *The Bridges Network Approach. Draft. Summary of Report.* Bridges Blacktown.
- ◆ Suhood, T. (2009) *The Bridges Network Approach Draft Report: strengthening relationships, resilience and systems to address drug related harm and other challenges our families and communities are facing*
- ◆ Bridges. (2008) *Annual Report 2007 – 2008.* Bridges, Blacktown
- ◆ Miller Group. (2007). *The Evaluation of Blacktown Alcohol and other Drugs Family Services (BADFS) Bridges Strategy and Counselling Services.* Social Accounting Process.
- ◆ Suhood, T. Flowers, R. and Gethin, A. (2007) *Bridges Strategy Stage 2 Final Report*
- ◆ Suhood, T. Marks, C. and Waterford, M. (2006). *Voice for SONG. The way forward: Tackling the issues confronting small community organisations.* Western Sydney Community Forum, Parramatta.
- ◆ Suhood, T., Azizi, M., Pedler, S. And Hayes, T. (2002) *Bridges Stage 1 Report*
- ◆ Suhood, T. (2002) BADFS Story in “ *Odd Socks: Why the survival of small community organisations is critical*” published by Local Community Services Association, September 2002
- ◆ Suhood, T. (2002) *BADFS as a models of a Small Non-Government Organisation – Future Directions and Requirements.* A Discussion and Promotion Paper.
- ◆ Suhood, T. (2001) *Emerging voice and survival of small not-for-profit organisations* published in Australian New Zealand Third Sector Review, Vol. 7, No. 2
- ◆ Suhood, T. (2000) Presentation to National Family and Community Conference on Drugs. *Passion, Challenge and Hope.*
- ◆ Suhood, T. (2006) *Social Capital and the Strengthening of Family and Community Relationships to address substance abuse and related issues.* Presentation.

Internal Evaluation Process and Findings

In 2008, Bridges – then known as Blacktown Alcohol and Drugs Family Service (BADFS) – engaged Frazer Howard & Partners to work with the organisation as they developed an evaluation process.

The organisation had commissioned three evaluation reports in the past and these had provided valuable information from which new ideas had been developed and existing programmes refined. In this project staff and management at Bridges wanted to work with consultants in the development of an ongoing evaluation process that could be applied to all aspects of Bridges work, and could be carried out within existing resources as part of each activity or project undertaken.

Central to the brief provided for the development of the evaluation process was an imperative that a collaborative strategy involving all staff be followed throughout the project, and that the evaluation process should pay particular attention to the impacts of the BNA. The significant role played by relationships both within the organisation and between the organisation and others (clients, families, communities, government, other agencies and organisations) provided an underpinning theme in the development of the evaluation process. Initial data from that evaluation process is now included in this report. The data reflects the critical role played by staff in developing and implementing the BNA in each aspect of Bridges operations as well as its overall directions.

Key Objectives

The key objectives of the evaluation process were to be:

- ◆ To establish a systematic and consistent framework for the collection and analysis of evaluation data already being collected by Bridges.
- ◆ Through this process, to highlight and address any additional data that needed to be collected and included in Bridges evaluation reports.
- ◆ To develop a practical and easy to use tool that would enable the timely and effective collection of both quantitative and qualitative data about the work being undertaken by Bridges.
- ◆ To embed an ongoing evaluation process into all aspects of Bridges work without producing an onerous increase in workloads for staff or management.
- ◆ To enable staff to collect and integrate evaluation information into the planning and implementation of activities and projects they were working on.

Methodology

The methodology used in the development of the evaluation process was one based on participatory action research. This methodology involved all staff in the shaping and detailed development of the process. Consistent with this methodology, appreciative inquiry was utilised as a key strategy for developing questions and directions for the organisation to explore its current operations and its vision for the future.

Four workshops were held with staff over a period of 6 months with each workshop structured around a process of reflection, planning and action as the evaluation process was refined and clarified in response to the experiences and practice of those involved. The workshop context and directions is outline below.

Workshop 1

- ◆ Discussion of methodology, purpose and expectations of the project
- ◆ Clarification of evaluation history at Bridges, existing knowledge and evaluation information
- ◆ Questions and reflection about the scope and overall direction of the evaluation process and how it was envisaged in practice by staff.

Workshop 2

- ◆ Clarification and further scoping of evaluation process.
- ◆ Discussion of key themes and elements of the evaluation
- ◆ Evaluating the Network Approach model – discussion and reflection on why the model was important to Bridges work and what aspects of it might be critical in the evaluation.
- ◆ Discussion of what was working well in using this approach and where Bridges would like to see it go in the future.

Workshop 3

- ◆ Developing the framework and questions for evaluation.
- ◆ Clarifying how different aspects of Bridges work could be contained and evaluated consistently.
- ◆ Discussion of how each component can be linked with an overall evaluation of the approach and work of Bridges.
- ◆ Discussion of practical and accessible tool for questioning, reflecting and planning for all aspects of Bridges work
- ◆ Working through a set of draft questions developed in groups on key activities undertaken by Bridges
- ◆ Staff pilot draft evaluation tool before next workshop on different activities of the organisation

Workshop 4

- ◆ Refining and adding to the evaluation questions
- ◆ Further specifying the range and type of evidence that is most useful for the evaluation process
- ◆ Piloting the evaluation tool using the Children's Group as an example – collaborative process of questioning, describing and collating qualitative and quantitative evidence.
- ◆ Staff to continue pilot of evaluation process in priority activities undertaken by Bridges.

The Consultants provided facilitation and feedback to staff over the process as they developed an evaluation framework that was going to be both meaningful and manageable in the long term.

Developing the Evaluation Process

In each of the workshops an iterative process unfolded in which staff and consultants worked together to shape and detail what was to be evaluated, how and why the process was being developed, manageable and accessible tools for ongoing evaluation. Staff were able to question, reflect and trial the evaluation questions and process between workshops and through this cycle, a meaningful and practical strategy for evaluation emerged.

A critical element underpinning the development of the evaluation process was an imperative that it provide useful information for clients of Bridges, for Bridges itself and for funding bodies and partners both now and into the future, and that the information was able to be collected and analysed by Bridges staff. The ongoing sustainability of the evaluation process within current resources was fundamental to its design.

The Evaluation Questions

In line with the objectives outlined above a set of six questions was initially developed with four additional questions added as the process was tested and reflected upon during the fourth workshop with staff.

The final set of questions was:

1. What worked?
2. How do we know?
3. Where is the evidence of the Bridges Network Approach?
4. What was the impact (if any) of the BNA?(on clients, community, other stakeholders, service capacity)
5. What can we build on?
6. What would we do differently?
7. What are the opportunities we would take up here with additional resources?
8. What are the existing connections between this activity and other activities of Bridges?
9. What are the connections between activities we would like to work on in future?
10. What has been surprising or unexpected?

These questions were tested during and between the final two workshops with a number of specific aspects of Bridges work. There was considerable discussion regarding how various activities and processes could best be contained for the purposes of evaluation. Data included here is from 7 key areas and projects undertaken by Bridges.

In using the evaluation questions to gather evidence in relation to the range of activities undertaken by Bridges and the role played by the BNA in each of these, as well as in the impacts of the organisations as a whole, a key theme was the importance of answering questions in a way that was able to link directly with one or more specific pieces of evidence (either quantitative or qualitative) rather than in a more general way.

The areas and projects included in the report are:

- ◆ Counselling (Including Outreach)
- ◆ Intake and Referral
- ◆ Groupwork
- ◆ Children's Group
- ◆ Shalvey High School DVD

Data

All of the data below was gained via workshop and additional discussions with staff. This data is used in conjunction with data from client surveys and external stakeholder interviews as a key element in the evaluation process.

Data is provided in a matrix covering key evaluation questions. The matrix enables cross referencing between data sets, questions and sources of evidence included.

Counselling (Including Outreach)

<p>What Worked? <i>Well known and highly regarded in the community</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Staff reported that Bridges counselling services were well known and highly regarded in the community. Regular referrals via Bridges reputation were reported as a major strengths of the organisation and provided valuable evaluative information supporting both the professionalism of Bridges and its holistic approach to counselling services. <p><i>Specialist knowledge and focus on Alcohol and Other Drugs(AOD)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ The specialist knowledge in the area of alcohol and other drugs that Bridges provides was also reported as a critical and very effective area of Bridges operations. It was this knowledge put in practice within the BNA that staff saw as a unique and effective focus for Bridges counselling services. 	<p>How Do we Know? (evidence) <i>Well known and highly regarded in the community</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ All counselling staff interviewed reported that a significant number of referrals to the services had come via word of mouth and reputation. Staff reported that feedback from families regarding the source of their knowledge about and referral to Bridges provided evidence for this. Client surveys also provided further evidence for the reputation of Bridges as providing a professional, welcoming and effective counselling service to which clients were happy to refer friends and other family members. <p><i>Specialist knowledge and focus on Alcohol and Other Drugs(AOD)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ All staff who were interviewed stated that clients had reported that the knowledge of AOD made a difference to them feeling heard and addressing these issues. A number of staff also reported that their knowledge of the complexities of drug and alcohol use was critical in working effectively with families in the long term, and understanding the impacts of addiction on a range of other issues for individuals and families.
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Non-judgemental culture of Bridges and a strengths based approach

- ◆ Staff reported that using a strengths based approach along with a range of counselling perspectives including Gestalt and narrative approaches worked very effectively with clients overall.

Staff support and supervision

- ◆ Staff reported good support and supervision within the counselling team, from Bridges management and via external supervision and training.

Flexibility to work with clients over the short or long term on a range of issues – recognising complexities

- ◆ Staff reported that Bridges use of systems approaches and focus on the social determinants of drug use enabled a richer and more effective counselling process to take place and recognised that time was often needed for change.

Non-judgemental culture of Bridges and a strengths based approach

- ◆ Staff reported that the intentional use of a strengths based approach and a strong culture of welcome and acceptance of clients and families was an important element of Bridges approach to counselling and one that worked very well.

One staff member interviewed reported: “One client said that she had never had anyone sit down and talk to her without judging her. I use humour and a normal conversation to build trust and rapport being present and listening to client. I might say, 'Look at where you were and where you are now. What to do next.'”

Staff support and supervision

- ◆ Staff reported that all counsellors have supervision paid for by the organisation as well as informal supervision within the team.

They also reported good access to training with one example being the completion of the Dulwich Centre Narrative Therapy course for counselling staff.

One staff member said, “ People bring cases and share their experience and approaches.”

Flexibility to work with clients over the short or long term on a range of issues – recognising complexities

All staff interviewed reported that the flexibility offered at Bridges for clients wanting to work on a range of issues over time provided much more effective and sustainable positive outcomes for families. One staff member reflected: “Some clients have stayed for 3 years. One client came in after being on drugs for years. I advised to go to detox. He got off drugs cold turkey. He got a partner who had complications then I saw her and then his kids and her kids. He said to me 'if I didn't have this place to come to I'd be a wreck.

	<p>He stayed clean and sober the whole time. Some services say only 8 sessions but what would happen to him then? When long term clients are ready to go they tell me. We have to be careful of not creating a dependence and we have to connect them with another agency but sometime issues take time to resolve and change along the way.”</p>
<p>Where is the evidence of the Network Approach?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Staff identified counselling work as a way of putting the BNA into practice and described their work with individuals, and families as part of the way in which the BNA worked well in the organisation. ◆ “Counselling is a continuation of the network approach. people who attend groups will often need or want counselling. Being a continuum is good. “I’m constantly thinking about the wider community and the relationships that the person has outside the counselling session.” ◆ “I don’t see the counselling and bigger picture stuff as separate. I see it as one. Out at Riverstone we worked alongside and with other agencies including the Police.” ◆ Staff shared a number of stories where parents had resumed counselling after a break as they still felt connected with Bridges via other contacts, kids groups etc. ◆ Working relationships and shared information and resources with other agencies including DoCS, health services and a number of non-government organisations were reported as evidence of the BNA making an impact. ◆ Branching into other types of group work including parenting groups, Peter Slattery 	<p>What was the impact(if any) of the Network Approach? (on clients, community, other stakeholders, service capacity)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Reports from staff in response to this question included: ◆ “Not treating people as a single item, you are not on your own. This is curative in itself. Takes the 'badness' and normalises it. It gets people out of slotting people into personality types. I'm not an angry person I'm a person that gets angry. It also helps people with dual diagnosis that there are other supports and they can manage themselves.” ◆ “If someone calls me to report they are not well I connect them with that community where they are. eg someone thinks they are being followed I invite them to talk with someone in their own community eg Dr, other service providers.” ◆ “A person's service provider can often connect with me and I connect with them. It is not one way.”

<p>workshops, kids groups and work with the indigenous church. All of these were seen as evidence for the BNA's impact on the work of Bridges.</p>	
<p>What can we build on?</p> <p>Staff identified the following areas for further work in developing a implementing the BNA:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Connecting clients ◆ Build on working relationships with other agencies ◆ More training – professional development ◆ Finding ways to encourage clients to be more self sufficient, confident and participate in the community 	<p>What would we do differently?</p> <p>Three key areas were identified by staff as areas in which a different angle could be taken to improve services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Outreach counselling – making sure the worker here has the capacity to do the work. The importance of planning for and building capacity in this areas was seen as important. ◆ Formal agreements around outreach counselling. This was an area connected to planing and formalising this work as a core element of the BNA in action. ◆ Plan better in general. Staff recognised that the uncertain funding environment at Bridges had made long term planning difficult but reported that this was an area where additional attention would be beneficial into the future as the BNA develops.
<p>What are the opportunities we would take up here with additional resources?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Additional workers who combined counselling and groupwork were seen as a potential addition to Bridges staff should more resources be available. Staff suggested that this would assist in further integrating these two aspects of Bridges work using the BNA. This was also reported as an effective strategy for addressing waiting list numbers in a way that reflected the BNA. 	<p>What are the existing connections between this activity and other activities of Bridges?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Strong connections were reported with groupwork, intake and referral.
<p>What are the connections between activities we would like to work on in future?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Connections with other agencies and between counselling and the community development work undertaken by Bridges were suggested by staff as critical future 	<p>What has been surprising or unexpected?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Staff found this question difficult to answer overall but one theme did emerge from discussions. The role of the Bridges premises as a house rather than a clinical centre was reported as an issues reported

directions. Bridges identity as a small but networked service was reported as an essential element in this. One staff member said:

- ◆ “My vision is that we will be connecting with people who would not otherwise seek help. We aim to create a welcoming, family environment that values relationships. This about us being small. If it was too big we would lose that.”

by client that was more important than staff had imagined it was. One staff member commented;

- ◆ “Location and anonymity are more important than we think. Some people like the anonymity. When we have a flash premises it seems very clinical, like where we just do a job. It's cold, medical.”
- ◆ “What allows people to be comfortable when they walk through the door is that it is homely – BNA focus on relationships is critical and no sign out the front is part of the approach. We intentionally create a welcoming space.”

Intake and General Contact

<p>What Worked?</p> <p>Overall, the use of the BNA as part of the intake process was reported by staff as working well as a practical way of recognising and responding to the complexities experiences by many clients and potential clients that make contact with Bridges, Staff said that the BNA assisted in setting a framework for intake that was focused on the best holistic outcome for the person rather than only connecting them with Bridges services. Comments from staff included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ “Context based work works well with clients. Drug use is not the only problem for them. Seeing the complexities of peoples' situations is critical to doing good work.” ◆ “Acknowledging the context and trying to address this context individually and at a broader level is part of how we do intake.” ◆ “The value of recognising that other people and agencies can have a role and our process of actively connecting people with different services, not just ours works really well.” 	<p>How Do we Know?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Staff reported that using the BNA as part of intake enabled them to feel more effective in assisting clients through connecting them with w range of options and services. They reported that clients had provided informal positive feedback about how this process had been helpful. ◆ Staff reported that the BNA had actively encouraged an approach to intake that recognised clients had a range of issues and actively sought to address these by utilising networks as well as the range of services offered by Bridges.
<p>Where is the evidence of the Network Approach?</p> <p>Staff identified three major areas where evidence could be gathered regarding the BNA. These were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Increased agency contacts and more detailed knowledge of other local agencies. ◆ Better co-ordination between staff that worked effectively towards a holistic 	<p>What was the impact (if any) of the Network Approach?(on clients, community, other stakeholders, service capacity</p> <p>Staff reported a significant overall impact for clients and the general community in using the BNA highlighting the focus on relationships that had enabled a deeper and more effective service to develop. Comments included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ “[BNA has been]Transformational in the way I've practised, the way I communicate. There is safety in communication here

<p>approach with clients.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Improving networks and relationships. Staff said that seeing networks and relationships as an central to all of Bridges work had resulted in the expansion and diversifying of networks which was translating into better outcomes for clients. 	<p>which means people can be honest with each other and pay attention to relationships.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ “The Board is supportive of BNA and this has made space for the model to develop with everyone involved.” ◆ “There is good ownership of BNA in the organisation and good support from other organisations.” ◆ “It's [BNA] had a big impact – people from CALD and ATSI community are happy to use Bridges services and connect without the issues that other organisations have had. Mostly agencies come from the 'what do we need' approach but Bridges asks 'what does everyone need including us and how can we work together?’”
<p>What can we build on?</p> <p>Three key areas were identified by staff:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Developing agency contacts ◆ Co-ordination and communication between staff about the new intake process and casework role ◆ Build on connections between intake, groupwork and community development. 	<p>What would we do differently?</p> <p>Two major areas were identified here:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Define and clarify the referral process further so everyone understands and is able to collaborate where they need to with the process ◆ Need to do more of getting to know other agencies
<p>What are the opportunities we would take up here with additional resources?</p> <p>Staff identified more groupwork and an expanded community development program as key areas for the future given additional resources.</p>	<p>What are the existing connections between this activity and other activities of Bridges?</p> <p>Staff reported that connections between each of the areas of focus for Bridges worked quite well but said they would like to see the connections between intake, groupwork, counselling and community development further integrated in the future.</p>
<p>What are the connections between activities we would like to work on in future?</p> <p>Staff reported that connections between each of the areas of focus for Bridges</p>	<p>What has been surprising or unexpected?</p> <p>Staff reported that although the BNA has resulted in better connections and integration in service delivery, it has also put surprising pressure on resources as the model has opened up possibilities for additional work on a broader</p>

worked quite well but said they would like to see the connections between intake, groupwork, counselling and community development further integrated in the future.

scale than had previously been a focus. They also saw the BNA as a much broader change process that was challenging in terms of current resources: Comments from staff included:

- ◆ “BNA does put pressure on Bridges service delivery because of the uncertainty around resources for the organisation in the longer term. It's because of the scale of change we are trying to achieve.”
- ◆ “It's [pressure on resources] because we try to do much more than service delivery. The social and cultural change we are looking for is much bigger than us. To get the message out there takes more resources than we are funded for.”
- ◆ “For me it[BNA and better service delivery] goes hand in hand as all the CD we do and the counselling is part of the bigger picture.”
- ◆ “We have integrated the BNA with a social innovation which is a big change but very exciting.”
- ◆ “Having two people doing both counselling and CD works well for better integration. It shows how the BNA can work.”
- ◆ “We really need medium term and long term funding to see the BNA take shape the way it can.”
- ◆ “Project funding as it currently stands may not move us from the current dilemma as there will be more services to deliver. We need to build things into all the activities of the organisation that take us where we want to go with the BNA.”
- ◆ The organisation needs to grow a foundation within itself to just focus on the BNA.”

Groupwork

What Worked?

A range of themes were raised here by staff:

- ◆ Clients being moved into treatment in a timelier manner via groups.
- ◆ Existence of groups provides another form of counseling and maintaining a therapeutic relationship.
- ◆ Groups provide an opportunity for clients to move into 1 on 1 counseling in a way that allows them more time to understand their own issues.
- ◆ Many clients who go to group may also decide that they do not need 1 on 1 counseling, that the group has been enough for them to address issues they had come to Bridges to address.
- ◆ Participants are voluntary and this works much more effectively in groups than those who have to be there for any reason.
- ◆ Philosophies, putting a focus on what clients want in their life is a key success factor in all Bridges groups.
- ◆ Bridges groups encourage people to share their wisdom and their stories, which means that group members learn from each other.
- ◆ Educational material is provided to take home for reflection.

How Do we Know?

Staff reported that formal and informal evaluations and feedback from group participants was the major source of evidence for what had worked well in groupwork and how the BNA had impacted.

Staff identified connections reported via groups to a range of other agencies as well as to other aspects of Bridges service.

<p>Where is the evidence of the Network Approach?</p> <p>Staff reported that the BNA underpinned the philosophy of Bridges groupwork and made space for participants to tap into and utilise a range of networks and relationships to assist them in dealing with their issues in a holistic way. Staff comments included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ “The BNA philosophy fits with 'there’s more to drug use than drugs' and focusing on strengths, working together, relationship building. That's what we do in all our groups.” ◆ “People in group share their networks which helps everyone.” ◆ “ Groups encourage mutual support and the importance of positive relationships for participants.” 	<p>What was the impact (if any) of the Network Approach? (on clients, community, other stakeholders, service capacity?)</p> <p>Staff identified the development of partnerships such as that with Holyoake to run groups as a key impact of the BNA on groupwork. Staff reported that this partnership approach had resulted in better outcomes for clients and their families as well as valuable learning opportunities for Bridges staff.</p>
<p>What do we build on?</p> <p>Staff identified a number of areas to build on regarding group work. These were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More groups for adults as well as, children, and families • Creating more links with other networks in the community to partner in groupwork. E.g. with Holyoake. • Develop comprehensive session plans for group so that others can run Bridges groups. 	<p>What would we do differently?</p> <p>Staff identified two key areas in responses to this question:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearer rights and responsibilities outlined for each group and as a policy direction for all Bridges groups. • Developing groups in the evening for people who work full time.
<p>What are the opportunities we would take up here with additional resources?</p> <p>Staff identified more groupwork and particularly a greater range of groups run in partnership with other organisations as key areas of focus should more resources become available.</p>	<p>What are the existing connections between this activity and other activities of Bridges?</p> <p>Staff reported strong connections with Intake, Counselling and Community Development. In many cases it was reported that individuals and families on the waiting list could be referred to a group, which resulted in a timely and effective service being offered either while they were waiting for individual counselling or instead of counselling.</p>

<p>What are the connections between activities we would like to work on in future?</p> <p>Staff reported that they would like to see a stronger connection between groupwork and the community development activities of Bridges as a future focus.</p>	<p>What has been surprising or unexpected?</p> <p>Staff reported that high attendance rates were often surprising as the barriers experienced by people coming to groups in terms of transport and other issues were considerable.</p>
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Children's Group

This group was identified as a particular case study in the evaluation process as it was new and developed using a partnership approach as well as combining groupwork and community development principles. As a result Bridges staff saw it as an important example (similar to Bridges work with the Indigenous Church) of the BNA in action that could be considered in further detail.

<p>What Worked?</p> <p>Staff reported the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Marketing via a range of methods – email, word of mouth, personal calls, flyers ◆ Connecting families with the group via intake ◆ Providing transport ◆ Positive and growing relationship developed with Holyoake ◆ Support for children feeding back to positive family support ◆ Time out, belonging and enjoyment for kids ◆ Active welcoming and support for families to group via reminder phone calls and connections with group and counselling service offered by Bridges. ◆ More integrated service delivery as a result of the group at Bridges 	<p>How Do we Know?</p> <p>A range of detailed evidence was identified by staff in response to this question:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Verbal feedback from DoCs staff about positive impacts for parents and kids who attended. ◆ Inquiries from DoCS about future groups that clients could attend ◆ Parents asked for more groups – 4 parents asked whether more groups would be run as they were interested in sending their children ◆ One parent reported that their child had demonstrated a stronger awareness of the impact of drug and alcohol abuse, how it was impacting on their family and was able to talk with the parent about it for the first time. ◆ There have been 6 inquiries from parents for groups aimed at younger children and 3 inquiries about groups for teenagers ◆ All of the children who started the group completed it. There were no children who stopped attending during the course of the group. ◆ Parents reported that their children were enthusiastic about coming to the group and were ready and waiting outside well
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	<p>before their lift was due each time.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ One parent reported that her children were ready to go to the group an hour before because they enjoyed it so much. ◆ Staff reported that children and parents were enthusiastic about the group - “In one case the whole family would be waiting out the front for us each time we came.” ◆ Evidence of children in the group developing friendships over the life of the group – staff witnessed children helping each other and exchanging phone numbers at the conclusion of the group so they could stay in touch. ◆ Parents reported improvements in behaviour from children attending the group. One parent reported less violent behaviour at home after their child attended the group. ◆ One parent reported an improvement in the relationship between their child who attended the group and her sister, while another said, “the group had made a big difference to my daughter. When is the next one?” ◆ One parent started coming to counselling following their child attending the group and the child was also referred for counselling. ◆ Another parent returned to counselling after their child had attended the group, after a period of no contact with Bridges. ◆ Holyoake reported that they had not experienced such high numbers in a group so quickly before. ◆ Parents reported that the transport made it possible for their children to attend. ◆ Holyoake offered to provide opportunities for Bridges staff to be trained in their programs and to undertake future joint groups.
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Where is the evidence of the Network Approach?

Three key themes were identified by staff here:

- ◆ Sharing resources and developing partnership with Holyoake
- ◆ Integrated approach connecting this group with other aspects of Bridges services e.g. counselling
- ◆ Enhanced relationships with other agencies such as DoCS as a result of outcomes for kids attending group.

What was the impact (if any) of the Network Approach? (on clients, community, other stakeholders, service capacity)

- ◆ Partnership developed with Holyoake including future opportunities for further groups, joint training, and joint facilitation.
- ◆ Clients received more integrated service with resources and skills from both Bridge and Holyoake co-ordinated in the running of the group.
- ◆ DoCS reported noticeable positive outcomes for their clients after the group.
- ◆ Implementation of a more holistic approach within Bridges between Intake process, counselling and the group offering families a more integrated range of services.
- ◆ Holyoake and Bridges were able to complement each other 's contribution over the life of the group -Bridges provided co-ordination, logistical support, informal support, counselling and feedback, connection with ongoing work with families. Holyoake provided expertise in groupwork, assessments and working with children re drug and alcohol family issues.
- ◆ Trust and positive relationships between Bridges and Holyoake allowed for the program to be improved during its implementation by way of an added session, and a more comprehensive evaluation process being developed through this collaborative partnership.

What can we build on?

- ◆ Partnership with Holyoake for future groups including those for other age groups.
- ◆ Lessons from this group about designing groups for different ages – especially

What would we do differently?

- ◆ Clarify duty of care responsibilities with Holyoake re when kids are in the bus, and when they are at Bridges but not in the group specifically eg in the corridor or outside

<p>young people</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Good relationships with families established during the group ◆ Exploring the possibility of sessions with kids and parents together 	
<p>What are the opportunities we would take up here with additional resources?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Additional groups with this and other age groups of children ◆ Develop group for young people along similar lines 	<p>What are the existing connections between this activity and other activities of Bridges?</p> <p>Staff actively connected families with the group via intake offering the group in addition to other parts of the service.</p>
<p>What are the connections between activities we would like to work on in future?</p> <p>Build stronger connection between this type of group work and counselling aspects of Bridges as well as casework and other community development projects in the future.</p>	<p>What has been surprising or unexpected?</p> <p>The level of ongoing participation as well as the flow on impacts of the group into families where parents were attending counselling was reported as unexpected by staff. The group acted as a connector for families and through it some children were able to work exclusively on their own issues as well as acting as educators at home. Some parents reported that this had made a significant positive difference in dealing with drug and alcohol issues at home.</p>

DVD – Shalvey High School (Community Development Project)

<p>What Worked?</p> <p>A range of factor were identified by staff here including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Long term trusting relationships with Lily Shearer and Kathy Carn helped engage contractor and students ◆ Flexible funding and being able to contract out – for areas skills that Bridges didn't have. e.g. film work. This enabled a high quality DVD to be produced. ◆ Openness – not very prescribed. This allowed the project to develop in a way that reflected the themes participants thought were important. ◆ Involvement of whole school in the project. 	<p>How Do we Know?</p> <p>Key evidence suggested by staff was:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Contractor and students were engaged really quickly. There was a high level of interest in the project from students and the project was launched in a timely manner. This helped to build strong relationships and 'runs on the board' early in the project. ◆ Students reported about how the project connected with them and why they got involved. ◆ Students remained involved in the project and shared their stories in a thoughtful way. ◆ DVD produced and used as a resource in the area and further afield.
<p>Where is the evidence of the Network Approach?</p> <p>Staff identified a range of evidence of the BNA in action:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Networks that were formed over years made this possible. Trust with the school resulted in a high level of engagement between Bridges and the school. ◆ Bridges reputation in doing community projects created a sense of confidence in stakeholders. Evidence of a high level of engagement reflects this. ◆ The strengths-based focus – with minimal prescription supported the student's creativity. This is evidenced by the DVD itself and records of the process undertaken to produce it. ◆ The content of the DVD fitted with Bridges approach “There's more to drug use than drugs”, and other themes and 	<p>What was the impact (if any) of the Network Approach? (on clients, community, other stakeholders, service capacity)</p> <p>Staff reported that this project was only possible because of the strong and long term networks developed through the BNA. These networks enabled students and staff at the school to work creatively and effectively with Bridges to develop a high quality DVD that can be used in a range of educational contexts.</p>

<p>resilience is a key piece of evidence for the BNA in this case.</p>	
<p>What can we build on?</p> <p>The following areas were identified by staff as a future focus for the project:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Create package to go together with the DVD including teaching materials associated with the DVD ◆ Create a project using the DVD where we go out to schools and promote drug awareness and the BNA. ◆ Could have another DVD with the students in this project co-facilitating the process with other students. ◆ Teach other students/teachers to use DVD as a resource for personal development and other arenas. ◆ We could promote this DVD with our other resources – promoting the voices of young people. 	<p>What would we do differently?</p> <p>Three key areas were identified by staff in response to this question:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ More clarity around the roles and limitations of contractors and the script. ◆ Profile Bridges more at the start with the school. ◆ Plan ahead and more if possible.
<p>What are the opportunities we would take up here with additional resources?</p> <p>Staff responses to this question were similar to those for 'what can we build on?'</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Additional DVDs. ◆ Development of teaching material to go with the DVD. ◆ Project with student mentors to develop a new DVD. 	<p>What are the existing connections between this activity and other activities of Bridges?</p> <p>While this project provided an effective community development demonstration of the BNA in action, staff reported that it tended to be a stand alone project rather than one that was closely linked with other aspects of Bridges work.</p>
<p>What are the connections between activities we would like to work on in future?</p> <p>Staff reported that there were opportunities to use the DVD in groups and other contexts at Bridges. They also saw the potential of this</p>	<p>What has been surprising or unexpected?</p> <p>Major elements reported by staff here were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ The quality of the film. Staff expected a high quality film but reported that it was

<p>kind of community development project to be closely linked with groupwork processes used by Bridges.</p>	<p>even better than they had hoped.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ The contractor worked very quickly to produce the film. ◆ The willingness and enthusiasm of the students to participate in the project was reported as much higher than was expected. ◆ Students from different ethnic groups within the school worked well together, cutting across cultural lines. ◆ The high level of support and engagement from other parts of the school. i.e. those not directly involved in the project.
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Evaluation with External Stakeholders

Themes From Stakeholder Interviews

Seventeen stakeholders were interviewed as part of this evaluation. Stakeholders included funding providers, individuals who had worked closely with Bridges and were involved in the development of the BNA and agencies who had formed partnerships with Bridges around specific projects. Some stakeholders were currently working with Bridges while others referred to their past experience. A further five stakeholders were contacted to participate in the evaluation but were unable to for a range of reasons. The full list of stakeholders and the questions asked in the interviews are in Appendix B.

Throughout the interviews a number of themes emerged. These were;

- ◆ What works well at Bridges,
- ◆ How others understand the Bridges Network Approach (BNA),
- ◆ How the model is communicated to others,
- ◆ How Bridges influences other agencies and government with the model,
- ◆ How Bridges works in partnership with other agencies
- ◆ Challenges Bridges faces.

What is it about Bridges That Works Well?

Overall participants were very positive about Bridges. They were complimentary about many aspects of the organisation, the professionalism of staff, the relationship building and in particular about the ongoing passion and energy to develop and promote the BNA.

The genuine desire to connect with a range of agencies and to work collaboratively was seen as a real benefit. The strength of purpose and vision and the clarity to hold course and not give up on something you believe strongly in was seen as an asset both for Bridges as an organisation and for the development of the BNA. One participant said “Bridges asks the right questions and creates the debate in industry about the right stuff.”

Many said that Bridges has had a systematic approach to services working together and building the capacity of community leaders and community members. Stakeholders said that the framework and the support structure Bridges works from are different from most in the service system.

Most of those interviewed reported that Bridges had built the capacity of small organisations and that it was critical for small non government organizations to work collaboratively together in the current climate of funding constraints and competition with bigger agencies.

Stakeholders observed that traditionally the community sector networks well but does not collaborate well as a competitive funding environment creates significant barriers for all non government organisations but smaller ones in particular. Many participants talked about how they were impressed that the BNA supported the not for profit sector to work collaboratively. The BNA was seen as an effective way to deliver services that were, as one stakeholder put it, “undervalued by government and society generally.”

One stakeholder said that “Bridges has managed to link services in a holistic approach that understands the individuals ‘that rub against society’ and all the issues that surround them like family and community.”

The BNA was praised for having infiltrated the clinical model and pushed the boundaries of the biomedical model that needed to be challenged.

The agency was seen as being good at evaluating itself and the BNA as well as documenting the journey. Stakeholders reported that it was important that Bridges continued to do this.

Another of those interviewed said they thought that Bridges practise was very open and transparent. Bridges provided others with a lot of information and were involved in many projects. Bridges staff were reported as always willing to share with others, which was seen as a strength. Bridges had developed relationships with other professionals to critique the BNA as it was developed and they incorporated the ideas of others to develop best practise. This was reported as adding significant rigour to the BNA.

Some described diversity as Bridges best strength and whilst the number of stakeholders they involved in a project was seen as challenging, it was this inclusive approach to community development that was reported by stakeholders as critical to the success of Bridges projects and the potential of the BNA.

Stakeholders reported that staff had a very high level of professionalism, they were a strong and consistent team, had excellent communication skill. and put a lot of time and effort put into documents and the website, publications etc. One stakeholder comment illustrated this: “A lot of different skills are required in one organisation to do what Bridges does.”

Understanding The Bridges Network Approach (BNA)

Understandings of the BNA varied amongst stakeholders who were interviewed. Whilst some said the concepts were simple and easy to convey, others had taken time to understand the BNA and how it was being implemented. The stakeholders interviewed for the evaluation had been involved with Bridges at different times and the development of the BNA over this extended period may have impacted on stakeholders' understanding.

A number of stakeholders said that they liked the simplicity of the BNA and the ease with which the key messages could be understood, while others interviewed said it had taken a long time to understand the BNA in the early days but as the concepts have become more mainstream it has become easier to articulate. Many stakeholders said that the way in which the BNA works from a holistic, strengths based perspective was an inclusive approach that allowed flexibility and creativity in working with individuals, their families and communities. These stakeholders reported that from their perspective the BNA was an innovative, positive and more effective way of working than other approaches.

One stakeholder described this as follows:

“It’s about facilitating genuine community participation from the grass roots through building cooperative and trusting relationships. The Bridges project uses 3 main themes that look at drug use issues within the context of the whole community. It broadens the issue from the micro- not just about drugs and the impact on the individual, but to the macro 'there is more to drug issues than

drugs'. This transformative process allows it to become everybody's issue by creating open dialogue about the impact of drugs in many arenas and for many different people. These improved participatory processes enhance the capacity for change. They take longer to achieve specific outcomes. But for me it's more about the journey and not necessarily about the destination. It has the capacity to enrich peoples lives and then in turn community well being. People discover their own solutions and can celebrate each milestone along the way."

Stakeholders said that Bridges provides a comprehensive service to people with addictions and offers a far more effective range of options than traditional services. One stakeholder reported; "The stronger sense of purpose and potential outcomes for people in turn build stronger services which is important for people who use the services."

A number of those interviewed also reported that the BNA allows stakeholders to be linked via an efficient communication system. They observed that the BNA brings people together in a structured way that enabled them to work together when this would not usually be the case.

Many stakeholders said Tirrania was a visionary who was well ahead of her time and only now are others catching up with the concepts and the practise.

Communicating The Model

A majority of those interviewed said that they saw communicating the BNA as a huge challenge that needed ongoing work, "slowly chipping away" to get the message across the sector and beyond. One stakeholder said that the opportunities were endless and adopting the BNA was a good way for government to build the capacity of small organisations. Most of those interviewed said that it was important for Bridges to get buy-in from other organisations and it was acknowledged that it [Bridges] needed support from funding bodies to do that.

One comment from a stakeholder provides a clear summary of this challenge:

"Bridges has done a lot of thinking about the approach and has put a lot of effort into communicating and promoting the model. Now there needs to be more action put into implementing the approach and overcoming the barriers that prevent agencies working collaboratively. The approach needs to be more viable for other organizations to adopt."

Many of those interviewed said that Bridges was a high profile organisation and that the time invested by Bridges promoting the BNA in a broad range of forums was an important strategy for growth and development of the approach.

One stakeholder comment regarding this;

"They [Bridges] do it because it is important and really matters. Recognition of the journey is as important as the outcome."

Another stakeholder likened the process to "turning a flotilla of ships, it takes time, communication, respect of the uniqueness of the individuals involved and co-operation."

Many of those interviewed reported that they thought changing the name of the organisation from B.A.D.F.S to Bridges has contributed to the success of the BNA and will move the concept forward. One person suggested 'How To Guides' to help other organisations to adopt the approach. They reported that these systemic changes were critical for the sustainability of the BNA over time.

One participant said that it was also important in this context for the Board to work collaboratively together and to be able to articulate the model.

Influencing Other Government and Non-Government Agencies to Adopt the Bridge Network Approach (BNA)

Most stakeholders interviewed spoke about the high level of time and effort Bridges puts into promoting the BNA to influence other agencies and government to adopt the approach. Stakeholders reported that Bridges maintains a high profile in the sector speaking at forums and conferences and attending networks. This work was described as crucial in a wider context with one stakeholder arguing for the BNA's capacity to significantly influence the systems in which work on addictions is done. They said;

[The BNA had the] “potential to change policy and challenge structural mechanisms from the ground up. By engaging the wider community, through creating debate, shared understandings and changing habits of thinking, trust is then built and people become more empowered through education, and supportive structures that are about respect and inclusion.”

Another of those interviewed said that the current federal government agenda for social inclusion meant that the BNA was very relevant and there may be opportunities to develop the approach further with government.

There was also strong evidence from stakeholder interviews that other agencies were already adopting and adapting the BNA in their work. One stakeholder reported:

“Bridges and VFS [Voice For SONG] was the impetus that allowed me to use similar concepts in the projects that I undertake and to progress the VFS movement in the Blue Mountains. Blue Mountains networks are already quite strong. I and other workers have been slowly introducing a 'hybrid' of Bridges concepts and the framework of community and cultural development together to create a wonderful mix of creative energy, raw talent and a variety of professional input.”

Working in Partnerships

Stakeholders described their experiences of working in partnership with Bridges as very positive. They said Bridges offered professional support and developed the capacity of others. Many of those interviewed reported that working from a strengths based perspective made for successful outcomes to projects as well as the effort and time Bridges took in developing relationships with others.

Some of those interviewed said that the high quality of staff, the excellent communication, the flexibility and thoughtfulness of staff made partnerships very successful. One comment in relation to a specific project was:

“The project was well researched and planned and provided the kids a platform to move to the next stage.”

In relation to this project the stakeholder interviewed said that the Bridges staff communicated well with the students and that there had been a positive impact on students who had been motivated to continue after the project had finished.

In relation to another project a stakeholder said that the project they worked on with Bridges built resilience in the kids involved and was great for the parents, other students and teachers to see what was possible.

Working in partnership where resources were usually tight and funding time limited was a common theme raised by those interviewed. Many praised Bridges staff for their energy and passion and high level of professionalism in working in partnership with other agencies and groups. Bridges strength was described as having the ability to build projects and give them away to create sustainability and best practise. Stakeholders saw this as a critical element in the BNA.

In a further project, a partnership between Bridges, a local school and Short Black Films was formed to write produce and present a short film on young people and their views on drugs and drug taking. Partners reported that this relationship would not have been fostered without the support and initiative of Bridges. Good communication, patience in waiting for responses, realistic expectations and an understanding of time constraints and legalities in a school situation, willingness to listen to advice from those who understand school policy and procedures were described as ways Bridges made the partnership so successful.

Two final reflections from stakeholders in relation to partnerships summarise the role played by the BNA very clearly:

“Each time I have worked in partnership with Bridges it has been very ethical, collaborative, open and flexible. They demonstrate a high level of professionalism and they work well as a team, and that translates to those they are in partnership with.”

[I have found in working with Bridges] “genuine collaboration builds trust between services which enables small organisations to get a different result and become quite powerful.”

Challenges

Sustainability - Funding

The lack of sustainable, recurrent funding is an ongoing challenge for Bridges and significant level of resources is put into seeking funding to maintain the viability of the organisation. A number of those interviewed expressed the view that if Bridges were able to secure ongoing funding it would make a critical difference to the capacity of Bridges to develop the BNA further. Some of those interviewed also said that ongoing funding would signal an indicator that funders supported the BNA, which they said would also be very positive. Others said that by creating the broad network Bridges has supports the sustainability of the approach, however the challenge for Bridges in terms of longer term planning in a context where resources are uncertain is a major ongoing challenge.

Many commented on what had been achieved in such limited resources and time, and the potential of what could be achieved if funding was sustainable. Others said that because Bridges was funded from a broad range of sources their sustainability was more likely than those with single funding streams. The challenge of finding ongoing funding to develop the BNA remained a constant theme identified by those interviewed, however. One comment reflects this:

“Bridges is a small organisation with a good idea and limited capacity to ‘pull it off’. Due to its size and funding, it is vulnerable to falling over at times. Bridges needs to look at their future very strategically.”

Sustainability – BNA as a systemic integrated approach at Bridges

A number of people interviewed identified the passion, energy and skill of Tirrania as Manager of the service as a key factor in the development of the BNA. For these stakeholders the importance of further embedding the approach into Bridges systems, structures and processes was a priority. Another group of stakeholders reported that they had seen the BNA move effectively in recent years into Bridges services in a broad sense and felt that the BNA was very much now a systemic part of everything Bridges was involved in.

Strategic and Operational Balance

Another challenge identified consistently by stakeholders was the tension between Bridges operation as a small drug and alcohol family service and the much broader strategic scope of the BNA. Some of those interviewed wondered whether the BNA would outgrow the organisation or even overtake the organisation. One of those interviewed reflected that while half of the services offered by Bridges were very locally focused on Blacktown, the other half (those focused on the policy and systemic implications of the BNA) were strategic with a potential role to play in state, national and potentially international arenas. They suggested that as a result, Bridges may need to grow in two different directions in the future. In this way local services would act as practical manifestations of the BNA while the broader systemic implications might be pursued as a separate arm of the organisation.

Another stakeholder warned against a separated approach arguing that it was important to connect the clinical and community gap and that that was the benefit of the holistic Bridges approach.

Some saw the challenge of engaging the big players such as government departments in the areas of education, employment and health as important but daunting. Others said that they thought strategic links between Bridges and family services should be a priority area for addressing the tension between local and broader service foci.

Bridges In the Future

Most stakeholders who were interviewed reported the view that the Bridges name will be well recognised in the future for the BNA. They said that they envisaged other organisations adopting the BNA in the future and that Bridges would have an important role as original demonstration site for the approach as well as mentoring other organisations.

Some stakeholders said that Bridges could build their role within networks to develop the knowledge and skills of others and to support organisations to adopt and develop the BNA.

Many of those interviewed said that the BNA could develop further to include other stakeholders such as General Practitioners, police, Council, schools. If this happened, one stakeholder reflected'

“It will have a ripple effect to other communities enabling the concept to stand on its own.”

Other areas for the future identified by stakeholders included a growing role with the Aboriginal community, as well as developing opportunities for Bridges to work more collaboratively with the mental health sector as there often wasn't good links between the drug and alcohol sector and mental health services

At a logistical level a number of stakeholders said that Bridges should be in bigger premises as long as the welcoming friendly nature of the agency, which was seen as a key strength, was maintained. Others suggested Bridges have satellite offices or outreach to other areas. Some stakeholders wanted Bridges to be a one-stop shop, a place that had a ‘buzz’ when you walked in and a family friendly place. They argued that any new premises needed to welcome a person off the street as well as demonstrating the collaborative model.

Overall, stakeholders who were interviewed reflected a good knowledge of the BNA and provided a range of important insights with regard to its strengths, challenges and some possible future directions. There was a high degree of consistency in the themes identified by stakeholders with innovation, sustainability, and broader advocacy and implementation of the approach raised by most stakeholders.

The following case study has been included as part of the external stakeholder interviews as it provides a more detailed example of the BNA in action. It contributes to the overall evaluation of the BNA by outlining key elements in the approach in a context of an unfolding community development project that represents a new focus for Bridges work. The case study comprises an in depth semi structured interview with two key leaders in the Mt Druitt Indigenous Church.

Bridges and the Mount Druitt Indigenous Church. A Case Study of the BNA

Interview with Church Leaders Rick and Kayleen Manton

The evaluation of Bridges has involved interviewing a range of stakeholders from funding providers, to supporters of the Bridges approach, to partnering agencies. The story of Bridges relationship with the Mt Druitt Indigenous Church has grown from its beginnings and evolved from one of scepticism, to supportive into a true partnership.

The Importance of Relationships and Building Trust.

Church Leaders from the Mount Druitt Indigenous Church first became aware of Bridges through their involvement with one staff member in a Photovoice project. They reported that the Church had been offered support from other agencies over time but that it was always very short term or what the agencies promised was not followed through. On first meeting with Bridges, members of the Church recall being very sceptical about Bridges being another agency that was interested only in taking from them rather than developing a relationship of mutual support and understanding. Rick said “No other service has ever come regularly to our group offering ongoing support. Others have just come for a short time and used us.”

The first project Bridges partnered with Mount Druitt Indigenous Church and the Wilmott Public School was the Photovoice project. The PhotoVoice project for Indigenous Students from Stage 3 classes involved students participating in a 10 week program in which they learned digital photography skills. This was considered a very successful project that empowered the indigenous children involved and gave them a sense of pride as well as developing new skills. At this stage Church members had developed a strong relationship with one particular staff member who then left Bridges. Church members proceeded cautiously and remained somewhat sceptical about what Bridges had to offer them and their members. Building trust in a relationship was a key issue for members of the Mount Druitt Indigenous Church.

Church leaders described how Bridges then offered them and their members a range of support

including counselling, funding and promotion for their youth programs, training opportunities with Peter Slattery on ‘What Helps Kids Grow Strong’ and information. However, at this stage the relationship was still very much based on relationships with individual members of staff rather than Bridges as an organisation as a whole. They described the loss of Miriam and other Bridges staff members (Sylvia and Yoga) as disruptive as it takes time to develop a relationship and trust with someone. They appreciated that Viviane created continuity through these losses. Church Leaders reported that as the trust between them and Bridges staff grew, it enabled links to develop between other church members and Bridges. Consequently Bridges have been able over time to link church members to other services and resources as required using their relationships with other agencies.

Moving From Individual Relationships to Support and Partnerships

The Mount Druitt Indigenous Church has now worked collaboratively on a number of projects with Bridges including a Photovoice project with adults, Celebrate Recovery, Tree of Life, and a community walk using narrative therapy. Bridges counsellors have been made available for recovery group members, and some outreach counselling has followed. Bridges staff have consulted the Indigenous church leadership group to identify how Bridges could further support them. The group requested support around training in counselling, domestic violence, child protection and drug and alcohol issues. Bridges has now linked the Mt Druitt Indigenous Church with Mt Druitt TAFE who are now providing the church's community leaders accredited training in child protection. Bridges utilised their TAFE contact, David Nash who has previously been involved with Bridges to support the Mt Druitt Indigenous Church members.

Church Leaders, Rick and Kayleen described the relationship they have now with Bridges as being very different from when they first met. They reported a growing partnership between the two organisations that is less reliant on individuals and more based on the agency as a whole. Kayleen said that “Bridges has enabled us to grow as people, supported our church members and encouraged us to stand on our own two feet. We feel welcome at Bridges and Bridges is welcome in our Church. They make us feel relax and we feel part of the family.”

The relationship was described by Church leaders as genuine and supportive and not clinical. They cited the good communication skills of the staff as being a contributing asset to this change and the way the staff interact with church members as always positive. They said that the time Bridges staff took to build the relationship now makes it sustainable between the two organisations.

Rick and Kayleen are now partnering with Bridges by providing information and support, advising them on matters of indigenous culture and attending meetings and seminars with Tirrania, the Manager of Bridges to represent their community on broader issues and network with others. Rick said that “Bridges works with us in a supportive way, skilling people up and building bridges with others. They offer useful information, resources and opportunities and are always consultative.”

Rick and Kayleen believe their future with Bridges will continue to grow and are currently working on a project ‘Living Eulogies’ which will capture the stories of older church members. They said that they hoped Bridges would continue to up skill people to have self confidence, to think ‘outside the box’ and not to be afraid about making choices that can lead to a more positive life. They said that positive words can be overwhelming and change both attitude and behaviour significantly.

The relationship between Bridges and the members of the Mt Druitt Indigenous Church demonstrate that supporting and connecting individuals, families and communities in a strength based way, can be effective in enabling others to address the challenges of life in a positive and

sustainable way. It shows that developing trust and taking time to build relationships is essential to long term sustainable partnerships.

This case study demonstrates the critical role played by long term relationship building, the development of strong social capital through attention to mutual trust and benefit by both Bridges and the Indigenous Church, the impact of this approach on addressing issues of drug and alcohol both in a preventative and service focused context. The use of the BNA in paying attention to these long term relationships, the importance of self determination and working with the whole community provides very useful evaluative information about how the approach works in practice. Use of the BNA here has resulted in an integrated and sustainable strategy for working respectfully and effectively in partnership with the Aboriginal community to address drug and alcohol issues both now and into the future.

Client Survey

During November 2009, Bridges clients using the counselling and groupwork services were asked to complete a survey asking them about their experience with Bridges' services and with the BNA.

A total of 11 surveys were received during this period. Survey questions are provided in Appendix C of this report.

Data from the client surveys represents a very small snapshot of Bridges work with individuals and families, however, a number of themes were consistent across all the surveys received. These themes focused on key elements of the BNA discussed throughout this report. The key themes reflected in all survey were:

◆ **A central focus on drugs and drug use as part of a broader context of family and community life.**

Key outcomes reported in the surveys were improved or changed relationships with family members, increased confidence and connection with the broader community, a deeper understanding of addiction as a systemic and complex issue, working towards better relationships with partners and children.

Comments from clients included:

- “Your energy – reactions filter out to your family. They react to how you act.”
- “ I think me and my mother have become closer and this is also true of my kids. I have the confidence to ring up the kids and be a part of their life now.”
- “Family life is calmer. There is more talking than yelling. I feel a lot less stressed than I was when I first came. I see a purpose and a life worthwhile enjoying and appreciate my family even more.”
- “Children have noticed a difference and are more happy at home.”

This approach in working on drug issues as part of a wider spectrum of issues is clearly reflected in client survey responses. All responses referred equally to outcomes for an individual addiction and to improvements in family or broader relationships. Indeed, for over half the clients who completed surveys, it was a change for the better in family relationships that was more important, although directly linked to the outcomes regarding their addiction.

◆ **Bridges active role in connecting clients with a range of services and supports to address issues in an integrated way.**

All survey respondents reported that Bridges had actively connected them and their family with a range of other services and contacts that had been helpful. While both counselling and groupwork were listed as the most helpful aspects of Bridges service, this process of connecting families with a broader range of services and contacts was consistently reported as important in addressing individual issues as well as better supporting families. Comments from clients included:

- “It[Bridges] has been extremely beneficial to members of our family but putting us in touch with support groups which has helped us so much as individuals. As a family many services were suggested and we are utilising many of them.”
- “Provided me with good support. Connected me with Herbert Street Clinic detox and also the M.E.R.I.T Program.”
- “Became aware of AlAnon, Crisis Line, FDS. I've used crisis line – was very helpful when I felt overwhelmed.”
- “Phone numbers of back up places when I was drinking.”

◆ **Respectful and welcoming culture that clients experienced at Bridges.**

All respondents spoke of the respectful and welcoming culture at Bridges. They reported that this was different to a number of other services they had been in contact with and that it made a significant difference to the outcomes they experienced after coming to Bridges. Comments from clients included:

- “Staff very caring, concerned, professional yet very gentle.....There was a recognition of my own strengths, feelings and to love myself for who I am.”
- “[Bridges staff were] friendlier and more understanding of what is happening in my life. Non-judgemental.”
- “Friendly, more relaxed, work better as a team. Listen and take notice of what you say.”
- “Being able to connect with a counsellor. Feeling safe and secure in a non-judgemental environment – that is important when you are sharing personal and intimate details.”
- “I feel safe to say what I want knowing it is private and confidential.”
- This aspect of the culture of Bridges was reported by clients as a major factor for them in returning to Bridges and engaging in the programs and strategies they developed with counsellors there.

◆ **Practical and empowering focus of assistance provided.**

The practical assistance provided by Bridges and the way in which that assistance built on the confidence and strengths of clients was reported in all surveys. Bridges was described as a service that welcomed and encouraged people and made space for them to change aspects of their lives rather than delivering services in a prescriptive way. Client comments included:

- “The most valuable thing I have experienced at Bridges was encouragement to be strong, think more about myself, more independent, more self-esteem.”

- “I think I am more positive and supportive and try to have a calming influence on my child.”
- “Experienced people who are supportive, caring and understanding, who have a lot of information to offer but are also real.”
- “I now have the courage to face them{my family] and talk to them looking forward in the relationship.”
- “Huge changes for me – yelling less, putting some sort of routine together as a family.....I've been able to be more positive with my kids – discipline with consequences rather than smacking.”

The systemic and strengths based approach that is central to the BNA was a key theme in the responses of clients. They highlighted relationships changes, practical assistance and outcomes from Bridges in addition to the service addressing individual issues of addiction.

Key Outcomes from the Evaluation

The evidence gathered for this Evaluation Report and outline above provides an outline of an innovative and flexible approach to working on issues related to drug and alcohol use, as well as the potential to be used in a range of other contexts. The BNA emerges from this data as a work in progress but one that is already having significant positive impacts for Bridges clients, staff and other organisations working in partnership with Bridges.

Throughout it's development a range of critical themes have remained constant.

- ◆ Long term planning
- ◆ Flexibility and an adaptive approach
- ◆ Intentional, trusting and reciprocal relationships with other organisations
- ◆ A focus on collaboration
- ◆ Recognition of the value of Bridges staying small and adopting a networked process to achieve larger outcomes
- ◆ Ongoing engagement with a range of stakeholders to refine the approach
- ◆ A culture of ongoing improvement and development valuing the feedback of stakeholders in the BNA's development
- ◆ Ongoing commitment to communicate and grow the BNA in different contexts.

Similarly, there have been key ongoing challenges for Bridges in developing and implementing the BNA that remain relevant. These are;

- ◆ Ongoing uncertainty regarding funding for Bridges – particularly ongoing funding that would enable the BNA to grow.
- ◆ The time and effort required by Bridges to engage with other organisations, develop relationships and establish partnerships for projects that reflect the principles of the BNA. The evaluation has demonstrated the crucial outcomes that can be achieved using this approach (case study examples of the Children's Group and work with the Mt Druitt Indigenous Church illustrate these) but the time and resource pressure for a small organisation to undertake this work is significant.

- ◆ Ongoing tensions between the different expectations and reporting requirements of various funding bodies and the time and resources required to implement the BNA effectively mean that Bridges often has to stretch its resources.
- ◆ Further integration of the BNA throughout all of Bridges work and the importance of collecting and analysing evaluation data about this in a systematic and ongoing way.

Key Outcomes

To date these outcomes as revealed in the evaluation data include:

- ◆ A more seamless and integrated service for clients of Bridges who are able to benefit from a range of partnership programs, activities and approaches. The BNA means that for clients there is more choice with regard to services, access and a more holistic focus in relation to their issues.
- ◆ A more integrated and empowering approach for staff who reported that the BNA enabled them to think creatively about the work they did with clients, develop more connected program options and strategies in their work, develop stronger relationships with a diverse range of agencies that enhanced the work Bridges could do with individuals families and communities, and participate in a spectrum of approaches from counselling to groupwork to community development.
- ◆ Stronger relationships and more effective partnerships between Bridges and other organisations as well as the broader community. There is evidence that this has enabled Bridges to take on a more preventative focus in their work and to engage effectively with groups they had not previously worked with such as children and the Aboriginal community.
- ◆ The BNA has enabled a demonstration of the key role that can be played by small organisations in bringing local ideas to a strategic and policy stage in a way that creates innovative practice at all levels.

For the future, evaluation data from all sources indicates that further development of the BNA both within and outside Bridges is a priority, further work on integration of the BNA into all aspects of Bridges work (which has already begun), continued documentation and advocacy for the use of the BNA across a range of contexts, and building on the ongoing internal evaluation process outlined here are priority directions.

In addition to this, some ongoing research regarding the longer term impacts and outcomes of the BNA would be invaluable.

Recommendations to Bridges

1. Continued advocacy and negotiation by Bridges to secure ongoing funding to enable the further development of the BNA in all aspects of the organisation's work.
2. Ongoing documentation and communication with regard to the BNA as it develops further. This to include published papers and conferences as well as presentations and conversations with key stakeholder forums, government and other relevant forums.
3. Further work to build on the integration of the BNA into Bridges work and the active involvement of all staff and the Board in this process.
4. Further development of the relationship with the Indigenous Church for joint projects.
5. Development of partnerships with other organisations to establish use of the BNA in different contexts.
6. Investigate joint research opportunities with government, non-government organisations and universities for further research and development of the BNA.
7. Investigate the possibility of new premises for Bridges.
8. Establishment of an ongoing internal evaluation program as outlined in this Report to collect and monitor the impacts of the BNA on each of Bridges' activities and services and enhancing the existing process for ongoing client feedback and ideas.

Recommendations to the community and social sectors

1. To gain increased understanding of the BNA and its potential to strengthen social and agency networks to both address alcohol and other drug issues as well as other social issues
2. For funders, agencies and organisations to explore how the BNA can benefit and enhance their programs in terms of accessibility, flexibility and in other ways
3. To use the BNA to facilitate the development of trust, sharing of leadership, and collaboration between small and large organisations and between different sectors
4. To use the BNA to facilitate mutual learning and sharing strengths between communities and agencies
5. For other organisations to take an active role in supporting and partnering with Bridges in further developing, refining and implementing the BNA
6. To support Bridges to gain resources to continue to its lead role in progressing the BNA
7. For government, non-government organisations and universities to take the opportunity to be involved in collaborative research projects involving the BNA.

Appendix A Schedule of Questions for Stakeholders

1. Can you tell me about your knowledge and involvement with Bridges (either in the past or ongoing)?
2. What is it about Bridges that works really well?
3. Bridges uses a network approach in the work that it does and this approach has developed over time. Can you tell us what you understand about this approach and how you have seen it in action in your connection with Bridges? Have you or your organisation contributed to activities? Have you or your clients or organisation benefited? Or have you seen other clients groups or organizations or networks benefit?
4. Tell us about your experience of relationships and partnerships in working with Bridges. How have they worked? How do you think your relationships and partnerships with Bridges could develop in the future?
5. From your perspective, what are the strengths of Bridges and the way it goes about it's work?
6. How do you think BNA can influence the way people think what is possible for themselves and their community?
7. Tell me about some of the challenges you have seen Bridges face and how the organisation has addressed those challenges.
8. What are some of the specific outcomes you have seen from the work Bridges undertakes and the way they approach it?
9. From your perspective, how could Bridges build on the work it does now to develop it's approach well into the future?
10. Can you think of something Bridges could change about its current approach and focus that would enhance its work into the future?
11. Looking 3 years into the future where Bridges is recognised as a leading innovator amongst NGO's, what would it be doing, what might it look like and how would you describe its focus and approach?

Appendix B Stakeholders Interviewed for Evaluation.

The following stakeholders currently or previously have supported or partnered in relation to Bridges, the Bridges Network Approach and/or Voice for SONG.

Name	Agency	Role with Bridges
Tony Trimmingham	CEO Family Drug Support	Partner Agency and previous Board member
Tony Frew	Research and Policy Manager Centre For Volunteering	Acting President
Gary Moore	Former Director, Council of Social Services of NSW (NCOSS) Currently Director Community Services, Marrickville Council	Supporter of Bridges approach NCOSS has been a partner agency (Voice for SONG)
Sandra Pedler	Manager, Western Sydney Drug and Alcohol Resource Centre (WESDARC)	Partner agency
Chris Ryan	Community Development Worker Riverstone Neighbourhood Centre Former Coordinator Doonside Hub	Partner agency
Mary Waterford	Executive Officer Western Sydney Community Forum. Former Manager, Mountains Community Resource Network	Partner agency. Used Bridges model
Leanne Schuster	Team Leader Social and Emotional Wellbeing Team, Aboriginal Medical Service	Partner agency
Kathy Carn	Teacher Shalvey High	Partner in project. Response provided via email
Phil Ross	Arts and Multi-Media Manager, NSW PCYC Former Manager, Liverpool PCYC Former Cultural Arts Officer, Sydwest Multicultural Services Former Links to Learning Coordinator, Mission Australia Mt Druitt Mission Australia	Supporter. Partner agencies. Uses Bridges model.
Irena Liddell	Executive Officer Northside Community Forum	Partner agency and supporter. New Board member
Rick and Kayleen Manton	Pastors/Community Leaders Mt Druitt Indigenous Church	Partner agency
Jackie Wilgress	Manager Family Worker Training and Development Program	Supporter. Partner Agency
Peter Corney	Headmaster Wilmott Public School	Partner in project.
Janie Lawson	Former Policy Officer, Youth Bureau, FAHCSIA	Funding agency

	Currently Assistant Section Manager, Policy, Data and Evaluation	
Louise Cowper	Network Director Primary Care & Community Health Sydney West Area Health Service	Funding agency and partner agency
Dave Nash	Teacher Mt Druitt TAFE Former Teacher, Nirimba TAFE	Partner in project. Used Bridges model. Former Board member
Lauren Harris	Former Coordinator, Learning Difficulties Support Group. Former Community Development Worker, Lower Mountains Neighbourhood Centre. Currently Community Cultural Development Coordinator, Springwood Neighbourhood Centre.	Uses Bridges model. Partner agencies. Former Bridges President. Information provided but no interview due to family illness.

Appendix C – Client Survey

Questions for people using Bridges services

List of Questions

How did you find out about Bridges?

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How has your involvement with Bridges connected you with other services, groups, people and activities in the community?

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Have you noticed anything different about Bridges from any other services you have used? What was that?

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What has been most valuable for you about what Bridges has offered?

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What changes have you noticed in your life, family and relationships since coming to Bridges?

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What could Bridges do to improve the services they provide?

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Additional question only for people who we know have sought treatment for their AOD issues or someone in their family.

What changes have you noticed in your pattern of alcohol or drug use, or how you have dealt with another person's drug use since you first started to use Bridges services?

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Additional question for a person who performs the role of a parent in some form or other.

What changes have you noticed in your parenting skills and relationships with your children since you started using Bridges services?

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Any other comments or statements

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