



Getting started with street-level engagement and neighbourhood-led development: a synopsis of the Back2Back experience.

Initiative: Back2Back, Massey-Ranui

Theme: Working Together in Place

The Back2Back project emerged out of a joint funding proposal to the Department of Internal Affairs in 2008. With a multi-party partners group in place from the get-go, street-level engagement and neighbourhood-led development in Ranui and Massey got a huge boost from 2009-2012. This story talks about the importance of a strong foundation and skilled workers in order to hit the ground running and enable the achievement of intentional outcomes over a relatively short period of time.

Massey and Ranui are two adjoining young, ethnically and socially diverse communities in the north west of Waitakere in urban Auckland. These suburbs are home to 42,000 people, many of whom do not own their homes, have few formal qualifications and travel out of the Waitakere for work. Many households here are one parent households and households tend to be larger than average with most including children. Both areas have high concentrations of deprivation and high degrees of transience so children's education is often interrupted.

In this context, Back2Back aimed to create safer neighbourhoods through encouraging and supporting residents in defined neighbourhoods and key agencies to work together. Such neighbourhoods would be characterized by:

- Healthy housing
- Active and vibrant streets,
- Opportunities for skill development and local employment,
- Healthy and affordable food choices,
- People who are connected to and care for the natural environment
- Neighbours who feel happy, healthy, proud and connected to the place where they live.

The project also aimed to strengthen community governance and foster learning to support resilient neighbourhood-led development as well as establish an infrastructure that could help grow the work beyond the life of the initial funding.

Getting started involved the development of a 'working together agreement' of principles to work together because, although all the project partners had worked together previously in different ways, this was the first time they had embarked on a collaborative project together. Taking the time to do this was critical in building relationships and understandings between the key representatives from each of the partner organisations, uncovering assumptions and re-clarifying the project purpose, roles and responsibilities.

Alongside forging a working partnership, the focus for the first half of 2009 was on developing the job descriptions, and putting in place systems and processes to manage and support the workers and the recruitment process. Initially two part time positions were filled but this quickly changed to being one full time position. The worker role is obviously pivotal to the success of the project and a key advantage for this project was in securing a highly skilled community development worker who had previously worked in Massey with the Tatou West Harbour Project and also in other council-community projects. Through this work she had built extensive networks, relationships, trust and reputation. This meant she could hit the ground running and immediately began extending the street-based engagement that was already happening through Tatou West Harbour and Sustainable Ranui.

This establishment and recruitment period took several months and its importance can not be underestimated. As the Massey Matters [experience shows](#), it is critical to develop strong credible foundations where, especially in a three year project, there is some security that the workers will stay with the project for a significant period. This was also the case in the establishment of [Vibrant Communities in Canada](#) where the inaugural directors made a ten year commitment to building community-based, multisectoral networks to reduce poverty, because they knew that deep and durable social change takes time.

Intended Outcomes (over 3 years)

- **Local people leading creative neighbourhood initiatives**
This included:
 - Street level leadership development
 - Neighbourhood priorities determined and actioned
- **Strengthening community governance and learning for resilient neighbourhood-led development**
This included:
 - Project partners developing an effective shared stewardship structure
 - Capacity building at the neighbourhood level –building skills, networks and bonds across a neighbourhood or collective of people
 - Developing learning frameworks to support the project and extend learning beyond Ranui and Massey
- **Infrastructure to support and sustain the process for neighbourhood change – a package of people and resources**
This included:
 - Developing a pool of community volunteers to support neighbourhood change
 - Have a tool kit of practical 'doing and how to' resources

As well, the credibility of social change ventures is substantially improved when some quick wins on the board are yielded: this demonstrates the value of that particular project and generates momentum. This can be particularly important in areas that have been subject to numerous 'interventions' over the years and people are sceptical that things can be improved.

In Back2Back's case, once staff were on board, the work got underway fairly quickly and Year One culminated in the first Massey Ranui Stakeholder meeting at the end of 2009. This meeting gave mandate and direction to the project's community led processes and drew together the growing stakeholder group of community organisations, service providers, churches, schools as well as residents to build understanding of the project and to identify gaps and opportunities. Agreements reached were:

- Residents must lead project development
- Give support to those that can effectively support community change in the community
- Inform, engage and support schools and preschools
- Work to breakdown social barriers where possible in bringing people together

The project was launched in conjunction with four local primary schools through a logo and naming competition. This initiative resulted in the **Back2Back** name and logo and also sparked the interest of teachers and students to be actively involved in the project going forward such as <http://inspiringcommunities.org.nz/doing-neighbourhood-led-development-massey-ranui-there-no-one-size-fits-all>.

Intent:

To develop a project that worked cross-sectorally and with local residents to support and grow street-level engagement and neighbourhood-led development in specific areas of Massey Ranui.

Key Learnings:

- Establishment takes time and can be fraught with competing tensions to be visible and valued in the community at the same time as developing foundations that help to underpin *how* a project does *what* it does, with *who*, *when* and *where*. Striking some sort of balance that enables some early quick wins whilst also agreeing key principles is tricky but worth the effort.
- Context can be everything and working with what has gone before and is already within a community, or nearby, helps with both getting started and keeping momentum. Building on learnings of other local projects as well as attracting a key worker with local experience, credibility and experience enabled Back2Back to contribute locally quickly. Sharing learnings can assist the development of what comes next.

Key Outcomes:

- A co-created principled way of working together in Massey-Ranui.
- A mandate and direction from local people that gave detail to the intention and enabled constructive work to begin and add value quickly.
- Ownership of the project by local school children and their teachers especially

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References:

<http://www.inspiringcommunities.org.nz/learning-centre/core-learning-cluster/massey/188-massey-matters-three-years-on>

http://tamarackcommunity.ca/g3s61_VC_2011g.html

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