



Social Cooperatives in Northern Italy and Switzerland: What can we learn?

Sasha Boys

An International Specialised Skills Fellowship

Sponsored by The Italian Services Institute



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Published by International Specialised Skills Institute, Melbourne

Published on www.issinstitute.org.au

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i. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Having worked as a Social Worker for more than 10 years, Sasha Boys has been fortunate to experience a variety of community service practice models in both City and Regional settings. During this time, The Fellow has witnessed a series of changes that have influenced the facilitation of social services in regional Victoria and her Fellowship aims to seek better models to place the focus on clients through improved knowledge in the operation of 'social cooperatives' in Italy and Switzerland. The Fellow was fortunate to be awarded this Fellowship which allowed her to gain an international perspective into how social cooperatives operate in Europe and what influence they may have on improving service delivery in small communities in regional Victoria.

This Fellowship allowed the Fellow to travel to Switzerland and Italy with a focus on the systemic frameworks that exist in each country to support social cooperatives whilst working with key stakeholders across a number of different organisations. The experience was a fantastic opportunity to learn from innovative practitioners within the social cooperative sector and to further develop close relationships to continue working together on projects into the future. The Fellow visited a number of organisations, both private and public, and found a great diversity of experience and knowledge that has helped to re-frame her thinking and approach to service delivery in the social cooperative space.

The Fellowship highlighted the need for Australian social service practitioners and host organisations to work together and to further engage with government and industry to maximise outcomes for all persons in receipt of community services, especially those in the ageing and disability area. The major findings from the research highlight that, from an international perspective, the Australian social services sector is robust and delivers quality services in a number of areas but it needs to re-evaluate the way in which clients are engaged and consulted with when planning services to meet the needs of all individuals. When considering the impacts locally, the Italian communities in South Gippsland will benefit from the Fellowship as they will be able to consider the recommendations with specific cultural reference to their needs and goals. Governments also need to ensure that they support and promote regional Victorians to manage their own social service delivery within their communities to ensure that all specific local goals are achieved in a productive and timely manner.

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ii. ABBREVIATIONS/ACRONYMS

AASW	Australian Association of Social Workers
BCSC	Bass Coast Shire Council
SGBCLLEN	South Gippsland and Bass Coast Local Learning and Employment Network
DHS	Department of Human Services
GSHS	Gippsland Southern Health Service
OCST	Organisation Christiano Sociale Ticino
SGSC	Southern Gippsland Shire Council
VETDC	Vocational Education and Training Development Centre
VET	Vocational Education and Training

iii. DEFINITIONS

Social Cooperative

Providing services that facilitate the social improvement for communities including children, the elderly, person with disabilities and a range of other community programs.

Person Centered Care

Reflects the related concepts of dignity, worth and human rights. These ideas are enshrined in national and international documents that govern the way health care is provided.

Applied Research

Scientific investigations conducted to answer specific clinical questions or solve practice-related problems.

Third Sector

Also known as the Volunteer sector

Law 381/91

A law passed in Italy to regulate the set-up, management and reporting of Social Cooperatives

Social Capital

Social Capital is a form of economic and cultural capital in which social networks are central, transactions are marked by reciprocity, trust, and cooperation, and market agents produce goods and services not mainly for themselves, but for a common good.

1. ABOUT THE FELLOW

Name

Sasha Joelle Boys

Current Employer

Gippsland Southern Health Service

Qualifications

- Bachelor of Social Science – Policy and Research (RMIT)
- Bachelor of Social Work (Monash University)
- Graduate Certificate Public Health (UTAS)

Brief Biography

Sasha Boys is a Grade 2 Social Worker at Gippsland Southern Health Service. The Gippsland Southern Health Service provides acute and community care to the people of South Gippsland operating out of two campuses at Korumburra and Leongatha. Currently the Fellow responds to all inpatient referrals from both campuses, conducting Psychosocial Assessments, assisting with discharge planning, counselling, care planning and transitioning into Aged Care or back to the community. As a Social Worker, the Fellow is a strong advocate for her clients who often find themselves overwhelmed as they navigate the health service, come to terms with illness and work towards recovery. In the Fellow's role, Social Work provides education to the individual client or group about services and supports in the local area. Social Work is also heavily involved in community education opportunities on topics such as Chronic Disease Management, Mental Health and Aged Care.

Above all the Fellow is passionate about social justice and equity. The Fellow is a strong advocate for her clients to remain independent, happy and healthy in their local communities for as long as they wish. The Fellow has a belief in the strength and resilience of regional communities. Exploring the idea of Social Cooperatives brings to light the strategies and functions of examples in Northern Italy where Social Services are provided through a different model to what is commonly offered here in Australia. The Italian Social Cooperative model is successful due to the client's involvement and sense of belonging, where service users feel they are part of the organisation that provides the assistance. The benefit of promoting social capital through cooperatives as implications for better health and social connectedness and for those who are marginalised or disadvantaged, this impact can be particularly significant.

2. AIM OF THE FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM

The aims of this Fellowship were to:

- To visit and investigate the social cooperative model in action, across five different organisations in Northern Italy and Switzerland.
- To understand the rationale of social cooperatives and relate those to the Australian context.
- To discover and document the different services provided to social cooperative members across a diverse range of groups requiring support in the community.
- To experience the social cooperative model of person-centred care and how this is considered and respected throughout the provision of services.
- To investigate the roles for paid and voluntary workers within social cooperatives.
- To understand any limitations of the Italian Social Cooperative model and how these are being recognised and improved.

3. THE AUSTRALIAN CONTEXT

Cooperatives are defined as providing services that facilitate the social improvement for communities including children, the elderly, person with disabilities and a range of other community programs. Cooperatives are unique within the Australian system as they are governed on the principle of one member, one vote which aims to empower members to actively own and manage the future direction of the services they facilitate.¹ They are further characterised by their member ownership, democratic governance, autonomy and independence and re-investment of its profits into further community projects to benefit its members. The cooperative model empowers members providing innovative and responsive management structures that allow for issues and challenges to be addressed in a timely manner with direct action approaches.

Social cooperatives have been active in the Australian landscape for more than 150 years with a variety of services being facilitated including aged care, early childhood education, family services and a range of community based improvement services.² Although well established, social cooperatives have suffered from an identity crisis throughout the past twenty years as governments have leaned towards outsourcing social services to for-profit organisations that were once the traditional domain of the social cooperative. This has been especially evident when referenced to regional communities where there is an on-going debate about the role that communities can and do play in the facilitation of locally delivered social services. The inability for local communities to have control over the planning and facilitation of social programs has led to the need for further investigation to be made into a new approach to allow for greater input and accountability for local communities.³

As Australia looks to the future there is an agreed recognition for communities to re-frame how we address and tackle social challenges and the social cooperative is an important tool that we can use to take a fresh approach to these challenges. Regional communities within Victoria will face numerous challenges in the near future including environmental, social and economic challenges that require communities to work together to achieve the best outcomes. These issues will require new models for their management and the social cooperative is a critical element to allow for these challenges to be faced as a community with a central focus for the benefit of all communities.^{4 5}

¹ Reilly, T., 2016, 'Are Social Enterprises Viable Models for Funding Nonprofits?', *Human Service Organizations: Management, Leadership & Governance*, pp.1-5.

² Millar, R. and Hall, K., 2013, 'Social return on investment (SROI) and performance measurement: The opportunities and barriers for social enterprises in health and social care', *Public Management Review*, 15(6), pp.923-941.

³ Borzaga, C., Depedri, S. and Galera, G., 2015, 'Emergence, evolution, and institutionalization of Italian social co-operatives', *Cooperative Enterprises in Australia and Italy*, p.209.

⁴ Millar, R. and Hall, K., 2013, 'Social return on investment (SROI) and performance measurement: The opportunities and barriers for social enterprises in health and social care', *Public Management Review*, 15(6), pp.923-941.

⁵ Ranci, C., 2015, 'The Long-Term Evolution of the Government-Third Sector Partnership in Italy: Old Wine in a New Bottle?', *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 26(6), pp.2311-2329.

3. THE AUSTRALIAN CONTEXT

SWOT Analysis (Australian Social Cooperative Sector)

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Committed to delivering quality services to all community members. • Established networks. • Cultural imperatives are considered in program design. • Stakeholder engagement in the design of services facilitated by social cooperatives. • Well supported with statistical data. 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low levels of awareness amongst general community. • Minimal engagement with governments to facilitate services enhancement. • Lack of formal evaluation of services against international benchmarks. • Inconsistency of service delivery across communities in Cities and Regional Victoria. • Status of social cooperatives.
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve access to community based services for regional Victorians. • Change attitudes around the value of social cooperatives. • To increase engagement with governments and service providers. • Grow the awareness of social cooperatives within regional Victoria. • Improve access and equity through better targeting of funding. 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corporatisation of community services delivery. • Governmental policy changes. • Increased costs of program facilitation. • Lack of relevance within the community of social cooperatives. • Apathetic attitudes towards reforms and change in the sector.

Table 1: SWOT Analysis of the Australian Social Cooperative Sector

4. IDENTIFYING THE SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE ENHANCEMENTS REQUIRED

As the Australian Social Cooperative sector continues to evolve, community service practitioners need to develop their engagement in line with international best practice to ensure that future services are provided in an efficient and timely manner with a person-centred approach to program design and facilitation.¹ There is also a need to professionally develop practitioners and improve their knowledge around social cooperatives to allow for measured debate and research to influence services and how they are managed. A number of Australian commentators have written of the need for further research to be undertaken in this area so that people remain the focus and priority for service providers.

The main focus for skill enhancements are detailed in Table 2, which also provides a series of actions based around these defined enhancement areas. As shown, the key elements that will drive success will be the use of comparative analysis as the primary tool for evaluation of the primary research organisations and the strengths and weaknesses identified in all. Comparative analysis is defined by Esping-Anderson “as the act of comparing two or more things with a view to discovering something about one or all of the things being compared”.²

Skill Enhancement Area	Action
Selecting the most effective models for delivering community services for regional Victorians	Investigate best practice models for the engagement of regional communities in service provisions
Improving awareness of social cooperative service models	Develop a series of examples from Italy and Switzerland that have been effective in facilitating quality community services
The management of the social cooperative frameworks	Compare processes across provinces and cantons in Italy and Switzerland and then develop a comparative analysis of the systems strengths and weaknesses as identified
Aged Care Planning	Investigate the methodologies that are currently applied to facilitate the provision of aged care services

Table 2: Skills enhancements and actions

¹ Defourny, J. and Nyssens, M., 2012, *The EMES Approach of Social Enterprises in a Comparative Perspective*.

² Esping-Andersen, Gosta., 1990, *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*, Princeton University Press.

5. THE INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE

Throughout the Fellows three week applied learning experience within Italy and Switzerland, several organisations involved in the provision and management of Social Services across a number of fields including Ageing, Disability, Unemployment and Social Research were visited. The Fellowship was a life-changing opportunity and the details and learning derived from each experience is listed below:

5.1 Sant'Andrea House

Destination: Sant'Andrea House (Venice, Italy)

Contact: Antonina Guarella, Administration Manager

The Sant'Andrea House is managed by the MACE group of Social Co-operatives. MACE was formed in 1992 after a need expressed by Caritas Venice, due to their particular concern for community members in the region affected by a variety of dependencies, including drugs, alcohol and pharmaceutical medications. Furthermore the concern was extended to young people who were residents of state care / housing arrangements and were finding the task of looking for employment daunting due to barriers caused by discrimination. MACE offers the ability for these disadvantaged community members to slowly reintegrate into the community, with the support they need. MACE recognises that they aim to achieve a variety of outcomes for their clients and that not all stories end positively due to overdose, illness etc. Some participants find work and independence while some do not.



Image 1: Sant'Andrea House - entrance

During the visit the Fellow met with Antonina Guarella, the Administration Manager of the facility, to discuss how the structure of the social cooperative provides greater benefit to their clients than a for-profit facility. Antonina claimed that the major benefit of the cooperative structure is that the profits can be poured back into the facility and redistributed to the end user through lower accommodation charges thus allowing more people to enjoy the beauty and splendor that is Venice. The cooperative also allows for a Board of Management to make the day-to-day operational decisions within the facility which allows for the direct application of changes with minimal impact on clients and operations. The major findings acquired during the Fellow's interview are outlined below:

- Social cooperatives allow all stakeholders to have a say in the distribution and management of services within an organisation
- Finances are able to be managed at a local level allowing for faster responses to operational challenges
- The governing board is influenced by governmental charters in respect of their structure but members and clients also have the ability to provide input that can change organisational practices
- Social cooperatives place the power in the hands of individuals with financial management being a component of success but not the driving force as would occur in private enterprise.

5. THE INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE



Image 2 (above): Sasha Boys – Outside Casa San Andrea, Social Cooperative, Venice, Italy



Image 3 (left): Casa San Andrea, Social Cooperative, Venice, Italy

5.2 Organisation Christiano Sociale Ticino (OCST)

Destination: Organisation Christiano Sociale Ticino (Lugano, Switzerland)

Contact: Sandra Botta, Secretary

OCST is an association that assists people who have reached the age of retirement, to stay active and participate in social life. They aim to assist the elderly to maintain social connections and maximise their health to improve their overall mental and physical health.

OCST provides spaces and facilitates a range of activities throughout the year that are aimed at enhancing friendships that can stimulate the members to feel less lonely and encourage their social integration. All activities are organised independently by the staff, appointed by the Board of Management, at its five regional offices across the Ticino canton. Through consultation with its members OCST provides cultural, recreational, spiritual and travel based activities, as agreed to by the majority of members in monthly planning meetings. The association is also committed to acting as intermediaries with other institutions that support their members to ensure they are receiving appropriate support to address the added demands experienced by older and retired people. Membership is currently set at 36 CHF (Swiss Francs) (Roughly \$50AUD) per year allowing each member voting rights and the opportunity to engage in decision making if they see fit.



Image 4: The logo used by the OCST Social Cooperative

The Fellow was able to visit the offices of OCST in the week prior to Christmas 2016 and engage with a range of members by observing their monthly cooperative meeting. It was interesting to hear the stories from members of how OCST allowed them to maintain meaningful engagement with their local community whilst empowering members to directly influence the programs and daily operations. The sense of purpose and continuity of service that the cooperative provided was repeatedly mentioned by members to be key to them maintaining good mental and physical health. The Fellow found the experience touching and valued the discussions she was involved in and the accompanying learnings that were taken away. The primary benefits that members listed for maintaining a social cooperative structure are below:

- Complete ownership over activities and planning
- The ability to engage and influence daily operations
- Maintaining strong links to local communities and forging better engagement with younger community members through direct relationships with schools.
- More control over the financial operations off the cooperative.

Image 5 (right): Sasha Boys outside the offices of OCST, prior to their monthly planning meeting



5. THE INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE

5.3 Fare Comunità Soc. Coop. Cons. Sociale

Destination: Fare Comunità Soc. Coop. Cons. Sociale (Bologna, Italy)

Contact: Massimo Caroli

Fare Comunità is a non-profit provincial consortium established in 2010 thanks to the joint work between the Ravenna social co-operation system and professional training institutions.

The consortium's objective is to encourage the processes of employment and social inclusion of people who experience greater difficulty to integrate into the community.

Fare Comunità believes that if the community participates and is able to make the sense of "us" possible, besides the sense of belonging, organisational clients can develop skills and abilities:

- To cope with distress, social/family/personal crises, lack of self-confidence, uncertainty created by the many and quick changes
- To access to the resources and opportunities actually available to every generation
- To support all social fragilities.

While the Fellow was scheduled to meet with Massimo Caroli, Regional Manager of Fare Comunità, unfortunately Mr Caroli was no longer available but left an array of literature and resources for review instead. Pleasingly, the Fellow was able to speak with another representative from this cooperative a few days later, which provided a chance to discuss and confirm the main goals and objectives of the organisation. This cooperative is an interesting organisation that focuses on training and employment services to assist in the reintegration of marginalised peoples to "normal" social practices. Although the cooperative is relatively young, being only six years old, they have managed to have had a sizeable impact on the local community by assisting more than 300 clients to re-integrate and gain employment locally. The organisation demonstrated that the benefits of being a social cooperative were that they were "able to better control their future" by owning decision making and providing strategic objectives linked to identified social needs. The benefits of the social cooperative structure employed by Fare Comunità are:

- The ability to amend service delivery to meet the needs of a changing population. This is evident in the changing of employment programs to meet labour market demands in the local community
- Better control of strategic planning
- The social cooperative owns all of the assets thereby allowing for greater control of their maintenance and up-keep, in consultation with the board of management
- Clients have representation through monthly feedback sessions that allow for their input to influence planning and strategic goal setting
- The most important benefit, as claimed, was that the social cooperative structure allows for staff to feel empowered to own the operations and focus on the client and their individual needs when planning for their case management.

5. THE INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE



Image 6: The Fare Comunità Soc. Coop. Cons. Sociale located near the old city in Bologna

5. THE INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE

5.4 Department of Economics and Management – EMES International Research Network

Destination: Department of Economics and Management – EMES International Research Network (Bologna, Italy)

Contact: Dr Ermanno Tortia

Dr Ermanno Tortia is an Associate Professor at the University of Trento. It was important for the Fellow to meet Dr Tortia as he is internationally respected for his research into Social Cooperatives and their benefits to community. Dr Tortia's research focuses on the theory of the firm, business economics, human resource management and organisational behaviour; as applied to third sector research and organisational forms populating the social economy (cooperative social enterprises, non-profit organisations). Dr Tortia has authored and co-authored; (i) empirical studies dealing with happiness economics, on-the-job satisfaction, organisational justice, worker motivations, and studying the relationships between complex sets of practices. He collaborates closely with EuRICSE (European Research Institute on Cooperative and Social Enterprises, Trento Italy); and he is a member of the scientific committee of JEOD (Journal of Entrepreneurial and Organisational Diversity) and member of the teaching committee of the PhD Program in Development Economics and Local Systems (DELoS) at the School of Social Science, Trento University.

As a preeminent researcher within this Fellowship field the Fellow was in contact with Dr Tortia in the months prior to her international applied research study tour. This activity greatly enhanced the Fellow's Fellowship-related preparatory knowledge and links, as documented below:

- Had been in communication with Dr Tortia during the planning and research phase of the international visit
- Was able to gain contacts through Dr Tortia extensive expertise and connections through the social cooperative field
- Was able to mentor the Fellow through her various visits in Italy and to also provide her with the ability to summarize learnings and ask questions when the visits had all concluded.

While the Fellow had arranged to meet Dr Tortia in Faenza, whilst in Bologna, upon arrival at the designated meeting location she was informed that Dr Tortia had been delayed in Rome and thus unable to attend the scheduled meeting. Although disappointing, the Fellow understood the reason why and was able to speak to Dr Tortia a week later via telephone. A summary of the main points of discussion were:

- Dr Tortia reinforced the need to research different organisational models when planning to set-up a social cooperative to ensure that the right structure and framework is designed to assist in achieving your organisational goals.
- Social cooperatives are a great model that places the power in the hands of its members thereby allowing for direct engagement of members in all aspects of the organisation.
- Volunteer at like-minded organisations to determine the trials and pitfalls that they have experienced to better guide the planning and set-up of the cooperative
- Develop networks within your local community to share experiences and learnings
- Make sure the goal of the cooperative is focused on definable outcomes that are centred on bettering communities and local service provision.

5.5 Identified Social Cooperative Challenges

As with all practical theories and organisational structures, there can be challenges that members must recognise when choosing to adopt a new approach to addressing social challenges within local communities. As the Fellow interviewed and read research in preparation for the Fellowship, she was eluded to the reference of challenges as faced by members when running and setting-up social cooperatives. It was identified that there were two main difficulties which social cooperatives are having to face. One is the lack of sufficient managers and the challenges of recruiting managers. The social cooperatives are perceived to offer their managers insufficient status and clearly offer insufficient salaries. It is very difficult to find people who are capable of good business management who also understand and are committed to the social objectives.

There is a further irritation for the social cooperatives and their managers. Although they are able to plan their own services, they have little influence on the broader policy framework decided upon by the municipalities and the national state. The social cooperatives would like more influence on the setting of the rules, such as the quality framework.

The problem with recruitment is becoming increasingly critical. More profit-orientated businesses now see the potential in winning social services contracts. In order to raise their own skill levels to win contracts and deliver services they are seeking to recruit from the limited pool of experienced talent. This means that growing numbers of social cooperative managers have been poached by the private sector, with greater competition for skilled people during the recruitment process. At less senior levels, wages offered by social cooperatives are competitive with those available in the wider labour market. Social cooperatives also face specific difficulties with their business planning. Many are heavily independent on their public sector contracts, but they may have to re-tender on an annual basis. The impact of this is both to drive down the value of contracts – prices are depressed by the frequent bidding process – it leads to high transaction costs and social cooperatives are restricted in their ability to forward plan.

There is a growing concern that while the legal framework for social cooperatives is welcomed as having a positive impact, it can also act as a restrictive factor. It does, for instance, discourage the development of social cooperatives with only worker members. It could also deter diversity in the forms of social enterprise, further reducing flexibility.

It has been observed that the dramatic increase in numbers of social cooperatives following the Law 381/91 has had effects that are negative as well as positive. In order to respond to the vast rise in demand for their services, social cooperatives have become more entrepreneurial and better businesses. It can be argued, though, that the decreased involvement by volunteers in the social cooperatives reflects a lessening in importance of their social relationships, reducing their potential role as providers of 'social capital'. This is an area of political connection as many politicians are opposed to the involvement of volunteers as members of social cooperatives.

The sector has a major concern that its dependence on preferential relationships with local authorities could cause problems in the future. At present, a satisfactory arrangement has been established with the European Union's competition policy. However, future reviews of policy might conceivably lead to the end of these preferential arrangements.

6. KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER: APPLYING THE OUTCOMES

The Fellow has developed a 30 minute presentation detailing the key experiences, learning outcomes and recommendations from her international applied research experience. The Fellow has also provided a series of best-practice examples to be used by interested parties to further their development in this skill deficiency area.

The presentation is being delivered to the following partners:

- South Gippsland and Bass Coast LLEN - February 2017
- Gippsland Southern Health Services - Community Practitioner Meeting - February 2017
- South Gippsland Shire Council - Community Services Department - February 2017

The application of the Fellowship learning outcomes cover a broad range of areas which the Fellow has broken into the following four tables:

Table 1: The benefits of a social cooperative governance structure

Power is in the hands of members.
All members have a direct say in the planning and direction of the organisation.
Cost effective and allows members to have better control of the finances and structures of the cooperative.
Greater flexibility in service delivery allowing the cooperative to make change to suit the needs of local communities and the persons involved in the delivery of services.
Ability to engage and interact with other community groups to share ideas with the aim of developing a model of continuous improvement.
Control over strategic planning.
All profits remain within the organisation and are returned to the members through improved services and facilities.

Table 2: Member engagement in planning and decision making

The consistent message across all persons interviewed was the empowerment that came from owning the planning and decision making process.
Ownership is maintained by members and planning is community centered.
All members have equal voting rights and representation in all aspects of the decision making process.
First responsibility is to members and the local community.

6. KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER: APPLYING THE OUTCOMES

Table 3: Social cooperatives versus private sector service delivery

Social cooperatives put people before profit.
Ownership remains with members and is transferable as people choose to leave or join the cooperative.
Members are the centre of all aspects of the cooperative as opposed to for-profit services where clients are second in the line of responsibility with shareholders considered the first priority.
Annual reporting mechanisms are similar to private enterprise but focuses on services and outcomes rather than finances, although there is a need to remain financially viable and cooperatives are still accountable to meet government regulation.

Table 4: Benefits to regional Italian communities

Culture becomes the centre of planning and engagement.
Local communities feel connected with Italy and have the ability to strengthen these connections through the Fellows report.
Regional Italian communities can share knowledge and resources as learned by the Fellow which will allow for better decision making.
When engaging with local government, Italian communities in regional Victoria will be able to reference the experiences from Italy to influence future policy directions in their local communities.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations as founded in the Fellowship will be shared amongst Local Governments in South Gippsland, Health Services and Education providers. The preparatory research, coupled with the interviews and meetings held as part of the international applied research formed the Fellow's recommendations listed below

Industry

With reference to the Fellowship findings, Industry is encouraged to:

- Review the learnings from the fellowship and consider the benefits of the social governance structure to improved service delivery outcomes
- Industry, Government and training providers need to further enhance their knowledge of social cooperatives to ensure that units of competence and training packages embed into future learning the best components of the governance structure. This will ensure that students studying community services are receiving current, valid training that meets industry needs.

Government

With reference to the Fellowship findings, Government is encouraged to:

- Consider the benefits that are achievable through a cooperative structure allowing members and communities to drive local needs and respond to their local challenges promptly
- Regulate to allow for social cooperatives to be easily formed and provide greater flexibility in organisational structures
- Allow communities to own their problems and look for local solutions
- Both State and Federal governments should provide greater resources to ensure that social cooperatives are promoted as an option for communities to work on local issues.

Education and Training

With reference to the Fellowship findings, the Education and Training sector is encouraged to:

- Partner with industry to develop up-to-date information on social cooperatives so that it can be incorporated into current training packages within the community services field
- Invest in the Professional Development of trainers within RTO's to ensure that they are aware of social cooperatives and their benefits
- Engage with international best practice to determine governance models for social cooperatives that allow for greater flexibility for both industry, and community practitioners. There needs to be a re-framing of the roles that each stakeholder plays in community service provision with governance models being at the fore-front of these conversations
- Greater collaboration between VET Institutes to ensure that training resources and assessments have contemporary practice included in their design

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

Community

With reference to the Fellowship findings, Community is encouraged to:

- Work with State and Local Government to gather information on social cooperative structures to see if these are the best option for local problems
- Invest in the development of a handbook that can be distributed to local communities to ensure they are informed of the benefits of social cooperatives over private enterprise when weighing up options for local community service provision

9. REFERENCES

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10. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Fellow would like to thank the following individuals and organisations who generously gave their time and their expertise to assist, advise and guide her throughout the Fellowship program.

International Specialised Skills Institute (ISS Institute) – The Awarding Body

The ISS Institute exists to foster an aspirational, skilled and smart Australia by cultivating the mastery and knowledge of talented Australians through international research Fellowships.

The International Specialised Skills Institute (ISS Institute) is proud of its heritage. The organisation was founded over 25 years ago by Sir James Gobbo AC CVO QC, former Governor of Victoria, to encourage investment in the development of Australia's specialised skills. Its international Fellowship program supports a large number of Australians and international leaders across a broad cross-section of industries to undertake applied research that will benefit economic development through vocational training, industry innovation and advancement. To date, over 350 Australian and international Fellows have undertaken Fellowships facilitated through ISS Institute. The program encourages mutual and shared learning, leadership and communities of practice.

At the heart of the ISS Institute are our individual Fellows. Under the International Applied Research Fellowship Program the Fellows travel overseas and upon their return, they are required to pass on what they have learnt by:

- Preparing a detailed report for distribution to government departments, industry and educational institutions
- Recommending improvements to accredited educational courses
- Delivering training activities including workshops, conferences and forums.

The organisation plays a pivotal role in creating value and opportunity, encouraging new thinking and early adoption of ideas and practice. By working with others, ISS Institute invests in individuals who wish to create an aspirational, skilled and smart Australia through innovation, mastery and knowledge cultivation.

For further information on ISS Institute Fellows, refer to www.issinstitute.org.au

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10. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Italian Services Institute Inc. – Fellowship Sponsor

The Fellow sincerely thanks the Italian Services Institute for providing funding support for this Fellowship and to the ISS Institute. The Italian Services Institute was established, inter alia, to advance the education of Australian residents who are of Italian descent. The Fellowship provides the opportunity for successful Fellows to advance their skills and knowledge. Italian Services Institute and ISS Institute work with the successful recipients upon their return to share and publicise the learnings and recommendations from their fellowship investigation.

Fellowship Supporters

Employer support:

Gippsland Southern Health Service (GSHS) generously supported this Fellowship by providing time to travel as well as support the Fellow with additional mentoring as required. The Fellow particularly acknowledges the following people:

- Kim Bolding, Manager Social Work (GSHS)
- Mark Johnson, CEO (GSHS)
- Sue Dutton, Manager Drug and Alcohol Services (GSHS)

Industry support:

- Local Social Service providers in South Gippsland
- Gippsland Southern Health Services

Community support:

Community organisations who have supported and whose networks will benefit from the research:

- South Gippsland and Bass Coast Local Learning and Employment Network (SGBCLLEN)
- Bass Coast Shire Council (BCSC)
- South Gippsland Shire Council (SGSC)
- Learn Local

Mentor support:

- Kim Bolding, GSHS (Workplace Mentor)
- Vicki Bradley, SGSC (Industry Mentor)
- Daniel Smith, GSHS (Report Writing Mentor)

Overseas support organisations and representatives

- Casa Sant Andrea-Antonina Guarella
- OCST
- Fare Comunità Soc. Coop. Cons. Sociale-Massimo Caroli
- Dr Ermanno Tortia

Organisations impacted by the Fellowship

Professional Associations:

The following organisations and industry groups should benefit from the findings of this report:

- Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW)
- Department of Human Services (DHS)
- Vocational Education and Training Development Centre (VDC)
- Gippsland Southern Health Community Services/ Volunteer Programs
- South Gippsland Shire Council – Home and Community Services
- South Gippsland Shire Council – Ageing Plan 2017
- Community Services training across TAFE Victoria
- Bass Coast Shire Council
- South Gippsland and Bass Coast Local Learning and Employment Network (SGBCLLEN)
- Community Services Industry Association
- Business Council of Co-Operatives and Mutuals

Education and Training:

The education and training organisations that will benefit from the Fellowship include:

- Victorian TAFE Colleges
- Learn Local Colleges
- Adult Community and Further Education (ACFE) Colleges

