



MCRN Strategic Plan 2010-2013

Leadership in our local community services sector



Social justice is what faces you in the morning. It is awakening in a house with adequate water supply, cooking facilities and sanitation. It is the ability to nourish your children and send them to school where their education not only equips them for employment but reinforces their knowledge and understanding of their cultural inheritance. It is the prospect of genuine employment and good health: a life of choices and opportunity, free from discrimination.

Mick Dodson, Annual Report of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, 1993

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Preface

As a sign of respect to all Aboriginal people, MCRN acknowledges the traditional owners and custodians of these lands and waters, the Darug and Gundugurra people, their Elders past and present and their local communities living in the Blue Mountains. We also acknowledge all Aboriginal people living in the Blue Mountains.

The Mountains Community Resource Network (MCRN) is the local peak organisation for community services in the Blue Mountains. MCRN is a membership-based not-for-profit organisation and its actions are founded in principles of social justice, access & equity and community development.

Entering the second decade of the second millennium, MCRN endeavours to respond to the changes in the political, economical, social and ecological environments MCRN is operating in. Our sector faces many challenges and opportunities in the near future. As the local peak organisation for community services, MCRN will demonstrate

1. Leadership in Community Management
2. Leadership in Community Development
3. Leadership in Best Practice, and
4. Leadership in Sector Development.

Leadership is a broad term that can be explored from many different points of view. MCRN holds a democratic view of the leadership principle, which comprises of values such as participation, equity, setting positive examples, inspiring new ideas, guiding opinions and actions, diversity of cultures, acceptance of different views, tolerance and transparency of communications and processes. MCRN does not support any views that promote anti-democratic leadership principles that prevent any of the values expressed above to unfold.

This Strategic Plan is an attempt to clearly communicate our strategic aims to our members and to all community sector stakeholders we are working with. It is designed to identify and monitor outcome measures, which will ensure transparency and a common understanding of MCRN's leadership role in the Blue Mountains community sector.

A Strategic Plan is a process, which the MCRN Management has committed to. This plan sets out MCRN's strategic direction for the next 3 years. This direction was identified through a series of consultations with stakeholders and MCRN Planning Days. MCRN will review its Strategic Plan annually and measure outcomes through closely monitoring MCRN workplans, funding plans, annual planning days and through feedback and evaluation. MCRN would like to thank all members and stakeholders who contributed to the planning process.

MCRN's Vision and Commitment to Social Justice

VISION

Mountains Community Resource Network (MCRN) is a dynamic peak organisation whose actions are founded on social justice and community development principles. We value community and cultural diversity, and we challenge inequality. On behalf of organisations, groups and individuals, and concerning the Blue Mountains as a whole, the Mountains Community Resource Network will work towards achieving a socially just community in the Blue Mountains and alleviating community disempowerment caused by poverty, discrimination and human rights injustices.

Commitment to Social Justice

MCRN has a commitment to the following four principles:

Equity - a fairer distribution of resources and power ensuring that marginalised groups are given priority.

Access - ensuring fair and equal opportunities for all people to those services that are important for their quality of life.

Participation - maximising the opportunities for people to participate in the circumstances that affect their lives. This includes being involved with the management, service provision and planning of MCRN.

Rights - fairer and more comprehensive human rights that are equally accessible by all people regardless of their age, gender, cultural background, race, sexual orientation, marital status, abilities, health, responsibility as a carer and income. This includes civil, political, industrial, social, environmental and economic rights.

A Brief History of MCRN

The Mountains Community Resource Network began in 1984 as the Blue Mountains Community Services Advisory Council. The Advisory Council was to provide advice to Blue Mountains City Council and to act as an 'umbrella organisation' for local community and welfare groups and services.

The initial aims of the Network involved drawing together organisations and individuals in the Blue Mountains to meet the following objectives:

- To act in a formal consultative role with BMCC and other levels of government.
- To develop a co-ordinated approach to the needs of people in the Blue Mountains and issues affecting them.
- To be an advocate for community organisations in the Mountains.
- To develop an information base of socio-economic need in the Mountains.
- To develop forums to determine needs and strategise to meet those needs.

- To assist organisations in skill development.
- To raise community awareness of relevant social issues.

MCRN became incorporated in 1986. We received WSAAS funding in 1985, picked up by the Department of Community Services from 1987. The Migrant Community Project was funded by the Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs in 1992 to 2005, the Disability Community Development Project by WSAAS from 1998 to 2002 and the Mental Health Community Cultural Development Project 2003 to 2007. In most recent years MCRN has received further WSAAS funding for a Young People's Mental Health Project as well as funding from the Department of Health and Ageing for an Aged Care Access Project for CALD people living in the Blue Mountains.

MCRN's Key Roles in the BM community sector

As the local peak organisation for the community services sector in the Blue Mountains, MCRN's key role is the initiation and coordination of actions which address social justice issues on a local level. To achieve this MCRN is committed to

- Networking and Advocacy
- Community Development
- Facilitation and Resourcing
- Research
- Best Practice

MCRN takes a leading role in establishing and maintaining networks, interagencies, and collaborations. It is one core function of MCRN to demonstrate leadership by convening the Blue Mountains Community Interagency (BMCI), the Mountains Multicultural Interagency (MMI) and the Raising Awareness of Mental Health Issues (RAMHI) meetings. MCRN also takes a leading role in building coalitions to address local needs.

Furthermore, MCRN represents the BM community services sector on various forums including but not limited to the Access & Equity Working Party, Premises Review Panel, CDSE Ranking Committee, Families NSW Implementation Group, Stronger Voice for Western Sydney, TRI Community Exchange Management Committee and Project 40 Steering Committee.

Working on behalf of organisations, community groups and individuals, MCRN advocates for social justice issues in the wider political arena and promotes the viability and efficiency of local community-based not-for-profit organisations as well as the importance of social action around issues effecting disadvantaged individuals and communities.

MCRN actively supports community development initiatives that celebrate diversity within our community. Through partnerships and collaboration with local indigenous and multicultural communities and organisations, MCRN is committed reconciliation and celebrating cultural diversity. MCRN promotes and participates in annual events such as NAIDOC Week, Reconciliation Week, Harmony Day and Refugee Week. MCRN also works together with local services and other stakeholders to raise awareness and highlight the importance of Mental Health Week, Neighbourhood Centre Week, White Ribbon Day and International Day Against Homophobia.

MCRN Planning Process

Methodology

In 2009 MCRN consulted with local stakeholders, Interagency Members, local networks, service managers, community development workers and representatives from local government, in order to seek input and feedback regarding the following questions:

- *What do you expect from MCRN as your local peak organisation?*
- *What are MCRN's strengths and what has MCRN done well?*
- *What are MCRN's weaknesses and what could MCRN have done better or differently?*
- *Where do you see MCRN in 5 years time?*
- *Are there any services and resource provided by MCRN that would benefit your network, organisation and work practices?*

In addition to these questions, internal consultations were held with MCRN management committee members and MCRN staff and volunteers, exploring the following issues:

- *What are some threats for MCRN that might have a negative effect on organisational and operational performance?*
- *What does sustainability mean for MCRN?*
- *Can you think of any innovative strategies and opportunities that would address MCRN's viability needs and would ensure MCRN's financial sustainability (e.g. fee-for-service, diversification of service delivery, social enterprise etc...)?*

The consultation process used two methods: 1. Questionnaire and 2. Group Discussions (based on the Appreciative Inquiry model).

1. The questionnaire was sent out to 130 workers but only representing 40-50 organisations working within the local community sector. The individual response rate was low.

2. In group discussions the same questionnaire was also used during network meetings guiding the discussions amongst many workers from different parts of our sector: Youth Services Network (youth workers), Coalition Against Violence and Abuse (DV & family workers), HACC Forum (carers and support workers), BM Child and Family Forum (child & family workers), CDW Meeting (Community Development Workers), Generalist Interagency and a Manager Focus Group. These meeting were well attended by workers from all facets of our sector and respectively the discussions were diverse.

Through this 2-pronged approach we are confident to have captured a broad view. We will incorporate the variations in response rate into our measuring framework for the future. In summary the following themes have emerged from collating all answers:

- Clearer avenues of communication/procedures with all involved
- Membership arrangements and benefits
- Picking up tasks and projects that other organisations can't do
- Role and responsibility of MCRN as a local peak organisation
- Promotion of our sector
- Building partnerships and collaborations

Based on these themes the MCRN Staff and Management Committee participated in a series of two facilitated Planning Days. We explored and identified the following key issues:

- *What is the role of MCRN?*
- *Who are MCRN's members?*
- *Where does MCRN get its mandate?*
- *What does that mandate authorise MCRN to do?*
- *What is the relationship between MCRN and Congress?*
- *What is the importance of a formalised membership base for MCRN?*
- *What is the ideal composition for the MCRN Management Committee?*

As a result of the Planning Days and further discussions, this document has been prepared to reflect the answers to these questions i.e. the outcomes from our planning with a view to give the reader an insight into the important strategic directions MCRN is committed to in the next 3 years. MCRN will constantly consult with local stakeholders and evaluate this Strategic Plan on an ongoing-basis and in the best interest of MCRN Members.

Planning and Review Cycle

MCRN Management Committed is committed to monitor and evaluate the outcomes from the Planning Process through an annual review of this Strategic Plan at an Annual Planning Day for all staff, volunteers and Management Committee Members. Furthermore this Strategic Plan will form the basis for a Results Based Accountability Framework for MCRN as a local peak organisation.

MCRN will incorporate the Strategic Plan in its Policies & Procedures as well as the workplans of MCRN staff. Currently MCRN employs the MCRN Team Leader (35 hours per week) and the MCRN Financial Administrator (10 hours per week). Employment of project workers is dependant on additional funding, which is to be secured in line with the rationale set out in MCRN Financial Viability (see appendix). There will be 6-monthly reviews of all workplans.

MCRN Management is committed to openly communicate with all its members and stakeholders about outcomes and prospective changes within MCRN's Strategic Directions. MCRN will consult all members and stakeholders and encourage them to give feedback and have their input in MCRN's Strategic responsibilities.

Key Findings for MCRN's New Strategic Direction

Moving towards a Representative Membership Model

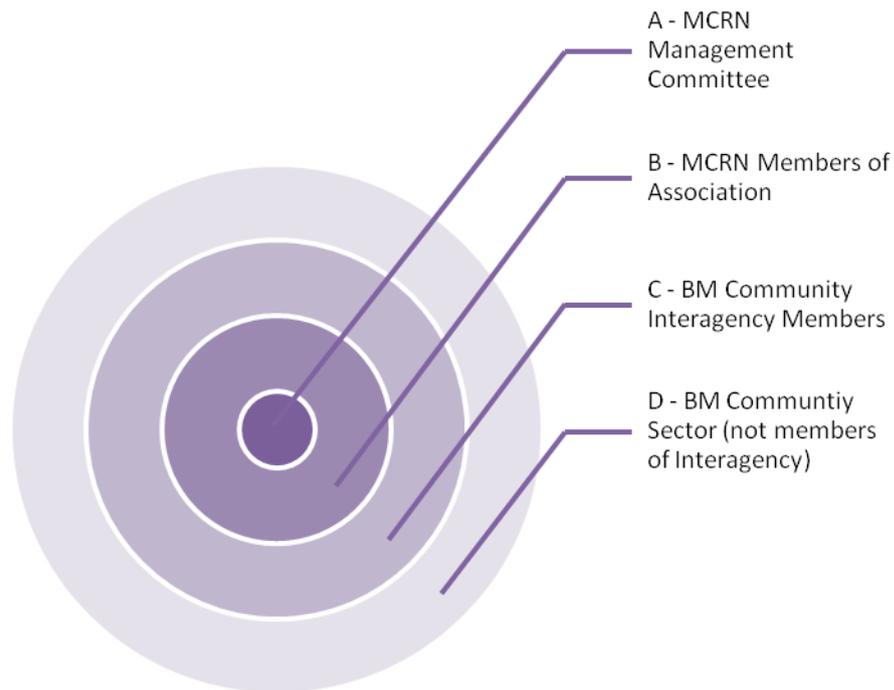
MCRN is a local peak organisation and as such has the responsibility to be representative of the diverse nature of our sector. It was a key finding of our Consultations and Planning Process, that MCRN needs to strengthen its membership base and its Management Committee and as a result we have made a commitment to move towards a more formal 'representative membership model'.

The community services sector is diverse and multi-layered. Many organisations receive funding from various funding bodies and service people with diverse needs. MCRN acknowledges that if we are to represent some organisations we need to be abreast of the variety within the sector and the dynamics that come with it.

MCRN is an Incorporated Association and its membership is open to every community organisation and community group that operates within the Blue Mountains LGA and is community based, community managed and reflects this in its aims/objectives/vision.

Respectively one key finding of our planning process is that MCRN needs a representative Management Committee, reflecting strong CSGP-service involvement as well as participation of non-CSGP services with diverse funding sources.

MCRN's Current Membership Structure



A - MCRN Management Committee

Currently consists of one representative from

- BM Women's Health and Resource Centre
- Mid Mountains Youth Centre
- Mountains Outreach Community Services
- Elizabeth Evatt Community Legal Centre
- Blue Mountains City Council (Councillors, ex-officio)
- Two community members

B - MCRN current Members of Association

These are the de-facto members of the association through an auspice contract relationship:

- BM Multicultural Residents Association
- BM East Timor Sisters
- Pink Mountains
- BM Unions Council

C - BM Community Interagency Members

The Blue Mountains Community Interagency (BMCI) is a regular Forum attended by representatives from neighbourhood centres, family support services, community development projects, youth services, disability services, migrant services, children's and child protection services, community housing and staff from Blue Mountains City Council, Sydney West Area Health Services, Centrelink and employment services. BMCI is open to any stakeholder of the local community services sector.

The BMCI is convened by MCRN and meets monthly. Members subscribe to an e-mail distribution list, through which they receive important updates and information relevant to our sector. The list below shows all paid members of the Interagency in 2009-2010. Services that meet MCRN's membership criteria will continue their Interagency membership and will get the opportunity to become MCRN Members of Association.

- BM Women's Health and Resource Centre
- Mid Mountains Youth Centre
- Mountains Outreach Community Services
- Elizabeth Evatt Community Legal Centre
- Blackheath Area Neighbourhood Centre
- Katoomba Neighbourhood Centre
- Mid Mountains Neighbourhood Centre
- Winmalee Neighbourhood Centre
- Springwood Neighbourhood Centre
- Lower Mountains Neighbourhood Centre
- Gunedoo Child Protection Services
- BM Aboriginal Culture and Resource Centre
- Blue Mountains Food Services
- Great Community Transport
- Blue Mountains GP Network
- Lower Mountains Family Support Services
- Blue Mountains Family Support Services
- Mountains Youth Services Team
- Connect Child and Family Services
- BM World Heritage Institute
- Blue Gum
- The Hon. Bob Debus MP
- Blue Mountains City Council
- Kirinari
- Western Sydney Community Forum
- Uniting Counselling Service
- Playgroup NSW
- Complete Care Team Glenbrook
- Blue Mountains TAFE
- Disability Enterprises
- TRI Community Exchange

D - BM Community Sector (currently not members of Interagency)

There are other community organisations in the Blue Mountains which are eligible to become a MCRN member of association. Recruiting members from this pool will be crucial to build up a comprehensive membership base. Some of the services in this group are regularly attending the Interagency or indeed are actively working together with MCRN on other projects and collaborations.

As highlighted above the MCRN Management Committee shall consist of members representing various sections of the local community sector i.e. one representative each from the HACC, SAAP, Youth, Aged Care and Disability sector. Furthermore, there is the

employment, education and aboriginal services. This group also includes local activist groups and volunteer groups that operating within the Blue Mountains.

In order to move towards a 'Representative Model of Membership', MCRN has made a strategic commitment to provide the opportunity for all eligible local community organisations and community groups, to become MCRN Members of Association. MCRN Management Committee will be elected from Members of the Association and it is endeavoured that the Management Committee Membership will be reflective of the diversity of services within the local community services sector.

Summary of Findings & Planning Outcomes

In summary, as a result from the Strategic Planning Process MCRN has identified four Strategic Goals for 2010-2013:

1. Leadership in Community Management: *Membership and Representation*
2. Leadership in Community Development: *Resourcing and Communication*
3. Leadership in Best Practice: *Social Justice and Social Action*, and
4. Leadership in Sector Development: *Advocacy, Research & Collaborations*

The following chapters will explain in more detail how MCRN's Strategic Goals are defined, what the strategies and actions are in order to work towards these goals and how we will measure our performance and success in accomplishing our tasks ahead.

MCRN's Strategic Direction and Goals for 2010-2013

GOAL 1: "Leadership in Community Management" Membership & Representation

MCRN is a dynamic peak organisation, representing community-managed, not-for-profit community organisations in the Blue Mountains. MCRN is committed to the community management model. Therefore it is our goal to establish and maintain a strong membership base, reflecting the diversity within the BM Community Sector. The MCRN Management Committee will be reflecting the same diversity and shall have the delegated mandate to represent our members' best interest, which are capacity building and sector development.

GOAL 2: "Leadership in Community Development" Resourcing & Communication

MCRN is committed to providing leadership in best community development principles and practices. The communication amongst services and workers is based on trustful relationships, cutting-edge knowledge and best use of communication technologies. Within the next 3 years MCRN endeavours to lead the way in initiating, promoting and using the concept of "Virtual Community Development" in addition to the 'traditional' means of communication.

GOAL 3: "Leadership in Best Practice" Social Justice & Social Action

MCRN is committed to the social justice principles of Equity, Access, Participation and Rights. MCRN will celebrate diversity within our community and promote a spirit of reconciliation between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians. In respect of MCRN's long history of identifying current social justice issues, initiating and supporting local social action, giving marginalised groups and individuals a voice, MCRN will continue its commitment and leadership in social justice; constantly acknowledging and reviewing a changing funding, political, economic and ecological environment.

GOAL 4: "Leadership in Sector Development" Advocacy, Research & Collaborations

MCRN will promote our sector as viable, efficient and sustainable, with a particular emphasis on the importance of small, community-based, not-for-profit organisations. MCRN acknowledges the important of constructive collaborations in order to achieve the best outcomes for our community. MCRN endeavours to promote an evidence-based approach as best practice and is therefore committed to develop the nexus between community services, research centres and funding bodies for further assessing the needs of our community.

GOAL 1: "Leadership in Community Management" Membership & Representation

MCRN is a dynamic peak organisation, representing community-managed, not-for-profit community organisations in the Blue Mountains. MCRN is committed to the community management model. Therefore it is our goal to establish and maintain a strong membership base, reflecting the diversity within the BM Community Sector. The MCRN Management Committee will be reflecting the same diversity and shall have the delegated mandate to represent our members' best interest, which are capacity building and sector development.

Strategies	Performance Measures
1. Broaden membership of both MCRN and Management Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ membership representation from various parts of the sector ○ membership base 20 members in 2011, 30 in 2012 and 40 in 2013
2. Review existing policies to reflect new membership structure and benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ policies, procedures and other systems in place to facilitate MCRN's relationship with its Members of Association
3. Actively recruit new Management Committee members from diverse organisations and commitment to demonstrate best practice in governance, especially through increased membership of Management Committee and MCRN as an association	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Management Committee representative of various parts of the sector ○ M/C at full capacity, operating with Sub-Committee structure ○ policies and procedures to reflect best practice in community management and governance
4. Explore ways of re-engaging some organisations and their managers and develop sound strategies to clearly communicate our mandate and how to prioritise issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ provision of training for service managers in governance and community management ○ promote good relationships amongst managers, ensuring high standards in governance ○ develop tools available to all members and on website as resource
5. Ensuring MCRN's financial viability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ complimentary funding identified ○ project funding applied for and secured
6. Effective representation of members and issues in the wider political arena	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ successful representation of issues as required ○ feedback sought from members on MCRN representative role

GOAL 2: “Leadership in Community Development”

Resourcing & Communication

MCRN is committed to providing leadership in best community development principles and practices. The communication amongst services and workers is based on trustful relationships, cutting-edge knowledge and best use of communication technologies. Within the next 3 years MCRN endeavours to lead the way in initiating, promoting and using the concept of “Virtual Community Development” in addition to the ‘traditional’ means of communication.

Strategies	Performance Measures
1. Continue commitment to BM Community Development through resourcing the local network (BMCI, RAMHI and MMI) and by initiating and supporting BM wide projects that address social justice issues; community training regarding social justice and community services organisational issues.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ BMCI, MMI and RAMHI convened and resourced successfully ○ actively participate in other network meetings and promote relevant tools and resources ○ promote social justice and support local initiatives addressing inequity
2. Set up clear communication mechanisms between MCRN and its members as well as amongst members, to ensure effective and adequate representation of issues and interests. Developing proper feedback mechanisms will ensure constant quality control and management.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ develop policies and procedures for MCRN members to raise issues, request representation, ask for support or give feedback ○ use website to allow members to voice opinions, participate in campaigns, contribute to submissions and give feedback on issues
3. Continue commitment to partnership and auspice arrangements that further the cause of MCRN, by establishing terms of reference for sub-committees and auspiced groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ New auspice policy developed and implemented ○ Evaluation of auspice arrangements
4. Promote the concept “Virtual Community Development” by launching a new website with content management tools; investigate new web-based information distribution tools (e.g. RSS feeds) and social network media tools (e.g. blogs) for the local community services network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ develop, maintain and evaluate the new MCRN Website, always considering trends and needs ○ promote use of on-line tools to set standards (P&P manuals, links and other resources) and ensure maximum participation

GOAL 3: “Leadership in Best Practice”

Social Justice & Social Action

MCRN is committed to the social justice principles of Equity, Access, Participation and Rights. MCRN will celebrate diversity within our community and promote a spirit of reconciliation between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians. In respect of MCRN’s long history of identifying current social justice issues, initiating and supporting local social action, giving marginalised groups and individuals a voice, MCRN will continue its commitment and leadership in social justice; constantly acknowledging and reviewing a changing funding, political, economic and ecological environment.

Strategies	Performance measures
1. Prioritise project work and funds towards current social justice issues e.g. homelessness, mental health, disability advocacy, social justice and environmental issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ actively support existing networks and activities addressing social justice issues such as Project 40, Mental Health Week activities, Access & Equity Working Party and others as required
2. Redefine Social Justice in today’s context through briefing papers, dissemination of relevant information, public forums and group discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Organise public forums and professional development opportunities for local workers in the community sector around social justice issues
3. Promote democratic principles of leadership and participation as best practice in community development	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ collate and disseminate information, sent out to MCRN members and stakeholders through e-mail and made available on MCRN website
4. Promote cultural diversity, reconciliation and social justice	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ participate in local events promoting cultural diversity (e.g. Harmony Day, Refugee Week), reconciliation (e.g. Reconciliation Week, NAIDOC Week) and other social justice issues (e.g. International Day of Homelessness, International Day of Anti-Homophobia, White Ribbon Day)
5. Support local initiatives, groups and individuals working towards social justice and community empowerment and towards alleviating human rights violations, discrimination and poverty	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Provide auspice and partnership opportunities to local social action groups and individuals working towards goals that MCRN stands for

GOAL 4:”Leadership in Sector Development”

Advocacy, Research & Collaborations

MCRN will promote our sector as viable, efficient and sustainable, with a particular emphasis on the importance of small, community-based, not-for-profit organisations. MCRN acknowledges the important of constructive collaborations in order to achieve the best outcomes for our community. MCRN endeavours to promote an evidence-based approach as best practice and is therefore committed to develop the nexus between community services, research centres and funding bodies for further assessing the needs of our community.

Strategies	Performance Measure
1. Promote building evidence based practice	MCRN further demonstrates leadership successfully in three networks, convened and resourced by the MCRN Team Leader/CDW: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Blue Mountains Community Interagency ○ Mountains Multicultural Interagency ○ Raising Awareness of Mental Health Issues
2. Building the capacity within our sector including working with organisations and individual workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Establish and lead BMCI working parties on relevant issues ○ Participating in and feedback on submissions
3. Seek funding to monitor and evaluate collaborative practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ funding for collaborative practices sought ○ projects successfully completed
4. Continue to advocate on issues that effect small NGOs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Actively promote Voice for SONG, and other advocacy networks ○ Actively support local small NGOs
5. Actively support collaborations, participate in research and develop research database and provide local support for members when preparing funding or lobbying submissions	Where appropriate MCRN will take a leadership role in developing, promoting and sustaining such collaborations, including but not limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Stronger Families Alliance ○ Project 40 Blue Mountains ○ Coalition Against Violence and Abuse ○ Youth Mental Illness and Substance Abuse Reference Group ○ Stronger Voice for Western Sydney

Appendix 1: MCRN's Aims and Objectives

MCRN will initiate and co-ordinate actions which address social justice issues. To achieve this the following strategies will be the primary focus of Mountains Community Resource Network:

1. *Networking and Advocacy*, MCRN will:

1.1 Represent Blue Mountains community organisations on local, regional, statewide and national bodies (both government and non-government), and advocate on behalf of disadvantaged groups and communities

1.2 Lead individuals, groups and agencies in the Blue Mountains to advocate for social justice

1.3 Network and collaborate with non-government and government agencies on community welfare service development, community development and developing responses to social policy

1.4 Contribute to public and social policy development by raising issues and facilitating a community response to government initiatives.

2. *Community Development*, MCRN will:

2.1 Facilitate action and activities aimed at improving the wellbeing of disadvantaged individuals and groups

2.2 Initiate, support and resource the emergence of projects which address social justice and respond to community needs. In cases where there is no other appropriate sponsor, MCRN may auspice such projects, depending on available resources.

3. *Facilitation and Resourcing*, MCRN will:

3.1 Facilitate a range of interagencies and forums that enable Blue Mountains community organisations to work effectively together

3.2 Facilitate community education on issues of social justice, disadvantage and prejudice

3.3 Facilitate training opportunities for community welfare workers and community welfare organisations.

3.4 Provide information and referrals to community groups

3.5 Provide resources, support and promote community organisations for the wellbeing of individuals and the community

4. *Research*, MCRN will:

4.1 Seek resources for and undertake research on community needs and issues in the Blue Mountains

4.2 Promote the use of research for effective social planning.

5. *Best Practice*, MCRN will:

5.1 Manage and administer the organisation in accordance with best practice principles as determined in MCRN policies.

Appendix 2: MCRN's Key Activities funded under Community Services Grant Program

MCRN is funded under CSGP to...
➤ Build and maintain community service system networks, brief other services and related activities to promote best practice, improve the level of information exchange and service coordination and enhance the effectiveness and utilisation of services.
➤ Provide community information or education to raise awareness of issues, services and activities
➤ Plan, develop and support new and existing services to meet the community's needs including those services experiencing difficulty.
➤ Resource, develop and support community building events – range of activities under MCRN auspice
➤ Advocate on community issues and related social justice issues affecting local communities:
➤ Undertake research and inclusive local needs based planning
➤ Undertake strategies to improve access to other services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients, clients from culturally & linguistically diverse backgrounds or clients from other specific disadvantaged groups
➤ Facilitate and coordinate collaboration and partnerships in planning, service delivery and development at a state or regional level
➤ Disseminate information and provide support or advice on policy, operational and management issues to services, the sector and the broader community.
➤ Conduct and contribute to research, policy development and evaluation
➤ Advocate on social justice and related policy issues on behalf of the sector to address disadvantage within communities.
➤ Identify and promote emerging community services initiatives with regional or state significance to address disadvantage within communities
➤ Undertake organisational and practitioner development including training
➤ Lead or facilitate industry change and the development of community services infrastructure

Appendix 3: MCRN's Financial Viability

MCRN is a small community based, not-for-profit organisation, which is funded under the Community Services Grants Program as a Community Resource Network project. The funding covers the salaries of the MCRN Team Leader/CDW for 35 hours per week and the MCRN Financial Administrator for 10 hours per week. The remaining funding contributes towards operational costs. MCRN raises some income through membership fees, project administration costs, interest on deposits and through room and equipment hire.

MCRN acknowledges the strength of small community organisations (see references: Voice for SONG), however in order to achieve more of the strategic goals MCRN is relying on additional funding sources. In respect of the four Strategic Goals, MCRN will prioritise funding applications that enhance MCRN's work towards achieving these goals.

MCRN will apply for project funding that

- build the capacity of MCRN and/or the BM community services sector
- uses community development and cultural community development to achieve MCRN goals
- promotes collaborative practice either as partner or as lead agency
- develops MCRN's organisational capacity through capital purchases and production of relevant resources

Establishing evidence-based practice has been identified as a key responsibility of MCRN as a leader in the local community sector. MCRN is committed work in collaboration with other stakeholders to address on-going needs in our community such as mental health, cultural diversity, reconciliation, access & equity, governance and capacity building.

Appendix 4: MCRN Networks

Network meetings and collaborations convened by MCRN

1. Blue Mountains Community Interagency (BMCI)

The Blue Mountains Community Interagency is a regular Forum attended by representatives from neighbourhood centres, family support services, community development projects, youth services, disability services, migrant services, children's and child protection services, community housing and staff from Blue Mountains City Council, Sydney West Area Health Services, Centrelink and employment services. BMCI is open to any stakeholder of the local community services sector. It is convened by the Mountains Community Resource Network.

The BMCI meets monthly. Members subscribe to an e-mail distribution list, through which they receive important updates and information relevant to our sector. The MCRN Website will have most of this information stored and easily accessible.

BMCI has guest-speakers on a regular basis, covering topics which are relevant and engaging for BMCI participants. BMCI also gives representative from other network meetings and interagencies the opportunity to feedback, thus BMCI becomes an 'umbrella' generalist Interagency and an invaluable information share and peer support forum.

Occasionally BMCI members will form working parties to fulfil tasks such as writing submissions towards official documents e.g. BMCC Plans of Management, governmental enquiries and consultations. Some working parties may work towards organising an event or preparing pre-election briefing papers and activities.

2. Mountains Multicultural Interagency (MMI)

MCRN will continue to provide leadership in convening and resourcing the MMI. As stated in the Terms of Reference, the aims of MMI are as follows:

- to encourage the wider community and workers from Government and non government sector to network, exchange information and collaborate on issues and projects relevant to the CALD communities in the Blue Mountains LGA.
- MMI will identify service delivery issues, including gaps in services, obstacles and barriers to accessing services, both Government and non-Government. It will also act as an advisory body and will support workers in their work with the target group.
- MMI will advocate for improving and effective service delivery, for additional services and where local, state and national issues affect local multicultural communities.
- MMI will actively promote cultural harmony and productive diversity engaging the whole community.
- MMI Interagency will advocate on behalf of CALD people in order that they be given opportunities to contribute and participate in the social and economic life of the region.

3. Raising Awareness of Mental Health Issues (RAMHI)

Blue Mountains Raising Awareness of Mental Health Issues (RAMHI) is a local forum of carers, consumers and representatives from Neighbourhood Centres, community development projects, aged and disability services, employment services and staff from Blue Mountains City Council and Sydney West Area Health Services. It aims at improving access to all services for people with and recovering from mental illness. It is convened by the MCRN Team Leader.

RAMHI is a local umbrella group with a broad focus on Mental Health issues. It aims at improving access to all services for people with and recovering from mental illness. RAMHI is a collaboration of services and individuals to

- coordinate activities around mental health issues
- provide advocacy for relevant issues
- increase connections and quality of relationships between services and individuals
- support related projects and groups
- provide the opportunity for participants to raise issues
- provide and share information and resources

MCRN will take an active convening role in further the goals of RAMHI as an open collaboration and networking opportunity for local workers and individuals concerned with mental health issues. MCRN will organise the monthly meetings and will demonstrate leadership in ensuring that actions and tasks are fulfilled.

RAMHI will have a 'web-presence' on MCRN's website. A newsletter will be produced through contributions from RAMHI members and supporters. Furthermore, MCRN will support the annual Mental Week and activities such as the Blue Fringe Art Exhibition. MCRN will also advocate on behalf of services and consumers on mental health issues.

4. MCRN as an active partner in local collaborations

MCRN acknowledges the importance of networking and good working relationships in the community sector. Depending on its capacity MCRN will actively be involved in the work of local service networks and social action groups and provide support where possible. Some of the existing networks that MCRN support as the Blue Mountains Child and Family Forum, Youth Services Network, Youth Mental Illness and Substance Abuse, Coalition Against Violence and Abuse, BM Community Care Forum, and BM Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation / BM People for Reconciliation.

MCRN also acknowledges the importance of the collaboration between services. MCRN plays an active role in the Stronger Families Alliance, which is a collaboration of twenty stakeholder organisations in child, family and community well being in the Blue Mountains. The group has written a strategic plan, 'The Blue Mountains Child and Family Plan' that directs its member services towards a best practice and coordinated / collaborative approach to working with Blue Mountains children and their families.

The following example demonstrates how MCRN's Strategic Plan ties in with the Blue Mountains Child and Family Plan.

Stronger Families Alliance (SFA) & MCRN

Supporting collaborations and promoting best practice in the sector

As the local peak organisation for the community services in the Blue Mountains, MCRN will support creating an open dialogue amongst organisations and between community organisations, government agencies and other relevant stakeholders such as universities, research centres, businesses and volunteer community groups coming together under the SFA.

MCRN endeavours ensuring the consideration of different points of view and promoting a perspective of grassroots community organisations and community development principles e.g. social justice, participation, and access & equity. To ensure the most comprehensive discourse regarding best outcomes for BM children and their families, MCRN will actively participate in the governing of BBA by fulfilling executive functions such as

- identifying and securing funding,
- ensuring sound communication management,
- promoting BBA sustainability through monitoring and evaluating the plan role out
- promoting BBA and advocating for children and families in the Blue Mountains

Blue Mountains Child and Family Plan

Outcome Four: Collaborative, comprehensive and respectful service systems are created through the establishment of School Centred Community Hubs (SCCH)

Outcome Eight: The service system is well coordinated and implements emerging best practice for vulnerable families.

MCRN's role in the Stronger Families Alliance is targeted at the outcomes Four and Eight of the BM Child and Family Plan. MCRN is committed to continue being a custodian of the Blue Mountains Child and Family Plan, developed by local community organisations and other stakeholders coming together as the "Stronger Families Planning Group" (now known as the Stronger Families Alliance). As MCRN does not provide a direct service to Children and Families, MCRN endeavours to work towards building the capacity of the Children and Families Services Sector in the Blue Mountains.

Appendix 5: References

- ‘Neighbourhood and Community Centres: results for children, families and communities’, Gül Izmir, Ilan Katz and Jasmine Bruce, SPRC Report 16/09, Social Policy Research Centre, University of New South Wales, August 2009
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- ‘Voice for SONG’, The way forward: Tackling the issues confronting small community organisations, Tirrania Suhood, Chris Marks, Mary Waterford, and Voice for SONG members, March 2006
- ‘East Meets West Report’, Exploring Cultural Diversity in the Blue Mountains, A report prepared for Sydney West Area Health Service, Beatriz Cardona, Carol Tingate and Fiona Luckhurst, 2007
- ‘Making great interagencies, networks and forums’, A resource and information kit, Western Sydney Community Forum, Revised 2008
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