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## **Social Entrepreneurship: Developing Robust Hope in the next generation**

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### Abstract

The value of social capital that enhances others' lives and assists in their development of skills and knowledge can no be underestimated. Moving away from a focus of entrepreneurship being purely the development of financial literacy skill the University of Western Sydney has focused on the development of social entrepreneurship. With the introduction of a unit of study – Learning through Community Service – we have seen a variation in

the role of students and how they interact with their community. So by focussing on the skills that need to be developed to enhance the social capital of our university community, students are being required to work either within the university community, the local community or the world community. Through the development of a particular unit of study available to all undergraduate students at the University of Western Sydney, students work with a mentor to develop and implement a community project utilising the skills they are learning within their degree but also meeting the needs of the local community.

In the past semester the students were involved in six different project strands:

- Maltese Cultural Exchange;
- International Buddies;
- Equity Buddies;
- Students in Free Enterprise;
- Creative arts in the community; and,
- Video production in the community.

Each one is lead by a university academic and occurs within the university or wider community.

This paper analyses the responses from the first cohort of students to undertake this unit, their reasons for participation, the experiences they were involved in and the outcomes of each of the different projects undertaken. At the beginning of the unit of study students completed a short survey giving details of their background and previous commitment to community service. The relevance and value of the development of the students' social entrepreneurship will be discussed in light of the longer term value of the skills and knowledge developed.

### Introduction

The need for both community awareness and support is always required. With university students undertaking full time study, part time work there seems to be little time to undertake work with in the community in any form. By assisting the students to develop their theoretical knowledge gained in studies within a community setting has seen the development of a specific unit of study. Within this unit, students work in small teams with community groups in a wide range of areas. From this practical position students are

encouraged to develop their skills and knowledge whilst helping other people.

Literature Discussion

With the acceptance of social entrepreneurship as part of the business and community welfare groups' collaboration there seems to be a logical introduction of the concepts to students within a university environment. Willans, Harreveld and Danaher (2003) see that 'these changes have been "driven" by broader economic, political, sociocultural and technological forces' (p. 1). However Boschee and McClurg (2003) clearly make a distinction between social entrepreneurship and social innovation. They purport that 'unless a non profit organisation is generating earned revenue from its activities; it is not acting in an entrepreneurial manner' (p. 1). The level of income earned will determine if the organisation will be able to sustain their work. Previously the traditional non profit organisations 'will continue offering products and services that have a significant social impact even if they lose money; commercial enterprises will not. Social entrepreneurs, on the other hand, are equally concerned with both bottom lines, and that means they must simultaneously analyse the social impact and financial viability, of each product and service' (Boschee, 2006, p. 2). Within a university culture that adopts a social entrepreneurship model, the social impact and financial viability are both measured to determine the viability of any program.

Boschee (2006) has developed a Strategic Marketing Matrix to evaluate different social entrepreneurs endeavours which contrasts the financial returns and the social impact. The simple method of the evaluation quickly assists the developers and implementers of a project to determine whether the community service would be worthwhile to be continued. However Dees (2001) suggests that the 'social mission is explicit and central' (p. 2) and it is 'much harder to determine whether a social entrepreneur is creating sufficient social value to justify the resources used in creating the value' (p. 3).

	Positive financial returns	Negative financial returns

Significant social impact	EXPAND	NURTURE
Minimal social impact	HARVEST	KILL

Figure 1: The Strategic Marketing Matrix for Social Entrepreneurs (Boschee, 2006, p. 2)

### The Contextual Framework

The University of Western Sydney encompasses six campuses including Bankstown, Blacktown, Campbelltown, Hawkesbury, Parramatta, and Penrith. Greater Western Sydney is one of the world's largest urban areas. It covers almost 9,000 square kilometres, an area greater than the combined areas of Tokyo, London and Chicago. It is home to 1.5 million people, about 40% of Sydney's population. These campuses have the benefit of a multicultural population bringing to the learning experience of their students the opportunity to engage with a variety of global perspectives on issues that impact on our societies. The community 'engagement is the collaboration between the university and a community (regional, national or global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity'. The uniqueness of the approach of UWS is a 'commitment to two-way engagement' that is an 'outreach' which 'rests upon a rationale that recognises an intellectual, social and moral imperative' to ensure 'that we are in fact addressing the most pressing social, civic, and ethical problems faced by the communities we serve' (McKenna, 2006, p.65). In response to the overview of the university engagement and service in 2006 there was in the introduction of unit of study, Learning through Community Service, which focuses on students working either within the university community, the local or international community.

### The Academic Framework

The unit of study Learning through Community Services was offered as an elective valued at 20 credit points (this is double the usual allocation of credit points) for students within the College of Arts. This unit is one 'in

which students apply discipline based knowledge as they carry out projects of substantial benefit to community agencies' (UWS, School of Education unit outline 101117, p. 2). The unit is an open elective available to all undergraduate students within the college of arts and so is available to students enrolled in Humanities, Education and Languages.

The overall learning outcomes in the unit expect that the students will:  
Apply academic knowledge to issues that concern community agencies;  
Apply observation, reflection, and interpretation skills in identifying issues affecting community agencies;  
Understand and be sensitive to issues of cultural and social diversity and their impact on the acquisition of social capital of individuals and groups;  
Analyse problems and synthesize information useful to the ongoing concerns of the agency;  
Communicate effectively in person and in writing to a wide variety of stakeholders;  
Develop products of potential benefit to the communities and agencies in which they do their placements.

(School of Education, 2006, p. 2).

By undertaking a range of activities that included:  
Develop an understanding of the nature and roles of public sector agencies and of non-profit community organizations;  
Explore issues that typically confront public sector and non-profit community agencies;  
Examine strategies that agencies employ to address problems, including the role of voluntary service and advocacy;  
Contribute to research and service provision in collaboration with public sector and non-profit community agencies;  
Develop effective communication, advocacy and analytical and intervention and interpersonal skills.

(School of Education, 2006, p. 2).

The students are required to undertake a range of activities including participating in a range of lectures and tutorials in an intensive 3 day workshop which is then followed up by a range of meetings by each strand undertaken. The meetings may be in person or over the web using a discussion board.

To demonstrate their participation in the community based service the students complete the actual project and submit four reflections which focus on the particular strand:

Reflection 1: Selection of appropriate community group and project

Reflection 2: Setting up and commencing project

Reflection 3: Workings of the project

Reflection 4: Evaluation and achievements of the project

The final submission is a portfolio representing a consolidation of the four previous reflections and a synthesis of the work undertaken in the community project.

The determination that the assessment would be based upon reflection was supported in the research which find that ‘Critical reflection as a concept means certain pedagogical actions in practice’ (Willans, Harreveld and Danaher, 2003, p. 4) ‘Using critical reflection, learners are engaged in critical analysis and active construction of experiences in context’ (ibid).

Each strand undertaken concluded with a celebration of learning for the community and students. This varied for each strand and obviously reflected the needs of the community group and the age of the participants.

### The Academic Learning Structure

The unit of study comprised a three day intensive workshop which included four lectures which focussed on working in a community as ‘an important aspect of social entrepreneurship is understanding both the social positioning of people and the ways in which they can be assisted to move beyond those positions’ (McConachie & Simpson, 2003, p 3). Therefore the lectures comprised information on:

Lecture one: General overview of service learning

Lecture two: Background to service learning and the theories related to service learning

Lecture three: Social Justice and working in the community

Lecture four: Helping other people, knowing what they need

Each lecture was presented by a specialist in the area and so the students were gaining knowledge and insights into the area of community engagement from researchers who are working in the area at present.

The formal lectures were punctuated by strand meetings with the academic leading the strand. These times included the developed of an understanding of the way in which the university students will work with their community group and undertake the development of social entrepreneurship. The final session, of the three day workshop, was a compulsory session for students who would be working in schools or where there would be children attending the activities. This session was on child protection and the mandatory reporting of offences against children. This session is taken by experts in the area.

The following give an overview of the strands available to students within the unit Learning through Community Service:

1. Sharing Ideas, Sharing Knowledge: Academic literacy through on-line service learning

Entering University can be a daunting experience, with some students finding the content challenging but also the academic literacy tasks and assignments especially difficult. Some new students experiencing these feelings can end up dropping out of university. Students taking this elective will be involved in a close association with a student needing support. You will be involved in peer mentoring and support of at least one first year student during Spring semester who needs extra assistance in developing their academic literacy skills - reading and/or writing. It is anticipated that you will be in 3rd year and the students you mentor will be in 1st year. Your experiences at university and knowledge of academic reading and writing tasks will assist you in being a mentor to the 1st year students. Lecturers will provide support to you about the role of being a mentor, explicit teaching of literacy strategies, ways to provide support and be there for you to discuss ideas with. This unit will be of particular interest to students wanting to develop their interactive skills, while providing help to other students with academic literacy in supportive one-on-one situations.

2. Serving Children, Families and Professionals as Children Start School

Starting school is a big deal for children, families, early childhood educators and school teachers. It provides an opportunity for a community to celebrate its children, families and educational settings. In this project strand, UWS students will assist communities in making their transition to school

programs even more successful than they would otherwise have been. In a connected pair consisting of a school and a prior-to-school service, pairs of UWS students will learn about the settings, act as volunteer assistants in the settings and assist in the implementation of the transition program within the community. The roles of the students will depend on the educational settings in which they work but the aim of their work is the same in each of the contexts – to assist in ensuring that the children starting school have as successful a start as they possibly can. Students will need to undertake independent learning modules during the semester in order that their projects are successful.

### 3. MADD about the arts: Music, Arts, Dance and Drama in the Primary School

This college-based project builds students' social and intellectual capital in relation to the arts by engaging them in authentic learning experiences with primary school children. It will give students the opportunity to develop their own skills in teaching and communicating about their preferred art form(s) within diverse cultures as well as being a catalyst for making effective change in children's lives through their involvement in the arts. As part of this project strand, students may be involved in working with children to produce a children's art exhibition in the local community, interacting with teachers and children to develop and implement an integrated arts program using the UWS student's preferred artistic skills and experience and/or facilitating an after school arts program for primary aged children. Completing this project strand will provide students with a firm foundation for postgraduate teacher education courses as well as enhancing their own artistic skills and knowledge as they assist in the holistic development of children.

### 4. Students in Free Enterprise (SIFE)

Do you want to try your hand at being a UWS apprentice and support the local community? Be part of UWS SIFE where your imagination is your limitation. SIFE is a philanthropic initiative in which Australian companies provide money and training to support University students to carry out community projects in their local regions. Underpinning the SIFE principles are that the students will teach and learn through practical application of the knowledge and skills gained at university in the wider community by means of student-designed and implemented projects. In this project strand,



students will draw together their own interests and abilities with specific skills along with the aims of SIFE to implement small group projects that meet the needs of local communities. Projects have included developing financial literacy, a community cookbook, assisting unemployed women and fundraising for Ethiopian orphans – you choose and develop your own project.

#### 5. Video Production

Students in this project strand will undertake the production of a promotion video/documentary of the International Student Social Support Network strand. Students in this strand will work with the UWS and international students documenting the outcomes of the strand. Students will follow the integration of international students into the UWS and Australian community, as well as the cultural exchange between international and UWS students. Pre-production and production will take place in Autumn semester with post-production and the final product to be done throughout Spring semester.

6. International Student Social Support Networks: This project strand responds to widely expressed concerns in the UWS community for the academic and social well-being of International students. The aim of this project strand is to pilot a model for linking small groups of international students with small groups of third year undergraduates. There will be a range of activities from February to July designed to provide social, cultural, language and learning support for the international students. Undergraduates will gain skills in reflection, communication, organization and collaboration. The project facilitates cultural exchange to develop mutual understanding. Assessment for this strand is via on-line monitoring and reflective journals, evaluated as a research project and good practice recorded on video.

7. Community Language School Development: This project strand will have UWS students work with the Maltese Language School on a program of work that culminates in a one-day community event dealing with the Maltese language in the diaspora. This project strand will enable students to not only be enriching the MLS's community role on the one hand, but also provide the chance for language and linguistics students to use their knowledge and skills in authentic contexts.

8. Equity Buddies: The aim of this project strand is to increase first year retention of mature age students (over 25). Students will be educated and trained in the area of equity/diversity support as well as in the issues related to student attrition - particularly in relation to the access, participation and retention of mature age first year students. They will be trained to become first year equity mentors and will be paired up with a small group of first year students to be mentored throughout the Autumn semester.

### The Teaching Framework

At the beginning of the first session in the workshops students were asked to complete a short questionnaire about their previous work in the community. Six open ended questions inquired about the students' work undertaken in the community, the skills and knowledge they bring to community service learning and which ones they would like to develop when involved in community service learning. One other question focussed on whether the students had gained any qualification while working within a community and one on the students' interests outside university study. One closed question asked the students the number of hours they work in paid employment.

Following the lectures and strand sessions students undertook the work for the semester. At the closure of some of the strand a celebration of learning was planned and organised. In some instances the celebration was planned by the students – such as in the Community Language School Development - Maltese Language School; others participate in a celebration organised by an outside provider – Students in Free Enterprise attend the annual national competition. What ever the activity it brings closure to the students and the community they have been working with together.

### Analysis of the student cohort within Learning through Community Service

At the commencement of the semester the students completed a short questionnaire relating to their pattern of study, amount of part time work and the level of community service undertaken previously and at present. The students were also asked to comment on the skills and knowledge they bring to the community service as well as the skills and knowledge they would like to develop while engaged in community service.

The cohort of students in Learning through Community Service came from a range of degrees including: Arts, Business, Health Sciences, Music and

Education. The unit was recommended for third year students to undertake and about 30.5% of the enrolled students were in the third year of their study, 36% from second year, 22% from fourth year and 5.5% from both first and fifth year students.

Of the cohort 25% stated they were not working part time however a number of these students are parents and therefore looking after 2-6 children, other students cared for elderly parents. Of the 75% who work part time the average time was 18 hours work.

Of the students enrolled 47% were not undertaking any community service at present. It can easily be seen that with students working part time while they study fulltime they have limited time available to undertake community service. However of the students working in the community at present the range of activities were varied both in the type of service and the community groups they are involved in. They included working with scouts, with religious groups, coaching sport, and with service organisation such as The Salvation Army.

The interesting information given by the students was the skills and knowledge they would like to develop while engaged in community service. Students were particularly pleased to be working with children and others so that they would 'develop further my people skills, interacting with others' and develop 'leadership skills and time management skills while working independently'.

The reflections that are submitted by the students give a clear insight into their obvious development. For some students initially the opening up about their learning was difficult but as they were assured the reflections were for submission and not discussion they were freer with their comments and insights. Some students showed a meaningful development in their skills commenting that – 'having passion is fantastic and essential for us, but passion needs to have guidelines so that it is productive and our goals are met' and 'I have learnt that you can apply life's principles to business, such as you can try to achieve certain outcomes, but sometimes there is a different reason for you to be doing a project, etc. It is like a higher being or message, destiny or fate and it becomes more about the journey, than the goal.'

A deeper understanding of self is evident in many reflections with students commenting in the following fashion: 'I need to continue to push myself, it fulfils me, yet it sometimes also scares me, which to me means to take a deep breath and keep on pushing. Personally, I still have a long way to go, but I feel that I have made a lot of progress from the experiences and achievements of the project.' Overtime the students also could see the impact they would have on the community they were working with: 'I am excited to be part of a project that will have a profound affect on numerous children's lives, that will give them an opportunity to create better lives for themselves and the consequential flow on effect of this.' The ultimate comment was given 'This semester has given me more fulfilment than any material object our society idolises could give me.'

#### Evaluation of Learning through Community Service

Strand leaders have the opportunity to see the development of the students' understanding and knowledge through their work in the four reflection papers that they submitted through out the semester. As each project developed within a community the students would reflect on a different component and therefore the strand leader would see the development and be able to guide and mentor the students.

Still it needs to be examined as to whether universities do have a place to be providers and developers of social entrepreneurship. As with most discussions the 'advocates maintain that improved collaboration can bring benefits to all parties and particularly, improve circumstances at a local level. Whereas opponents believe that it condones the abrogation of government responsibility in the provision of welfare services and job creation' (University of Newcastle, 2001, p. 1). Whatever the standpoint the students involved in the process of developing community based projects, whether they are working in the creative arts, undertaking a SIFE project or assisting university buddies have seen a marked increase in their development and understanding of the skills they have learnt at the university whilst they work with the community. The success of the initial semester of Learning through Community Service has established as a recognised program for students at the University of Western Sydney within the College of Arts and also sees other colleges wanting to develop their own community service units of study.

### The development of RobustHope within the students

The value of the development of social entrepreneurship within students and the wider university community also brings with it the development of the students' social conscience. With in the social conscience there is the development of RobustHope within the individual and the community.

RobustHope has two definitional aspects, that of a futures orientation and turning away from any sense of hope as something naïve, to a rooted-ness in evidence based experience. RobustHope has psychological and sociological dimensions. It affects society and the individual, thus it operates at both a societal and individual level. It is within this individual psychological level that the changes in the students are seen. The RobustHope enables us to explore and understand the students' development of social conscience as they work within a community project that develops the social enterprise of the community.

Thus through the development of students' skills and knowledge of social entrepreneurship they are seeing the changes within themselves and the community which may be attributed to the development of RobustHope of all the participants and see the evolving of more opportunities for the future.

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