

New directions for trust funding

Strengthening families and communities

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Some leading philanthropic trusts and foundations in Australia, like those in North America, are increasingly interested in moving away from a reactive funding model in which they merely respond to requests for funding to a more proactive model in which they develop, in collaboration with those in the field, the broad parameters of innovative programs they wish to support, and then invite agencies to make expressions of interest in relation to these program dimensions.

Selected programs need to be committed to evaluation and prepared to help disseminate their innovations and experiences to the field. It is this last step, from innovation to dissemination, which has often not been taken in the past, resulting in lost opportunities for valuable and cutting edge pilot projects to make an impact on practice and policy.

Equally problematic, especially in a period of fiscal restraint, is the issue of sustainability. A number of promising programs in Australia, established with short-term pilot funding, have collapsed after a short time because of lack of ongoing funding. More attention will therefore need to be given to possible ways in which a new program could obtain ongoing funding.

THE IAN POTTER FOUNDATION

The Ian Potter Foundation is an Australia-wide trust which provides grants to a very broad range of fields, including the humanities, health, science, environment and conservation, education and social welfare. It has a distinctive approach to tackling the underlying problems, rather than merely supporting the amelioration of symptoms. For example, symbolising the approach of the trust in conservation and agriculture was the Potter Farmland Plan, a far-sighted model of ecologically sustainable farming established in the Western District of Victoria in 1984. Through this and similar initiatives, the Ian Potter Foundation has played a leading role in transforming farming practices in Australia to enhance soil conservation and land care, helping

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communities help themselves. A large scale environmental project of the Ian Potter Foundation which is currently under way is in the Riverland region of the Murray-Darling Basin, the site of some of our worst salinity problems.

Reflected in the approach of the Ian Potter Foundation are:

- a breadth of thinking in the analysis of the problem and solutions;
- pursuing long-term rather than 'quick-fix' solutions;
- drawing in expertise where necessary;
- facilitating close collaboration between universities, government and non-government bodies;
- valuing individuals with vision, integrity and commitment; and
- upholding the principle of self-help.

New directions in child welfare

The Ian Potter Foundation has adopted the same approach in the field of child and family welfare. For example, in the early 1990s it played a leading role in supporting the introduction of the intensive family preservation programs at the Ballarat Children's Home in Victoria. After funding a pilot program, the Foundation, through a partnership with non-government agencies, the Victorian Government and the University of Melbourne School of Social Work, hosted a conference to inform the field about this new development. St Luke's Family Care was given support to disseminate their innovative work with families in the regional city of Bendigo, which included travel grants to agency personnel and financial assistance for publication of the book, *Beyond Child Rescue*, by Allen and Unwin at the end of 1996. In these ways the Ian Potter Foundation has facilitated the dissemination of family preservation programs.

The focus of the Foundation in the field of child welfare is now shifting to prevention. Growing out of a series of discussions between the Secretary of the Foundation, Pat Feilman, the Executive Director of the Australian Association of Philanthropy, Elizabeth Cham, and myself in early 1996 on the current crisis of child protection in Australia, the Ian Potter Foundation brought together a small group of people from around Australia for a 'think

tank' on how the Foundation could better assist agencies in strengthening families and communities. There was particular interest expressed in projects which:

- are aimed at secondary rather than primary or tertiary prevention (that is, aimed at vulnerable families and communities, but not those who are already part of the statutory child protection system);
- exhibit a holistic or ecological approach to strengthening families (a child-in family-in network-in community perspective);
- are 'family friendly' and are closely linked with universal organisations and places in the community with which children and their families come into contact in their day-to-day life (such as Maternal and Child Health Services, schools, etc);
- are able to draw upon the resources of the community, such as volunteers;
- have the capacity to collaborate effectively with universities and research bodies to allow their work to be evaluated;
- are committed to disseminating their innovations;
- are potentially self-sufficient without ongoing Trust support (for example, by virtue of their low cost, or through strategies to obtain government or corporate funding).

The following, which illustrate some of the principles above, are among the many projects which the Foundation supported in 1996.

St Luke's SAFE project

SAFE, which stands for Shared Action for Family Enhancement, is the exciting new project of St Luke's Family Care. It is still in its very early days but this program, located in the rural community of Eaglehawk, is exploring a new community-based approach to strengthening families and preventing child abuse and neglect. The Ian Potter Foundation has made a commitment to support the program for a period of three years. Associate Professor John Owen from the University of Melbourne is the consultant for the evaluation of the program and a number of regional tertiary institutions are participating in the project.

Edith Cowan's Kalgoorlie Program for Children at Risk

This is an interesting project located in a primary school in Kalgoorlie with a large number of Aboriginal children, many of whom have nutritional and health problems, such as recurrent ear infections, which seriously hinder their educational opportunities. Working in very close collaboration with representatives from the indigenous community, the school nurse and people in local organisations, the Faculty of Health and Human Sciences at Edith Cowan University has developed a participatory action research model for monitoring the project and measuring its outcomes. Such evaluation is part and parcel of the innovation and will allow the outcomes of the project to be disseminated in the professional literature and shape the professional education of health professionals.

Mission to the Streets and Lanes

This well-established Anglican agency in Melbourne is pioneering a model of how a parish might be able to respond to the needs in its immediate community in the outer suburb of Clayton, and become a nucleus in the neighbourhood supporting vulnerable individuals and families. Hopefully this externally evaluated project will act as a stimulus to how congregations of different denominations can reach out to those around them.

SEEKING THE SUPPORT OF FOUNDATIONS

The Ian Potter Foundation is keen to support community agencies doing innovative preventive work with children and families. A copy of the Grant Application Guidelines can be obtained from the Ian Potter Foundation. The Australian Association of Philanthropy, which has a large number of member trusts and foundations, and which is located with the Ian Potter Foundation, has copies of the Australian Directory of Philanthropy 1996/1997 and can assist with information about many other trusts and foundations. They will be running Grantseeker Workshops in most capital cities throughout 1997 which might be useful to agencies wanting to learn more about how to approach trusts and foundations.

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