GET ON BOARD

Helping develop young and emerging leaders for board roles in the WA aged care and community sectors

This publication is dedicated to the memory of Richard Hill, Chairman of Melville Cares Inc, Councillor for the City of Melville and local business owner, with respect and gratitude.

Richard was passionate about the independence, wellbeing and inclusion of everyone, and especially people with disability, the aged and youth. An inspirational leader, Richard displayed a positive attitude to overcoming challenges in his quest of making tomorrow's dreams happen today.

He will truly be missed.

ENGAGING Young Leaders ON Aged Care & Community Boards

Acknowledgements

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Southcare Inc
Melville Cares Inc
SwanCare Group Inc
MercyCare

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Introduction

For the aged care and community sector in Western Australia, the legacy of the Silent and Baby Boomer generations has been the growth of organisations that offer vital services to society's most vulnerable people. In more recent years however, numerous challenges such as an aging population, funding cuts and rising competition have meant that these organisations are increasingly needing to adapt and innovate in order to survive and continue offering high quality services.

In this climate, the role of the board is more important than ever; both in terms of maintaining effective governance and in guiding organisations through change. While the average age of Australian not-for-profit board directors sits at 55, a growing pool of emerging leaders are increasingly interested in contributing to the aged care and community sector. Savvy organisations understand and capitalise on the numerous benefits that come from nurturing younger leaders and engaging their input at the board level.

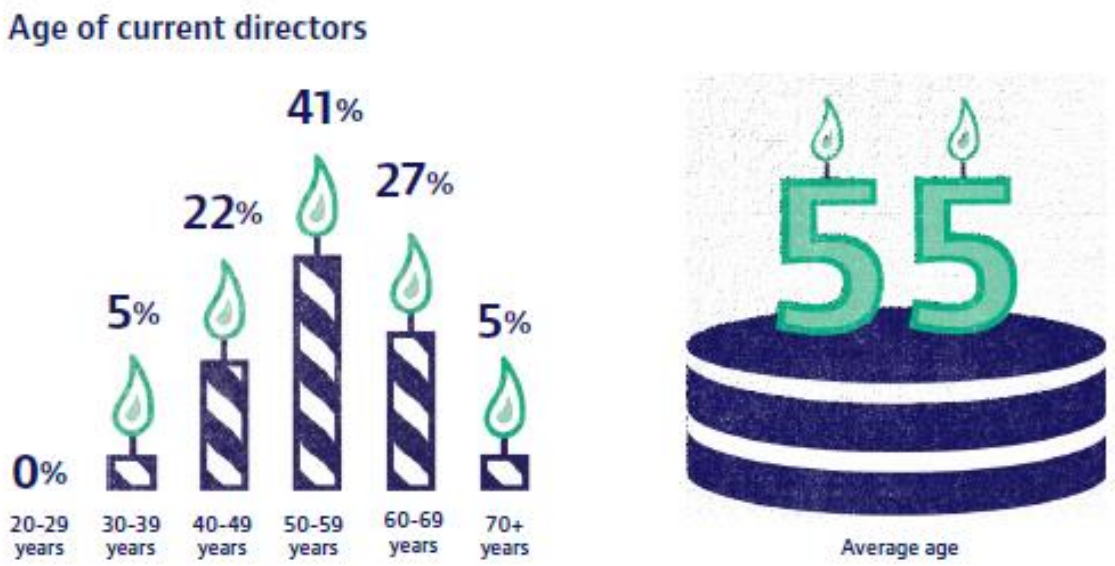
By initiating board traineeship programs for emerging leaders, WA organisations such as Southcare, Melville Cares, SwanCare and MercyCare (just to name a few) are tapping into the talent and perspectives of the next generations to the benefit of their organisation and the sector overall. This publication tells the story of these traineeship programs: how they were established, what they have meant for the participants, and the benefits they have realised. Through these stories, we can come to understand how fostering emerging leadership at the board level can lead to transformational change and renewal for organisations as well as for the whole sector.

Emerging leaders on boards: the way forward

Directors for community boards across Australia are in high demand. Averaging eight directors per board, the sector needs around 472,000 directors at any one time (SVA Consulting 2014). Yet many boards struggle to find and retain high performing members. Given these challenges, could younger people help make up the shortfall?

A study of more than 5,000 not-for-profit organisations in the United States (Ostrower 2007) has revealed that 90% indicate it is difficult to find skilled board directors. This demand has not led to younger people being appointed as only 7% of US directors are less than 36 years old.

Australia shows a similar profile, with the Australian Institute of Company Directors reporting in 2014 that almost all directors serving on not-for-profit boards are over 40 years of age, with an average age of 55.



Source: AICD 2014

Nurturing emerging leaders is one way boards can meet the challenges of a shrinking talent pool as baby boomers phase into retirement. To ensure there are sufficient candidates for future demand, community boards should consider innovative and flexible approaches such as enabling aspiring young leaders to be exposed early-on to the board process and to develop relevant and valuable skills and experience.

Of course, this is not just a 'numbers game'. Connecting with emerging leaders brings numerous benefits for boards such as greater insight into youth issues, increased credibility with the community, and growth in community capacity for the future.

Capability needed by community boards

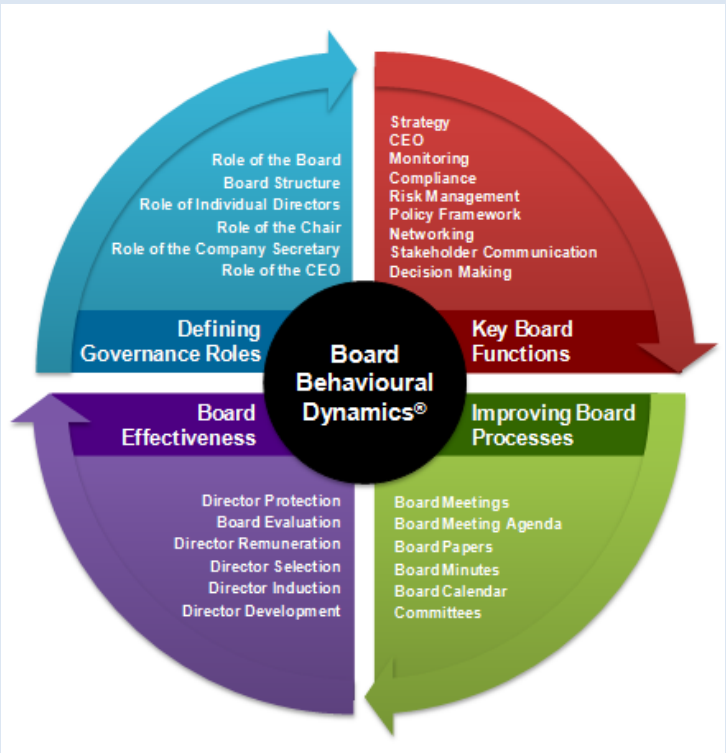
Serving on a not-for-profit board represents a significant responsibility and a unique set of challenges, such as limited resources or a lack of continuous funding. For an organisation to run efficiently and remain true to its core values and mission, it needs an effective board. In the community sector, this is especially critical as organisations are charged with caring for those who are vulnerable and in need.

An effective board is not simply a collective of individuals, with appropriate skills and experience, who meet periodically to make decisions affecting an organisation. Instead, boards require a cohesive team of directors, with a diverse range of backgrounds, knowledge and experiences, who each contribute in different ways to the overall functionality and success of the board and the organisation.

As derived from the below diagram (Kiel et al. 2012), the role of board directors is broad and draws on talents and qualities that extend beyond the traditional 'skills' that often come to mind, such as knowledge of governance.

Younger people can offer many of these qualities. Skills such as the following are often inherent traits regardless of age:

- passionate about the mission
- gifted at building relationships
- committed to integrity and accountability
- focused on listening and learning
- attentive to detail
- able to think creatively and be future-oriented
- well-prepared and organised.



Source: Kiel et al. 2012

Traineeship programs for younger directors

In 2013, a group of WA service providers engaged with a young social entrepreneur to launch a new initiative, the Young Leaders on Aged Care Boards Program. The stakeholders' aim was for aged care organisations to commit to having a younger person participate in their board process.

Emerging Leaders on Aged Care and Community Boards Program (ELP) (formerly Young Leaders on Aged Care Boards)

The ELP is an award-winning collaborative leadership project, which is building a talent pipeline for younger professionals to secure board director positions with community organisations.

The three-month program empowers participants to join aged care and community boards and committees. It offers learning opportunities such as meeting CEOs and board members, leadership and governance training sessions, networking events, board observations, mentoring, site visits and a unique leadership retreat.

In December each year, the ELP seeks around 20 emerging leaders from all backgrounds and industries, who are keen to volunteer on an aged care or community board. The program is provided at no cost to participants due to the financial and in-kind investment of more than 20 community partners.

Alicia Curtis, the Leadership Consultant who facilitates the program, advises the commitment is not to be taken lightly. There are compulsory sessions every week, a team project and the weekend retreat. All sessions are held outside normal working hours. However, the program comes highly recommended by past participants.

While participation does not guarantee a board position, it does provide the knowledge, resources and contacts to help younger leaders join a board.

The ELP participants form a strong bond during the program, and continue to support each other with their mutual aims after the program is finished.

for further information, see <youngleadersonboards.com.au>

Arising from the Young Leaders on Aged Care Boards Program, eight board traineeship programs, representing six to 12-month non-voting and experiential learning opportunities, have taken place since 2013 (or will shortly commence) in the WA aged care and community sectors.

The organisations involved (or currently preparing) include SwanCare, Southcare, Baptistcare, MercyCare, Melville Cares, Community Vision, Rise and CommunityWest. SwanCare has run its program in each of the three years, with the remaining organisations split equally across both first and third years, and one year only. A handful of participants in the Young Leaders Program have been through these traineeships to date, with more expected to commence in the future.

However, the eight organisations currently offering these traineeships represent only a small fraction of community organisations in WA that are likely to have a board of management. For example, the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Register indicates there are more than 300 active registered entities supporting aged persons in WA.

With so few traineeships and almost one-third of board members aged over 60 years, there remains significant opportunity for WA's community boards to contribute to developing the directors of the future.

You're getting free thinking

Dr Nicky Howe, CEO of Southcare, is a leadership and management coach, with over 25 years' senior management experience working in the government and not-for-profit sectors, within employment, education, welfare, health, aged care and other community services.

This experience led to her co-founding the Young Leaders on Aged Care Boards Program in 2013. In her role as the Southcare CEO, Nicky has engaged with two trainees who spent 12 months on the Southcare Board following the Young Leaders Program, and she has seen first-hand the benefits that age diversity brings to the boardroom.

Drawing on her experience with the Southcare trainees and her engagement with the Young Leaders Program, Nicky makes the business case for an organisation to establish a board traineeship so appealing that the only question left to answer is whether to take on just one or more trainees.

Dr Nicky Howe, Southcare CEO

Q&A with Dr Nicky Howe, Southcare CEO

What does age diversity bring to the boardroom?

Age diversity is like any diversity and I think what it brings is a different viewpoint, a different perspective ,and it challenges groupthink. It reduces the homogeneity of members and brings cognitive diversity. I also think it brings board renewal. One of the challenges is that board directors can be there for a long time; there are no renewal processes. I think what board trainees do is renew a board's sense of its values.

What tangible benefits do you see that trainee directors, and young directors in general, bring to the boardroom?

I think they bring a real passion for the mission. They bring their values and their strengths. They also bring their networks. I think something we can fall into the trap of is thinking that older people have all the networks, whereas young people do have their own networks. I think another thing they bring to an organisation as a whole is a view of how it might be seen from the outside – they bring fresh eyes. We might love our organisation and think 'we're doing it so well' but they can sometimes be a neutral observer and offer some fresh perspectives.

Why should young people join boards?

Well, we want young people on boards and committees because we want a world-class aged care and community sector. So, why should young people join boards? Because without them, how do we build civil society? How do we create 'world-class' if we're not engaging everybody in our community? I think younger people do want to contribute and I think they should join a board because then they can contribute. They're involved, they're engaged, they're contributing and if they're on a board within an area they love, then they're completely energised.

What might be the future of board traineeships?

That every board in Australia has a traineeship – a 12-month traineeship program. It just becomes normal board governance. I can see it written up by the Governance Institute or the Australian Institute of Company Directors: "For board effectiveness, every board in Australia should offer the opportunity of a board traineeship". Wouldn't that be fantastic?

Benefits of younger directors

Emerging leaders offer community boards the opportunity to build diversity of membership, manage and plan for succession, improve board performance and contribute to the development of future leaders. Many benefits have been realised through the board traineeships linked to completion of the Young Leaders on Aged Care Boards Program. The following case studies provide evidence that the benefits to boards and organisations are tangible and real.

Melville Cares – Richard Hill, Board Chair

** At the time of writing, Richard Hill was in this position*

Richard Hill is the Board Chair of Melville Cares, a not-for-profit organisation that provides support services to the aged, people with special needs, war veterans and carers to help them lead an independent and healthy lifestyle. Melville Cares employs 85 staff to provide administrative or direct care services. The 160 volunteers from the local community are the backbone of the organisation in providing support services to about 2,000 community members.

Melville Cares' board of management comprises seven volunteers from the community, including Richard, who has been the Chair since 2009. The members have a variety of skills and experience in the areas of management, business, accounting, residential aged care and community health. This diversity of expertise and the associated range of views form the core of the board's balanced decision making process.

Richard Hill
Melville Cares Board Chair

> ***Reflect the community, young and old***

As the board chair, Richard believes it is essential for members to have a diversity of age, gender and disability. He states that "Melville Cares is a community organisation and as such the board composition should be reflective of the community, both young and old". Richard notes this should not just be about the local community – this means representing everyone.

In 2013, the board recognised a need for younger members with particular skills and relevant experience. The Young Leaders on Aged Care Boards Program provided an opportunity for the board to recruit a trainee who had developed board skills such as leadership, governance and financial management. This trainee, Orla Hill, also brought relevant experience and awareness from her work in the aged care sector as a Research Officer with Silver Chain Group.

Initially, Richard feels the board was uncertain about the value of the 12-month traineeship. However, it was recognised there was a need to better balance the role of the board, which operates quite closely to Melville Cares and is passionate about the work done by the organisation. Reviews of the board had shown some capability gaps, which it was thought Orla could help fill. The traineeship was considered a lower-risk opportunity to test that thinking as Orla would be a non-voting member and there was no requirement that she join the board following the program.

An important first step to the traineeship was for Richard to meet with Orla outside the boardroom, find out more about her and identify the board's expectations of her participation. Richard then introduced Orla to the board and over the course of the traineeship, any perceived risks to the board were reduced or managed. Richard feels the process went very well although Orla "did have to manage the granddaughter syndrome".

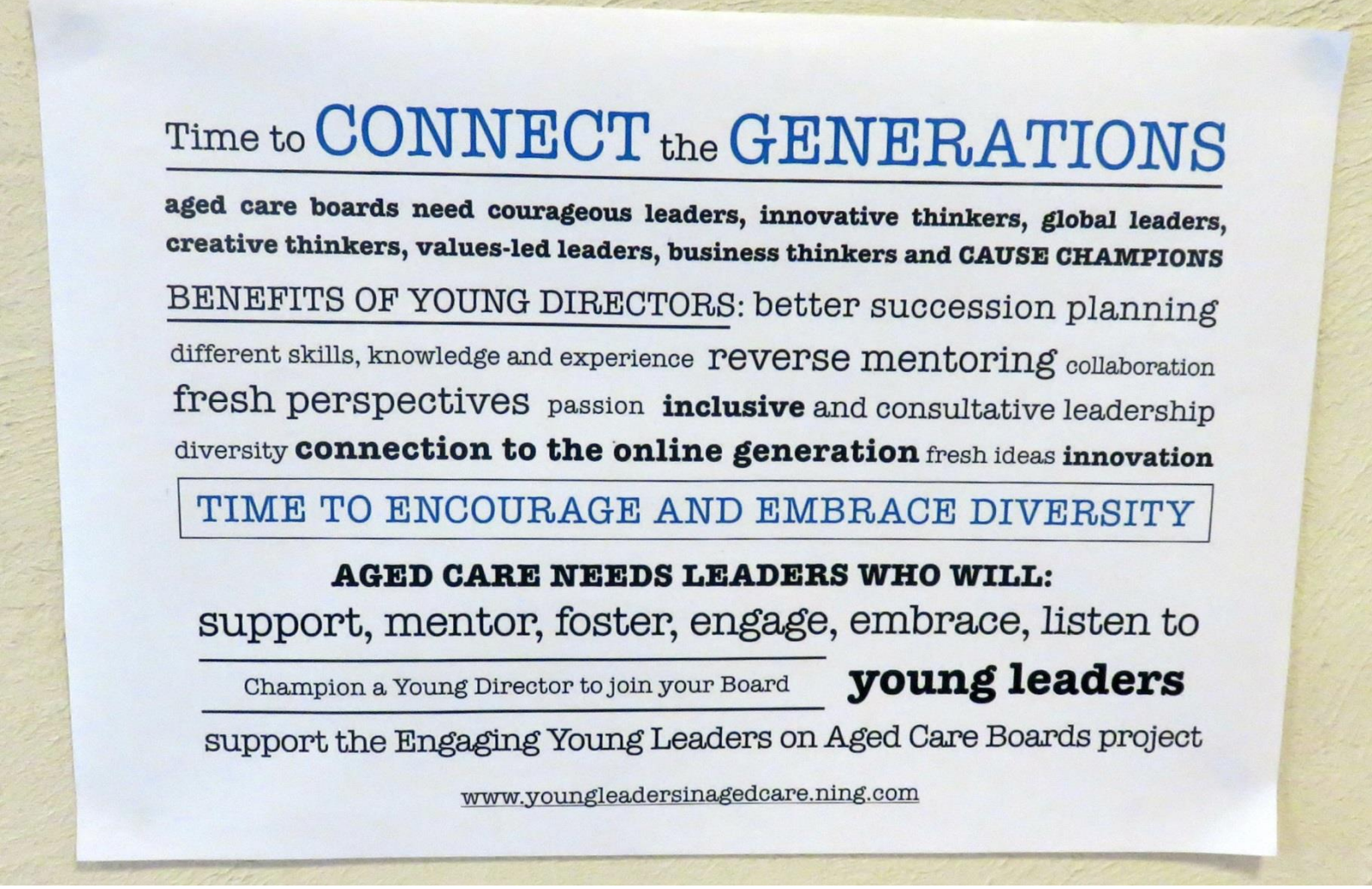
Richard notes that ongoing communication about the responsibility for funds and for protecting the organisation's reputation was an important part of the traineeship. During the course of the program, the board continued to ensure Orla was aware of her role in representing the community. However, board membership is a voluntary role and Richard believes the demonstration of this "volunteering spirit", which does not seek public recognition or visibility, immediately lends itself to some reduced risk.

The cost of engaging Orla in a trainee capacity was not recorded by the board however Richard feels the cost was negligible. While there was some time involved in additional meetings and rethinking the agenda, this did not represent a significant impost on the board's resources. Instead, Orla brought the benefit of new strategic thinking to the board as she was not associated with Melville Cares. Richard believes the traineeship helped change the board's opinion about younger members. It was realised there is a "whole wealth of knowledge out there – some of which is not being seen or heard".

Richard feels the traineeship enabled the board to bring in a member with few preconceptions to challenge some stale thinking. He holds that "level of experience and knowledge about the role you are playing are more important than age". Independent of age, important qualities for an effective board member include being able to work in a group environment, consider others' opinions and advice, accept the decisions that are being made and move forward. These were qualities that Orla was found to display over the course of the traineeship.

> ***Whole wealth of knowledge***

Following the completion of the traineeship, Orla joined the board and is a current serving member. Richard continues to regularly meet with Orla outside of the boardroom. He says he values her honest opinion and relies on her to "ask questions that others wouldn't ask". Richard has found Orla to effectively manage any conflict of interest with her day job and to demonstrate a commitment to being at meetings and being prepared. He comments that the board so values Orla's participation that meeting times have been changed on occasion to accommodate her work commitments.



In terms of any community organisation that is considering whether to establish a board traineeship program, Richard comments “look at your board from a strategic point of view and don’t let age prejudice your decisions”. He advises boards to consider a traineeship as the board will learn a lot but “just make sure you interview the potential trainee first to establish fit”. If the board is prepared to support trainees, and ensure their engagement over the period, the board stands to reap significant reward.

“Level of experience and knowledge about the role you are playing is more important than age”

Richard Hill, Board Chair, Orla Hill and the other members of Melville Cares Board (below)

Melville Cares – Orla Hill, Current Board Member and ex-Board Trainee

** At the time of writing, Richard Hill was the Board Chair, Melville Cares*

Orla Hill had been working for three years at Silver Chain Group as a Research Officer when the opportunity arose in 2013 to participate in the Young Leaders on Aged Care Boards Program. While Orla was keen to expand on her knowledge of the state's aged care sector, she was unsure whether this interest extended to sitting on a board. However, Orla considered the program to be a valuable development initiative which would help determine her capacity for board directorship.

Over the course of the program, Orla discovered she had much to offer community boards in terms of personal qualities, such as a willingness to share ideas and listen to others, and a desire to advocate for fellow members of the community. To support these attributes, the Young Leaders Program helped her learn business skills required of board members, such as good governance practices and the responsible management of finances.

Following the completion of the program, Orla commenced a board traineeship with Melville Cares, a not-for-profit organisation that supports elders, people with disabilities and carers to lead an active life as part of the community. This ethos of enabling people to maintain independence and live for longer in their own homes is what initially drew Orla to this board.

Orla felt the 12-month board traineeship was a good segue from the Young Leaders Program in helping her prepare to join a board. She was supported from the beginning of the traineeship by the Board Chair, Richard Hill, through a two-way mentoring arrangement in which she felt her personal attributes were recognised and appreciated. She also participated in operational training with the Melville Cares' executive to better understand the issues facing the organisation. While she expressed some initial concern about managing her financial responsibilities, she found the board encouraged her learning in this area and the board's treasurer was happy to provide ongoing support. She also found the time commitment easier to manage than expected, even with juggling other priorities such as full-time work, sport, music practice and community service.

Engaging with members outside formal board meetings on an ad hoc basis proved beneficial. Events such as the Christmas lunch enabled her to build rapport in an informal social setting, which translated to better working relationships in the boardroom and an increased sense of fellowship.

As the only woman on the board, as well as the youngest, the board was facing the unknown in taking on Orla. It was therefore important that she was respectful in her approach to joining the board. Orla believes the year-long traineeship helped her "learn her place". As a trainee, she was in a different position to the others and the new presence was welcomed in that capacity. The board enjoyed the process of helping her learn the business and she in turn, through asking 'why' more often, encouraged the board to look at different ways of doing things.

Putting the issue of diversity aside, Orla believes 'intelligent naivety' serves to benefit the board through challenging longstanding beliefs and reducing the risk of groupthink. Orla's professional knowledge of the aged care industry also offered fresh insight to the board. It was recognised that she could make a significant contribution to the board's strategic planning process.

Following the completion of her traineeship, Orla became a Melville Cares board member. She finds that she continues to learn something new at each meeting she attends. Richard checks in with Orla every two to three months outside the boardroom and values her input to setting the board's strategic direction. In looking back at her traineeship, the highlight for Orla was meeting the passionate volunteers and other people involved with Melville Cares who believe in making a difference. She also found the Melville Cares' client feedback to be personally rewarding.

Orla suggests to any community organisation considering whether to establish a board traineeship program to "just try it". She notes there is no binding contract associated with the traineeship and it can serve as a probationary period or trial for the board, organisation and trainee. In Orla's experience, the traineeship is a good opportunity for a board to try something new and benefit from a fresh perspective, while also contributing to the development of younger people in the community.

So benefits include:

- Challenging long-standing beliefs
- Reducing the risk of groupthink
- New ways of doing things
- Fresh insight
- Asking 'why' more often

MercyCare's Trainee Governance Program

James Lawton is currently the Director of Executive Services at MercyCare. This large not-for-profit organisation is a leading Catholic provider of aged care, family, health and community services. MercyCare's mission is to bring compassion and justice to life by breaking cycles of disadvantage. Employing over 750 staff and volunteers, MercyCare delivers services from more than 30 locations throughout the Perth metropolitan area.

James, as MercyCare's representative, was part of the inaugural Young Leaders on Aged Care Boards program with Dr Nicky Howe, Southcare CEO, Dr Lucy Morris, Baptistcare CEO, and Alicia Curtis, Leadership Consultant. James also started the planning of a Trainee Governance Program at MercyCare, with the support of the organisation's management and board.

As MercyCare serves society's most vulnerable people, the organisation actively seeks staff diversity so that, as a whole, MercyCare can relate well to clients who hail from a huge range of backgrounds.

While MercyCare is a Catholic organisation, its leadership and staff are highly respectful of different beliefs amongst staff members and the client base. It is not just faith that unites staff in pursuing the organisation's mission. Rather, it is a keen sense of values, compassion and a strong desire to make a real difference for those who are experiencing significant disadvantage, marginalisation and discrimination.

James recognised that, due to MercyCare's diversity of clients, the organisation needed to have a mix of opinions and perspectives coming through at the board level. As well as providing aged care services, MercyCare also provides assistance to a range of young people, including the homeless, displaced youth and unaccompanied, young asylum seekers. Therefore, MercyCare sought to gain strategic input from young people as they can relate to this client demographic.

While some organisations are not certain as to what young and emerging leaders can bring to a board, James and his colleagues held a deep-felt belief that young people provide a wealth of knowledge and professionalism to boards.

In James' opinion, age diversity at the leadership level is extremely important. Whenever there is too much of any one demographic in a group, there is a tendency to have homogeneous thought patterns and it is less likely the group will reach the richness of diverse discussion, debate and input that is really needed for a board. As well as gender diversity, age diversity is essential so the board can benefit from the strength of these combined perspectives.

James Lawton, MercyCare

In James' opinion, diversity stops groupthink, and prevents deep-rooted norms from perpetuating. Some boards have the same board members for 20 years, who may have been in the command and control philosophy for the whole time. The past can then become a hindrance. For MercyCare, it is about opening the door to different beliefs, thought processes and passions. James feels it is ultimately about inclusiveness, integrity and connectedness.

In order to start achieving age diversity in the MercyCare Board, James and his colleagues set up a Trainee Governance Program to give young people the experience of sitting on a board committee. This program was set up so that MercyCare could benefit from the perspectives that a young leader has to offer.

The first program started in 2013 and ran for a few months. Louise Forster, a participant in the first Young Leaders Program, was offered a year-long secondment to the MercyCare Board. In addition, Christelle Gibson, was successful in her application to sit on MercyCare's Risk and Audit Committee, with the Chair of the Committee, Darren Cutri, acting as her mentor for six months. Darren provided her with advice on the different elements of the meeting agenda, decision processes, background to discussion items, decisions in the context of MercyCare's mission, values and Catholic identity, financial implications, governance structure and processes, and board, trustees and management roles and responsibilities.

SwanCare Group – Julian Keys, Board Chair

Julian Keys is the Board Chair of SwanCare Group, a large not-for-profit organisation providing retirement living, residential care and community care services. SwanCare employs a dedicated workforce of more than 300 staff, who support the highly qualified and experienced management team.

SwanCare is administered by a voluntary board of directors, consisting of recognised leaders from the corporate and community sectors. Julian joined the SwanCare board in 2009, became the Deputy Chair in 2010 and Chair in 2012.

Julian Keys
SwanCare Board Chair

> ***We are hoping trainees will go on to get aged care roles. Having trainees coming in with fresh eyes is a good thing.***

When asked to describe why SwanCare decided to start a board traineeship program, Julian recounts that this started as part of the Young Leaders on Aged Care Boards Program, following discussion with Dr Nicky Howe, Southcare CEO, and Alicia Curtis, Leadership Consultant. While SwanCare did form its own program, it is believed the model has helped other organisations to form trainee programs.

Julian knew that SwanCare's board was not looking for a full board member but wanted trainees to experience board meetings and how sub-committees work. When a trainee enters the SwanCare traineeship program, they are inducted the same as other board members; the process is no different. Trainee directors also attend one of each of the sub-committee meetings, tour facilities and go to business or strategy development days.

The SwanCare CEO receives and shortlists traineeship applications and the CEO and Deputy Chair then interview the potential trainees. The chair is not involved in recruitment or selection but does have a one-to-one meeting with the selected trainee on commencement. The trainee is then assigned a mentor on the board.

Julian notes that the board has just been through an external board review and half of the board members are graduates from the Australian Institute of Company Directors. Structurally, the sub-committees that are in place as part of the board are entitled Finance and Audit, Governance and Business Development.

When asked to recall if board members had any initial reservations about setting up a board traineeship, Julian remembers it being generally well accepted with no major concerns. He remembers a small concern about having another person at the table given the size of the board, but states that this has not been an issue. To ensure confidentiality is maintained, the meeting process is covered with trainees so they are aware of the guidelines.

In terms of tangible benefits to the board and the organisation, Julian feels enthusiasm is one of the greatest benefits. Julian believes that both of the SwanCare board trainees have been very enthusiastic and have brought that to the table. He feels the board is already quite diverse so there was no aim to diversify but to instead help the trainees learn. He also feels that the trainees brought positive energy to the board.

In Julian's opinion, the traineeship program has focused less on board learning and more on providing opportunities to the trainee. Despite this, he feels the traineeship has no real cost to the organisation aside from a little bit of time. He also notes that working relationships between board members and trainees continue past the traineeship and trainees continue to be involved in the sector.

In reflecting upon the question of board diversity, Julian feels that because SwanCare has a relatively younger board, the members are quite prepared to make more complex decisions to grow the organisation. Julian recognises the industry can be quite slow to react in general and the entry of new private sector organisations can be challenging. SwanCare board members have experience dealing with this and are up to the challenge.

In considering the management of any risks associated with having a trainee on the board, Julian feels there will always be a possible risk of inappropriate internal or external behaviour due to inexperience, caveating this by underscoring that this has not happened to date. He believes the selection process for trainees is quite involved, by way of engaging the CEO in applicant pre-screening followed by board involvement, and that this helps to mitigate some of the risks.

In terms of innovations, Julian states that the current trainee is working on a project to better analyse and understand the competition around SwanCare services. As part of the traineeship program, the board is considering having every trainee complete a project and present it to the board. Julian notes that trainees also have to give a presentation at the end of their placement to describe their experience on the board, make suggestions for future traineeship iterations, outline their board observations and highlight the outcomes of the program.

When asked if the trainee role has been considered a testing ground for future directors, Julian feels this is not SwanCare's intent and that "the priority is developing the trainee". SwanCare chooses candidates based more on what they can learn rather than what they already know. The board does not think of the traineeship as a recruitment path and as such is more inclined to select younger and less experienced candidates.

> ***Enthusiasm and positive energy***

In terms of possible advice to another board on the benefits of a traineeship program, Julian believes it could serve as a recruitment path in other organisations. "Having trainees coming in with fresh eyes is a good thing". There is a possibility for SwanCare trainees to join the board if circumstances arise, depending on the vacancy and skill set needed.

Matthew Horgan,
SwanCare Board Trainee

When asked about his feelings toward the board traineeship program, Julian states, "We are hoping trainees will go on to get aged care roles. We were the first trainee program and there are now eight trainee programs, which is positive".

SwanCare Group – Matthew Horgan, Current Board Trainee

Matthew Horgan is currently undergoing a traineeship as a non-executive director on the board of SwanCare Group, a leading provider of accommodation services for older Western Australians.

Matt participated in the Young Leaders on Aged Care Boards Program in 2014. With a background in chemical engineering, he currently works for Alcoa Inc within its technology delivery group. Matt has a keen interest in business strategy and is currently studying a Masters of Business Administration (MBA) at the University of Western Australia.

Matt applied for the trainee director role with SwanCare because he saw it as a good opportunity. Once he was on the board, Evan Nunn stepped in to mentor Matt on financials. What Matt feels is key is structure, and trainees really throwing themselves into the role, fully embracing the opportunity. Matt was quiet at the first few meetings he attended and used this time to build up his confidence. Now Matt dives in, calls the CFO to question the financials and operates like other directors. He had reservations when he was new and worried about his contributions but quickly "got over it by getting into it", now feeling a valued member of the board.

Matt believes his inquisitive nature has helped with ensuring some finer details are not overlooked, a skill critical to the role of a board member. Matt believes that his attention to detail has been an asset to the board and there have been several instances where he has picked up issues for discussion that would have otherwise been missed. Having a good analytical mind and being able to interpret complex information have also been of benefit. Matt recounts one particular instance where he was able to take the lead role in a discussion when reviewing an Australian Institute of Company Directors' (AICD) governance study covering variances, arithmetic means and distributions.

Matt believes the biggest tangible benefit he has brought to the board has been the review of financial activity in the Australian aged care sector, which he is currently doing for Julian Keys, the Board Chair. Matt believes his strong financial base developed through his MBA study has played an important part in his trainee director role.

While boards may have some trepidation about creating a board trainee role, Matt says "it's awesome, try it"! Matt believes risk can be managed and it is a fixed tenure at the board's discretion. The risks of conversation sway are minimal in the context of inexperience causing issues and if the trainee is a bad fit it will quickly be identified. Matt has discussed board traineeships with a few CEOs and even brought the topic up at an AICD speed-networking event, with positive sentiment expressed by CEOs.

As a trainee director, Matt was new to the sector and very inquisitive, challenging the status quo. The SwanCare Board has been very receptive to this, enjoying being challenged and having a younger perspective on the board. Matt feels that traineeships break up groupthink and foster new ideas. Even though Matt is younger than the other members, he is not expected to know about technology or social media, which has come as a pleasant surprise. Matt has learnt more about the community sector, gaining a much broader perspective and understanding of the term 'mission statement'. He has also learned how a board works, the etiquette required in building relationships with executives and the importance of directors "keeping fingers out".

Upon reflection, Matt believes that he "didn't fully grasp the time commitment" of a director role. Matt encourages future directors to be really structured in scheduling their time. When board papers are released, Matt spends Sunday morning reviewing them, then revisits them that night and sends any questions to the SwanCare CEO. It takes him roughly five to six hours to prepare for each board meeting every month, as well as participating in the three-hour monthly meeting. There is also attendance and preparation time required for each bi-monthly committee meeting. Matt's advice is to give it the time it deserves, representing roughly 1.5 days a month, and to "be mindful of your commitments".

Because of the experience he has gained, Matt feels he is building enough confidence to contribute as a full board member. In terms of long-lasting benefits, Matt has gained exposure to the not-for-profit sector and is more professionally well-rounded. He has always wanted to be on a board and this position has helped him solidify that desire. Matt has enjoyed giving back to the community, using professional skills that really help the organisation. The traineeship has given him experiences he can draw on in different scenarios, along with the confidence to apply for director roles.

Matt valued his time and experience working with Julian as Chair of the SwanCare Board, especially his authentic leadership style. Matt had originally thought the chair needs to be openly charismatic and outspoken but later discovered that chairs need to leverage their strengths and be who they really are to be most effective.

When asked if he would recommend other young leaders engage in a board traineeship program, Matt's answer was an emphatic "Yes"! He believes it is a good taster with less legal responsibility to start with. It is also a good reality check to see if one really wants to be on a board.

Conclusion

The aged care and community organisations as well as the people profiled in this publication represent only a few of the growing number of boards recognising the need to further support diversity and to engage with younger leaders in the board room. In the few short years since the first traineeship program in collaboration with the Young Leaders on Aged Care Boards Program, the number of trainee director programs has increased to eight, with that number continuing to increase each year.

Given the need for around 472,000 directors for community boards at any given time across Australia, this publication aims to provide support in increasing board diversity by looking at the experiences of organisations within the aged care and community sector. The background research, review of programs in place and interviews with trainee directors and their respective chairs have outlined just some of the things happening to engage emerging leaders in this sector.

A board traineeship program is only one of several ways that younger leaders can become involved with a community organisation, contributing a number of unique attributes and experiences. For more information on engaging young leaders, additional resources on past projects within the program, as well as specific resources on how to start a board traineeship program within an organisation, please see the Toolkit at <youngleadersonboards.com.au>.

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Contact information

If you are interested in further exploring the possibility of setting up a board traineeship for your organisation, please contact:

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- Dr Nicky Howe on <nicky.h@southcare.org.au>.

You may also be interested in <youngleadersonboards.com.au>.

For further information, see <youngleadersonboards.com.au>

ENGAGING
Young Leaders
ON Aged Care & Community Boards