Victorian Councils: Supporting Communities Around End of Life Project

Summary of 'learnings' from the demonstration projects

October 2019

The Victorian Councils: Supporting Communities Around End of Life Project is a partnership project between the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) & La Trobe University Palliative Care Unit (LTUPCU) funded by the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) for three years (2017-2019).

The overall aim of the Project is to explore how local government can be involved in building the capacity of communities to better accept that dying is a part of life and encourage more Victorians to actively participate in caring and supporting people at the end of their lives, at home and in their community.

End of life as used in the Project refers to:

> 'the period of time around dying and death and the impacts of this on the dying person, their family and their wider social and community networks'.

Three councils– Mansfield Shire Council, South Gippsland Shire Council and Whittlesea City Council – received a small one-off grant to undertake a demonstration project. Each of the projects had a different focus. Mansfield Shire invited all residents to participate in the project and built on previous community development work with their community, South Gippsland Shire implemented the project in Foster, a central town in the Shire and Whittlesea City Council focused on engaging the culturally and linguistic diverse community.

This report by the MAV Project Team aims to capture the learnings from the three demonstration projects to share this knowledge and practice with other councils interested in working in this area.

An evaluation report of the outcomes of the *Victorian Councils: Supporting Communities Around End of Life Project* including the demonstration projects is being produced by La Trobe University Palliative Care Unit and is due to be released early in 2020.

For more information about the Project and Project resources developed for councils please see:
www.mav.asn.au/what-we-do/policy-advocacy/social-community/positive-ageing/end-of-life-project

or contact the MAV Project Team:
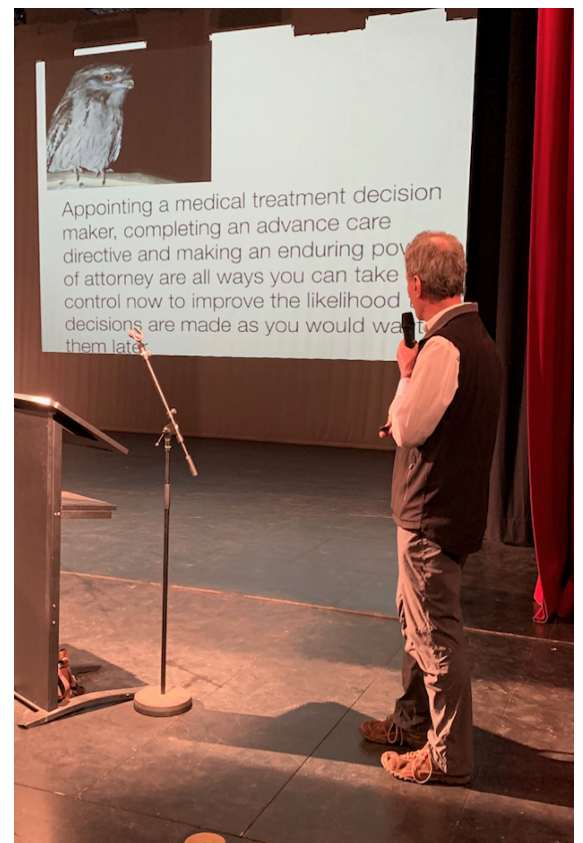Jan Bruce E: jbruce@mav.asn.au
Katherine Wositzky E: kwositzky@mav.asn.au

Contents

Mansfield Shire Council

The Good Life Project

Background context

The Mansfield Shire Council saw the demonstration project as an opportunity to build on their community development work in the Shire, to embrace an untapped and new topic for the community and to have a project that involved two departments – Community Development and Aged and Disability Services. Having the two departments involved facilitated the integration of community development theory and practice into a client-based service delivery area whilst at the same time, assisted the Community Development area to become more engaged with older residents.

The Mansfield 'Good Life Project' aimed to empower the community around dying and death, where community members are well informed in order to plan and respond to their own dying. The project hoped to build community resilience around dying and death – where death is recognised as a natural stage of life and where the community are more confident in supporting people through the end stages of their lives.

The Shire implemented a community development action learning approach, capitalising on learnings of earlier community projects and the emergence of community leaders. Council were keen to engage residents from the outset and to support residents to define and develop the project in response to their own interests and needs.

A number of structures were put in place to support the development of the project including the formation of a Project Steering Committee with membership from services, hospitals, the funeral industry, council and a community group. The 'End of Lifers' with membership from interested residents was also established.

Project implementation was supported by the Community Development Team Leader and a Project Officer (5-hour per week).

The Project commenced in February 2018 with a community information session attended by 15 residents.

Project overview
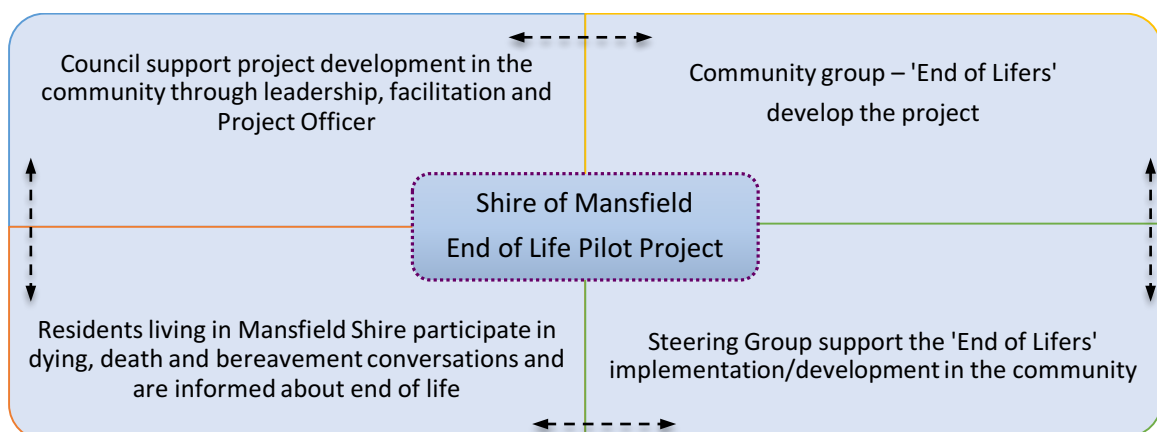
Key learnings

Introducing the 'end of life' concept in a council setting

The Project utilised 'Dying to Know Day', a national day organised by the Groundswell Project that promotes conversations in the community about dying and death, to introduce the Project to council staff and councillors.

Strategies and factors that were helpful included:

- getting support from the media – the local newspapers and local and regional radio were helpful in spreading the word. The Mayor could utilise the media quotes.
- locating the 'Before I Die Board' in the staff room to facilitate conversations
- creating a comfortable space for people to engage in conversation
- including the project in portfolio reports to council
- utilising the 'Hot Topics' section on council's intranet to update staff about the Project
- being sensitive to personal experiences and acknowledging that not everyone is in a position to discuss dying, death and bereavement
- having a bereavement counsellor at the session to provide support.

'The staff morning tea generated a lot of conversations. We had a grief and bereavement counsellor attend to provide support if required.'

'The Project Officer had a nursing background and considerable networks within council and the community. This assisted getting the message out in the community and engaging the community groups.'

Building staff knowledge and capacity

Staff knowledge was built over the length of the project – there was an 'informal letting people know as you go' approach as well as specific training. Learning about a new topic and council's potential role in this area took time as well as considerable attention to the language used to describe the project and the end of life concept.

Strategies and factors that were helpful included:

- allowing time and processes to build up trust around the project for staff and community
- attending 'Catch a Story' training delivered by Benalla Palliative Care Volunteers. Staff and volunteers were invited to participate in training to build interview skills in order to engage residents in aged care facilities on a certain theme or topic
- attending the Demonstration Projects Training Day conducted by the MAV and LTUPCU
- sharing issues and challenges with other demonstration projects and the MAV.

Working with the community

The Project implemented a range of strategies to ensure that it was community driven – by the community, for the community. Council led and facilitated a community development approach however the community was instrumental in developing the Project in response to local needs. A community group, 'The End of Lifers', was established and met monthly to develop the Project. The group was supported administratively through the Project Officer. A Project Steering Committee was

developed and provided education and information support to build group members confidence and capacity to lead the project in the community.

The 'End of Lifers' took on the key role of engaging with the community through meetings, information sessions, a community forum panel and events such as 'Before I Die Boards' in the library.

Strategies and factors that were helpful included:

- utilising established days/ weeks such as Dying to Know Day, Palliative Care Week, Advance Care Planning week etc., to introduce the Project to the community
- engaging the media – both local newspaper and regional and local radio were interested in covering Project events
- displaying a 'Before I Die Board' in the library, local hospital and other community settings generated a lot of media interest and conversations in the community
- displaying end of life resources in the library
- inviting a guest speaker to the End of Lifers monthly meeting to present on a topic of relevance as identified by the group. Speakers included Palliative Care service providers, Death Doulas, Palliative Care volunteers and Alternative funerals
- facilitating a Panel of Experts event for the community.

The Project Steering Committee had membership from service providers, organisations and professional people. The steering group were a hands-on resource and provided information, discussion and guidance to the End of Lifers group.

'A significant success factor was utilising professionals and industry experts in our forums and information sessions.'

'It took councils facilitation and the building of trust for the groups to work together on such a raw subject.'

'At the August meeting, the End of Lifers group discussed that they did not feel confident or have the relevant background knowledge to initiate conversations in their communities about end of life. In September a panel of professional bodies came to talk and answer the groups questions in regard to legalities around death, dying, wills and advance care planning. The group thought this was so valuable that they organised a similar panel discussion for the broader community.'

Activities implemented with the community to promote conversations and information sharing around dying, death and loss

- **Community Group Monthly Meeting**
  Residents were invited to join the community group to discuss, design and develop the project in response to local needs. From the outset residents were interested in joining the group and this has been maintained throughout the Project. The Group decided on the name 'End of Lifers' and utilised the expertise of the Project Steering Group to provide them with knowledge and confidence for taking the project out into the community. The group was supported by the Project Officer, and will continue beyond the pilot period by amalgamating with the new hospice facility volunteers group. The End of Lifers skills were built through education and knowledge and sharing of open conversations.

- **Community Forum**
  The 'End of Lifers' group ran two successful community forums utilising a Panel of Experts and question and answer segments. The group sought questions from the community for the Panel members which were submitted to the Panel prior to the day. The Forum theme of Advance Care Planning had good media coverage and attracted 70 people. The group engaged the CWA to cater for the event with the added benefit of exposing a further community organisation to the Project.

- **Project launch, 'Before I Die Board' and information in library**
  As part of Dying to Know Day, the Project was launched and residents were invited to contribute to a 'Before I Die Board' located in the library. Approximately 30 people wrote messages and pinned them to the board. The board stayed in the library for a few weeks and then toured to the staff rooms at the local hospital and at council. This generated further discussion. Information about the Project and end of life resources were also displayed at the library.

- **Rio's Legacy Fundraiser**
  Rio's Legacy promotes awareness and support for children with a terminal illness and their families. On route from Melbourne to Sydney, running to raise funds for Rio's Legacy, Ryan (Rio's father) travelled through Mansfield. The End of Lifers Group hosted a fundraising event.

- **Annual Christmas Tree of Remembrance**
  This event brought together the Palliative Care volunteers and the End of Lifers group. The community were invited to write special messages and cards in memory of their loved ones, including pets, which were hung on the tee with other decorations. Thirty-one cards were placed on the Tree of Remembrance over the Christmas period.

- **Catch a Story training**
  Training of volunteers in collecting stories/memoirs for audio recording of what is/has been important to the person's life. These stories can then be used for sharing with family and friends

Key challenges for local government

As a new topic for council, there were a number of challenges that the Project needed to overcome. These included:

- managing Project demands – the Project required more than the allocated 5 hours per week
- working with the community group on how to sustain the Project beyond the pilot funding
- introducing the 'end of life' topic to the community so that council staff and community were comfortable with the information and communication
- working through consistent communication terms and messages. The term 'end of life' for example, was confusing and for some people they found that this term did not sit well with their beliefs and values
- building staff and community skills
- exploring new ground, new ideas – there were not any templates to follow.

What difference did the project make?

In the community….

'The Project facilitated conversations in the community, facilitated a space for the community to have these conversations.'

'The Project built the foundation around conversations and information on dying, death and bereavement in the community.'

'The Project has started conversations in the community. The community is now more comfortable at having these conversations.'

'Seventy residents attended the Advance Care Planning Forum, which is an extensive reach out into our small community, and people who attended continued the conversations after the forum.'

In council …

'Council has made new supportive networks through the Project.'

'The Project timing was opportune – the Project connected council to the end of life topic, which in turn has provided council with greater connections and engagement with the hospice and palliative care.'

'Council would not have gone into the end of life space without this project. It would not have been considered.'

Future role, opportunities and directions for council

Council is interested in pursuing end of life intergenerational conversations and have commenced early thinking for a project involving youth services and the older population.

It would be beneficial to look at the implementation model of how gender equity work became core council business, and consider this model to progress end of life in council business.

The project presents opportunities to build workforce skills through café discussion events, a different topic at each of the tables.

The End of Lifers Group are continuing on as a community group and are committed to the cause. The group are currently developing a new name and looking at the structure for the group. It will be an amalgamation of the original group and volunteers connected to the hospice facility currently being developed. The new group will continue to engage with the community and run events such as the Tree of Remembrance.

'Communication is the key – how to create courageous conversations.'

'There are a lot of questions to be answered in this space.'

For further information about the Mansfield Shire Council Demonstration Project
Video presentation 22 March 2018
https://vimeo.com/269100238

South Gippsland Shire Council

Foster End of Life Pilot Project

South Gippsland Shire Council Community Strengthening Officer Sophie Dixon and Community Strengthening Manager Ned Dennis were part of a council team looking at dying. Source: Foster Community Online

Background context

Council is uniquely placed to act as a 'broker' in communities and a demonstration project was seen as an opportunity for council to play a broker role with the community in the end of life area. Prior to the project there had been some expressions of interest from the community for council to be more active in supporting residents around end of life.
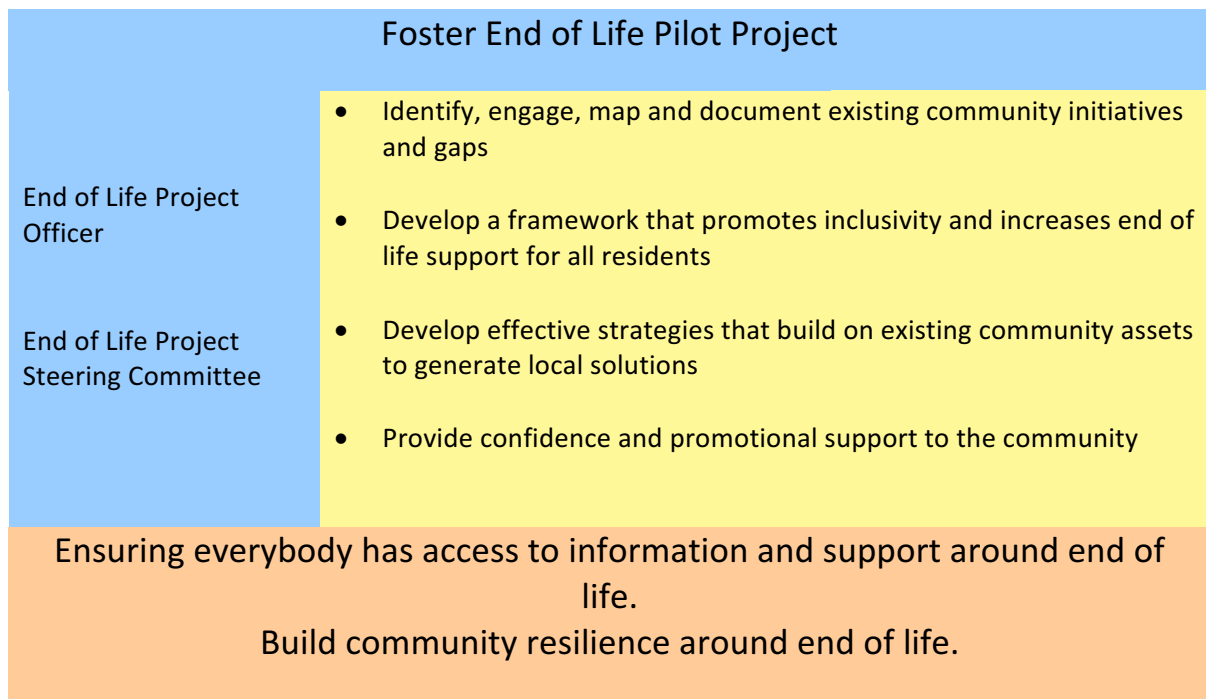
The Foster End of Life Pilot Project in South Gippsland aimed to create processes and documentation to promote general understanding that death is a natural part of life. Through community meetings and engagement with residents, community services, agencies and networks, the Project aimed to identify ways in which community, individuals and organisations (including Council) could support a dying person and their family at the end of life. This also included planning for an appropriate way to celebrate life.

The town of Foster was selected as the Demonstration Project site. Foster has a predominantly ageing population and acts a central hub for many outlying towns with medical, hospital, aged care, palliative care, library, banking, schools, child care and shopping facilities. Foster also has a wide range of community groups and networks. It was anticipated that the Project model and learnings developed in Foster would be transferable to other towns across the South Gippsland Shire.

The Project was located in the Community Strengthening Department. Rationale for this approach was the department's connections with community groups, knowledge of community leaders and capacity to work across all of the community (not just with one demographic such as the ageing population).

The Project was overseen by the Manager of Community Strengthening and allocated a Project Officer position (1 day per week from within current staffing). A Steering Group with representatives from the community and council was formed to guide the Project.

Project overview

Foster End of Life Pilot Project	
End of Life Project Officer End of Life Project Steering Committee	• Identify, engage, map and document existing community initiatives and gaps • Develop a framework that promotes inclusivity and increases end of life support for all residents • Develop effective strategies that build on existing community assets to generate local solutions • Provide confidence and promotional support to the community
Ensuring everybody has access to information and support around end of life. Build community resilience around end of life.	

Key learnings

Introducing the 'end of life' concept in a council setting

A key learning from the Project was the importance of having lead-up time for planning and introducing a new concept to staff and council. It would have been beneficial for the Project to have had more time for staff and community input into the Project at the outset.

As a new topic and area for local government it took considerable discussion to clarify the aims and anticipated outcomes of the Project. The original focus of the Project was modified as a result of these discussions.

Strategies and factors that were helpful included:

- reinforcing that the Project was about accessibility to information and support – not about providing programs
- providing presentations and briefings to council to enable clarification, discussion and opportunities for questions.

'Council has not been in the 'end of life' space, but our communities have been. So it is interesting for Council to find out what they do.'

Building staff knowledge and capacity

Within council, people were supportive of the idea of the Project, however a key learning was to acknowledge that many people may be impacted by death and it is important to know how to be sensitive and manage responses appropriately.

Strategies and factors that were helpful included:

- having some basic training and information about services and supports was helpful. For example, basic information on Palliative Care – how to access it and explaining common terms used
- training on how to deal with the stories that people share around end of life. The Accidental Counsellor Training was used and is recommended however it is not directly tailored towards end of life.

Working with the community

There are a number of factors that needed to be taken into account in working with the community including attention to the language and terms used around end of life, literacy levels of the population and the complexity of end of life language, information and services.

Strategies and factors that were helpful included:

- having information in plain English and accessible language
- choosing the 'right time' to go to a community event to consult the community
- exploring with the community what exists to support people at the end of their life at the outset of the Project.
.

Activities implemented with the community to promote conversations and information sharing around dying, death and loss

- **Community representation on the Project Steering Group**
  The Project Steering Committee was active in working between the Project and the community. Steering Committee members were selected because of their role in the community and included a shopkeeper, a community association member and a community house representative. This Steering Group was supported by the Project Officer, and assisted in reaching out into some of the key networks in Foster.

- **Community meetings and brainstorming**
  Brainstorming session with health care, hospital, aged care, RDNS and community members. This session helped to identify community needs. The top priority for community was access to good clear information that was understandable for all people in the community.

- **Identifying current community assets around end of life**
  An Asset Mapping Exercise with community members and service providers was undertaken through a series of community meetings to identify community assets, strengths, gaps and opportunities. This exercise helped get the 'picture' on the map and prioritise directions for the Project.

- **Community consultation and conversations**
  An 'End of life' consultation at the local community market invited the community to discuss the Project and it provided opportunities to have a conversation about end of life in Foster.

- **Unspoken**
  At the outset of the Demonstration Project, the Community Association had engaged 'Unspoken' a touring show presented by the Health Issues Centre which aimed to generate conversations about end of life in the community. Although 'Unspoken' was a separate event from the End of Life Project, the Project Officer and Steering Group provided extensive resources and support for this event.

Key challenges for local government

As a new topic for council, there were a number of challenges to the Project. These included:

- the limited lead up time to apply for Project funding did not enable sufficient time for council to plan the Project and consult the community

- the 'End of Life' title of the Project and the 'end of life' language created difficulties in the community. End of life meant many different things to different people, and the Project continually needed to explain itself. Some people in the community were offended by the 'end of life' term.
The Project adopted the Compassionate Communities term half way through to try counteract the confusion. 'Compassionate Communities' was also not clearly understood by the community and the Project then adopted both terms – Compassionate Communities - End of Life Project to communicate with the community.

In addition, and specific to the South Gippsland Shire, the Project was impacted by a number of factors that were outside the control of the Project. These included: the impact in the community from the Shire's decision to outsource the Home and Community Care services, Councillor resignations and the eventual dismissal of the South Gippsland Council, a change in the Shire's CEO and a breakdown in the Foster Community Association who were closely linked with the Project. These factors greatly impacted on the capacity of the Project to engage and consult in the community.

'Compassionate communities still did not explain what the Project was about. People did not know what a compassionate community was, and many associated this term with supporting refugees.'

What difference did the project make?

In the community….

'There are a number of initiatives that we are now able to do because of the support of the council. For example, 'The Dreamers Exhibition' at the community house and the 'End of life journey conversations over cake' involving local palliative care volunteers.'

'The RDNS do not have the capacity to sit with clients and go through all of the complex information available around end of life. Before the Project, RDNS staff were often going back to people in the community in their own time to help them understand information and services around end of life. The proposed Death Hub will now take up this need.'

'Council's community grants applications this year indicate that since the Project there has been some interest in the community around end of life.'

'There was a group of people in the community who were interested in doing something around end of life. To have interest and enthusiasm from council made a difference and allowed us to do some of the things we were thinking about.'

'Council already has a good relationship with the hospital. Through the Project this relationship has strengthened and expanded to include 'end of life'.'

'Council made links with community groups that it did not have before the Project.'

'Staff (some) are now more comfortable to talk about death. Conversations happen more easily than they used to.'

Future role, opportunities and directions for council

Two key developments in particular have emerged as a result of the Foster End of Life Demonstration Project. Both of these indicate the Project has contributed to ongoing work around end of life for the Foster area and the South Gippsland Shire.

South Gippsland Shire has recently appointed a Positive Ageing staff position. This position was informed by the Demonstration Project and is located in the Community Strengthening Team, providing opportunity for knowledge gained through the Demonstration Project to be easily shared.

The Positive Ageing role in some capacity will further the work begun through the Demonstration Project and early contributions from this role included organising a community event around Dying to Know Day.

The Shire will be developing a Positive Ageing Strategy and it is anticipated that 'end of life' will be included in this strategy.

In response to the community identifying the need for accessible end of life information through the Project consultations, a proposal is being considered for establishing a 'Death Information Hub' at the Foster library. The library is currently working on infrastructure for a 24-hour accessible library and if successful, access to end of life information for residents will be greatly enhanced.

'One of the most valuable things out of the Project was identifying the need for easy access to information that is available for everyone in the community.'

'A current proposal before council and the library board is for a 'Death Information Hub' to be located at the library.'

For further information about the South Gippsland Shire Demonstration Project
Video presentation 22 March 2018
https://vimeo.com/269100244

Whittlesea City Council

'Way to Go' Project

WHITTLESEA
POSITIVE
AGEING

Way to go
Project

City of Whittlesea

Email: LEAP@whittlesea.vic.gov.au
Phone: 9407 5913

Background context

The Whittlesea 'Way to Go' Project focused on diversity and gaining a deeper understanding of dying, death and bereavement as it is experienced in different cultural groups. The Project aimed to explore community perceptions of dying, death and bereavement and experiences of dying at home.

Whittlesea City Council's Positive Ageing Team support and engage culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) seniors through a range of groups, activities and recreational programs. The team had previously experienced challenges and difficulties in engaging CALD seniors on end of life topics such as wills and end of life care.

Through the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) Positive Ageing Network, Whittlesea's Positive Ageing Team Leader became aware of the work being undertaken around end of life by La Trobe University Palliative Care Unit (LTUPCU) and the *Victorian Councils: Supporting Communities Around End of Life Project.* The Manger saw the Demonstration Project as an opportunity to explore how to engage and develop successful communication strategies for CALD seniors around end of life.

The City of Whittlesea applied a team approach to implement the Project involving all members of the Positive Ageing Team. The Project in particular targeted the Greek and Macedonian communities and utilised the teams cultural and bi-lingual skills and established connections with these communities.

Project overview
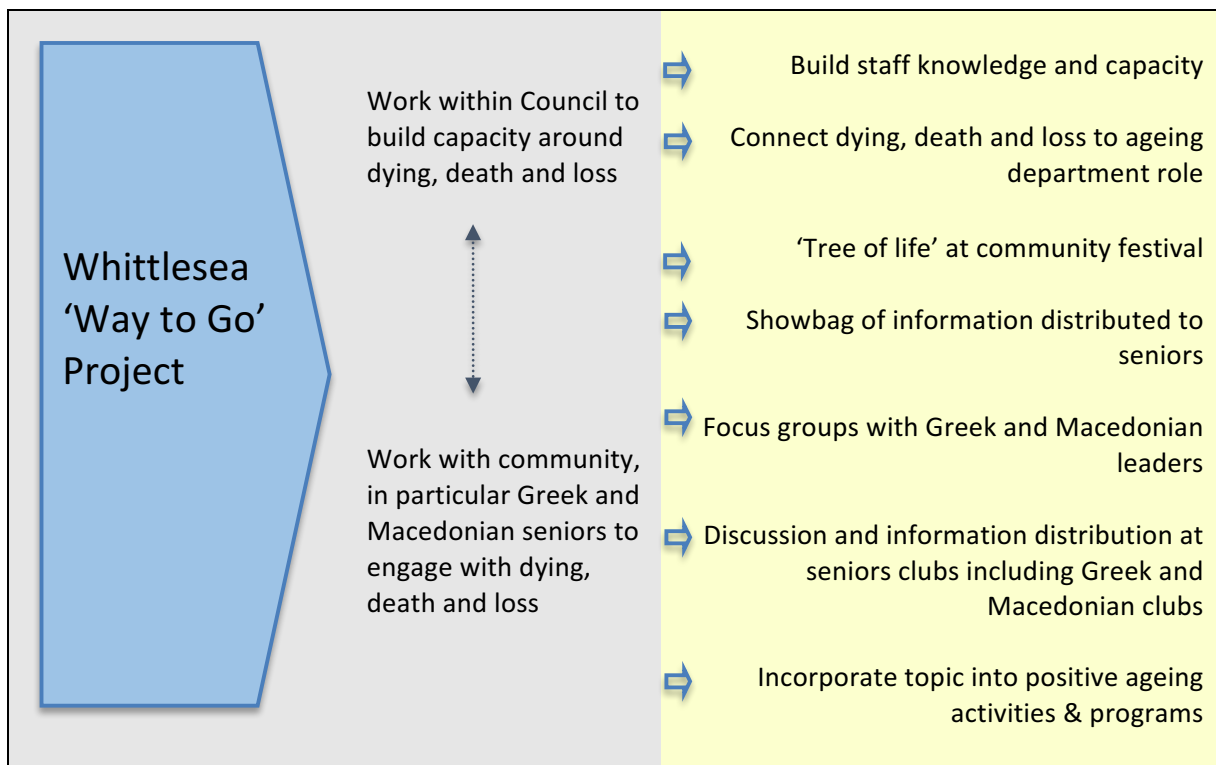
Key learnings

Introducing the 'end of life' concept in a council setting

Although council is heavily involved with older people in the community, with the exception of distributing information on wills and power of attorney, 'end of life' has not been an area that council had engaged in. Introducing an end of life project raised many initial challenges, including a fundamental need to understand the end of life sector and the relevance of end of life for local government work.

'It was a steep learning curve.'

Strategies and factors that were helpful included:

- informal discussions at team meetings
- adequate time for staff to discuss and explore end of life concepts
- attention to language to describe 'end of life' or dying, death and bereavement
- adequate time to build staff confidence in becoming the knowledge keepers around end of life
- collectively exploring the relevance and connections between the team's role and end of life.

'Staff required lots of discussion to be mentally prepared to undertake this project.'

Building staff knowledge and capacity

Building information, knowledge and capacity of staff was essential at the outset of the Project. Staff needed to be mentally prepared and confident of taking new knowledge and disseminating this internally in council and out in the community.

'Staff came to know the range of services available and became confident to talk about these.'

Discussions around end of life did raise sensitive personal experiences for staff and working out how to manage these in a professional setting was highlighted by the Project. Seeking appropriate training proved to be a challenge with available training around end of life primarily focusing on the care of a client.

Strategies and factors that were helpful included:

- the whole team attending the Demonstration Projects Training Day conducted by the MAV and LTUPCU
- having opportunities to share issues and challenges with the other demonstration projects
- staff undertaking the Office of Public Advocate 'Take Control' Training
- staff participating in Advance Care Planning Information Sessions.

Working with the community

The Positive Ageing Team required time to plan an engagement strategy with the community and the targeted Greek and Macedonian seniors. Considerations for cultural sensitivities and practices needed to be understood and discussed. Planning needed to include how staff would manage grief or other sensitive issues that may arise in implementing the Project or an activity in the community.

Strategies and factors that were helpful included:

- using sensitive language and concepts to discuss dying, death and loss
- having discussions in a group setting – less confronting for participants than one to one discussion
- having a prior relationship and connection with the group assisted staff to build trust with the CALD groups
- using bilingual, bicultural staff to bring language and a cultural perspective on death. This assisted to frame the discussion in a positive way and engage participants on what is culturally a difficult topic.

Activities implemented with the community to promote conversations and information sharing around dying, death and loss

- **Tree of Life** activity at Whittlesea community festival.
  Residents participated in a non-confronting activity of writing before I die wishes on a leaf and placing these on a tree. The visual attraction of the trees was successful in attracting people to the site. Throughout the day over 250 messages from people of all ages were placed on the trees. This provided an opportunity for staff to open up discussion with participants from which approximately 200 showbags were distributed.
  The 'Tree of Life' symbol was used to enable a discussion of death within the overall life discussions.

- **Information Showbags**
  Showbags were compiled for residents with take away information on the project and information from the Groundswell Project's Dying to Know Day (postcards, chatterboxes, wills, 'Your Final Checklist'). These showbags were used throughout the Project in a number of different settings including at senior citizen centres, libraries and at recreation and support groups.

- **Focus group with Greek and Macedonian leaders**
  Leaders of the Greek and Macedonian groups were invited to a focus group to find out about the Whittlesea 'Way to Go' Project and discuss dying, death and bereavement. The Positive Ageing Team Leader facilitated the discussion utilising pre-prepared questions. Questions focused on experiences of death and barriers people may experience as they are approaching the end of their lives. The discussion identified information gaps for people from these communities, which in turn informed future engagement with the groups. Death was not at the forefront of people's minds and the CALD elderly were not aware of services. Common feedback included 'this is information that we need to know.'

- **Healthy Ageing Bingo**
  A healthy ageing bingo game was modified to facilitate discussion about dying, death and loss. Participants were engaged through the bingo master weaving questions on experiences of death and healthy ageing. Staff reported that playing bingo worked well as an engagement tool and people enjoyed it.
  The Bingo game has been repeated in a number of different settings including at a Planned Activity Group.

Key challenges for local government

Conversations with community around a 'good death' or how one wants to live out the end stage of their life had not been part of council programs or activities with the ageing population. The extent of knowledge of end of life services and supports in the community was an unknown factor.

As a new topic for council, there were a number of challenges that the Project needed to overcome. These included:

- building workforce capacity to a point where staff felt confident to open conversations in the community and manage community responses
- establishing the connections between positive ageing and end of life
- understanding the complex end of life sector, services, language, concepts, terminology
- being at the forefront of exploring end of life in local government with limited training and practice examples to guide the Project/role
- fulfilling a 'community connector' or information role whilst not the deliverer of services or programs. Particular concerns included raising of expectations for CALD communities where much information is not available in community languages.

A further challenge for council included managing the range of issues raised by residents resulting from 'an opening up' of conversations about end of life. Questions occurred about voluntary assisted dying, advance care plans, suicide and responsibilities around 'do not resuscitate'. Being involved in the Project has alerted council to potential new challenging areas for staff and the possible need to implement new processes and practices.

'Dying, death and loss are a touchy and sensitive topic in many cultures which brings challenges for facilitating discussion.'

'It was necessary to tie in the end of life topic with other (fun) activities to introduce it in a suitable way for the community.'

What difference did the project make?

In the community....

'The Project has broken some taboos. Death and dying is part of someone's life.'

'Community groups are now requesting information sessions or discussion groups about end of life.'

'The Macedonian focus group session gave participants confidence to start having conversations with families and to revisit their cultural practices around death.'

'A lot of personal stories were shared and people were able to hear other people's experience about death – which isn't usually talked about.'

'The Project planted a seed – opened up conversation. We have now seen conversations about death occurring naturally between people at our activities and groups.'

'The greatest outcome from the project is overcoming the barrier that you can have these conversations in the community. This helps staff and the community.'

In council ...

'Previously we would not have considered distributing information around end of life as part of our information dissemination or communication with residents. Now in partnership with Whittlesea U3A we will be including information in the Whittlesea Seniors Link up website.'

'Council (ageing area) is better informed about end of life services and we can pass this information onto our clients.'

'Our aged care workforce has gained some awareness of how to identify a client who is at the end of their life – and know where to go to seek information or to discuss this with other staff.'

'We identified an improved workforce capacity around end of life – for example, staff are more knowledgeable about legalities around end of life.'

'Staff involved in the 'Way to Go' Project are now able to assist council home carers who may work with people at the end of their lives.'

Future role, opportunities and directions for council

The sustainability of the 'Way to Go' Project is an ongoing issue given demonstration funding was limited to a one-off $20,000 grant. The City of Whittlesea identified opportunities that it will implement to build on the achievements of the Project. These include:

- exploring the connection between 'end of life' and the Commonwealth Home Support Program (CHSP) quality standards. CHSP standard one and two – 'Dignity of choice' and 'Dignity of risk', provide the opportunity to operationalise workforce development and end of life
- advocating for a 'good death' in ageing discussions and directions
- educating council staff in the ageing department about a 'good death'
- including end of life in council community information
- continuing to promote and engage community around end of life through existing infrastructures such as libraries. Libraries are well placed to hold information sessions and discussions.

The City of Whittlesea Positive Ageing Action Plan identifies some end of life actions. These actions have been embedded into workforce development, work plans and business plans.

For further information about the City of Whittlesea Demonstration Project
Video presentation 22 March 2018
https://vimeo.com/269100174