

The Winds of Change - social change philanthropy organisation set for Australian launch

A new Australian organisation designed to help build interest and skills in social change philanthropy will be launched in Melbourne next month. Kathy Richardson spoke with Changemakers Australia Project Manager TRUDY WYSE about what the grantmaking sector can expect from this ambitious new organisation.

Best Practice Grantmaking: What is Changemakers Australia? Can you give us a broad sketch of what you want to do?

Trudy Wyse: Changemakers Australia is an organisation whose mission is to actively encourage and resource philanthropic organisations and individuals to work for long-term, structural change through effective partnerships with groups experiencing disadvantage and discrimination.

We believe that the answer to the question of how the philanthropic dollar can best be spent to address issues of poverty, discrimination and injustice in Australia, is through the support of those community organisations working for social and economic justice, environmental sustainability and equality of opportunity for all.

It is well summed up through the phrase 'Change not Charity' – the most effective way to assist disadvantaged people may not simply be through the provision of services to individuals, but through the reform of public policy, institutional practice and community attitudes which impact on whole groups of people.

There are a number of progressive philanthropic organisations and individuals in Australia who have consciously tried to adopt this approach into their own grantmaking practice over a number of years. They have also tried to discuss and promote this approach within the broader sector here, firstly through a group called Women in Philanthropy, and then through the Horizons funders' network for social change.

Horizons was an informal collaboration of five or six organisations which shared responsibility for organising a bi monthly forum around a particular policy issue or area of community need. They would bring speakers together to explore the issue and effective ways of working to get effective change. However, because those organisations were all absorbing the work of organising the forums into their current workloads, it tended to hobble along a bit.

We were also aware of the work of several organisations in the United States which are committed to promoting a social change model within American philanthropy and were inspired in particular by two of them – Changemakers which is where we got our name, and Alliance for Justice, which works with non-profit organisations and charitable foundations, encouraging them to play a role in advocating for change in public policy as part of their charitable goals.

About 18 months to two years ago, the Horizons network decided to take the plunge and think about setting up a new organisation in Australia along the lines of Changemakers in the United States, and incorporating some of the foci of the

Alliance for Justice and several other very progressive organisations working around social change philanthropy.

As a result, over this period, we've been working to set up Changemakers Australia, which is committed to promoting a philanthropic approach characterized by support for those organisations which are addressing the underlying causes of social problems and which adopts within its own grantmaking practice a more inclusive, democratic and accountable model of governance and decision making.

Best Practice Grantmaking: Will you be working with philanthropic organisations, or non-profit organisations, or both?

Trudy Wyse: Both, although our focus in the first instance will be directed more to the philanthropic sector. But as Changemakers is very much based on the principle of partnerships, we will be encouraging philanthropic organisations and individuals to work collaboratively with the community organisations they fund, so inevitably we'll be working with community organisations too.

The social change philanthropy model calls for a deeper involvement by grantmakers. Under this model, a philanthropic organisation wanting to support a particular area of social policy will work in collaboration with a community organisation – in some instances they might just provide the financial resources the community organisation needs to undertake a range of activities, in other instances the philanthropic organisation may itself have a range of skills, expertise or contacts that it can contribute.

So the philanthropic organisation or donor may play more than just a funding role. They may have staff with terrific writing skills who can help the community organisation edit reports or write press releases, or they might have contacts within government or bureaucracy or other organisations working effectively in that area that will allow them to play a role in bringing people together. A number of private donors not only contribute financially to a campaign or project, but actively participate in a range of practical ways to support it.

What is social change philanthropy?

“Many people see wisdom in the aphorism ‘Give a man a fish and he can eat for day. Teach a man to fish and he can eat for a lifetime’. Social-change groups take this a step further. Recognising that problems like hunger have myriad causes, these groups support hungry people to ask tough questions: ‘Why doesn’t society teach all people to fish? Who owns the pool? Who wrote the rules about how ponds get used, and how can they be changed? Who is polluting the pool, and how can they be stopped?’ Social change philanthropy supports people to work for fundamental change in political, economic and cultural institutions.”

adapted from Slepian and Mogil, *Welcome to Philanthropy* 1997

But all of that really has got to be predicated on the relationship being a partnership – it's not about a philanthropic organisation imposing on the community organisation its own understanding of what the solutions are, it's about working in collaboration and providing the resources – both financial and other – that will assist that community organisation to achieve the change it is working towards.

Whilst we're talking about partnerships, I should add that we are keen to work collaboratively with the other peak and research bodies within the philanthropic sector – Philanthropy Australia, the Centres for Philanthropy in universities etc. We are hoping however to also reach outside the existing sector and attract new and existing private donors, who may not be members of Philanthropy Australia and are not necessarily linked into the sector.

Best Practice Grantmaking: How is the organisation funded?

Trudy Wyse: We are primarily funded from within the philanthropic sector and that is as it should be as we're going to be a resource for the sector. We have received grants from organisations such as the Reichstein Foundation and the Myer Foundation, and we will be applying to the Myer Foundation again for funding for specific projects under their Philanthropy in Australia stream of funding. We've also been supported by some individual donors and we're hoping to secure more support from individual donors within the sector.

It would be fantastic to have ongoing, full-time staff and we have identified a myriad of tasks in our strategic plan which could keep them fully occupied, but certainly in the first year or two we will only be employing people as we get the funding to undertake the projects, so it will be a small and lean organisation in the establishment phase.

I have been employed over the past 18 months on a two-day-a-week basis to get the organisation up and running, and as part of our 5 year strategic plan, we are beginning to cost out various projects. Obviously we won't implement the projects until we have the funding to undertake them.

We have recently become a partner project of the Community Advocacy Unit, based at RMIT. This is a fantastic arrangement and we are beginning to discuss a number of joint projects. It also has the added benefit of providing us with tax deductibility for donations made to support our activities.

Best Practice Grantmaking: You mentioned a bit earlier that you were interested in encouraging more public policy advocacy in Australia. Do you think funders should be paying others to do that sort of work, or do they have an obligation themselves to advocate for change? Are there legal restrictions on this?

Trudy Wyse: Philanthropic organisations themselves are able to advocate, and as I've outlined in the partnership approach, should contribute to effect change in their priority funding areas in a range of ways, of which funding is only one. It's a bit more complicated when it comes to the organisations they fund. In order for those groups to be charitable they need to be working directly with the groups that they're trying to assist, but part of that can be broader, more systemic work to change policy, attitudes and legislation.

So, for example, if you're working with a community organisation around issues of homelessness, as long as the advocacy activity that you're supporting is assisting that organisation to achieve its goals around homelessness or services for homeless people, then that's legitimate, although there are some limitations – it can only be an insubstantial part of the charitable purpose.

One of the outcomes Changemakers Australia wants to achieve is along the lines of the organisation I referred to earlier, Alliance for Justice, which produces a number of publications in the United States looking at the tax law as it relates to philanthropic funding and what philanthropic organisations can legitimately do in the area of advocacy and lobbying for public policy change. We want to do the same here, to work out what the parameters are and get some definition of what philanthropic organisations can legitimately fund. We will then produce material that will outline those boundaries clearly for philanthropic organisations and encourage them to take that broader role.

Best Practice Grantmaking: What other activities will Changemakers Australia be undertaking?

Trudy Wyse: Another thing we want to do is to develop some tools to use to evaluate social change outcomes in philanthropic funding, again both because it's important to be able to evaluate the sort of difference these activities are making and also as a way of encouraging and supporting others in the sector to look at those sorts of funding models.

Evaluation is an area lots of funders – not just philanthropic – have struggled with. It is hard to move away from things like service delivery and counting how many people you have assisted and find ways to measure those intangibles – the longer-term changes that have occurred.

We are looking for funding to undertake work to identify evaluation methodologies and tools, which we will then use as the basis for education sessions within the philanthropic sector.

Best Practice Grantmaking: Are there any grantmakers who have got to grips with those issues?

Trudy Wyse: There are – around the world there are a number of organisations coming to grips with how you do measure those sorts of outcomes and developing some tools around that. We do not want to reinvent the wheel, we are keen to look at what's been developed and then adapt it to Australian circumstances.

Best Practice Grantmaking: How many philanthropic organisations or individuals in Australia are actually practising what is defined as "social change philanthropy" at the moment?

Trudy Wyse: There are a number of philanthropic organisations and individuals who have taken a social change approach to philanthropy over a number of years. It's hard to put a number on it, but there are certainly organisations that have done it or are doing it – the Stegley Foundation in its day, and the Reichstein Foundation, as well as a number of the donors I'm associated with through the Melbourne Community Foundation and the Victorian Women's Trust. And of course there would be many other organisations that we don't know about which have been working in that way.

So we don't want to give the impression that we're coming in with this whole new approach that nobody's doing or thought about before. I guess our role will be to try to support and encourage the ones that are already doing social change philanthropy, as well as to explore the concepts with the broad sector and get people to think about their current funding practices and how they might fund more effectively.

Best Practice Grantmaking: Do you expect any resistance to your organisation and its work? It is a rather different philanthropic environment that you're dealing with in Australia than in America where these sorts of organisations seem to flourish.

Trudy Wyse: It will be interesting to see. I don't know that we will meet with open resistance, but I think as in many other sectors, there are people who are set in their ways and aren't all that open to thinking about longer term change and structural reform.

But I think the sector is mature enough to be open to hearing about other ways of working. Certainly, this appears to be true given the interest we had in the first Changemakers information session we held in July.

There is a lot of interest in the sector, and not necessarily only from the organisations that we would have immediately listed as the ones that would respond to the establishment of a new organisation such as this. Now, whether in the end all of those groups or individuals want to adopt that approach I don't know, but they're certainly interested in hearing about it, they're certainly interested in being on our email list and coming to sessions as we develop them. And I think that's really all we can expect at this stage.

Best Practice Grantmaking: So you're not just preaching to the converted?

Trudy Wyse: We do definitely not want to preach to the converted. There are a number of people who are already committed to working this way and that's terrific, they form the backbone of the organisation. But the whole purpose of establishing Changemakers is to reach more broadly into the sector, both to existing organisations and to also encourage new philanthropists and to excite them by a different way of working. We've started to talk to younger people who see philanthropy as fairly staid, conservative and old-fashioned. They are much more interested and inspired by this way of working, and much more likely to become engaged with it.

Trudy Wyse is the Project Manager with Changemakers Australia. She also works with the Melbourne Community Foundation (MCF), where her role as Manager, Community and Donor Services involves providing individual advice and support to donors, and grantmaking policy advice to the MCF board. Changemakers Australia will be launched in Melbourne on October 24. People interested in attending the launch or finding out more about Changemakers can call Trudy on 0419 581 678 or email changemakers_aust@yahoo.com.au