



International Association
for Public Participation
AUSTRALASIA

IAP2 - Bliss Browne Sydney Breakfast Article

On a warm and sunny morning in December, around 20 IAP2 members rolled into the Sydney Mechanics School of Arts, to hear Bliss Browne from 'Imagine Chicago' speak. The turnout was fantastic, particularly for some who had enjoyed the work Christmas party the night before! The wonderful breakfast, cooked by Rosie, Allison and Helena, provided the perfect backdrop to Bliss' stories.

Bliss focused the discussion around her work with a community on the south island of New Zealand, who had lost their direction and purpose as a community, through a combination of economic and social changes. Bliss undertook a visioning exercise with that community, and her stories focussed around the one day exercise and some of the wonderful stories that emerged from that day.

One of the key underlying themes behind the success of the day was Bliss' engagement of local children into the visioning process. Bliss essentially drew on a choir performance that these children had given – and then ran the songs that they were singing into the structure of the day and the visioning process. Songs of hope, possibility and dreaming ended up providing the perfect backdrop to the more structured process that the adults in the room were working through.

Other activities that the children engaged in, throughout the day, was a mural created across the wall – where at one end of the wall the children were to draw 'what they loved doing in the community' and at the other end 'what they ideally saw that this place could be'. This supported the process that the adults were undertaking in identifying the strengths of their community and working through the process of dreaming about what the community could become (the vision).

This story was amazing and made even more so by the fact that Bliss had drawn the children into the process on the day and had integrated their activities into the day as the children's interest and engagement in the process unfolded.

Other themes that Bliss discussed included the importance of 'dreaming' and creating 'dream trees' as part of your visioning process – and that there is a chance, that as adults, we have forgotten to dream or have become too cynical to believe in the power of dreams. These themes linked into the process and importance of appreciative enquiry and the difference that this approach can take to working forward to find a common vision. Bliss also spoke of 'social construction' and its importance in building and rebuilding communities.

This article only touches on the extent of ground covered by Bliss in 2 hours – we wish we had more time with her. However, those who came were inspired by the ideas and approaches adopted by Bliss and hope that we can build on the ideas and stories to better inform our visioning processes.