

CENTRAL COAST COMMUNITY CONGRESS

A bi-annual showcasing of ABCD



Ten years ago a group of people working and living in the Central Coast region of New South Wales (in Australia) became disillusioned by the negativity attached to the Central Coast.

An informal group was formed to create space for people to tell their stories of positive community development in the area.

As a result the Central Coast Community Congress was developed to highlight the strengths within the region.

Background

The Central Coast Community Congress was formed by an informal committee, who came together 10 years ago to do something different in the Central Coast. People in the group were disillusioned because the Central Coast was portrayed in terms of its deficits. This resulted in strong sense of negativity—and a needs based approach to community development. Initially, the group did not know about ABCD; however, their practices paralleled an ABCD approach. They worked from the inside out, and were relationship driven and community focused. Overall, the group wanted to find positive stories that highlighted the

strengths of the Central Coast community. The group decided the best way to find positive stories was to hold an event that would celebrate positive community stories that highlighted the strengths of people and the area. The first Central Coast Community Congress was held in 2001. 200 people attended, keen to learn from each other about community building and the possibilities in the Central Coast region.

Resulting initiatives

Building on this initial success, the Central Coast Community Congress now takes place every 2 years, and people continue to use the event as an opportunity for learning and networking around ABCD. The Congress is organised by a Working Party, made up of people who live and work in the Central Coast region. This includes people from Wyong and Gosford Councils, Department of Community Services, Burnside Benevolent Society, as well as small community groups.

People who attend the Congress embrace the ABCD approach and use it in their local areas. Through relationships, a number of smaller ABCD projects have become realities. For example, there is the Connecting Kincumber Project, Wyong Housing Department Project and the Killarney Vale, Bateau Bay, Tumbi Umbi Community Building Network (KBT).

Another event that has developed out of the Congress is the *Real People Doing Real Things* community building awards. These awards recognise grass roots community building. Every year, 150 to

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***Five-minute
segments
showcase
Real People
Doing Real
Things!***

180 people attend to celebrate local people's strengths and capacities. The Community Congress Working Party is also developing an Australian version of an ABCD tool kit so that community groups can use principles of ABCD in their community building.

The ABCD process

Initially, the Central Coast Community Congress Working Party did not know about ABCD. There was no formal asset mapping; however, the group still looked at what they had in order to build the Congress. This included using formal professional networks, as well as people they knew who would like to be involved. The things that worked well for the development of Congress were the focus on relationships and the passion of the group to build relationships with people who came to the congress.

All the organising is on a voluntary basis, so no-one is employed. The Central Coast Community Congress Working Party itself has no formal structure or positions. Decisions are made by consensus between all current members of the Working Party.

The Congress also draws on secondary assets in the region. The Central Coast Community Council acts as a banker for the Congress. The Community Council is the peak body in the region for community service organisations (and it is funded by the Department of Community Services to work on regional development and advocacy on social and community issues. The Council looks after the small amount of money that is generated from the congress (and that goes towards funding the next Congress). The Council also looks after funds that are accessed via local and state governments. Gosford Council donates \$10,000 a year and Wyong Council \$10,000 every 2 years, as part of their budget allocation.

What works well

Every time the Congress comes around, the group of people on the Working Party draw on their resources and networks to create the event and build the vision of ABCD. The event aims to create a space where people can learn from each other, share stories, develop skills and celebrate ABCD. The event includes keynotes and five-minute segments throughout the event from *Real People Doing Real Things*. In these short segments local community builders tell all Congress participants about their own local story. Workshops are also run by people from the Central Coast, and further afield, on projects and themes that reflect an ABCD approach to community building. Stalls and creative spaces also provide opportunities for plays and music.

Challenges

One challenge for the Community Congress Working Party is that because it has no formal structure, it is based the passion of people to keep the Congress running. Thus a major challenge for this group is keeping energy flowing and keeping an awareness of ABCD principles through changing group dynamics. This is addressed by maintaining good will and humour as well as bearing witness to the change that the congress makes to community development practice.



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