Mixed Reception
An Evaluation of Neighbourhood Houses & Learning Centres’ Experience in 30 Community Hubs

David Perry & Angela Savage
Association of Neighbourhood Houses and Learning Centres 2012
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Graphic design and layout of this report by Nicole Meister.

Photograph Joanna Kozakiewicz, Port Melbourne Neighbourhood House (computer class photo, p. 47).

Photograph Kate Kelly, Port Melbourne Neighbourhood House (reading and writing photo, p. 47).
Executive Summary

This report presents the findings and recommendations of a research project that aimed to fill a gap in current knowledge about the experience of Neighbourhood Houses in community hubs. Specifically, the Association of Neighbourhood Houses and Learning Centres (ANHLC) was interested in whether there were relationships between variations in the ways community hubs were established and the outcomes for Neighbourhood Houses and their participants.

Recent government policy has encouraged the development of community hubs where various services are co-located, and Neighbourhood Houses have been encouraged to be part of these hub arrangements.

Neighbourhood Houses have been identified as ‘shared facilities’ (VCEC, 2009, p. xxvi). However, a definition that entails co-location of these ‘shared facilities’ with other services is more consistent with the current policy direction. In order to define and compare community hubs, ANHLC developed the following hubs typology:

• A single multipurpose facility that accommodates a number of organisations or services together with the Neighbourhood House. It may or may not be a new building, e.g. a Neighbourhood House housed in the same building as council offices, libraries, maternal and child health services, or other not-for-profit organisations.

• A series of conjoined buildings where a Neighbourhood House is in a building physically connected to other buildings that have other services. It may or may not include shared functions such as reception or shared spaces such as meeting rooms or training rooms, e.g. an existing library and a community hall that have been joined together with new buildings to include a Neighbourhood House.

• A community precinct: more than two physically separate public facilities, community organisations and/or community services located on the same land parcel or in direct proximity. This may or may not include shared functions such as reception or shared spaces such as meeting rooms, training rooms, gardens, etc.

• Satellite model: Neighbourhood House sits physically separate from the hub, but is able to access and use hub facilities (e.g. meeting rooms, kitchen, gardens, etc) as an off-site partner, e.g. a Neighbourhood House located in a suburban house with access to and use of nearby hub in a partnership arrangement.
The survey design was based on ANHLC’s consultation with its members, culminating in in-depth interviews with two Neighbourhood Houses, one already in and the other about to move in to a hub. An online survey instrument developed using SurveyMonkey was structured to capture the themes raised, and the nine survey topics reflect potential variables in the establishment of hubs.

Hub details

Establishment of the hub

Design

Participants

Other organisations

Management and administration

Governance arrangements

Costs

Overall experience
Most surveys were self-administered, completed online by the survey respondents. In a few cases, representatives were interviewed by ANHLC staff or a Neighbourhood House Networker using the survey questions. Follow-up interviews were conducted by phone to assist where an online survey was commenced but not completed (two cases) and/or to assist with the interpretation of the data.

All Neighbourhood Houses identified as being in a community hub were invited to participate. Thirty (30) respondents completed the survey.

The research found significant variation amongst respondents in almost all sections of the survey. This appears to reflect the local circumstances and relationships, a lack of adequate support materials1 and the different levels of experience in the complex task of undertaking a hub project.

The research concludes that community hubs are generally positive for communities, often leading to increased activities and participation across all demographic groups. The research validates the recommendations in much of the best practice type literature. It also supports the conclusions of the Victorian Competition and Efficiency Commission (VCEC) that ‘sharing facilities is not appropriate in all circumstances’ (VCEC, 2009, pp. 57–58) particularly where the experience was reported as negative for both the organisation and community.

The research also finds that for the majority of Neighbourhood Houses their experience of being in a community hub is positive. They provide benefits to Neighbourhood Houses, including but not limited to opportunities for partnerships and networking, improved facilities and improved access to services.

However, for a significant minority this is not the case. In these cases poor relationships between the Neighbourhood Houses and local government as the owners of the hub appears to be a contributing factor to the negative impact. There is no direct correlation between the levels of overall satisfaction for Neighbourhood Houses and who initiated the hub, or whether administration or other agreements were in place in a timely way.

Community precincts are more likely to result in higher levels of positive overall experience than single multipurpose buildings, without sacrificing complimentary relationships with other organisations in the precinct. They are considered cost effective (DPCD, 2010a, p. 5). However, precincts have become a less common type of co-location in recent years.

The Neighbourhood House’s motivation for moving into hubs is more important than who initiates the hub in terms of satisfaction with the overall experience. Where increased community benefit is the primary motivation a positive overall experience is more likely.

For Neighbourhood Houses, being compelled by others to move to a hub compromises levels of satisfaction with the experience of being in a hub as does, to a lesser extent, moving to a hub primarily to meet infrastructure needs. While not a finding from this research, reliance on subsidised accommodation for Neighbourhood Houses may leave them more vulnerable to compulsion where local government or other landlords have predetermined infrastructure arrangements.

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1 This has been addressed significantly by the release of two guides from Department of Planning and Community Development (DPCD) in 2010: A guide to delivering community precincts and a guide to governing shared community facilities.
Attention in hub design to the community strengthening practices of Neighbourhood Houses and the potential negative impact on access for some marginalised demographics is important and has not always been adequately considered. In particular, welcoming and informal gathering and entry spaces are an important design requirement. Understanding how Neighbourhood Houses operate and the features critical to their success is essential in getting design right. This requires hub owners, architects and consultants to spend the time to consult fully and gain a real insight, as well as strong and skilled Neighbourhood House representation in the establishment process. Most Neighbourhood Houses didn’t get what they expected based on the hub design process. Independent technical assistance for Neighbourhood Houses in the design phase may improve outcomes.

Moving to a hub generally led to a significant increase in participation at Neighbourhood Houses associated with an increase in available space. While this is positive, care must be taken to mitigate against the potential negative impact for marginalised community members. The impacts of changed location for traditional house users should also be considered.

Increased participation and administrative functions without additional resources have contributed to increased workloads with associated OH&S risks.

The research confirms other literature in identifying that not all tenants are compatible and the capacity for complimentary relationships varies depending on organisation types. In particular, any assumption that Neighbourhood Houses and kindergartens are complimentary are not substantiated. Stronger collaboration between tenants is more likely where tenant selection is based on inter-organisational relationships based around a common objective and time is allowed to develop relationships.

While not within the scope of the research, there is some suggestion that being in a hub may impact negatively on the community development practice of Neighbourhood Houses. Administrative arrangements often place additional workload on Neighbourhood Houses without any funding to support this creating an OH&S concern in some cases. Documentation of administrative arrangements is not always adequate or timely.

While governance arrangements generally work well as long as Neighbourhood Houses are represented on a governing body, in some cases they are ad hoc or non-existent. This represents some risk to tenant organisations. Documentation of governance arrangements is not always adequate or timely.

Some Neighbourhood Houses are under pressure to dissolve their incorporated association and for a representative to join a new, hub based legal entity. This is contrary to Neighbourhood House community development principles and is unsupported by evidence as a best practice model; it is contrary to some best practice literature.

The most significant finding that deviates from the existing literature relates to the cost impacts on Neighbourhood Houses. In most cases, Neighbourhood Houses experience a cost increase rather than the cost saving much of the literature predicts. Increased costs for utilities, maintenance and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) are apparently not being offset by savings in back office functions or other sharing arrangements. This is not surprising given that Neighbourhood Houses often take on broader site management responsibilities.
Inequity in cost distribution among hub tenants is an issue in some cases. This can potentially strain relationships between tenants and undermine one of the desirable benefits of hubs: increased collaboration for the benefit of community and individuals.

The research finds that some best practice recommendations contained in the existing literature were not implemented in many of the hubs that were surveyed and in some cases this contributed to negative impacts. In particular these include:

- Clear and timely documented vision, goals and agreements
- Equity in relationships of stakeholders
- Evaluation of hubs.

Based on the literature and this research, ANHLC concludes that the best approach to developing a hub occurs where:

- It addresses a community need identified by stakeholders including community representatives
- Stakeholders, including the community, are actively engaged in the development process and their design and other needs are accommodated
- Adequate and timely governance and administration arrangements are agreed to and documented by partners with equal power
- Long term operating and maintenance costs are provided for
- The hub is evaluated to determine whether it is meeting its goals.
In this scenario the hub is a means to an end and not an end in itself. To assist with achieving this approach, this report recommends:

- A review of current policy to ensure that funding and other drivers of hub developments adequately encourage precincts as an option
- State funding is allocated to proposed hubs that can demonstrate: that identified community needs are being addressed; how proposed tenants can better meet those needs through co-location; adequate and equitable consultation with stakeholders and tenants; agreed governance and administrative arrangements; an evaluation process and a whole of life viability plan
- Independent technical support be made available to Neighbourhood Houses considering entering into hub arrangements
- Increased workload in relation to site management responsibilities incurred by Neighbourhood Houses is adequately funded
- Neighbourhood Houses entering hub arrangements are funded at a minimum of 30 hours per week through the Neighbourhood House Coordination Program (NHCP) or higher depending on community size and demographic
- Community hub owners undertake an independent evaluation from both the community and tenants’ perspectives where such an evaluation has not occurred.

This research provides some insight into hub arrangements for Neighbourhood Houses in Victoria from a Neighbourhood House perspective. Further questions could be investigated to better understand the effectiveness of hubs and current policy. The researchers recommend further research be undertaken to examine:

- The nature, degree and impact of collaboration in hubs, including the extent to which back office and other functions are shared
- The experience of other stakeholders in community hubs
- The impact on community development activities of Neighbourhood Houses in community hubs.
1. Background and Policy Context

Neighbourhood Houses and Learning Centres (‘Neighbourhood Houses’) across Victoria operate out of buildings with a wide range of original functions, styles, configurations and ownership: from converted houses, public halls and former church or government buildings, to purpose built centres. Recent government policy has encouraged the development of community hubs where various services are co-located, and Neighbourhood Houses have been encouraged to be part of these hub arrangements. The first capital grants rounds to assist this process were opened in late 2005.

In response to concerns raised by a number of Neighbourhood Houses in hub arrangements, ANHLC produced Moving in Together – A Co-location Guide for Neighbourhood Houses and Learning Centres (ANHLC, 2008). The guide outlined the pros and cons of co-location based on real-life case studies, and provided questions for organisations to consider before moving into a hub type facility.

By 2010 ANHLC was still receiving reports from Neighbourhood Houses indicating a range of overall levels of satisfaction with hub arrangements and the processes used to establish the hubs, as well as impacts on the organisations and communities. At the same time further work was being done by the Department of Planning and Community Development (DPCD) to assist in hub establishment processes with guides that went beyond infrastructure planning.

In 2010 the Victorian Competition and Efficiency Commission (VCEC) released a final report on its Inquiry into Shared Facilities (VCEC, 2009). The report broadly supported the current policy direction while also highlighting issues that can have a negative impact on organisations entering into shared facility arrangements if not addressed in the establishment process.

A literature review revealed limited published research in the Australian context that might help ANHLC understand the diverse experiences of Neighbourhood Houses in hubs and shared facilities. Most of the research into Australian hubs presents case studies and/or good practice guides for the processes of establishment of hubs (VCEC, 2009; Lennie, 2007; Walsh, McGregor-Lowndes, & Newton, 2006; ANHLC, 2008; Standing Committee on Public Works, 2004). The most substantial evaluative Australian research located was an ‘Evaluation of the Multi-Tenant Service Centre (MTSC) Pilots Project’ reviewing 3 hubs in Queensland (Lennie, 2010). There is general consensus in this literature about factors that contribute to successful co-location outcomes, the challenges that organisations face and the potential benefits of co-location.

Some guides have been produced (DPCD, 2010). However, no substantial empirical evaluation of community hubs was identified, and therefore nothing relating to the Neighbourhood House sector experience. Consequently ANHLC decided to undertake this research to better understand what contributed to the differing outcomes for Neighbourhood Houses in hubs.

According to McShane (2006, Change and Change Management section, para. 1) ‘The co-location of community facilities and services is arguably the most far-reaching policy trend in current facility planning and management in Australia.’
The recent policy context driving the establishment of community hubs was well summarised in an unpublished work from S. Gordon, an abridged version of which is presented with permission as follows.

The Victorian Competition and Efficiency Commission’s (VCEC) report, Getting it Together: An Inquiry into the Sharing of Government and Community Facilities, found the move toward shared facilities is occurring because of the changing needs and priorities of communities. Population growth, an ageing population and other demographic changes are among factors causing a higher demand for facilities and services (VCEC, 2009, p. 54).

The decision to co-locate Neighbourhood Houses as part of the changing face of communities was established by two state government initiatives: Growing Victoria Together and A Fairer Victoria.

Growing Victoria Together created by the Bracks Government in 2001 provided a framework for dealing with issues believed to be important to Victorians including: accessible community services, building cohesive communities by supporting new community building initiatives and infrastructure, enhancing community participation and developing connections between local government and local community needs (State Government of Victoria, 2001, p. 10 & 22).

In 2005, the Brumby government expanded social policy further by creating A Fairer Victoria. This framework outlined four priority areas for the state, one being liveable communities, which emphasised ‘good local facilities and services, (the improvement of) physical and social infrastructure in areas of high need and high growth and more opportunities for community and civic activities, and for local decision making’ (State Government of Victoria, 2010, p. 70).

In supporting community infrastructure the policy looked at helping ‘local councils meet demand for community infrastructure’ (State Government of Victoria, 2010, p. 75) and providing funding to enable Neighbourhood Houses to upgrade, redevelop, co-locate; to provide information and communication technology and to purchase essential infrastructure’ (State Government of Victoria, cited in ANHLC, 2007, p. 3). This funding was provided through the Modernising Neighbourhood House Program (MNHP).

As well as the state government, local government – being the main source of land and infrastructure – has also encouraged Neighbourhood Houses to move into shared facilities. The VCEC inquiry found that ‘a number of local governments have policies that encourage sharing of facilities’ (2009, p. 29). According to the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV), ‘councils are committed to ensuring that facilities are managed in a way to maximise their value for the community and are used in an integrated fashion to improve wellbeing and connectedness’ (cited in VCEC, 2009, p. 42). As a result local councils are also ‘the main providers of community shared facilities’ (VCEC, 2009, p. 42). The VCEC inquiry showed ‘a clear majority of the reported council facilities were built to be shared’ (VCEC, 2009, p. 44).
2. Research

2.1 Purpose

The ANHLC research aimed to fill a gap in current knowledge about the experience of Neighbourhood Houses in community hubs. Specifically, ANHLC was interested in whether there were relationships between the variations in the establishment of community hubs and the varied outcomes for Neighbourhood Houses and their participants. By identifying factors that enhanced positive outcomes and those which created obstacles or led to negative outcomes, ANHLC hoped the findings would improve the experience of establishing or moving into a community hub, not only for Neighbourhood Houses but for other stakeholders and partners.

The design and analysis of the research were shaped by the community development principles that underpin the work of Neighbourhood Houses and ANHLC. These principles comprise community ownership and participation, empowerment, access and equity, lifelong learning, inclusion, networking, advocacy, self-help and social action.

2.2 Definitions

The definition of community hubs is central to this research. The VCEC inquiry identified Neighbourhood Houses as ‘shared facilities’ (VCEC, 2009, p. xxvi) however, a definition that entails co-location of these ‘shared facilities’ with other services is more consistent with the current policy direction. In defining hubs and shared services for the purpose of this research, it emerged that a number of different co-location models are being implemented, with potentially different outcomes. ANHLC consequently adopted the following hubs typology:

- A single multipurpose facility that accommodates a number of organisations or services together with the Neighbourhood House. It may or may not be a new building, e.g. a Neighbourhood House housed in the same building as council offices, libraries, maternal and child health services, or other not-for-profit organisations.

- A series of conjoined buildings where a Neighbourhood House is in a building physically connected to other buildings that have other services. It may or may not include shared functions such as reception or shared spaces such as meeting rooms or training rooms, e.g. an existing library and a community hall that have been joined together with new buildings to include a Neighbourhood House.

- A community precinct: more than two physically separate public facilities, community organisations and/or community services located on the same land parcel or in direct proximity. This may or may not include shared functions such as reception or shared spaces such as meeting rooms, training rooms, gardens, etc.

- Satellite model: Neighbourhood House sits physically separate from the hub, but is able to access and use hub facilities (e.g. meeting rooms, kitchen, gardens, etc) as an off-site partner, e.g. a Neighbourhood House located in a suburban house with access to and use of nearby hub in a partnership arrangement.
For the purposes of the research, respondents were advised not to include in the definition of a hub a standalone Neighbourhood House that allows another organisation or group to share part of the house either on a part-time or full-time basis.

2.3 Methodology

Two structured face-to-face interviews were conducted with Neighbourhood House representatives – one in a hub, one poised to move into a hub – and from this process, a survey instrument was developed. The survey combined multiple choice and open-ended questions to generate quantitative and qualitative data. Questions were designed to capture issues:

- Raised by Neighbourhood Houses
- Raised by the VCEC study
- Identified as considerations for co-location in the ANHLCs 'Moving in Together'
- That might impact on community development principles.

An online survey instrument was developed using SurveyMonkey and pre-tested with two organisations prior to being released. The nine survey topics reflect potential variables in the establishment of hubs:

- Hub details
- Establishment of the hub
- Design
- Participants
- Other organisations
- Management and administration
- Governance arrangements
- Costs
- Overall experience

Most surveys were self-administered, completed online by the survey respondents. In a few cases, representatives were interviewed by ANHLC staff or a Neighbourhood House Networker using the survey questions. Follow-up interviews were conducted by phone to assist where an online survey was commenced but not completed (two cases) and/or to assist with the interpretation of the data.
All Neighbourhood Houses identified as being in a community hub were invited to participate. Thirty (30) respondents completed the survey. The names of participating organisations were collected for the purposes of data validation.

The following limitations to the survey were identified:

- The survey assumed Neighbourhood Houses moved to a hub from an alternative site, which was not true for four respondents where the Neighbourhood House was first accommodated in a hub. In one case the hub was built around the existing Neighbourhood House. Therefore some questions were not relevant though the survey required a response.
- For Neighbourhood Houses in long-established hubs, some questions regarding before and after comparisons could not be answered meaningfully.
- For one respondent the hub was not yet operational and therefore some questions were not relevant though the survey required a response.
- In some cases, the respondent became involved with the responding organisation subsequent to the establishment of the hub or had limited knowledge of the processes surrounding its establishment.

In the above circumstances where the survey did not allow for an appropriate response to specific questions, the data from these respondents has been excluded.

The research did not set out to evaluate the level of shared activity or partnering on projects within the hubs, nor explore the existence or extent of efficiencies such as back office or administrative functions.

The research is limited to the views of individual Neighbourhood House respondents and does not consider the experiences of hub owners or other tenants.
3. Key Findings

3.1 Hub details

Of the 30 hubs represented in the survey, 50 per cent were located in metropolitan Melbourne (n=15), the remainder divided almost evenly between regional centres (n=8) and rural areas (n=7).

Nearly two-thirds of all hubs are single, multipurpose facilities, while 26.7 per cent are part of community precincts. There was one case where the Neighbourhood House is in a single multipurpose facility that is also part of a community precinct. Figure 1 shows the configuration of the hubs according to the definition outlined in section 3.2.

![Figure 1: Number of Neighbourhood Houses in each hub type](image)

Eighty per cent of Neighbourhood Houses in the survey are incorporated associations governed by voluntary committees of management (n=24). The remaining Houses are auspiced, 10 per cent by local council (n=3) and ten per cent by other organisations.

Only four hubs in this study were not owned by local council, and all four are community precincts.

Fourteen hubs (47% of the sample) were established prior to 2006, and 16 (53%) established from 2006. Precincts make up a significantly higher proportion of hubs established prior to 2006 than since: 43% of hubs established prior to 2006 are precincts compared with only 12.5% since 2006. It is unclear whether this reflects a narrowing of policy direction and funding since 2006 in favour of single multipurpose facilities.

3.2 Establishment of the hub

Eleven Neighbourhood Houses were housed in a converted house or flat prior to moving into a hub, and four were previously located in purpose built centres. Four began in a hub with remainder previously housed in a variety of buildings including halls and school buildings.

Seventeen hubs (57%) were initiated by local government, with the Neighbourhood House co-initiating 5 of these. The Neighbourhood House was involved in the initiation of the hub in nearly half (n=14) of the hubs surveyed, whereas the local community was involved in only six cases (20%).
The most common reasons given for moving to a hub were providing better outcomes for the participants through linked services: 18 organisations (60%) identified this as a reason with nine (30%) nominating it as the primary reason. Equally important was the need for more space, which 18 organisations identified with seven (23.3%) nominating it as the primary reason for the move. Opportunity for partnerships was the next most common reason, nominated by nearly half the respondents (n=14). Table 1 summarises the main reasons given for moving to a hub aggregated into three categories.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Reason to move</th>
<th>Importance 1</th>
<th>Importance 2</th>
<th>Importance 3</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
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<tr>
<td>Community benefit</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facility related</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compelled/no choice</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
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Significantly, Neighbourhood Houses reporting facility related issues as their primary reason for being part of a hub were 1.5 times more likely to report a neutral or negative experience of being in a hub compared to others in the sample.

Neighbourhood Houses that reported compulsion to move in to a hub as a reason were more than 2.5 times more likely to report neutral or negative experience of being in a hub compared to others in the sample.

Twenty-three Neighbourhood Houses (77% of the sample) were original tenants in the hubs, and only one of these reported not being included in the planning and design phase. However, seven of the 11 comments made in relation to this issue revealed dissatisfaction with the process—such as having specific design requirements ignored. Respondents reported ‘not being listened to’ in what they called a ‘council controlled process’. As one respondent said:

*Don’t think the council really got the nature of the work of Neighbourhood House.*

The majority of Neighbourhood Houses reported not having sufficient skills and knowledge to participate in the establishment processes for the hub. Ten out of the 25 for whom this question was relevant (40%) felt they had sufficient skills for this process, 11 felt that they partly had the skills (44%) and four believed they did not have adequate skills (16%).

Sixteen respondents added comments in relation to this question. A key theme to emerge in these comments concerns a power imbalance in the design negotiation phase. Five of the comments referred directly to an imbalance.

*If [I] had it all over again [I] would push [my] point more. They would put forward their point, council say yeah yeah we take your point, but then nothing would happen.*

*If [I] did it again [I] would go in differently. Be better at standing your ground on important issues, get a definite agreement in writing.*

Four comments referred to having to learn as the process went along.

*Without the expertise of one committee member, the House would have struggled. The process provided an opportunity for other House personnel to become upskilled.* [sic]
Just over half the 23 respondents (n=12) who were original tenants in the hub reported having no Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) among hub stakeholders regarding hub arrangements prior to the hub being built. Three respondents were unsure. Eight (34.7%) said they did have a MOU, though in one case it had never been completed.

Where MOUs do exist, the contents appear to be neither consistent nor comprehensive. Table 2 outlines areas reportedly covered in the total of eight MOUs.

Table 2: Areas covered in MOU regarding hub arrangements

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<th>Area covered in MOU</th>
<th>No. cases (total=8)</th>
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<tr>
<td>The roles of each stakeholder</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>The rights of each stakeholder</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The responsibilities of each stakeholder</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The expected outcomes from joining a hub</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>Allocation of costs</td>
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Respondents identified 90 organisations or services co-located with the Neighbourhood Houses: an average of three services per hub, with a maximum of five.

Formal children’s services (maternal and child health service, kindergarten, childcare) were the services most commonly located in hubs, with 33 of these services located in 30 hubs. Community organisations (e.g. libraries, toy libraries, information centre, senior citizens etc) were also commonplace, with 28 of these services located in 30 hubs. Other services found in the 30 hubs were welfare (nine services), health (eight), education (six), government (five). In only one case was a commercial service co-located in a hub.

More than half the hubs had not had an evaluation from the users’ perspective (53.3% or 16 out of 30 hubs). Only nine were confident such a review had occurred (30%). Five respondents were unsure.

In 70 per cent of cases, there was no evaluation of the hub from the tenants’ perspective (n=21). Only five respondents (16.7%) said such a review had taken place.

A significant majority of Neighbourhood Houses reported having a positive or highly positive relationship with the hub owner (77%, n=23). Four of these highlighted the value of communication in their comments.

Conversely, of the seven whose experience was less positive, three made comments about not being listened to. Four reported a neutral relationship, two negative and one very negative.

---

2. Note that more than one service of the same type could be co-located in a single hub, e.g. maternal and child health service plus kindergarten plus Neighbourhood House. The data do not allow an analysis of what percentage of hubs contain the different types of services.
3.3 Hub design

There are specific design features in the physical environment that optimise community development outcomes associated with Neighbourhood House operations. These include a welcoming and safe design, adequate space to run programs, after hours access, and communal space for visitors to relax and interact (see 4.2).

The survey found the rate of inclusion of key features in hub designs that optimise conditions for a Neighbourhood House is variable. While almost all reported having after hours access, only 60 per cent reported a welcoming and safe design—the same proportion that reported having a communal place for visitors to relax and talk. Over half said the hub provided a separate entrance for the Neighbourhood House, though less than half had space for staff to take time out (see Table 3).

Table 3: Inclusion of design features to enhance Neighbourhood House operations and community development outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Design feature</th>
<th>No. hubs with this feature</th>
<th>% of the total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>After hours’ access</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>96.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adequate space to run programs</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welcoming and safe design</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communal space for visitors to relax and talk</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separate entrance</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>56.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff room/space for staff to take time out</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority of Neighbourhood Houses gained space as a result of their relocation to the hub, with a corresponding increase in the number of activities and, to a lesser extent, an increased range of activities. In only one case was there a reduction in the range of activities (see Table 4).³

While generally positive about the increased space, respondents raised some concerns about the impact of changes on programs and participants (see also 4.4).

Yes [space has] improved, but have not met the needs of the [Neighbourhood House] adequately, i.e. toy library too small, no storage for NH or groups, A/H security issues, no lunch area/staffroom, no lockers. Community space OK but the need for communal spaces not understood.

The variety of programs we are able to offer has changed as there are no appropriate spaces for grass roots, hands on activities.

The house did not gain any additional room from the redevelopment. If anything it has put more pressure on our space and lack of space creates problems for all concerned.

³ Two organisation’s data were excluded as one had no comparative data due to passage of time and one is not yet using the facility.
Table 4: Availability of space and the impact on programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer options</th>
<th>Increased No. (%)</th>
<th>Stayed the same No. (%)</th>
<th>Decreased No. (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The space available to you to use for your activities has...</td>
<td>22 (78.6%)</td>
<td>6 (21.4%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The number of activities you provide has...</td>
<td>23 (82.1%)</td>
<td>5 (17.9%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The range of activities you provide has...</td>
<td>18 (64.3%)</td>
<td>9 (32.1%)</td>
<td>1 (3.6%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One organisation paid for the building cost of the additional space they obtained.

For the majority of Neighbourhood Houses the design, fit out and appearance of the hub was not fully consistent with their expectations based on the plans and planning process: 16 respondents said the completed hub was ‘partly’ consistent with their expectations (53.3%), nine said it was consistent with their expectations (30%), while one said it was not consistent and the remainder were unsure.

Sixteen respondents that had participated in the design and planning process said the completed hub was only partly consistent or not consistent with their expectations. Asked whether they had sufficient skills and knowledge to participate in the establishment processes, four (25%) said ‘no’, six 37.5% said ‘partly’ and six (37.5%) said ‘yes’. Five commented that there were issues with their involvement in the design consultation, and two were not tenants from the beginning of the hub.

Seven respondents that had participated in the design and planning process said the completed hub was consistent with their expectations. Asked about whether they had sufficient skills and knowledge to participate in the establishment processes, none responded ‘no’, three 43% responded ‘partly’ and six (57%) responded ‘yes’.

Where respondents felt consulted in the design, this was reflected in more positive attitudes towards the finished hub:

[We had] high involvement in design including choosing colours etc.

Consultation prior to any designing to ensure the end users have a practical working environment.

The most consistent theme emerging from comments relating to hub design was inappropriate design for the purpose and activities of the Neighbourhood House. Size, placement of particular areas, lack of storage and other physical limitations and their impact on programs were mentioned. Six respondents commented on lack of specific facilities, five on design problems and four in relation to the community feel.
Design run and controlled by council and architects who did not understand how a community facility flows or the importance of communal space. [Neighbourhood House] upstairs doesn't get street flow and council rules will not allow a sign to be out that reflects what a NH is. This greatly impacts on the house.

[The] previous committee fought to keep their own separate entrance, rather than shared entrance for all users. To start I thought that wasn't necessary, but now agree keeping our own identity is important.

People tend not to drop in to chat or for a cuppa.

Formal entrance/reception area is not conducive to the welcoming neighbourhood house environment.

One organisation noted that they can no longer sublet, which for many Neighbourhood Houses provides a valuable income stream.

3.4 Participants

The majority of Neighbourhood Houses (84%, n=21) experienced an increase in participants as a result of re-locating to the hub, whilst four reported no change. Increased participation was related to increased space: all four Neighbourhood Houses that experienced no increase in participation did not increase their available space as a result of moving to a hub. One respondent suggested, ‘participant numbers have increased but this is due to an increased public awareness of the centre not relocating to it.’

For those fourteen respondents able to quantify the increase, the range was from 40 to 700 additional participants with a median of 190 per week. The average increase was 218% on pre-hub figures. Pre-hub figures ranged from 10 to 800 with a median of 100.

Collectively, there was increased participation for all demographic groups, with a range of specific impacts in individual Neighbourhood Houses (Figure 2). Seven out of ten comments regarding hub participants referred to the positive impact of being in the hub, particularly the expanded demographic groups or increased number of participants they reach. One mentioned they had ‘moved neighbourhood’ attracting a ‘different demographic’.

There were 14 reports of new demographic groups accessing the Neighbourhood House who did not participate prior to relocation in the hub. The most common was primary school aged children (8 cases), followed by secondary school aged young people (13–18) and young people post school age (19–25). There were three cases of people with a high income being new to the Neighbourhood House since the move to the hub, one of people with a medium income and one of people on a low income.

4 Five Neighbourhood Houses were excluded from this dataset as they were either always in the hub or had not begun using the new shared facility.
There were two cases each in which Neighbourhood Houses reported a decrease in participation from one or more of the following demographic groups: men aged 45–64; people with a low income; people with low levels of formal education and training; socially isolated people or people at risk of social isolation. Decreased participation, where reported, was predominantly amongst demographic groups that experience disadvantage or reduced levels of participation in society.

Among the four Neighbourhood Houses reporting a reduction in participation from at least one demographic group, the results in one case reflects a major demographic shift towards children and away from most other demographics. In another case there is a reduction of people on low incomes, the unemployed and socially isolated, but an increase in people on medium incomes with high income participants participating for the first time.

**Figure 2: Demographic change in Neighbourhood House participants since relocation to hub**

- Children under school age (0–5)
- Primary school aged children (6–12)
- Secondary school aged children (13–18)
- Young people post-school age (19–25)
- Men aged 26–44
- Men aged 45–64
- Men aged 65+
- Women aged 26–44
- Women aged 45–64
- Women aged 65+
- People with a disability
- People with a low income
- People with a medium income
- People with a high income
- CALD communities
- Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people
- Newly arrived migrants
- Refugees
- People looking for employment
- People with low levels of education/training
- Socially isolated people or people at risk

Colors represent:
- Did not participate before the hub but do now
- Participate now in greater numbers
- No change/participate now as before
- Participate now in lesser numbers
- No longer participate
Three Neighbourhood Houses reported at least one demographic group no longer participating at all—children below school age 0–5, primary school aged children, and people with a disability—though this may be related to discontinued programs or activities.

Survey participants were asked what feedback they had received about how the Neighbourhood House is perceived in the community. Of the 26 Houses/Centre to whom the question applied, less than 40 per cent (n=10) reported being perceived as a community organisation. Five said they were perceived as a local council facility or service, a further two said they were perceived alternately as a community facility or council facility, and one as a children’s centre. Two reported loss of identity. Signage, or the need for it, was noted in three instances.

For Neighbourhood Houses, being perceived as council facilities could create expectations inconsistent with the level of resources available to the Neighbourhood Houses.

Many people believe that it is either fully government funded or run by the Council

We are seen as a Council facility. Expectation of volunteers from professionals visiting the Centre can be unrealistic.

One respondent linked the design, perception of the service and impact on participation:

[There’s] been a decrease in people with low self esteem, income, even general community who now think you have to be doing a course to come here. For those who have had a bad experience with education, the appearance/design is a deterrent...

Once we get people in the door we work really hard to connect and make them feel at home.

3.5 Other organisations

The majority of respondents (56.7%, n=17) made positive comments about how they ‘fit in’ with other tenants in the hub. Thirteen of these respondents indicated that the organisations work well together and in some cases add value to each other:

Apart from the Kindergarten we work really well with all other users, value adding to one another’s programs and services.

All get on but [there’s] not much link[age].

However, there are still issues for some, and not all organisations work well together. Seven respondents reported some kind of issue with other tenants and one reported being prevented by their agreement from delivering accredited training from their hub (they are co-located with an Registered Training Organisation).

The kindergarten and Neighbourhood House childcare in theory seem to fit together however in practice there is some resistance.

Four said none of the other tenants complimented the work of the Neighbourhood House and four reported that all tenants complimented their work. It is noteworthy that all eight Neighbourhood Houses in precincts reported complimentary relationships, despite the fact they are in different buildings.
Table 5 illustrates the compatibility of relationships between Neighbourhood Houses and other hub tenants, comparing the total number of organisations or services co-located with Neighbourhood Houses by type with the number of cases in which the organisation/service was reported as complimentary.

Table 5: Compatibility of relationships between Neighbourhood Houses and other hub tenants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service type</th>
<th>Total reported</th>
<th>Reported as complementary</th>
<th>% reported as complimentary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child focused</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>24.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>35.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welfare</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>44.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>62.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>60.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Looking in more detail at child focused services which were the most common co-located service type, out of 11 Neighbourhood Houses co-located with a kindergarten, only one described it as a complimentary service. None of the eight providers co-located with a childcare facility identified childcare as a complimentary partner. By contrast, Maternal and Child Health services were identified as complimentary to Neighbourhood Houses in 50 per cent of cases (n=7).

Two organisations identified toy libraries as a co-located service and both reported them as complimentary (100%). Also ranked favourably as ‘Housemates’ were community health services (71.4%), other welfare organisations (60%) and libraries (44%).

Generally relationships with other tenants were reported as being positive or highly positive (83% of cases, n=25), though some respondents pointed to less positive relations with specific tenants. Additional comments made by respondents identified power imbalances and issues over contested costs as negatives. One respondent pointed out that current Vocational Education and Training policy now encourages competition between providers making co-location with non Neighbourhood House providers challenging.
3.6 Management and administration

Neighbourhood Houses are fully or partly responsible for the day to day administration of the majority of hubs, as outlined in Table 7, which shows all parties responsible or partly responsible for the day to day administration of the hubs.

*Figure 3: Allocation of administrative responsibility for the hub either full or partial*

- Neighbourhood House: 17 (56.7%)
- Local Government: 8 (26.7%)
- Hub Committee: 3 (10%)
- Other tenant: 3 (10%)
- Contractor/external agency: 2 (6.7%)

* Total exceeds 100% as there are cases of shared responsibility.

Local Government has sole responsibility for day to day administration in five hubs, compared to 11 for Neighbourhood Houses. In one case a tenant has sole responsibility. Two of those administered solely by council staff also contain council run Neighbourhood Houses. In the remaining 13 hubs this responsibility is shared.

Site arrangements are inconsistent across the hubs, with the majority of Neighbourhood Houses having had no agreement in place prior to joining the hub, as illustrated in Table 6.

*Table 6: Arrangements for hub management and administration*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Administration and management arrangements</th>
<th>No. cases</th>
<th>% cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Covered by formal MOU/agreement after hub was operating</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Covered by formal MOU/agreement before hub began operating</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>23.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arrangements still unresolved</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Covered by informal agreement</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other arrangements</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For those eight who specified other arrangements, four were covered by lease agreements (initiated both before and after moving in), two were unsure, and two referred to arrangements changing over time, e.g.

*[We] morphed into the lead agency. [We are] not recognised formally by Council but I’m often contacted by Council staff regarding hub issues.*

Of the three cases still unresolved, two are longstanding hubs.

Only eight respondents reported that funds were available for site management. Neighbourhood Houses in three of those eight cases reported that they had shared responsibilities for day to day administration of the hub. Four were managed exclusively by local government and one by another tenant. There were no funds available for site management in only one case where local government had any responsibility for day to day management. By contrast there were no funds available for site management in ten cases where Neighbourhood Houses had sole responsibility.

Of the 25 Neighbourhood Houses that moved into a hub arrangement from a previous arrangement and were able to comment on the impact of the move on staff time, 21 reported an increased workload (84%). Comments generally noted that the increased demand led to an increase in staff workload and this was viewed as positive. However, one noted that the funding to the Neighbourhood House had not increased. A further comment quantified the additional workload:

*In (the) old building centre management accounted for 10% of time now it accounts for 50%.*

Of the 25 Neighbourhood Houses that moved into a hub arrangement from a previous arrangement and were able to comment on the impact of the move on volunteer time, 18 reported an increased workload (72%). The following statement is typical of comments on the issue:

*More involvement by committee, and other volunteers have more to do/more responsibility now.*

Reception arrangements varied with just over half of all Neighbourhood Houses having their own reception (56.7%, n=17) and seven providing reception for the whole centre. One commented on the location of reception as problematic, and two shared reception. One reported having no reception and another had concerns about the quality of reception provided to Neighbourhood House participants by another tenant.

None of those providing reception for the whole facility reported being funded for site management.

Of eleven comments regarding management and administration, eight referred to ongoing issues and five of those related to the role of local councils. Issues included time and cost impacts, delays with maintenance and inadequate council involvement. Two reported positive experiences.
3.7 Governance arrangements

Eighty per cent of Neighbourhood Houses (n=24) report that governance arrangements work reasonably or very well, despite the fact that a number of these have no formal governance arrangements.

This is a mutually beneficial partnership with a written agreement that has worked extremely well in the three years that I have been employed here.

Just over half the respondents reported a committee or other body exists to oversee the management of the hub (53.3%, n=16), though in two cases the Neighbourhood House is not represented on this body and only 13 of the 16 have representation from all tenants. A number of Neighbourhood Houses commented on regular meetings of the body. Two reported that a body had existed previously but no longer functions. One reported being requested to wind up the Neighbourhood House committee, with a representative to join the board of a newly formed organisation to oversee the hub.

Of the 16 governing bodies, eight are covered by written partnership agreements but are not legally formalised, four are legally constituted in some form (e.g. incorporated association, Section 86 local government committee), and four exist in informal arrangements (no written agreement).

In the four hubs where there is no independent Neighbourhood House committee of management, the Neighbourhood House is auspiced by Council or another organisation.

Three Neighbourhood Houses report being under pressure to amalgamate the Committee of Management into a single entity responsible for the hub.

Of the six Neighbourhood Houses who reported that governance arrangements are not working well, five either have no governing body or are not represented where one exists.

Again, the quality of the relationship with the local council emerges in comments as a significant factor in Neighbourhood Houses’ experience of hubs.

Current arrangements work OK because existing staff have created a consultative relationship and work together well to resolve any issues without having to escalate to Council.

Councils in particularly [sic.] have the rhetoric but when it comes down to it do not really understand how a house functions – it is an issue of expediency and power for them. IT IS IMPERATIVE that a state government body advocates for the rights of houses in this process otherwise they are totally overpowered [emphasis in original].
3.8 Costs

Of the 25 Neighbourhood Houses for whom the question of cost increases associated with the move to the hub was relevant, 80 per cent (n=20) reported an increase in costs, as outlined in Table 7.

Table 7: Impact of move to hub on costs to Neighbourhood House

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer options</th>
<th>Increased</th>
<th>Stayed the same</th>
<th>Decreased</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rent costs have...</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICT support costs have...</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleaning and maintenance costs have...</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Seven of the twenty (35%) reported the increases as being balanced by other offsets or being reasonable. Five (20%) reported significant increased costs in cleaning and five significant costs in utilities. One reported a 1200% increase in cleaning and utilities costs. Two Neighbourhood Houses reported having to pay rent where no rent was paid previously. ICT costs were also noted as increasing due to more or improved infrastructure.

Eleven Neighbourhood Houses quantified the increase in costs. Increases ranged from $1,500 to $20,000 with a median increase of $3,500 per annum. Three Neighbourhood Houses reported cost increases between $10,000 and $20,000. Of the nine respondents who quantified the overall cost increase, only two reported that costs were shared by all tenants, and none had a documented agreement about costs prior to the hub being established.

The running costs of the thirty hubs were shared by tenants in 40 per cent of cases (n=12), with ‘some’ running costs shared by tenants in 30 per cent of cases (n=9). Running costs were reportedly not shared in 26.7% of cases (n=8), with one Neighbourhood House being unsure as to how costs were allocated. Of the eight hubs where running costs were not shared, five Neighbourhood Houses reported paying costs listed at Table 7.
3.9 Overall experience

Respondents were asked open-ended questions to nominate the greatest benefit and the greatest challenge for the Neighbourhood House in being part of a hub arrangement, and to rank their overall experience of ‘the move to the hub’, both from the Neighbourhood House’s perspective and from the community’s perspective.

A number of respondents reported multiple ‘greatest benefits’ of being in a hub arrangement, with partnership opportunities being the most common for 33 per cent (n=10). Responses to this question are summarised in Table 8.

Table 8: Greatest benefit for the Neighbourhood House in being part of hub

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Greatest benefit</th>
<th>No. of respondents*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities for partnerships and networking</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved facilities</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved access to services</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional resources</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability of other personnel</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved location and profile</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased provision</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity to cross promote</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased traffic</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reaching a broader demographic</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security of tenure</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity to generate income</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved relations with Local Government</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Greater than the sample size reflecting multiple responses
There was wide variation in the types of challenges nominated by Neighbourhood Houses in a hub arrangement, as illustrated in Table 9. Negotiating with Councils was the most commonly identified challenge by 13 per cent of Neighbourhood Houses (n=4).

Table 9: Greatest challenge for the Neighbourhood House in being part of hub

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Greatest challenge</th>
<th>No. of respondents*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Council negotiation</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining appropriate atmosphere</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining core business</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staffing</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration and maintenance</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing facilities</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate space</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost allocation</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site development constraints</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of identity</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promoting hub</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equity</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personalities</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governance</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding needs</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No street front</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining mutual benefit</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Greater than the sample size reflecting multiple responses
Although the question of overall experience assumed a move to the hub, three organisations that had not moved nonetheless ranked their experience. Total responses are summarised in Figure 4.5

![Figure 4: Overall experience of move to or being in a hub](image)

For the majority of respondents the experience of moving to, or being part of a hub arrangement was considered positive from both a Neighbourhood House perspective and a community perspective. From the Neighbourhood House perspective, 71 per cent (n=20) considered the move either positive or highly positive. From the community’s perspective, 85.7% (n=24) consider the move either positive or highly positive.

Positive experience because more people utilising Neighbourhood House activities, and there are also other services available for them at the Hub. This is a happy, vibrant place that we and the community like and enjoy working from.

Everyone appreciates the increased space and parking availability. The Hub arrangement works well as there are no other ‘full-time’ tenants here. It is important for everyone to change some of their ideas to make a hub work really well.

The hub is not yet operational but partnership to design and create the Hub has been a good and positive experience.

More easily accessible. Far greater range of courses. Hire facilities increased.

---

5 Two organisations indicated this question was not applicable to them, therefore the total n=28.
Seven Neighbourhood Houses with a positive or highly positive experience qualified their responses in terms of concerns about the changes in the profile of participants now accessing the House, loss of independence, need for increased funding for coordination hours, and need to negotiate use of shared areas.

*On the one hand we have increased the services to our community but I would say we are servicing a different group in the community in different ways to the previous community centre. You can’t compare the two services.*

*We need funding for far more coordination hours due to increase in activities since moving to the hub.*

Several made recommendations based on their experience.

Open communication between the various decision makers needs to be carefully facilitated from the very beginning of any relocation.

Best practice ideas for future. 1. Facilitator for hubs planning committee be independent and familiar with community sector, understand how [Neighbourhood Houses] work. 2. MOU developed before, clarity regarding rules. 3. Funding for meeting attendance. 4. Advocate from peak body present during planning and negotiation with architect and council. 5. Sufficient time between decisions to consult with committee and other professionals. 6. NH at table on planning and design, at the beginning.

It is worth noting in relation to Neighbourhood Houses’ positive experience of hubs:

- 100% (n=8) of respondents in precincts reported the experience as being positive or highly positive from the Neighbourhood House’s perspective, compared with 58% (n=11) in single multipurpose facilities
- 100% (n=5) of respondents in metropolitan precincts reported the experience as being positive or highly positive, compared with 33% (n=3) of respondents in single multipurpose facilities in metropolitan Melbourne.

There is no one factor common to the 21.4 per cent (n=6) that reported a negative experience of the move to a hub from the Neighbourhood House perspective. However, some patterns emerge in the data among this group. Neighbourhood Houses that have an overall negative experience of moving to a hub are all:

- Part of a single multipurpose facility
- Incorporated associations with their own Committee of Management
- In hubs owned by local government, though in different LGAs.

Those with an overall negative experience of the move to a hub from the Neighbourhood House perspective were:

- Nearly three times more likely to report being pressured by Council to move to a hub
- Nearly three times more likely not to be represented on the hub governing body
- Five times more likely to be under pressure to amalgamate the Neighbourhood House committee of management into a single entity governing the hub
- More than twice as likely to be in a hub governed by a legally constituted body
• More than four times less likely to report a positive or highly positive relationship with the hub owner

• More than three times less likely to suggest the hub has a welcoming and safe design

• Nearly three times more likely to have experienced cost increases of $10,000 or greater as a result of moving to the hub.

Three out of four Neighbourhood Houses who reported no complimentary relationships with other tenant organisations were in the group who reported an overall negative experience of the move to a hub, as were all the respondents who reported a negative relationship with the hub owner, and all those under pressure to amalgamate the Committee of Management into a single entity responsible for the hub.

Comments from those Neighbourhood Houses with a negative experience of the move to a hub include:

_It is hard to establish a community feel when half the clients using the centre have no connection to the Neighbourhood House._

_The managements structures and arrangements should have been discussed prior to even looking at plans. We did not fully understand that the expectation was for us to windup and join a newly formed organisation. Some information was a bit vague, we now feel pressured, with some suggestions that we are holding up the whole process of a integrated model because we have not wound up. At times it has been VERY uncomfortable for staff to work within this type of environment._

_It can be a harrowing process and if I had to do it over again I probably would not have bothered._

The final question of the survey asked respondents: ‘Is there anything else we should have asked you about but didn’t?’ Responses included:

_How our Community Hub will be affected by the competition of the new ‘Community Hubs’ being erected by Local Government._

_There needs to be a set of procedures developed that give NHs the know-how and the pitfalls. Above all NHs need to maintain their identity and purpose. The Community Development framework that we operate under does not always marry well with the top down service provision models used by others._

_Information about use of the Hub/House by other agencies/community groups – e.g. what did they do for meetings/activities before the Hub was built? What ‘gaps’ has the Hub filled for the community? _

_How will you stay viable if you move to a hub? Is there a business plan for the hub for economic viability? _

One respondent referred to a document they had prepared that will be referred to in the following section.

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6  This survey item recommended by Steve Bowman in his Conscious Governance program.
4. Discussion

4.1 Establishment
The State Government’s policy and funding focus on community hubs from about 2005–06 appears to have affected the configuration of hubs developed subsequently. All precincts except one were established prior to 2005. Since then, single multipurpose facilities and to a lesser extent conjoined buildings have predominated.

This is significant because all Neighbourhood Houses in precincts (100%) reported that the overall experience was positive or highly positive from a Neighbourhood House perspective. This contrasts with 64.7 per cent of Neighbourhood Houses in single multipurpose facilities.

When the four questions with positive to negative scales that were asked are considered, 7 out of 8 (87.5%) of those in precincts had a positive response in each question compared to 9 of the 19 (47.3%) in single multipurpose facilities. When negative impacts on community development and other areas were considered—such as increased workload with no additional funding, unevenly shared costs, critical design issues, inadequate consultation, impact on disadvantaged group participation—six of the eight precincts had did not experience negative impacts compared to only one of the 19 single multipurpose facilities.

Based on the findings of this research, precincts are more likely to deliver positive outcomes for Neighbourhood Houses and the community than single multipurpose buildings. It is not possible to draw a meaningful conclusion regarding conjoined buildings or satellite models due to low numbers in the sample.

The data was inconclusive with regard to the significance of who initiates the hub in terms of overall outcomes. Local government initiated more hubs than Neighbourhood Houses. According to McShane (2006 Change and Change Management section, para. 1),

In proclaiming that the era of the single use facility is over, local authorities advance persuasive arguments for shared occupancy. These arguments include increased ability to leverage capital works funding through sale of redundant assets, operational and cost efficiencies, peer support of staff, and (more speculatively) the ‘linking’ social capital created through shared-use facilities. However, relatively limited attention to holistic management models and new service capacities arising from co-location suggests that economic efficiency is a dominant policy objective.

The research provides some evidence to support McShane’s contention, given the relative lack of evaluation of hubs, together with shortcomings in the governance, administration and partnering arrangements. Considered together, these findings suggest economic considerations may be a primary driver of hub establishment.

However, there was a clear correlation between the Neighbourhood House’s motivation for being in a hub and the satisfaction level of the Neighbourhood House once in the hub. A lack of space and infrastructure concerns or being compelled to move by either local government or another party led to less satisfactory outcomes. Conversely, Neighbourhood Houses motivated by community need experienced better levels of satisfaction.
Documented agreements about the arrangements, processes and outcomes for the parties prior to the establishment of the hub are not commonplace and, where they do exist, not comprehensive. Critical areas such as cost sharing were not agreed in the majority of cases.

This situation may have been influenced by the lack of all the skills and experience required by Neighbourhood Houses to successfully negotiate and manage the process reported by a majority of respondents. This lack of expertise was noted by Lennie (2010, p. 22 & 24) as a challenge in her evaluation of ‘Multi-Tenant Service Centres’ in Queensland.

Given the limited resources of most Neighbourhood Houses, purchasing the expertise in planning and negotiation that is readily available to local government and other parties is not a viable option, although there is need for these skills to be available to all parties to ensure a fair and informed process that delivers positive outcomes for all stakeholders.

Neighbourhood Houses not being listened to by local government and their contractors was a recurring theme in the research. This resulted in inappropriate design outcomes in some cases including non-compliance with children’s services regulations as well as non-regulatory issues that impede the work of the Neighbourhood Houses. These problems appear more likely to occur when the hub planning is driven mainly by infrastructure requirements from local government and the Neighbourhood House, rather than an identified community need or desired outcome for communities. Establishing a clear vision for the hub is identified as a factor for success (VCEC, 2009, p. 79; Third Sector New England, 2002, p. 6) and problems can arise when ‘policy objectives are vague or there are too many goals to be reached in a short time’ (Fine, Pancharatnam, & Thomson, 2000, p. 40).

There is an inherent and inevitable power imbalance between the hub owner and Neighbourhood Houses that must be recognised and mitigated against to improve outcomes. This imbalance led to less than positive relationships between Neighbourhood Houses and the hub owner in a number of cases. Both the Standing Committee on Public Works (2004, p. 68) and VCEC (2009, p. 177) acknowledge the need for ‘Ensuring equality and equity in stakeholder participation’ for successful shared facilities. The VCEC (2009, p. 99) also quotes the Municipal Association of Victoria’s submission to their inquiry:

Since shared facilities usually have one owner and many users, clear decision-making processes also need to be established to ensure fairness and incorporation of all relevant stakeholder interests.

Lennie (2010, p. 33) found that the process should be driven by community sector tenants rather than government departments.

This research concurs with the VCEC conclusion that there is inadequate evaluation of hubs (VCEC, 2009, p. 34). This is true both from the communities’ and particularly from the tenants’ perspectives. If hubs are established to achieve goals in addition to meeting an infrastructure need, then evaluation against all goals is required to determine the effectiveness of the hub as a strategy to meet those goals. The credibility of claims that a hub was established to benefit the community is undermined by the absence of evaluation.
4.2 Design

A number of design issues were identified in the ANHLC research. Of particular concern was where features critical to the operation and community development outcomes of Neighbourhood Houses were overlooked in or excluded from the design.

Neighbourhood House community development practice recognises communities are strengthened through people forming networks within their community. Neighbourhood Houses provide opportunities for a broad cross section of society to do this. Central to this work is creating the spaces where people can meet with others informally such as over food around a communal table. The VCEC acknowledges the value of this function that can occur in shared facilities (2009, p. 60). This kind of social capital building requires the inclusion of informal spaces as well as training or activity spaces in hubs. For those who are vulnerable, and therefore arguably most in need of access to Neighbourhood Houses, there is a need for informal and welcoming design, particularly entry points.

The benefits of comfortable, informal, non-threatening and universally accessible hub design are noted in the literature (Soriano, Clarke, & Wise, 2008, p. 43; Rosen, 2011, p. 16). The Promising Practice Profiles (PPP) Final Report included the following recommendation from programs in the national Stronger Families and Communities Strategy (SFCS):

*Providing a welcoming space and things that clients value—such as a comfortable couch, tea and coffee facilities, a welcoming presence (smiling face), and a familiar and consistent presence (the same worker fronting the service)—does not require a great deal of effort or resources.* (Soriano, Clarke, & Wise, 2008, p. 47)

The absence of such spaces and the unwelcoming entries reported in some hubs create additional challenges for Neighbourhood House staff and participants.

Whilst Neighbourhood Houses report increased or improved space for activities, the lack of spaces of the type noted above is of concern, as is the lack of space for staff to eat or take time out. The need for adequate storage, a problem identified by four respondents, was also noted in the VCEC enquiry into shared facilities (VCEC, 2009, p. 138).

Welcoming entry points, community and outdoor space are among the best practice principles for integrated children’s services (Centre for Community Child Health, 2008, p. 31).

The finding that most Neighbourhood Houses felt the design and fit out was not fully consistent with their expectations appears to relate to their lack of experience, skills or knowledge noted above and/or not being listened to.

There is arguably a need for adequately skilled and independent professionals to provide assistance with interpreting plans and advising architects on the design needs of Neighbourhood Houses. In addition, a transparent and genuine process that ensures needs of all parties are understood, properly considered and effectively communicated throughout the process is required. It is particularly important that needs which may not be able to be accommodated due to budget or other constraints are identified and communicated at the earliest opportunity. This appears not to have happened in some cases.
4.3 Participants

Perhaps not surprisingly given the overall increase in participant numbers, Neighbourhood Houses report an increase in the participation of most demographic groups as a result of moving to a hub. These increases are significant and broadly indicate the value to the community of hub arrangements.

Of concern, however, is the finding in a small number of cases of a reduction in participation from people experiencing disadvantage i.e. those for whom the Neighbourhood House program is specifically intended. In the two hubs where the impact on these groups was greatest, they also reported a lack of welcoming design.

To ensure that vulnerable people continue to feel able to access the Neighbourhood House, the importance of both design and the community engagement processes that underpin a new hub development must be paramount. Research from the UK as quoted by the Centre for Community Child Health in their Policy Brief on Engaging Marginalised and Vulnerable Families shows

> Vulnerable families may also be deterred from using services if they perceive a critical mass of more affluent, assertive and confident parents to be dominating the use of services (Anning et al., 2007; National Evaluation of Sure Start Research Team, 2005; Tunstill et al., 2005).

Where a hub is created with the intention of meeting an identified community need, rather than just an infrastructure need, there may be less risk of this alienation occurring if the design and processes are consistent with the intent. This view is supported by the VCEC (2009, p. 82).

The VCEC inquiry also noted that 'when communities have a substantial involvement in the development, operation and use of a shared facility this is likely to be a good indicator, that enhanced social connectedness is a likely outcome' (VCEC, 2009, p. 60) and '...if government is to be involved in sharing arrangements it needs to target its action to...focus on those areas in which the actual demand for shared facilities is strong' (2009, p. 57).

The ANHLC research also raises concerns about the potential for Neighbourhood Houses to be mistaken as Council services or a limited service (e.g. education or children) and to lose their identity in hubs. Based on these findings, more consideration needs to be given to the presentation and marketing, including signage, of the hub and its tenants. It is important that Neighbourhood Houses and other tenants are able to maintain their identity, form relationships with their participants and value the volunteer community management contribution.

McShane (2006, Change and Change Management section, para. 2) points out that:

> User group 'needs' may extend beyond generic service provision to place-making desires, through display of club insignia or honour boards. These desires may conflict with the wishes of councils to break with earlier, more proprietorial attitudes to facilities.

The research findings support the views of Rosen, (2011, p. 15) that 'a single branding or name may undermine the identity of individual service providers' and 'branding with a specific use may discourage people from using ancillary services not covered by that brand as they may not identify with that particular use or activity.'
Where identity is lost or mistaken, there is the risk of changed expectations that are not appropriate and/or cannot be met. There are examples where Neighbourhood House volunteers are assumed to be council staff by community members, with expectations that are not able to be met. The overall look and feel of the building can contribute to this expectation.

This finding is consistent with a report analysing OH&S site visits at 124 Neighbourhood Houses conducted by independent OH&S consultants as part of a Worksafe funded project (Beale, 2010). This report identified hazards to Neighbourhood House staff increase in community hubs as a result of adverse behaviour from people who expect the Neighbourhood/community House staff to respond as though they are actually employees of the various agencies or government departments concerned. The report notes several verbal reports of serious incidents directly resulting in fear and adverse stress impact (Beale, 2010, p. 5).

While a hub is often conceptualised as a one-stop shop or as a primary entity in itself, in reality community members will attend for the specific service provided by one or more tenant organisations. Just as a shopping centre will prominently promote the shops within it, hubs ideally would do the same. This diversity can be seen as a strength and each service promoted as its own entity.

Neighbourhood Houses also must consider the impact on traditional participants where there is a change of locality to move to a hub. This has an impact not only on the Neighbourhood House but also on the community that has lost its service. McShane (2006, Change and Change Management section, para. 3) notes that ‘there is little attempt to assess whether the loss to neighbourhoods of the re-scaling and re-location... outweighs the benefits’ adding that ‘Issues of change and loss lie at the heart of regeneration or co-location projects’.
4.4 Other organisations

The research revealed that fit and complementarity between hub tenants is not self-evident. Most noteworthy is the relationship between children’s services and Neighbourhood Houses: while it is assumed that Neighbourhood Houses and children’s services are a good fit, kindergartens and childcare services were generally not seen as complimentary by Neighbourhood Houses.

Much of the existing literature refers to the desirability of sympathetic values and vision among tenants (VCEC, 2009, pp. 78–79; Lennie, 2010, p. 43; Fine, Pancharatnam, & Thomson, 2000 p. 40). This requires time to build understanding and trust. In one hub the informality was reported as being interpreted as a lack of professionalism suggesting value differences rather than alignment.

More consideration may need to be given to the purpose and function of other organisations, e.g. client services such as childcare and kindergarten versus participatory activities such as playgroups, maternal and child health and toy libraries, rather than simply their target demographic. Likewise there are potential problems with libraries as quiet places and Neighbourhood Houses that encourage activity that can be noisy though this can be addressed through hub design.

In addition, the evidence from the OH&S reports outlined above suggests the co-location of some agencies can create OH&S hazards for Neighbourhood Houses.

The research also raises questions about the potential impact of co-location partners on the Neighbourhood Houses’ conceptualisation and practice of their community development function. The predominance of welfare and health organisations reported as complimentary raises questions about whether some Neighbourhood Houses prioritise supporting the ‘clients’ of other services rather than the whole community. While this type of activity is clearly important, the lower reporting of complimentary relationships with other community organisations may mean broader developmental community level strategies may be subjugated in the process.
4.5 Management and administration

Neighbourhood Houses take on substantial roles in the administration of the majority of hubs. With few exceptions, this occurs alongside an increased workload, with no additional resources and sometimes in the initial or ongoing absence of formal site agreements. The extent to which administrative functions impact on their capacity for community development and other work is unclear.

Site management funds were only available to one of the 11 hubs for which Neighbourhood Houses have sole responsibility for the administration of the hub. This contrasts with the hubs where local government has sole responsibility, where in all but one case funds are made available for administration.

This raises questions about how the work of Neighbourhood Houses is valued and how hubs are funded. There may be good reasons for Neighbourhood Houses to take on administrative functions. However, the VCEC report (2009, p. 65) recognises that there can be costs associated with managing a hub and tasks may ‘divert attention from their [the organisation’s] core responsibilities’ potentially resulting in a negative cost-benefit outcome. One respondent reported a fivefold increase in time spent administering the hub compared to their previous site.

The VCEC defined cost shifting as ‘when the actions of one group result in another group being obligated to meet unexpected costs, without these costs being identified and agreed in the planning process’. Whilst the commission was referring to the shifting of costs from one level of government to the other, this research suggests that cost shifting may be occurring between local government and Neighbourhood Houses. This tendency to cost shifting is inevitable where funding for the ongoing management and governance of hubs is not available, even though such funding is identified as a ‘key success factor’ (VCEC, 2009, p. 110).

The other gap in funding occurs in the area of core operating costs. The increased workload associated with increased patronage and other responsibilities reported in the substantial majority of cases suggests there is a case for core funding increases for Neighbourhood Houses moving into hubs.

The OH&S report by Beale raises concerns about ‘the lack of full time coordinator funding, along with a lack of adequate assistant funded hours’ as the ‘major contributing factor for stress, burnout and fatigue’ (Beale, 2010, p. 4). The report makes particular reference to Neighbourhood Houses roles as lead tenant in community hubs whilst under-resourced, and quotes one consultant’s report:

"This issue was identified at the visit as a result of the expectation of performing a Centre management function...that would require the commitment of a full-time staff member; however [the coordinator] is currently employed part-time. The increased workload was another factor in creating workplace stress as was the fact that staff are experiencing Work Alone/or isolation issues."
The consultant in this case recommended:

*Consider a review at Committee level regarding the role of a Centre Manager as this facility should not be operated unless there is a paid staff member present at all times who is adequately trained in all procedures including emergency management to cover the entire centre operations (Beale, 2010, p. 5).*

The ANHLC research supports the findings of the OH&S report and highlights the importance of the VCEC’s view that whole of life funding for hubs, including ongoing administration, is an important consideration that should be included in initial application and funding process (VCEC, 2009, p. 166).

The increased workload reported by 87 per cent of Neighbourhood Houses, whether related to increased demand or additional roles undertaken, suggests there is a need to consider the level of Neighbourhood House coordination funding given the workload impacts.

The design of administrative arrangements may also require further attention to ensure that Neighbourhood House capacity and resources are enhanced rather than diminished. Fine et al. (2005, p. 41) comment:

*The importance of developing administrative arrangements to support the integrative initiatives between services at the local level cannot be overestimated. Administrative arrangements effectively make or break the integrated approach.*

### 4.6 Governance

The research suggests that in the majority of cases governance of hubs is working well for the Neighbourhood Houses.

That said, some issues of concern arise in the data: lack of Neighbourhood House representation on some governing bodies; risks where arrangements are absent or informal and based on current relationships; and pressure to wind up the Neighbourhood House and create a single entity responsible for the hub.

There was a direct correlation between Neighbourhood Houses reporting hub arrangements were not working well and their lack of representation on the governing body—or more commonly, the absence of any governing body.

The research also revealed some risk to a significant number of Neighbourhood Houses and other parties where no clear governing structure for the hub is in place. This risk increases if there is no clear agreement. In the absence of such governance structures and agreements, or where arrangements are not formalised, Neighbourhood Houses and other tenants may be disadvantaged by changes in personnel or policy from hub owners or other key players with no agreement to have recourse to. The same is true where Neighbourhood Houses do not have representation on governing bodies.

The research supports the views and findings of others (VCEC, 2009; DPCD, 2010; Walsh, McGregor-Lowndes, & Newton, 2006; Lennie, 2007) as to the importance of effective, well documented and clearly defined governance arrangements which provide for representation of all stakeholders. It also supports the value of governance structures ‘designed to equalise power so that decision making appropriately reflects all stakeholder groups and so that all are equally accountable’ (Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA, 2008, p. 9).
The pressure to dissolve committees of management in order to create a single legal entity for the hub in a number of cases:

- Undermines one of the documented potential benefits of hubs. The VCEC (2009, p. 60) identifies community governance opportunities as a potential benefit of shared facilities. Community governance fosters leadership and other skills development (VCEC, 2009, p. 60; McShane, 2006, From Government to Governance section, para. 3). Winding up Neighbourhood Houses and their committees reduces the number of opportunities for community participation in governance

- Undermines a number of Neighbourhood House principles. Community governance is cornerstone of the Neighbourhood House movement and is recognised in the Guidelines to the Neighbourhood House Coordination Program (NHCP) (DPCD, 2009, p. 24). It is one of the ways that the Neighbourhood House principles of community ownership, community participation, empowerment and lifelong learning are realised

- Compromises the Neighbourhood House committee’s legal responsibilities. Committee members governing Incorporated Associations have a legal obligation to act in the interests of their organisation at all times and to act to advance the purpose of the organisation. Neighbourhood House committees would need to satisfy both of these criteria in deciding to wind up the organisation and to have a representative on a new governing body whose role is to advance the purposes of the hub instead. This representative would not be legally allowed to act in the interest of the activities formerly covered by the Neighbourhood House but is obliged to act in the interests of the new hub governing body even if it is against the interests of the former Neighbourhood House activities. (see http://www.pilch.org.au/Assets/Files/DutiesGuide_April11_v1.2.pdf)

- Compromises the Neighbourhood House committee’s contractual responsibilities. The NHCP contract requires organisations to meet eligibility requirements that may not be deemed to be in the best interest of a hub governing body. These include having a documented agreement between the Neighbourhood House and the auspicing structure, a committee with community representation responsible for overseeing the business functions of the Neighbourhood House and notification for approval with the department responsible for the NHCP (DPCD, 2009, pp. 9–10)

- Undermines the Neighbourhood Houses identity with the associated negative impacts as discussed above.
The concern about being pressured was clearly expressed by one respondent:

*We feel that the Neighbourhood House was good enough to manage themselves for years, now we relocate to new premises and are being pressured to join a new organisation that has on its Board staff and members from other organisation who have different philosophies to the Neighbourhood House and Community Development.*

Fine, Pancharatnam and Thomson (2000, p. 6) put the concern this way:

*‘The one that integrates will call the tune’. This alerts us to the potential for conflict involved in moves towards integration. Conflict is particularly likely to be evident in any arrangement involving proposals for budget-holding and/or transfer of authority.*

This research supports this notion as the expected transfer of authority is a source of conflict in all cases where the expectation occurs.

The literature review conducted for this research found no evidence that supports replacing the governance structures of multiple organisations with a single facility-based governance body as an inherently more beneficial model. It did however find that respectful and equal engagement of stakeholders is critical to success (VCEC, 2009, p. 177; Lennie, J, 2010, p. 49; Lennie, 2007, p. 17).
4.7 Cost

Neighbourhood Houses moving into hubs are often incurring significant and unanticipated cost increases though cost impacts vary significantly amongst respondents. Some of these cost increases are associated with the terms of the tenancy in the hub, e.g. rent and utilities, and some with increased usage due to increased participation levels, e.g. ICT costs. This raises the question as to how clearly ongoing running costs were identified in the planning and development stages.

Of particular significance is the absence of documented agreements about costs prior to entering into co-location in the majority of hubs covered in the research sample.

The strong correlation between quantified, significant cost increases and costs not being shared by all tenants is consistent with the VCEC’s observation that costs can increase and fall disproportionately on some stakeholders (2009, p. 62).

When contrasted with Neighbourhood Houses that have had no cost increases, (or perhaps an overall cost reduction in one case) it raises the issue of the inconsistency of cost recovery policies in hubs.

This research substantiates the VCEC’s recognition of the potential for cost increases (2009, p. 64) and the inconsistencies in the cost recovery approaches in shared facilities (2009, pp. 189–193).

The VCEC outlines conditions where full cost recovery may not be appropriate according to the Department of Treasury and Finance (2009, p. 192) and it appears many hub owners apply a policy of limited cost recovery. Where full cost recovery policies are in place, it could be argued that cost savings achieved by hub owners through infrastructure rationalisation are sometimes made at the expense of hub tenants, including Neighbourhood Houses, where they experience cost increases.

The research points to the need for Neighbourhood Houses to fully understand the cost implications when considering co-location in a hub and the need to document cost sharing arrangements in agreements. These include tenancy related costs and costs associated with increased patronage. These should be considered together with impacts on income generation. The fact that this does not appear to have happened suggests some external expertise may be of assistance.

The research also challenges assumed reductions in operating cost as an anticipated benefit cited in some of the literature (Lennie.J, 2010, p. 27; NCOSS, 2007, p. 14; Standing Committee on Public Works, 2004, pp. 4–5) . In some cases this reduction is predicated on the savings from integrated and shared systems such as back office functions. While this research did not specifically investigate the extent to which shared functions were taking place, other than with reception and administration, the only saving identified was in ICT support at one hub. In both reception and administration the increased workload for Neighbourhood Houses suggests an additional cost increase, at least in terms of opportunity costs, rather than a saving.
The degree of integration that hub tenants seek to achieve may be a key determinant of the extent of cost savings through shared functions. However this may at times conflict with some of the community development practices of Neighbourhood Houses. An example may be where a function could be provided to all hub tenants by a larger tenant e.g. bookkeeping or cleaning. While there may be a saving to a Neighbourhood House, this may also close a pathway into a first job for someone who is discriminated against in the employment market if the tenant providing the service does not share the same philosophies and approaches to employment. Conversely, the Neighbourhood House may provide the service to other tenants and create more viable positions.

4.8 Overall experience

Collectively the respondents identified many of the expected benefits of co-location documented in the literature (Lennie.J, 2010, p. 5; Standing Committee on Public Works, 2004, pp. 4–9; VCEC, 2009, pp. 58–62; Centre for Community Child Health, 2008, p. 25). The clear exception is the area of cost savings as discussed at 4.7.

The research also identified challenges relating to ongoing operations, beyond the establishment of the hub. These largely indicate the individual circumstances of the respondents. Whilst the dearth of evaluative research on the operation of hubs means there is little to compare these finding to, many of the challenges are generally consistent with the types of challenges identified by the Standing Committee on Public Works (2004, pp. 10–11).

Despite ongoing challenges in some cases, 71 per cent found the overall experience positive or highly positive.

Comparing the data for the 20 per cent who report a negative experience of being in a hub with the whole sample, a number of themes emerge.

Some findings suggest that a misunderstanding by some LGAs about the purpose and practice of Neighbourhood Houses may contribute to their negative experience. Potential indicators of this include the over-representation of those for whom key design features were absent, lack of funding for reception arrangements, and the compulsion to amalgamate the Committees of Management into a single entity responsible for the hub. A fuller understanding and appreciation of these issues by local government as discussed above may improve outcomes for Neighbourhood Houses and the community.

There is an apparent lack of equality in the partnership arrangements for this group. This is evidenced by the compulsion to join the hub, pressure to amalgamate, unresolved issues with councils and the lack of representation on governing bodies.

The reportedly poor relationships, particularly with the hub owner, which in all cases is local government, appears to be a consistent factor and may be related to the issues of equality noted above. The high incidence of Neighbourhood Houses reporting only partly having the skills and knowledge required to participate in the establishment processes for the hub may exacerbate or be exacerbated by the apparent inequity in the relationship.
Outcomes for communities seem to be positive based on this research. Only two Neighbourhood Houses reported a negative experience for the community. In the two instances where communities were considered to have had a negative overall experience the Neighbourhood House also reported their experience as negative. By contrast where the Neighbourhood House reported a negative experience, half considered the community to have had a positive or highly positive experience.

The positive community outcomes are consistent with the expected benefits of co-location in the literature regarding improved services and access to them, increased participation and strengthening of communities (Lennie, 2010, p. 5; Standing Committee on Public Works, 2004, pp. 4–9; VCEC, 2009, pp. 58–62).

4.9 Other impacts

Neighbourhood Houses have often hired out meeting space to other organisations as an income generating activity. Two different impacts of moving to a hub were reported: on the one hand, the Neighbourhood House was no longer able to hire out rooms, thereby losing income; on the other, where the ability to generate increased income through room hire was offered to offset increased costs. The latter, however, requires significant diversion of organisational effort away from the core business of community development work simply to cover accommodation costs.

A further impact was reported where the Neighbourhood House has forgone the capacity to upgrade their Adult Education provider status as to do so would put it in competition with another tenant.

Neighbourhood Houses, like most not-for-profit organisations need to market themselves both to the community and to funding bodies. This requires a strong ‘brand’. The reports of lost or diminished identity, the creation of hub brands and the cases where the Neighbourhood House is under pressure to amalgamate may undermine their fundraising capacity.

Comparing the evaluations of hubs and co-located services in the existing literature with the circumstances of the sample in this research, Neighbourhood Houses’ dependent relationship with the hub owner emerges as a feature. Many Neighbourhood Houses depend on local government for their accommodation through low cost rental arrangements. This enables them to provide affordable activities for the community. However, when local government reviews and alters their infrastructure arrangements, Neighbourhood Houses are inevitably in a different position to organisations that are not dependent on subsidised rental.

This dependent situation is not evident in much of the literature. The work done by Lennie (2010), for example, reviews successful co-locations where all parties were independent and agreed to co-locate. Accommodation for the newly formed collaborations was sought subsequent to the decision to co-locate and the relationships with hub owners were commercial. Inevitably there is a different dynamic in relationships between hub owners and tenants in the two scenarios.
5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The research concludes that community hubs are generally positive for communities. The research supports the validity of recommendations in much of the best practice type literature. It also supports the conclusions of the VCEC that ‘sharing facilities is not appropriate in all circumstances’ (VCEC, 2009, pp. 57–58) particularly where the experience was reported as negative for both the organisation and community.

In the majority of cases moving to a hub leads to increased participation across all demographic groups, though this is largely contingent on increased space being available for Neighbourhood House activities.

The research also finds that for the majority of Neighbourhood Houses their experience of being in a community hub is positive. They provide benefits to Neighbourhood Houses, including but not limited to opportunities for partnerships and networking, improved facilities and improved access to services.

However, for a significant minority this is not the case. In these cases poor relationships with local government as the owners of the hub appears to be a contributing factor to the negative impact. There is no direct correlation between who initiated the hub or whether administration or other agreements were in place in a timely way and the levels of overall satisfaction for Neighbourhood Houses.

Community precincts are more likely to result in higher levels of positive overall experience than single multipurpose buildings, without sacrificing complimentary relationships with other organisations in the precinct. They are considered cost effective (DPCD, 2010a, p. 5). However, precincts have become a less common type of co-location in recent years.

The Neighbourhood House’s motivation for moving into a hub is more important than who initiates the hub in terms of satisfaction with the overall experience. Where increased community benefit is the primary motivation a positive overall experience is more likely.

For Neighbourhood Houses, being compelled by others to move to a hub compromises levels of satisfaction with the experience of being in a hub as does, to a lesser extent, moving to a hub primarily to meet infrastructure needs. While not a finding from this research, reliance on subsidised accommodation for Neighbourhood Houses may leave them more vulnerable to compulsion where local government or other landlords have predetermined infrastructure arrangements.

Attention in hub design to the community strengthening practices of Neighbourhood Houses and the potential negative impact on access for some marginalised demographics is important and has not always been adequately considered. In particular, welcoming and informal gathering and entry spaces are an important design requirement. Understanding how Neighbourhood Houses operate and the features critical to their success is essential in getting design right. This requires hub owners, architects and consultants to spend the time to consult fully and gain a real insight, as well as strong and skilled Neighbourhood House representation in the hub establishment process. Most Neighbourhood Houses didn’t get what they expected based on the design process. Independent technical assistance for Neighbourhood Houses in the design phase may improve outcomes.
Moving to a hub generally led to a significant increase in participation at Neighbourhood Houses. While this is positive, care must be taken to mitigate against the potential negative impact of moving to a hub on accessibility for marginalised community members. The impacts of changed location for traditional house users should also be considered.

Increased participation and administrative functions without additional resources has contributed to increased workloads and has associated OH&S risks.

The research confirms other literature in identifying that not all tenants are compatible and the capacity for complimentary relationships varies depending on organisation types. In particular, any assumption that Neighbourhood Houses and kindergartens are complimentary are not substantiated. Stronger collaboration between tenants is more likely where tenants share a common objective and time is allowed to develop relationships.

While not within the scope of research there were some indications that being in a hub may impact negatively on the community development practice of Neighbourhood Houses. Administrative arrangements often place additional workload on Neighbourhood Houses without any funding to support this creating an OH&S concern in some cases. Documentation of administrative arrangements is not always adequate or timely.

While governance arrangements generally work well as long as Neighbourhood Houses are represented on a governing body, in some cases they are ad hoc or nonexistent. This represents some risk to tenant organisations. Documentation of governance arrangements is not always adequate or timely.

Some Neighbourhood Houses are under pressure to dissolve their association and for a representative to join a hub based legal entity. This is contrary to Neighbourhood House community development principles and is unsupported by evidence as a best practice model; it is contrary to some best practice literature.

The most significant finding that deviates from the existing literature relates to the cost impacts on Neighbourhood Houses. In most cases, Neighbourhood Houses experience a cost increase rather than the cost saving much of the literature predicts. Increased costs for utilities, maintenance and ICT are apparently not being offset by savings in back office functions or other sharing arrangements. This is not surprising given that Neighbourhood Houses often take on broader site management responsibilities.

Inequity in cost distribution among hub tenants is an issue in some cases. This can potentially strain relationships between tenants and undermine one of the desirable benefits of hubs: increased collaboration for the benefit of community and individuals.

The research finds that some best practice recommendations contained in the existing literature were not implemented in many of the hubs that were surveyed and in some cases this contributed to negative impacts. In particular these include:

- Clear and timely documented vision, goals and agreements
- Equity in relationships of stakeholders
- Evaluation of hubs.
Based on the literature and this research, ANHLC concludes that the best approach to developing a hub occurs where:

- It addresses a community need identified by stakeholders including community representatives
- Stakeholders including the community are actively engaged in the development process and their design and other needs are accommodated
- Adequate and timely governance and administration arrangements are agreed to and documented by partners with equal power
- Long term operating and maintenance costs are provided for
- The hub is evaluated to determine whether it is meeting its goals.

In this scenario the hub is means to an end and not an end in itself. To assist with achieving this approach, this report recommends:

- A review of current policy to ensure that funding and other drivers of hub developments adequately encourage precincts as an option
- State funding is allocated to proposed hubs that can demonstrate: that identified community needs are being addressed; how proposed tenants can better meet those needs through co-location; adequate and equitable consultation with stakeholders and tenants; agreed governance and administrative arrangements; an evaluation process and a whole of life viability plan
- Independent technical support be made available to Neighbourhood Houses considering entering into hub arrangements
- Increased workload in relation to site management responsibilities incurred by Neighbourhood Houses is adequately funded
- Neighbourhood Houses entering hub arrangements are funded at a minimum of 30 hours per week through the NHCP or higher depending on community size and demographic
- Community hub owners undertake an independent evaluation from both the community and tenants’ perspectives where such an evaluation has not occurred.

This research provides some insight into hub arrangements for Neighbourhood Houses in Victoria from a Neighbourhood House perspective. Further questions could be investigated to better understand the effectiveness of hubs and current policy. The researchers recommend further research be undertaken to examine:

- The nature, degree and impact of collaboration in hubs, including the extent to which back office and other functions are shared
- The experience of other stakeholders in community hubs
- The impact on community development activities of Neighbourhood Houses in community hubs.
Bibliography


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