

Stewart Island “Snack and Yak”

The connecting space between local community-led projects.

Community: Stewart Island/Rakiura

Theme: Working together in place

Not another project

Stewart Island (Rakiura) has one main township, Half Moon Bay, with a population of 400 people. In that township there are currently 68 different trusts, groups, committees, boards and organisations - everything from a Health Committee, to School Board of Trustees and Search and Rescue, to a Community Centre Trust, Community Garden and Toi Rakiura Arts Trust. There are so many people on our Island who work very hard in each of their chosen areas and we're all focussed on making the Island a better place to live, each in our own way.

Because of this, the Island is wealthy in terms of care, creativity and environment – there's a really strong asset base of talent and commitment and a 'can do' local culture of getting things done.

Brent and I have been strong supporters of a community-led development approach and part of the Inspiring Communities network since its inception. We've been keen to share this with others on the Island but knew we needed to be careful about our approach. We felt in bringing back to the Island what we had seen, discussed and learned about the principles of community led development, that the last thing Rakiura needed was another official structure and set of projects. We also linked up with a small group of locals who had a similar desire and drive to strengthen our community. The next steps were then discussed and decided by this group.

In talking with other locals, we could see powerful opportunities could arise from creating more and stronger connections between the groups that are already running great projects on the island. We could see that by consciously identifying, vocalising and discussing what it is as a whole community we value about living on the island, what we like and don't like about living here, what we want to take into the future - regardless of the social, economic and environmental changes that lie ahead (or perhaps even to guide those social, economic and environmental changes), that we could potentially develop a common overarching vision for the Island for the next 10-50-100 yrs.

So, we decided on an approach where there is conscious effort put into **connecting** people and projects as opposed to **creating** projects, or working on the 'spaces in between projects'. Through shared dialogue we felt some gaps may still appear that could in turn bring out some great ideas for new projects. We were adamant though that anything new should come out of the community as a whole, and be owned and developed that same way.

The need for strategic connections

On Rakiura, there are several, natural splits in local people's social and work circles. Patterns to normal life, like working around small children's waking hours, the varied hours throughout the tourism and service industries, fishermen spending weeks away on fishing boats or nights at the salmon farms, DOC staff field trips and high school students away at boarding school all create barriers to groups and individuals connecting on a regular basis as a 'whole community'. Our reality is that while everyone here generally does know each other, we don't get to all catch up that often.

We also notice in our community that the best ideas always seem to grow when a group of friends get together in conversation. So, we wanted to set up a situation where people who are involved in community groups, formally came together to share a little about their chosen area - what they do, recent or upcoming challenges and successes for their organisation. We also wanted to provide an informal environment (on the Island this always involves kai and often a cuppa!) for conversations and natural connections to develop.

Getting Together

So, we bravely set a date, divided up people and groups to contact and sent out an invitation to come together. The first of these community get-togethers was held in early May 2011 on a Sunday. About sixty people came - including a lot of 'off the island' people. It was at this meeting that 68 different island groups and trusts were identified. One new group was also launched. Many more groups existed than any of us had realised. In effect, in naming each of the groups, we had also created the beginnings of a new local community groups database, which will shortly be published to promote local groups on the Island's main website www.stewartisland.co.nz.

Giving everyone time to talk at the meeting took much longer than we had initially anticipated. We felt it important that those attending had the chance to share and that everyone had the same amount of time to speak. As a result, everyone felt valued and energised.

Over all the morning was a huge success! From the overwhelmingly positive feedback we received, people commented that they just didn't realise how many other people were doing so much hard work on the Island as part of so many different groups. Some, who were beginning to feel isolated and disillusioned about the work they were putting into their chosen area and thinking they were the only ones working so hard, came away feeling encouraged and inspired that there are so many others around them who also have their shirt sleeves rolled up!

As well, a number of really practical ideas for strengthening community capacity emerged from discussions. For example, the Island's parent-led early childhood group 'Rugrats' needs to raise significant funding each year to pay teacher salaries. While Rugrats are generally able to secure some big fundraising catering jobs, they have trouble finding enough baby sitters for enough of the young mums to carry out the (often) evening work. When this was raised in discussions, it quickly became clear that community groups could 'team-up' to take on larger catering tasks and share the profits - meaning taking on larger jobs could again be possible for Rugrats.

Growing momentum and connections

A second 'Snack and Yak', as our community group get togethers have become known, was held in September 2011. While we had fewer people attend this second session, there was still considerable energy in the room, with many new ideas generated about how to connect locally ie. a website based calendar/events page for community activity and dialogue. We also made plans for a 'community groups' expo in November - to promote local organisations and how to get involved - to the wider community and the large number of seasonal workers who arrive on Rakiura for the summer tourist season. John Prendergast from the Community Trust of Southland (CTOS) also attended and gave a presentation about community-led development from a funder's perspective. He encouraged our collaboration and future planning efforts to date and indicated further potential support from CTOS to help us on our journey.

What next..

We can see now that the benefits of Snack and Yaks will continue to increase with time. Given we all have a common goal of making the Island a great place to live, as local groups get to know more about what other groups are up to - their skills, challenges and goals - then connections and collaboration will naturally grow. Once we have run three or four community group get togethers, we will be looking to arrange a 'whole-of-community' meeting to help facilitate a growing desire for a 'whole-of-community' connection and potential

shared visioning the Island's future. But things must work at local's pace, with everyone on the same page. So this means we need to take any next steps together, with everyone involved. We also need to make sure there's time and room for more local leaders to contribute to next steps as it emerges.

Intent:

To bring community groups and organisations on Stewart Island together to share respective activities, needs, challenges and ideas for making the Island an even better place to live.

Learnings:

- Community-led development doesn't have to always be about new projects – taking the time to connect and link existing activities and ideas is also key.
- Written invitations don't always convey the broader purpose of new initiatives like a Snack and Yak. Taking time to talk to people individually about what's planned and why helps increase buy in and participation. People also feel more welcome when they're personally invited.
- Having 'formal' and 'informal' times within meetings to connect and network is beneficial.
- Let the purpose and format of network meetings evolve and be driven by the ideas and needs of those participating.
- Convenors of network gatherings don't have to lead on good ideas that arise from network meetings. Intentionally waiting for others to volunteer enhances ownership and participation from the broader community in 'next steps' action.
- The concept of the "[Panarchy Model](#)" can also be used in planning when an idea feels right for a community but the timing and atmosphere are not yet ready. In this case the Snack and Yak initiative can be set in motion to grow in the right formative climate. It builds towards the point when it has fulfilled its early purpose and the groups involved are ready to deconstruct the initial framework and lead into their next stage.

Outcomes:

- New mechanism to formally link and connect community groups and activities across the Island created.
- Relationships strengthened and shared sense of purpose catalysed.
- New database of 68 community groups and organisations created and shared.
- Ideas for new initiatives brainstormed collectively by multiple organisations, rather than a single organisation
- Foundations for ongoing connecting and potential future visioning now in place, with community leaders energised with knowledge of what's happening now and what could be.

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