

Helping Nourish Flourish



a report prepared for
the Outer East Nutrition Network
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as part of the Masters in Strategic Foresight program

This report has been prepared for the leaders of the Outer East Nutrition Network (locally known as NOURISH) who approached Swinburne University Graduate School of Entrepreneurship to assist them in turning their informal group into a credible and viable network.

A student in the final year of a Master of Strategic Foresight program was engaged to research the issues which might have an impact on the ability of NOURISH to achieve this goal, and provide a report to all members of the network.

A comprehensive academic paper summarising the research and detailing the methodology used is available. This report takes the form of an executive summary and concludes with a series of 7 recommendations.

Introduction

There can be no doubt that access to adequate and nutritious food is one of a small number of absolutely essential ingredients to living a viable life.

It is therefore unsurprising that virtually all health practitioners have an interest in the access which their clients have to appropriate food. In the Outer East region of Melbourne, one way this interest has been expressed since 2007 is through the spontaneous creation of a network of health practitioners now called NOURISH.

By the commencement of this project, NOURISH members had already embarked on a number of initiatives, but they had concluded that real success depended on them taking a more structured approach to creating their future.

NOURISH members have already jointly engaged in two formal strategic planning sessions, as a result of which a clear and agreed vision statement:

“a healthy empowered and supported community where everyone has access to nutritious food”.

NOURISH is now keen to develop its structure and activities to ensure that this vision is actually brought to reality.

When the NOURISH leadership became aware of the emergence of a new approach to the process of creating future visions, they contacted the Strategic Foresight program at Swinburne University for assistance.

Background

In 2000 the Victorian Government Department of Human Services (DHS) created an initiative entitled: “Going Forward – Primary Care Partnerships Strategy” which envisaged “an integrated, cooperative and coordinated approach to health service planning and delivery”

As a result of this initiative 32 networks were created under the Primary Care Partnership (PCP) umbrella. One of these is the Outer East Health and Community Support Alliance (OEHCSA), which is the overarching body within which the NOURISH network operates.

OEHCSA brings together health professionals within the Cities of Maroondah and Knox and the Shire of Yarra Ranges.

A number of PCP providers have identified food access and security as critical dimensions of their strategic plans, but only within OEHCSA has a formal nutrition network developed. There are, however, at least 9 similar networks elsewhere in Australia and many more overseas.

There is a considerable body of research on factors affecting the success of such networks, much of it generated within Australia.

This consulting exercise has combined a number of detailed conversations with NOURISH leaders with a comprehensive Australian and international literature search designed to expose the factors believed to be pivotal to the success of networks such as NOURISH.

These have been summarised and presented to NOURISH in the form of a presentation purporting to describe NOURISH in three years' time. They have also been formulated as 7 specific recommendations, which form the final part of this report.

Methodology

The approach taken in this assignment is based on the work of Australian futurist Joe Voros, who has created what he calls a 'generic foresight process'.

Voros suggests that there are three distinct stages in the application of foresight in an organisational context:

- . **First is the Analysis stage which asks "what seems to be happening?"**
here the goal is to seek a 'first cut' at creating some order out of the bewildering array of data which the inputs step usually generates
- . **Second is the Interpretation stage which asks "what is really happening?"**
here one seeks to probe between the surface of the analysis to look for deeper structure and insights
- . **Third is the Prospection stage which asks "what might happen?"**
this is the activity of purposefully looking forward to create forward views

A detailed paper exploring the first two of these stages has been prepared, as has a 25 minute presentation exploring a possible future for NOURISH. These are available upon request from NOURISH members, and they are briefly summarised below.

Discussion

The continued government funding of PCPs attests to the importance of taking a holistic approach to community health.

A small number of health elements, however, are so fundamental to good health that they deserve focussed attention.

Reliable access to healthy food is clearly one of these.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the number of community networks focussing on food access and security operating in Australia is steadily growing.

Given the fragility of such largely volunteer networks, the creators of NOURISH have taken a cautious and steady approach to its operation.

After nearly three years, however, the potential contribution of NOURISH to improving the health of those living in Melbourne's outer east cannot be denied, and NOURISH is poised to take a significant step forward both in its size and its reach.

The challenge for the leaders of NOURISH is how best to utilize their limited resources to create the maximum impact. Providing some input to this challenge has been the primary purpose of this assignment.

Conclusion

7 detailed recommendations have been prepared and are reproduced below. Those of these which necessitate support from the agencies which employ the current members of NOURISH require further elaboration.

In its support of PCPs the Victorian Department of Human Services has published a detailed guide to their operation. One part of the guide provides a table listing the various forms of operational integration to which service providers can aspire. This table is reproduced below. The leaders of NOURISH clearly wish to operate at the highest level (collaboration) and have committed themselves to exploring what might be necessary to achieve this goal.

They appreciate that this will involve a number of discussions with colleagues within their various employing agencies whose prime focus is not food access or security.

Another of the key success factors is the breadth of the network, and it is becoming clear to NOURISH that the membership needs to broaden to include all five sectors of the food system – production, consumption, processing, distribution and waste recycling, as well as planning and other officers within local government agencies, and interested members of the general public. Creating close relationships with schools and other community groups in the outer east region is also considered essential.

Within the OEHCSA catchment, there are also a number of existing initiatives such as the Stringy Bark and Maroondah Festivals, Transition Towns and Community Harvest whose activities embrace, at least in part, food production and distribution. Closer relationships will need to be established with all of these.

The NOURISH leadership has demonstrated considerable ingenuity and resilience to reach this point of their development. With an appropriate amount of support they are poised to take some significant next steps and in the process make a powerful contribution to improving the health and wellbeing of those who live in Melbourne's outer east.

Recommendations

- 1. Strategically create events and activities – look for leverage, not quantity**
 - a. local food fair – significant potential to become self funding
 - b. links to schools – many of which already have active nutrition programs, kitchen facilities and are centres of community participation
 - c. make the annual gathering a significant event – and charge for attendance
 - d. create a brand – and charge for its use eg charge for access to local food brand or for advertising on the website

- 2. Gather data regularly – become the credible local source for information on nutrition and food access and security**
 - a. knowledge is power – and can be a source of credibility, and income
 - b. use as the basis for local and broader lobbying
 - c. keep people motivated to improve
 - d. use to evaluate success – both internally and benchmarking with others
 - e. maintain links (even virtual links) with similar networks in Victoria, Australia and globally

- 3. Supplement major research with local research**
 - a. put a local face on broader research data
 - b. fill gaps in the research picture
 - c. maintain links with universities and their students (many of whom may well become employees, and most of whom are probably residents)

- 4. Strive to get food fairness on the agendas of other PCPs**
 - a. encourage the collection (and sharing) of common data, both directly and indirectly related to food fairness
 - b. do shared research (and share the costs)
 - c. work together to increase lobbying effectiveness – there is strength in numbers

- 5. Grow the NOURISH network**
 - a. actively include non-health professionals – including food producers, distributors, retailers and recyclers as well as local government planning officers etc
 - b. carefully choose projects which engage others

6. Develop a NOURISH website

- a. provide an easy access point for information on local activities (including an on line version of the local food directory)
- b. an effective vehicle for communication between members as the network grows
- c. a source of professional information and advice
- d. a forum for discussion
- e. a link to broader networks in Victoria, Australia and overseas

7. Become strategic about financial sustainability

- a. actively look for commercial opportunities (even if these do not initially fully cover costs)
- b. recognise the importance of sponsors (in the broadest sense of that word)
- c. charge (even nominal amounts) for value created – there is a whole science of social entrepreneurship to draw from

Creating viable and successful networks

Integration	Process	Purpose
Low	Networking	The exchange of information for mutual benefit. This requires little time and trust between partners. Clearinghouse for information.
	Coordination	Exchanging information and altering activities for a common purpose. Match and coordinate needs and activities. Limit duplication of services.
	Cooperation	As above plus sharing resources. It requires a significant amount of time and high level of trust between partners.
	High	Collaboration

(Source: Department of Human Services - The Guide, 2003 part 1, page 11).

References

Department of Human Services – The Guide (2003)

Integrated health promotion – A practice guide for service providers – accessed on 6 August 2010 at:
http://www.health.vic.gov.au/healthpromotion/evidence_res/integrated.htm

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