UnitingCare Network Project Control Group

Key points in this report:

- The PCG was appointed by Standing Committee to establish a single governance body for UnitingCare Agencies
- Key areas of work have included NDIS, Early Childhood Services, governance and organisational structure
- Handover to New Agency Board will occur this year

1 INTRODUCTION

The Project Control Group (PCG) for the UnitingCare Network Project (UCNP) was formed by Resolution 15.23.4.3 at the Synod Standing Committee (SSC) meeting on 24 June 2015 to: `...establish a single governance body ("the Agency Board") which reports directly to the Synod Standing Committee to oversee service delivery and support functions for community services provided in the name of the Uniting Church in Victoria and Tasmania.''

Further information - including the Terms of Reference for the PCG and the members of the PCG - can be found at https://www.victas.uca.org.au/communityservices/Pages/UC-Update.aspx

The decision to establish a single governance body emerged from the work of the Major Strategic Review (MSR). Following extensive consultations, the MSR believed there was a clear case for change which resulted in the MSR bringing to the SSC a number of recommendations regarding the future of community services within the Uniting Church in Victoria and Tasmania. In a paper presented to the SSC in June 2015, the MSR urged the SSC to:

- Recognise the strong need for change;
- Recognise the theological basis for continuing to provide community services;
- Understand the benefits (and associated risks) of developing an approach that includes:
  - A single governing body to directly govern service delivery and support functions, with the responsibility for setting strategic direction, ethos, values and approach;
  - A coordinated approach to risk management and service delivery quality;
  - Maintaining a balance between local flexibility and centralised efficiency;
  - Strengthened connection to the wider Church that provides opportunities for ongoing interaction; and
  - A mandated model of support for smaller agencies, the development of new agencies and congregational outreach programs.

This new strategic direction builds on existing strengths to better champion the capacity and abilities of the network as a whole.

A single skills-based board will enable the network to work and speak as one unified voice for social advocacy and to share best practice and specialist skills across a range of agencies.

Currently there are 26 agencies involved. Wesley Mission Victoria (WMV) accepted an invitation from the PCG to join the process in March this year.

The involvement of WMV is an exciting development and testament to the strong spirit of collaboration in the Uniting Church community.

Uniting AgeWell and Uniting Housing are both important partners in the network but remain outside the scope of the new 'Agency Board' as they have different governance structures that already report directly to the Synod and its Standing Committee. The PCG meets regularly with these two agencies.
The PCG and the Program Director have also met with Board Chairs, CEOs and Boards regularly to seek feedback and also to advise on progress.

The New Agency will have a combined annual turnover of around $237 million with approximately 3500 staff and 4000 volunteers.

The PCG’s work is supported by a project team headed by a soon-to-be appointed Transition and Integration Manager. The team includes finance, human resources, communications and project management specialists.

It has also engaged consultants including KPMG (National Disability Insurance Scheme project) and Russell Kennedy Lawyers (governance) on an as required basis. Search consultants were also engaged to assist with the recruitment of the inaugural Board Chair and Board Members for the New Agency.

The PCG expects to handover to the new Agency Board during 2016.

2 PROJECT TEAM

The Project Control Group supported by an extremely competent and hard working staff team is participating in a change program that will ensure the long term professional delivery of integrated, holistic community services by the Uniting Church across Victoria and Tasmania through a single agency. The decision by the SSC in June 2015 was both brave and insightful.

In an effort to achieve the requirements of the resolution in a timely manner, and ensure widespread consultation, the PCG has kept to a demanding schedule – fortnightly formal meetings along with visits to individual UnitingCare agencies' board meetings, agencies at work, and board chairs.

I want to thank the members of the PCG for the considerable contribution of their time and skills: Cheryl Lawrie (CfM), Dick Carter (SSC), Emmanuel Tsakis (South Port UnitingCare), Jacque Harrison (UnitingCare Gippsland), Jason Talbot (MSR), Joanna Wriedt (ReGen), Ken Tabart (MSR), Philip Morris (Tas), Sue Norman (WMV), Raelene Thompson (WMV), Randall Kent (Prahran Mission) and Stan Clarke (SSC). I would also like to acknowledge the active contribution of Greg Crowe, chairperson of Commission for Mission, who resigned from the PCG earlier this year.

The board of UnitingCare lifeAssist gave their CEO, Gerry Mak, a six month leave of absence to head up the UCNP as Program Director. Gerry brought significant knowledge of the sector and a strategic vision to drive this project and ensure it remained on track. Gerry finished his term to return to lifeAssist at the end of April and we thank him for his passion and commitment.

The PCG is now recruiting to appoint a Transition and Integration Manager who will lead the Project Team until handover to the new Agency Board (currently scheduled for 1 October) and then through the early stages of the new agency.

3 KEY AREAS OF FOCUS

The key areas of focus for the PCG have included the NDIS, governance, organisational structure and Early Childhood Services (ECS) and the ongoing relationships with stakeholders including major funders.

3.1.1 NDIS

The strength of a single community services agency, providing coordinated services, will enable UnitingCare to be a far more effective champion of the disabled as the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is rolled out in Victoria and Tasmania from 1 July.
UnitingCare agencies (including Wesley Mission Victoria) providing services in the disability sector had already begun an NDIS Collaboration Project. The PCG commissioned KPMG to undertake an independent review of this Project to examine both the project strengths and key opportunities for improvement. This review was completed in mid April, just prior to this Synod report being finalised.

KPMG facilitated a two day workshop to establish a “target operating model” as described by KPMG. Agencies in attendance included UC Ballarat, lifeAssist, Gippsland, Goulburn NE, Prahran Mission, Wimmera, Harrison, Wesley Mission Victoria and Uniting AgeWell along with representatives of the UCNP Project team.

NDIS is about client choice. The clients determine the kind of service delivery most relevant to their particular needs. The mission of the UnitingCare agencies is ‘to be an inclusive and effective provider for all people with a disability, with a particular focus on those who are vulnerable’.

To do this most effectively, UnitingCare agencies are committed to developing one unified, consistent go-to-market approach for all agencies and geographies.

The KPMG review has provided the UCNP a template and a NDIS Transition Plan to enable the Network to adapt and respond to the changing nature of the market. Currently the UCNP is recruiting an NDIS Transition Manager to provide oversight of the readiness response. There is much to be done to enable the UCNP to provide the necessary fully coordinated, integrated response to the NDIS. Your prayers will be much appreciated as the various parties involved in this enormous project work towards the successful implementation of an integrated operating model for provision of NDIS services.

3.1.2 Governance

Earlier this year, the UCNP PCG sought expressions of interest for an inaugural Board Chairperson for this new single governance body. A recommendation has been put to the Synod Standing Committee, and it is expected that this key position will have been announced in May. The advertisement published in Crosslight and other relevant websites, outlined the PCG’s expectations: “...that the Chairperson will be an active high-level contributor with a genuine interest in the organisation, its operations and development, with a strong commitment to improve and expand service delivery for the clients we serve”.

This person, supported by a skills based board of highly capable individuals, all of whom are committed to the Church’s values and ethos and the provision of first class community services, will provide significant leadership in birthing this new single board UnitingCare agency.

The PCG announced the governance and high level organisational structure of the new-look organisation in April. It is currently anticipated that the Board will assume governance responsibility on 1 October 2016. Parish missions, such as Hotham Mission, Church of All Nations, Endeavour Hills UnitingCare Neighbourhood Centre, along with John Macrae Centre and Heatherlie Homes will be subject to a model of governance oversight. Presently, the PCG is still to determine the relationship between the new board and Wesley Centre for Life Enrichment, South Port UC and East Burwood Neighbourhood Centre.

3.1.3 Organisation structure

At the operational level, the PCG has resolved an organisational chart which names seven executive roles reporting directly to the CEO:

- Director of Mission
- Executive General Manager, Regional Service Delivery
- Executive General Manager, Programs
- Chief Financial Officer (including Shared Services)
- Executive General Manager, People and Culture
- Transition and Integration Manager
- Fundraising and Partnerships Manager
The Manager Early Childhood Services, Manager NDIS Services and Manager Alcohol and Other Drugs Services will report to the Executive General Manager, Programs. Managers of all other services will also report to the Executive General Manager, Programs, and these services will be delivered through a regionalised structure managed by the Executive General Manager, Regional Service Delivery.

3.1.4 Early Childhood Services

The Uniting Church has a long and proud history of providing children’s services to its local communities. UCVT currently provides nearly 3,000 approved places for children between birth and age thirteen; located in 72 service locations in 27 local government areas, and managed by 12 separate Uniting Care agencies across Victoria.

In 2015, Semann & Slattery was engaged to conduct a Children Services Review examining the performance of all UCVT early childhood services and formulating a strategic business model and associated business case. The review proposed next steps which included two focus areas:

Stream 1. An immediate response to the identified risk issues.
Stream 2. A detailed scoping of children’s services delivered by UCVT.

Stream 1 is completed. A new incident reporting process has been developed and implemented. Mandatory policies prescribed under the National Law have been developed and distributed to all agencies across Victoria. A Policy Review Group, with representation from agencies, has been initiated to ensure a consistent approach in policy intention and that best practice is embedded across the organisation.

Stream 2 is on target, with a final report to be completed by the end of April. An audit of children’s services has been conducted. Data collected included: a desktop review, internal and external stakeholder (including the Department of Education and Training) meetings and consultation with Cluster Managers from most agencies.

The UCNP PCG is expected to make recommendations re the future direction of the provision of Early Childhood Services in the wake of this report. It is likely that the PCG will authorise the ECS Transition Manager to create a transition plan toward a new model of service delivery leading into the new entity.

3.1.5 Support Services

The UCNP PCG undertook a CEO Change Readiness survey which indicated that agencies were well placed to provide information to the project. UCNP Finance Manager, Tony Chapman was appointed to commence a detailed planning process. He began data collections and audits late last year, and as part of the strategy development is undertaking property site visits throughout 2016. Planning for consolidated financial reporting and budgeting is well advanced but there is still much work to be done in this area.

3.1.6 New Agency Aspirational Statement

UnitingCare’s goal, when it was an arm of the Commission for Mission, was “to be an expression of God’s love and justice for the world, ensuring a faithful and effective response to the ever-changing patterns of human need and disadvantage”. This has not changed.

The PCG has prepared an Aspirational Statement for the new agency, which outlines its goals, values and purpose. It also guides the PCG in its work. The Aspirational Statement begins:

“(The Agency) is an agency of the Uniting Church in Australia, Synod of Vic/Tas and is part of its expression of the mission and ministry of Jesus to show care, compassion and justice for the world by serving others.
We hope for a just world, where all people can live with dignity, hope and opportunity.

We will serve and advocate alongside those most in need.

Our purpose is to work with individuals and society to reduce and overcome disadvantage by:

- Caring for and supporting individuals and families who are in need
- Advocating for social change so that everyone has a say in the decisions that will make our society fair and just
- Offering a real chance for people to have the support they need to make the changes they want.

4 WHAT NEXT?

The work of the UCNP continues apace. This is a significant change management project, which, as with any change, causes stress and anxiety for those at the coal face. The PCG is working closely with agency boards and CEOs and has engaged both communications and human resource specialists to ensure a strong emphasis on these vital elements of the project. We need to look after the people who live out the daily commitment of our agencies, endeavouring to bring equitable and caring service delivery to their clients.

What will the New Agency be called? Will the history and relationships developed over many years of service within particular regions be lost because of this merger? The PCG is very mindful of the strong connection to community and especially the treasured work of our volunteers and is working hard to ensure we retain and strengthen those connections. The PCG is also aware of the importance of brand awareness. We have engaged a brand specialist to create an identity that unifies, but we also expect to retain the individual unique brands of existing agencies.

It has been a privilege to chair this significant project. As a board member of Connections UnitingCare I have been exposed to the inspirational work of one of our agencies, but through the UCNP, the entire vista of UnitingCare’s service delivery, across two states, providing assistance from early childhood to aged care, has been revealed. As Uniting Church members, we should be very proud of the calibre and the reach of service provided by our agencies. It is truly an expression of Christian care and compassion and of God’s mission in the world. Under this new model, it is only going to get better.

BOB HODGES
Chairperson