

Minto Renewal Project

Imagining Our Common Purpose in Minto
Seeking Stable Ways to Work Together with Harmony and Respect
6 May 2005

Workshop Report and Draft Relationship Principles

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Aims of this report

This report aims to summarise the process and outcomes of the *Imagining Our Common Purpose* workshop, conducted on 6 May 2005 at the Minto Family Centre. The workshop formed part of the Minto Renewal project, but was not outcome-focused in terms of planning, design or management deliverables, as is often the case in community renewal processes.

Rather, it was designed to focus on the processes of relating that occur between community stakeholders and project team staff (most of whom are employees of the NSW DoH [Department of Housing]). Another focus of the workshop was to develop an initial set of "relationship principles" to guide interactions between DoH staff, members of the local community and community service providers in Minto.

This report describes the aims of the workshop, the context within which it took place and the activities which took place on the day. It describes the processes by which relationship principles have been developed so far and is to be used as a working document to support the refining of those principles.

Detailed appendices accompany this report.

1.2 Background to the *Imagining Our Common Purpose* workshop

The troubled history of the Minto Renewal Project stands as a powerful reminder to current DoH staff and community members of the importance of appropriate and timely community consultation.

History of Relating

A paper developed by the Macarthur Housing Coalition and the Minto Residents Action Group in 2005, documents how residents and community stakeholders perceived a lack of consultation and/or implementation in earlier stages of the Minto renewal project. An excerpt from this paper, below, outlines some



Figure 1: Ko Ko's Place, the Minto Family Centre.

of the fundamental points of contention that exist between residents and community stakeholders and other DoH staff.

How fair has the decision-making process been?

- *The original decision about the scope of the redevelopment was done without consultation with the community. There was no initial liaison with other relevant government agencies, such as those involved in providing key local health and education services.*
- *Relocation and demolitions occurred prior to the development of any policies or guidelines. As a result, there are significant inconsistencies in how tenants have been treated.*
- *No assessment of the social impact of the redevelopment has been undertaken. It would not be possible for a private developer to undertake a redevelopment which directly affects 3,000 people without a public social impact assessment process...*
- *The impact of the redevelopment on community assets - such as public open space, publicly owned land and community facilities - has not been adequately assessed....*
- *The DoH maintains that it wishes to work in partnership with residents. However, this is not being achieved. 90% of residents surveyed felt they had no involvement in the redevelopment and 97% felt they had no power or say over the consultation process or outcomes.*

Positive action by community and residents

The Minto community has been active in addressing the issues generated through the relationship with the DoH and local council. Community members have, among other things, informed the Stubbs Report (March, 2005), worked with the Macarthur Housing Coalition, formed a Residents Action Group, participated in the Community Reference Group and Safety Committee, hosted the *More Than Bricks and Mortar* Tenant Forum on March 15, 2005 and followed through with the Yellow Brick Road process which was initiated at that Forum.

Positive action by DoH

As residents and community stakeholders have become more active and assertive regarding their needs, the DoH has responded by employing a specialist relocation officer, auspicing the South West Regional Tenants Association (SWRTA) to employ an Independent Tenant Advocate, contributing to the production of a Relocation kit and the development of policy guidelines for the relocation process. The DoH has also provided support for and participation in the Community Reference Group and the Minto Safety Committee.

1.3 Context of the *Imagining Our Common Purpose* workshop

During the course of this year, a number of community development and consultation initiatives have been taking place in Minto. In fact, the sheer volume of community meetings and events at the time of the *Imagining Our Common Purpose* workshop was, according to some community members, “getting ridiculous”.

A major community process which the *Imagining Our Common Purpose* workshop was – to a degree – building on, was the *Yellow Brick Road* process. This process was inspired by Bliss Browne¹, from the Imagine

¹ Bliss W. Browne is an American specialist in *Appreciative Inquiry* and is the founder and president of Imagine Chicago. Imagine Chicago is a non-profit organisation that helps people develop their imagination as “city creators”. The organisation encourages individuals and organisations to focus constructively on their capacities and opportunities, using three core

Chicago Foundation. Bliss works with a process called Appreciative Inquiry, an approach that seeks to use the best of the present to imagine and create a better future². A basic principle of Appreciative Inquiry is that the future is not fixed and that the actions we take and the language we use help to create our future.

On 15 March 2005, the *More Than Bricks and Mortar* Tenant Forum was held at the Campbelltown Catholic Club. It was attended by more than 250 people and was regarded as a highly successful event, in terms of giving a voice to Minto people and expressing their individual and collective concerns about the renewal program. At this powerful community forum, tenants and community organisations reflected publicly on their experiences of the Minto redevelopment and relocation processes, including high and low points. Everyone attending was given the chance to contribute suggestions for a more constructive and harmonious future, as the renewal process continues.

In the days just before the tenant forum, Bliss facilitated two meetings about Minto. The first was with DoH staff, the Consultation Advisor, Wendy Sarkissian and representatives of the South West Regional Tenants Association (SWRTA) including Minto Tenant Advocate, Christine Fraser. The second meeting, held in Minto, was with the Residents Action Group (RAG).

At these sessions, using an appreciative inquiry approach, Bliss challenged those who attended the meetings to:

- think about the current situation;
- take the best parts of it and use them to help imagine the future ‘as we want it to be’; and
- take steps to create that future.

processes of dialogue, curriculum development and network formation. www.imaginechicago.org

² Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a process which focuses on “the coevolutionary search for the best in people, their organizations, and the relevant world around them.... AI involves, in a central way, the art and practice of asking questions that strengthen a system’s capacity to apprehend, anticipate, and heighten positive potential.” www.appreciativeinquiry.cwru.edu

1.4 Aims of the *Imagining Our Common Purpose* workshop

The *Imagining Our Common Purpose* workshop arose out of the meeting between Bliss and the DoH. The Community Reference Group asked Bernie Coates and Christine Fraser to liaise with Wendy Sarkissian and associates who agreed to facilitate the workshop. Christine Fraser said at the time that, as so many community consultation activities were already underway in Minto between the community and the DoH, the *only* thing that this workshop could offer – that would not be repeating or cutting across some other process – was a vision of how the *relationship* between the community and the DoH could be improved.

The invitation to the workshop described the intention as follows:

*There have been ups and downs in the working relationship between DoH staff and Minto residents and community service agents **AND** there have been many accomplishments since the start of the Minto redevelopment. Some of these accomplishments include:*

- *A strong and active RAG*
- *The Department, tenants, community and other government organisations working together in the Community Reference Group*
- *The employment of a tenant advocate*
- *The employment of a specialist relocation officer in the Department*
- *The Department and tenants working together in the Safety Committee*
- *The development of a Relocation Kit*
- *The development of policy guidelines especially for the Minto relocations.*

- *The success of the Minto More Than Bricks and Mortar Tenant Forum*

The Imagining Our Common Purpose workshop will focus on continuing to build strong and resilient relationships between the various participants in the Minto redevelopment process.

1.5 Workshop preparation

Considering the intentions of the workshop and the significant challenges in the history of the relationship between Minto residents and the DoH, the time allocated for the workshop (half a day) was really quite short. Further, the team from Sarkissian Associates Planners, contracted as independent facilitators to facilitate the workshop, had very little experience of the existing relationship dynamics in Minto. (However, both Wendy Sarkissian and Yollana Shore did have experience in similar government agency - community dynamics and, coincidentally, Wendy had conducted a detailed post-occupancy evaluation of four streets in the estate in the mid-1980s³).

To counter these two limiting factors, thorough preparation for the workshop was essential. Yollana Shore undertook to ring everyone invited to the workshop and discuss their hopes for and expectations of the workshop and any issues that they would be likely to raise on the day. The facilitators are very grateful to those who took the time to discuss the workshop with us, as it allowed us to begin with a rich sense of the context within which the workshop was taking place and to design the workshop program with a better sense of the needs of the participants.

While these conversations were confidential, anonymous quotations from the telephone conversations were presented back to the group as a whole at the beginning of the workshop to reflect our understanding of the context within which this workshop occurred.

³ See Sarkissian and Doherty (1987).

1.6 Workshop facilitation and attendance

The *Imagining Our Common Purpose* workshop was facilitated by Wendy Sarkissian and Yollana Shore, of Sarkissian Associates Planners, with Christine Fraser from SWRTA.

Minto residents and workers from agencies and community groups (including the DoH, Minto Residents Action Group, the South West Regional Tenants Association, South West Multicultural and Neighbourhood Centre, Uniting Care Burnside, Sarah Redfern Primary School, University of Western Sydney, Campbelltown Council and St Vincent De Paul Society) were invited to the workshop via email and telephone (see Appendix A for an example invitation).

The workshop was attended by seventeen participants from the local community and from government and community organisations, including the DoH, the Minto Residents Action Group, the South West Regional Tenants Association, NSW Department of Health, Campbelltown Council and Sarah Redfern Primary School. Set out below is a list of participants:

NSW Department of Housing

- Lindy Ryan, Project Manager, Minto Renewal Project.
- Mary Schulha, Minto Renewal Manager.
- Gemma Cooney, Area Director, South-West Sydney.

Minto Residents Action Group (RAG)

- Adele Goodwin, Chair, Minto Residents Action Group
- Kevin Goode, Secretary, Minto Residents Action Group
- Bev Davis, Minto Residents Action Group
- Yvonne Sayers, Minto Residents Action Group
- Jim Hill, Minto Residents Action Group
- Rosemary Gray, Resident Activist



Figure 2: Tenant Advocate Christine Fraser introduces the workshop and a magic wand – in case it's needed.

South West Regional Tenants Association

- Christine Fraser, Minto Tenant Advocate.
- Janet Davies, President.
- Emma Moulton, Community Resource Worker.
- Fiona Archer, Community Resource Worker.

NSW Department of Health

- Mary Enkababian, Community Development Officer, Health Promotions Team

NSW Department of Education

- Cheryl McBride, Principal, Sarah Redfern Primary School and Chair of Community Reference Group

Campbelltown City Council

- Louise Polikarpus, Community Development Co-ordinator.

University of Western Sydney

- Judy Stubbs, Researcher.

Apologies were received from:

- Vicky Wright, Minto Team Leader, DoH.
- Bernie Coates, Manager, Community Building, PPP Project Unit, DoH
- Tim Hall, Minto Renewal Project Information Line, DoH.
- Jenene Paisley, Minto Client Service Officer, DoH.
- Mollie Thomas, South West Multicultural and Neighbourhood Centre, Minto.
- Debbie Hinchcliffe and Anthea Jackson, Uniting Care Burnside.
- Paul Power, Manager, Vincentian Social Action Centre, St Vincent de Paul Society.
- Fiona Phillips, Minto Residents Action Group.
- Diane Townsend, Minto Residents Action Group

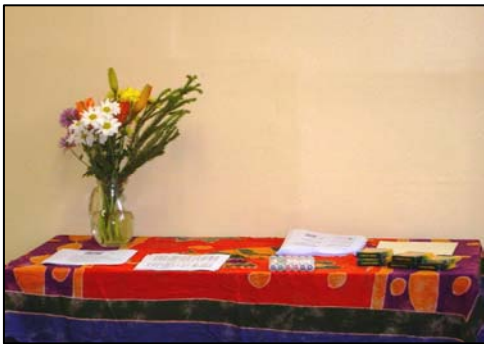


Figure 3: Careful attention was paid to details at the workshop (flowers, tablecloth, music and smells) to make participants feel welcome.



Figure 4: Participants at the workshop.

2.0 THE WORKSHOP PROGRAM

The workshop was held at KoKo's Place, Uniting Care Burnside Minto Family Centre. The program was developed by Wendy Sarkissian, Yollana Shore and Christine Fraser, in consultation with members of the Minto Residents Action Group (RAG).

On Tuesday 5 May 2005, four members of the RAG met with the facilitators to discuss the program in detail and to ensure its appropriateness. The agreed workshop program is shown below and in Appendix B.

Imagining Our Common Purpose in Minto Seeking Stable Ways to Work Together with Harmony and Respect

Workshop 6 May 2005

Agenda

- 9:00 Arrivals and refreshments
- 9:15 **Session 1** Introduction and objectives for this workshop (Christine Fraser)
Introduction Circles – *Where We Stand* (Wendy Sarkissian) (30 minutes)
- 9:45 **Session 2** Background to this workshop (Yollana Shore) (20 minutes)
- 10:05 **Session 3** Imagining a future where we work together with harmony and respect
Creative visioning exercise (Wendy Sarkissian) (20 minutes)
- 10:25 **Session 4** Recording our pictures of the future
Drawing exercise in silence (Wendy Sarkissian) (15 minutes)
- 10:40 Morning tea break (20 minutes)
- 11:00 **Session 5** The Worst case, the Best case, and Who's responsible?
Assessing the costs and benefits of change (Yollana Shore) (30 minutes)
- 11:10 **Session 6** Guiding principles for the future we want
Working in three small groups (Christine Fraser) (30 minutes)
- 12:00 **Session 7** Reporting back from group session (Christine Fraser) (15 minutes)
- 12:15 **Session 8** Feedback on this workshop (Christine Fraser) (15 minutes)
Taking this work forward:
- How to report on this session?
 - Who is responsible? Assignment of jobs
 - How will we know when we are really making progress?
 - Next steps and specific dates to work together
- Closing words (Adele Goodwin, Chairperson, RAG)
- 12:30 **Lunch**

2.1 Session 1: Introductions

In this session, the facilitators introduced themselves and the objectives of this workshop. Facilitators included:

- Wendy Sarkissian, social planner, community consultation specialist and Director of Sarkissian Associates Planners and
- Yollana Shore, social planner and group facilitator, Sarkissian Associates Planners

Christine Fraser, Tenant Advocate, South West Regional Tenants Association (SWRTA) both supported the facilitators and participated in the workshop.

During the introduction, Christine pointed out that the *only* thing that this workshop could offer – that would not be repeating or cutting across some other process – was to develop a vision of how the *relationship* between the community and the DoH could be improved. This aim is also described in Section 1.3, above.

Introduction circles – where we stand?

Wendy Sarkissian then facilitated an introductory activity, based on the “Stillness in Action” model, used by the NSW-based organisation, Interhelp, that aims to assist community change agents to strengthen and renew their work through a process of reflection on, and clarification of, their core personal values and purpose⁴. The activity involved placing five circles on the floor and asking participants to align themselves with the circles. Described as “embodying our commitment to action,” the circles represented five ways of being in the world:



Figure 5: Participants discussing ‘where they stand’ in the introduction circles.

- **Resisting:** holding actions, stopping the worst abuse
- **Strengthening:** building resilience in communities, organisations and systems
- **Creating:** building alternatives, finding new ways of doing and being
- **Renewing:** working to reform institutions, professions, social and economic systems
- **Serving:** caring for others—humans and all beings

Participants each stood close to the circle or circles that most represented how they felt in relation to this project and then introduced themselves; their names, how they are involved in this project, and why they chose to stand where they did. Some participants stood between two circles and one participant even stood in the middle of all of them. While participant comments during this activity were not recorded, the exercise showed that participants “stood” in all parts of the circle and were each committed, in different ways, to supporting Minto to be a better community.

⁴ www.stillnessinaction.net.au. See also Creative Edge Facilitators and Creative Edge Learning Networks Inc., organisations that aim to provide tools for community leaders to develop and implement strategies to deal with the social, economic and technological changes affecting their workplaces and communities and facilitate community ownership of solutions to these challenges (contact: info@icef.info).

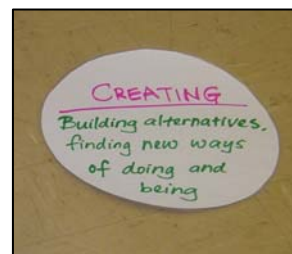


Figure 6: The Creating Circle.

2.2 Session 2: Background to this workshop

In this Session, Yollana Shore used a brief a PowerPoint presentation to describe her understanding of some of the relevant activities that DoH and community members had undertaken to date as part of the Minto Community Renewal project.

This was followed by an overview of the current state of the relationship between DoH staff and community members, based on comments made in telephone interviews with workshop participants before the workshop. Yollana's PowerPoint presentation is presented in Appendix C.

2.3 Session 5: Assessing the costs and benefits of change

This session was moved to earlier in the program, with the consent of participants, because, according to the energy on the day, it felt more appropriate at this time. In this session, Yollana Shore guided participants through a short but powerful exercise to assess the costs and benefits of being more trusting in relationships.

Rationale

The rationale for this activity is grounded in the understanding that trust is an important component of healthy relationships. In the case of DoH staff and community members affected by the Minto Renewal Project, past activities have led to a breakdown in trust and a definite resistance to trusting each other in the future.

Description of activity

In this activity, each participant wrote their own individual answers to the following set of questions on an A4 sheet. Participants were informed that this exercise was not a group activity. This activity was for their own personal benefit, as it provided an opportunity to explore the personal costs and benefits of being more trusting in relationships. The aim was to genuinely explore the answers, rather than to assume that being more or less trusting is 'better', and potentially to incorporate the discovery into their future relationships.

Five key questions

Yollana asked participants five key questions:

1. *Why it is important not to change / be more trusting in your relationships?*
2. *What's the worst that could happen if you were to change / become more trusting?*
3. *What's the worst that could happen if nothing changed / you never became more trusting?*
4. *What's the best that could happen if you were to be more trusting?*
5. *How will it be when you do trust?*

Participants were encouraged to answer each question in detail. For example, after they had an answer to Question 1, they were then to ask themselves, "What's the worst that could happen then?". They were then to explore the consequences of being more trusting in their lives with respect to this context.

Responses to questions

After responding to each question, some participants shared their answers. In answer to the third question, "What's the worst that could happen if you were to change / become more trusting?" participants related strong emotions and experiences, such as: feeling lonely, foolish, angry, like "I'd be betrayed again", etc.

Surprisingly, in answer to the question, "What's the worst that could happen if you could never become more trusting?", participants' answers were even stronger.



Figure 7: Gemma Cooney and Janet Davies consider the five key questions.

They made such comments as, "Life wouldn't be worth living", "I'd die", "I wouldn't survive." Part of the reason that these particular answers were surprising is that the facilitator had given the following instructions to one of the questions:

Please write down whatever comes up, even if it doesn't seem logical. Many of us have hidden belief systems literally stored in our cellular memory, so that even though our 'thinking minds' don't believe them, we believe them at a deeper level. For example, as a child, a person may have put their trust in someone – like a boy trusts his brother to protect him – and the brother lets him fall over and the boy has an accident. Even though the child survives, for a split second as he was falling, he may have thought that he was going to die. And he may have a subconscious belief 'if I trust, I will die.

What was surprising was that many participants, of their own accord, came up with the exact opposite belief: "If I can't trust, I will die." This result suggests that participants were not directly affected by the suggestion made by the facilitator.

On the other hand, the deeply held belief, "If I can't trust, I will die," is not so surprising, when considered from a psychological or social perspective. Lack of trust is often based upon a sense of isolation or independence from 'others', whereas physical, social and mental interdependence is a fact of life.



Figure 8: Mary Enkababian, Fiona Archer and Lindy Ryan draw their pictures of the future.

2.4 Session 3: Imagining a future where we work together with harmony and respect

Rationale

Creative visualisation processes have many acknowledged benefits in team-building and community consultation processes. Some of those benefits are described in Appendix D, which presents the rationale for the visualisation exercise.

A great deal of thought went into the design of this session. Christine Fraser, Wendy Sarkissian and Yollana Shore collaboratively designed a visualisation script, using leading practice visualisation techniques employed by international workshop presenters such as Jean Houston. Best-practice Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) techniques⁵ were also used to inform the design of this session.

Description of activity

The visualisation script (see Appendix E) was read to participants by Wendy Sarkissian, who guided them to explore their hopes and vision for the best outcome for a productive working relationship. These visions were then recorded in Session 4.

⁵ The clearest and most widely accepted definition of NLP is "the study of the structure of subjective experience". It concerns the way that language patterns affect human neurology. NLP teachings state that the mind can be programmed, and that we all tend to be mis-programmed by negative input in some way. The methods of neuro-linguistic programming involve reprogramming thought patterns in order to achieve desired outcomes (O'Connor & McDermott, 1996; Dilts *et al.* 1980; Milliner 1988).



Figure 9: Recording pictures of the future.

2.5 Session 4: Recording our pictures of the future

Rationale

The purpose of this session was to make the vision concrete and to help participants remember what they had seen, heard and felt during the visualisation. Participants were invited to keep their drawings as a personal reminder. A few participants returned their drawings. Examples of participant drawings are shown below.

Description of activity

After the visualisation, participants were provided with A3 paper and crayons and were encouraged to silently draw their pictures of the future, using colours, symbols and words to represent what they had seen.

2.6 Session 6: Guiding principles for the future we want

After clarifying and sharing their visions for the future, participants were invited to begin to formulate the principles that would help to create and maintain positive working relationships between the Minto community, community stakeholders and the Community Renewal Team.

To give an example of what such guiding principles could look like and the function they could serve, Wendy Sarkissian presented a brief PowerPoint showing a selection of principles developed by the Eagleby Residents Action Group (ERAG) in Queensland. The Eagleby community had some demographic similarities with the Minto

community and had used these principles to ensure a productive working relationship with Queensland Health, a Queensland Government department, with respect to a community development project. Wendy's PowerPoint presentation is shown in Appendix F. Detailed handouts about the Eagleby project were also provided, and are shown in Appendix G.

Description of activity

Following Wendy's presentation, participants split into three groups to begin to brainstorm the key principles that would support positive working relationships in Minto. Each group was supported by a facilitator, who recorded participants' responses on butchers paper.

Results

The results of the initial brainstorming session are provided in Appendix H. Those results have since been developed into more detailed principles which are described in Section 4.0 of this report.

2.7 Sessions 7 and 8: Reporting back, next steps and close of workshop

Description of activity

In Session 7, the facilitator from each group briefly shared the ideas from participants in their group. In the final session, participants collectively discussed the further action needed to distil and work through the results. As not enough time was available to develop any one principle in detail at the workshop, participants agreed that the principles developed in Session 6 were a "good start" towards developing effective principles to support productive working relationships, but were incomplete in their current form.

The main issues raised in this session were:

- How to report on the workshop outcomes to date?
- Who is responsible for completing the principles and reporting on them?
and
- What are the next steps?

How to report on the workshop outcomes to date?

The group decided that the transcript of the brainstormed principles should be written up and distributed to the CRG, RAG, Minto Safety Committee and others not able to attend this workshop, as well as to participants who had attended.

Workshop participants and members of the various community groups, in particular the CRG, would then provide feedback to inform a draft report on the workshop results (to be prepared by Yollana Shore of Sarkissian Associates Planners). Feedback on the draft report would then inform a final report.

Who is responsible for completing the principles and reporting on them?

The CRG was identified as being primarily responsible for providing feedback and ensuring that the principles were consistent with the groups' collective relationship goals. This body would also provide Yollana Shore with the preferred timeframe and outcomes for her work.

What are the next steps?

In terms of next steps, it was agreed that Yollana would provide the transcript within three working days (in time for the next CRG meeting). The draft report was expected to follow in about a month and a final report in about 2 months from the date of the workshop.⁶ Notes from this workshop suggest that the final report could then be ratified and distributed, as soon as issues had been ironed out and principles had been finalised.



Figure 10: One picture of the future showing the DoH bureaucracy (bats) coming down to the level of the people (purple person) to destroy the “stigma of Minto” (witch). Ding Dong the wicked witch is dead!



Figure 11: Two pictures of the future: working together with harmony and respect.

⁶ Due to alternative priorities at Community Reference Group meetings, and prior commitments of Yollana Shore and Sarkissian Associates Planners, this final report was provided four months after the workshop date.

3.0 WORKSHOP OUTCOMES

The outcome of the workshop was a typed transcript of the principles brainstormed in Session 6 (see Appendix H). Those principles have been developed according to the method described in Section 3.1, below, to formulate the draft principles presented in Section 4.0.

3.1 Analysis of workshop outcomes

The written results of the workshop, on butchers paper and a whiteboard, were recorded as a typed transcript (see Appendix H). The results in the transcript were then categorised in an initial, draft, categorisation process using the 'lump and split' method (see Appendix I). These two documents were then distributed for comment to members of the CRG (both those who attended and those who did not attend the workshop). Only a few written responses were received, expressing the following sentiments:

- Fine.
- Fine, but there are some issues that the CRG needs to talk through.
- Not happy with some of the principles. For example, fear that focus on positivity could be used manipulatively to quell dissent and that focus on "moving on" could diminish the importance of the history of the relationship, which should not be forgotten.
- Not happy with the idea of developing common principles to sign off on.

Other feedback, received via telephone, addressed the following issues:

- There is a difference between principles that guide the relationship between DoH staff and clients (public tenants) in Minto on a day-to-day basis at the DoH office and principles that guide the DoH Community Renewal Project Team and members of the working groups (such as the CRG and the RAG) who are working together to achieve better project



Figure 12: Participants linking hands at the end of the workshop: a gesture of working together.

outcomes.

- Everyone at the *Imagining Our Common Purpose* workshop has a "client group" – whether it is parts of the community or government – that they represent. These principles should support each person to remain in integrity in relation to their respective client groups, while creating and maintaining integrity in their relationships with each other.
- Community service providers are a distinct and separate group from the community members and the project team. In relation to the project, they may, in some cases, have more power than community members and less power than the project team. Principles need to reflect the special position that service providers hold, as well as the special positions of the project team and of community members.

Drawing on the feedback above, the initial transcript of draft Relationship Principles was refined into a more detailed and logical format and is now being redistributed to the CRG members for comment, within this report.

4.0 TWELVE DRAFT RELATIONSHIP PRINCIPLES

4.1 Introduction to the draft principles

These principles have been drafted in response to a need, identified by members of the community of Minto and the DoH Project Team for the Minto Community Renewal Project, to create a tangible, written agreement, in plain English, that is relevant to the people involved. The aim is to produce a document that can be used by all parties as a reference in the course of relating to each other.

The basis for these principles was created at the *Imagining Our Common Purpose* workshop on 6 May 2005. The focus is specifically on how project team members, community service providers and community members can productively relate to each other about the Community Renewal Project in Minto.

The principles presented here do not necessarily apply to all relationships between DoH staff and clients of the local DoH office. However, it was suggested at the workshop that principles developed specifically for that purpose would help to foster positive relationships between DoH staff and the Minto community generally.

While these principles refer to problem-solving approaches, this document is not an agreed protocol for conflict resolution. While community members and project team staff may find such a document useful, the power dynamics do not lend themselves to negotiating conflict on equal terms.



Figure 13: Linking hands at the completion of the workshop, to represent working together.

4.2 A two-way street

These principles are about relationships, which between any given parties are, of course, a “two-way street”. They are about “give-and-take”. An important emphasis of these principles is the simple practice of “giving more and giving first”. Key values include:

- Clarity
- Information
- Openness
- Respect
- Service
- Compassion
- Feedback (in appropriate ways)
- Reassurance
- Support
- Positivity

Workshop participants had several cogent shorthand terms to describe how these relationships would be experienced in the everyday relationships between DoH staff and community members. They included:

- “listening with both ears”
- offering “a two-handed handshake, not a one-handed handshake”

The practice of giving first is a matter of personal choice. Participants emphasised that, as individuals, we can make this choice. As a group, our relationships will undoubtedly benefit from the choices we make.

4.3 Twelve Guiding Relationship Principles

Set out below are the draft Guiding Relationship Principles.

PRINCIPLE 1: *Acknowledge the imbalance of power*

We recognise that these principles and the relationships between the project team, community service providers and community members occur in the context of a power dynamic that is not entirely neutral. The power imbalance relates partly to the fact that some community members are public tenants. Community members may also feel less powerful than representatives of a large (and powerful) government department.

Much of this power imbalance is created in the context of the ultimate decision-making power of government. Community service providers may be more able to influence government decisions than public tenants. And even private residents have limited decision-making power in many cases. We believe that respectful relationships are possible, but that the power dynamics need to be made explicit and acknowledged in the process.

- **The project team** agrees to strive to meet the needs of community members and service providers. If a community aspiration cannot be met, we agree to justify why and to support people to deal with the implications. Saying “no” should not undermine trust.
- **The project team** also agrees to try to ‘overcome red tape’ and, as much as possible, minimise bureaucratic hurdles that can have a negative impact on relationships.
- **Community service providers** and **community members** agree to make their aspirations clear and to recognise the constraints within which the project team and service providers are working (the limits of their power).

PRINCIPLE 2: *Be up-front about what’s negotiable*

We recognise that the Minto Renewal Project is affected by physical, financial and political constraints, some of which are beyond the control of any of the parties. Therefore, understanding the extent to which something is “negotiable” is very important.

- **The project team** agrees to provide appropriate and accessible information up front and as soon as possible about what genuinely is and is not negotiable concerning the Minto Renewal Project and to explain and justify decisions that are not negotiable.
- **Community service providers** agree to provide appropriate and accessible information to both project team and community members to help inform relevant decision-making processes.
- **Community members** agree to focus energy on those matters that are negotiable and not to waste energy and working time on resisting non-negotiables. Community members nevertheless reserve the right to disagree about what is negotiable.

PRINCIPLE 3: *Maintain transparency through clear, honest and open communication*

We believe that communication, including consultation, should be transparent, honest and open at all times.

- ***The project team*** agrees to ensure that all relevant information is available and widely distributed and to make sure communication is clear, accurate and presented in plain English.
- ***Community service providers*** agree to be honest and open in their communication and to communicate relevant information within their scope of authority/knowledge.
- ***Community members*** agree to be honest and open in their communication and to communicate relevant information about their perspectives and processes in clear language, free of unnecessarily emotional content.

PRINCIPLE 4: *Deal with conflict productively*

We respect that there may be fundamental differences in the perspectives of project team and community members. These principles are not intended to put an end to all disagreements, but rather to ensure that when conflict occurs, we have some basic stability, a strong basis with agreement about the fundamentals of *relating*.

In moments of conflict, ***the project team, community service providers and community members*** agree to:

- Openly and honestly acknowledge areas of disagreement.
- Listen to each other's concerns.
- Try to understand and respect what each person is experiencing.
- Respect and value each other's contributions.
- Explain processes in enough detail so that, where possible, everyone can work out an acceptable solution together.
- Identify specific ways to resolve issues that arise that acknowledge people's concerns, areas of interest, expertise and experience.

PRINCIPLE 5: Honour and respect each other

We acknowledge that while we may represent an organisation or a social group, we are individuals with diverse life experience. We recognise that everyone is unique and that we are all humans here.

Therefore it is important that we:

- Resist making assumptions about anyone.
- Acknowledge and honour people's backgrounds and experience and what they have to contribute.
- **The project team** and **community service providers** agree to honour the people who live on the land (the local perspective) and to honour the land where their homes are located.
- **Community members** agree to honour people's professional roles, expertise and relevant experience.

PRINCIPLE 6: Keep our word

We recognise that good working relationships are built on trust and respect. In order to build trust, it is important that we only promise what we can deliver, that we keep our promises.

- **The project team** agrees to honour the promises they make to the community and to community service providers.
- **Community service providers** agree to honour the promises they make to the project team and to community members.
- **Community members** agree to honour the promises they make to the project team and to community service providers.

PRINCIPLE 7: *Respect each other's time*

We acknowledge that everyone's time is valuable and that for good relationships to develop, we need to honour each other's time and timeframes. It is important not to waste time and to make every moment count.

- ***The project team*** agrees to build appropriate amounts of time for communication and consultation with the community into their program and to review the time allocation on a regular basis to ensure that it is adequate.
- ***The project team*** and ***community service providers*** agree to be on time when attending a community meeting or event.
- ***Community members*** and ***community service providers*** agree to be on time when attending a Departmental meeting or event and to provide feedback about timing issues in forums where that information can be dealt with effectively.

PRINCIPLE 8: *Be courteous and speak kindly*

We understand that common courtesy goes a long way.

Therefore:

- ***The project team, community service providers*** and ***community members*** make the commitment to be courteous and kind to each other in all our written and spoken relationships and in the language we use to address each other and speak about each other to other people.
- ***The project team, community service providers*** and ***community members*** agree to work hard to eliminate gossip and rumours.

PRINCIPLE 9: *Be consistent*

While we recognise that individual community members and project team staff do not always agree with other individuals within their group, we strive for consistency in our communication, even if that means consistently acknowledging differences:

- ***The project team*** agrees to seek a consistent flow of information through the DoH in relation to the Minto Renewal Project, so that residents get the same message, regardless of who they speak to.
- ***Community service providers*** and ***community members*** agree to provide a fair representation of activities they are involved in when communicating with others about the renewal process.

PRINCIPLE 10: *Take personal responsibility*

The Minto Renewal Project affects community members at a deep level. In this context, it is natural for strong feelings to occur. Strong emotions can be used productively or destructively in relationship.

In order to use them productively, members of ***the project team***, ***community service providers*** and ***community members*** can individually commit to taking personal responsibility for our communication and our actions, by:

- Calling for time-out and naming the way “I” am feeling, in distressed moments.
- Identifying personal and professional challenges and asking for support to meet those challenges.
- Apologising if I perceive that, in the heat of the moment, I have acted in a rude or inappropriate manner.

Furthermore:

- ***The project team*** agrees to act as individuals who respect individual community members and service providers and not to hide behind our bureaucratic titles or positions when issues of personal responsibility arise.
- ***Community service providers*** also agree not to hide behind their positions or titles and to take personal responsibility in the way we treat members of the project team and the community.
- ***Community members*** agree to take personal responsibility in the way we treat members of the project team and community service providers.

PRINCIPLE 11: *Maintain positivity and perspective*

We believe that positivity is an important means to supporting the energy to move forward, although it should not be maintained at the expense of honesty in communication. Our intention is to recognise the strengths and challenges of our situation and to focus on opportunities and assets.

The project team, community service providers and community members are committed to:

- Identify and affirm one another's positive actions, affirm our vision, affirm our collective strength and the assets we have to support us in this work together.
- Find ways to introduce and sustain fun and light-heartedness in meetings (eg., laughing session, start meeting with what went right, read out guiding principles / vision statement, acknowledging and bringing us back to the positives of each day and the positives of our working relationship).

PRINCIPLE 12: *Create the future together*

We recognise that past decisions made by the DoH have had significant impacts on the Minto community, the effects of which are still being felt. We want to learn from the mistakes of the past and to create a positive future for everyone.

- ***The project team*** agrees to listen to community service providers and to community members about what hasn't worked in the past and seek ways to relate more wholesomely in the future.
- ***Community service providers and community members*** agree to work in a collaborative way with the project team to create the future, even if we don't condone the actions that have occurred in the past.

5.0 CONCLUDING COMMENTS

These principles are a draft for discussion. While it is important that they be discussed in detail, there are also some overarching issues that workshop participants and CRG members may want to consider.

A possible agenda when discussing the principles may include:

Conduct a general review of the principles

Conduct an overall review so that members of the CRG can assess the views of its members, without going into detail about what comments of the above principles should or should not be changed. Then record:

- Which principles members are happy with overall;
- Which principles require small changes; and
- Which principles require big changes.

Attached is a template that can be used to support this review.

Determine who these principles will represent

It is necessary to ask, “Who specifically will these principles relate to?” Further, “Who specifically in this community and project will they most benefit?”

Currently, the principles refer to “the project team”, “community service providers” and “community members”. Is this correct? Would it be better to refer to:

- Members of the CRG (including DoH staff, community members and service providers)
- DoH Minto Renewal Project Team members (and DoH client service team?)
- RAG and other community members?

Resolve how these principles will be confirmed

So that this document is more than “empty words”, it is important that these principles be shown to be an accurate reflection of the

parties that they represent. How will this be symbolised?

- Is it important that these principles are:
 - Agreed to?
 - Signed?
 - Endorsed?
 - Ratified?
- How should that endorsement or ratification take place?

Resolve how these principles will be used

It would be a great shame if the hours spent by the Department of Housing, Community Reference Group and workshop consultants devising these principles resulted in a report that no one has read, simply gathering dust on household and office shelves. It is important to ask:

- How will you promote these principles to each other?
- How will you remind yourselves that they are important to you? For example:
 - Take them to CRG meetings
 - Pin them up on a wall in the room where meetings are regularly held
 - Publish in community newsletter
 - Conduct an six-month / annual review of the principles
- Who else will you tell about the principles that you have developed?
- What form do you want these principles to take:
 - Part of this report?
 - A free-standing document?
 - Part of the place management plan?
 - All/some of the above?

Check: Are the principles representative? What has been missed?

The *Imagining Our Common Purpose* workshop was really quite short and the outcomes on the day were a good start but not complete. Check that everything that needs to be, is covered in the relationships between:

- The project team and community service providers;
- Community service providers and community members; and
- Community members and the project team.

Review Template

Principle	OK	Small change	Big change
PRINCIPLE 1: Acknowledge the imbalance of power			
PRINCIPLE 2: Be up-front about what's negotiable			
PRINCIPLE 3: Maintain transparency through clear, honest and open communication			
PRINCIPLE 4: Deal with conflict productively			
PRINCIPLE 5: Honour and respect each other			
PRINCIPLE 6: Keep our word			
PRINCIPLE 7: Respect each other's time			
PRINCIPLE 8: Be courteous and speak kindly			
PRINCIPLE 9: Be consistent			
PRINCIPLE 10: Take personal responsibility			
PRINCIPLE 11: Maintain positivity and perspective			
PRINCIPLE 12: Create the future together			
OTHERS:			

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