

## Leadership in the Community Sector: A small organisation bringing together stakeholders to take a macro approach

**B**ADFS (Blacktown Alcohol and other Drugs Family Services) is a small organisation. It is involved in both clinical and health promotion activities to address the needs of families with substance use issues. A number of readers may be aware that this year BADFS has been raising concerns about the future of small organisations. BADFS has been both lobbying for itself and for small organisations as a group. At the same time BADFS is interested in seeing how we can all work together in these difficult times to build a stronger civil society. "We" being small *and* large organisations, community, public and private sectors and the community as a whole.

### Stakeholder Meeting

In June, BADFS brought together a range of stakeholders to look at how we could work together to address family and substance use issues whilst identifying BADFS role and its future. The meeting was significant for a number of reasons:

- It promoted an intersectoral approach for substance use and family issues.
- It was a meeting of true partnership. BADFS funding is just over \$100,000 per annum, yet it called together stakeholders, many of whom manage budgets in the millions. The stakeholders represented a range of government departments and peak body organisations. BADFS had to rethink its impressions of government officials as uncaring and unable to think outside "the square". If 17 stakeholders with big picture briefs were willing to come to such a

meeting that was being called by such a small organisation, then they certainly were willing to participate in a different approach and support a different type of leadership.

- It certainly focused on BADFS and how it might survive and grow in the current climate.
- It raised BADFS organisational issues as issues for the whole community. The current economic climate is one of decreasing funds in real terms. Quite reasonably government is looking for easier, more efficient ways to manage funds. However, the experience of BADFS is that small organisations are slowly withering away and there is a critical need for strategic action aimed at addressing issues for small organisations and the groups they represent.

### Outcomes from the Meeting

In terms of concrete outcomes, there were neither any promises for funding for BADFS nor was an intersectoral approach nipped out. However, what did happen was that a relationship was developed of a different kind; a relationship that showed that even a small organisation can be supported in its attempt to lead and initiate action. This meeting needs to be viewed as the *beginning* of a different type of collaboration rather than viewing it in terms of outcomes related to success or failure. However, some of the outcomes include that:

- Relationships have developed whereby organisational representatives will meet further to develop strategies to

address macro issues identified at the meeting.

- BADFS has stronger links with the organisations represented at the meeting, both with the high level officials and with the workers at the grass roots, and further partnership projects will ensue.
- The Coordinator has remained with the organisation and has increased confidence in the way she addresses issues related to the future of BADFS.
- BADFS profile has heightened.

### Leadership in the community sector and the role and value of small organisations?

Clearly, there is a willingness by individuals at high levels of government and from other sectors to give their time to gain increased clarity on the role of each organisation and sector to build a stronger civil society. It is important that organisations consider issues relating to strengthening community and inter-organisational relationships at the same time as promoting the issues of their specific target group. This process says that leadership can be initiated at any organisational level irrespective of the size of the organisation or its funding base. Small organisations play their part in representing the diversity of our community and can participate along with large organisations in influencing the way forward for our community and our society.

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