

Introducing the Stronger Families Learning Exchange Training and Support Team

As this edition of the Bulletin goes to print there are seven of us in the SFLEX Training and Support team. Our role is to support and assist the Stronger Families Fund projects to include action research processes in their practice, and to work with the projects to record and learn from the process. Each of us has a number of Stronger Families Fund projects with which we work directly, and a number of other projects for which we act as a back-up support person for the primary worker.

LIZ BRANIGAN

Acting team leader

What do you most enjoy about working in the team?

I love working with the local community projects. There have always been grassroots projects that have done great work in the community, but there have been far too few opportunities to collect and document the rich learnings that come out of such projects. I am inspired by the challenge of assisting the projects to document these processes and learnings in a way that preserves the integrity of their vision and practice.

What do you hope to learn from working in the team?

Working with the Stronger Families Learning Exchange team is already proving to be a wonderful learning opportunity. I hope I can work with the team in an action learning process of “plan-act-observe-reflect” that runs in parallel process to those of the projects we are supporting.

What is your contribution to the team/project?

I have a background in the TAFE sector, higher education and community development. I have conducted previous research with women who have been involved in activism, sole parents, and culturally and linguistically diverse communities. I would like to contribute to the team/project an understanding of diversity and an appreciation of the complexity of the articulation of community and family in Australian society.

ANNE GARROW

What do you most enjoy about working in the team?

Today is my first day! The most exciting thing for me right now is being part of something new. Such a huge range of

THE SFLEX TEAM'S PRINCIPLES

Very early on in our team existence we drafted a set of principles by which we are endeavouring to work.

As a team we are working in the following ways in all interactions and relationships:

- Learning and teaching by doing, observing and reflecting. When in doubt inquire and reflect and do it in a participatory way.
- Identifying stakeholders for our work and inviting them to participate.
- Being proactive with our vision.
- Allowing people space to work with us in a way that best suits their needs.
- Taking people with us by:
 - Enabling
 - Empowering
 - Exciting
 - Educating
- Creating and maintaining open and transparent processes.
- Supporting a learning environment, including giving ourselves and those we work with permission to take risks, improvise and make mistakes.
- Understanding, paying attention to, and working within the context at a range of levels, including project-based, organisation-based and policy-based levels.
- Building trust in order to speak to and work with challenges and difficulties.

new projects around Australia working on a common theme – ways to strengthen families in your communities. Hopefully, through using action research you can build and develop your projects as you go along, and share what you learn with other people. So it's new projects, a new approach for FaCS, a new project for the Institute, and a new team.

What do you hope to learn from working in the team?

I am looking forward to learning about my colleagues' life experiences, the different ways they have of doing things, and how

we as a team can support you in action research.

What is your contribution to the team/project?

I have worked in Aboriginal communities and organisations and I am very interested in the different perspectives which people bring to their projects, and in how evaluation can be made useful to participants, not just an added chore to satisfy outsiders.

COLLEEN TURNER

What do you most enjoy about working in the team?

Like my colleagues I have very much enjoyed visiting projects and seeing first hand the inspirational work they are doing in a challenging field in complex community settings. I have also enjoyed being part of a new team.

What do you hope to learn from working in the team?

I hope to learn more about early intervention theories and how they can best translate into effective community projects.

What is your contribution to the team/project?

I have a background in community psychology and a history of working in projects and service delivery in disadvantaged communities. I have recently coordinated aged and disability services in a poor and culturally diverse community in Melbourne. That work reinforced for me the importance of community and family at one end of the age continuum. I also bring a long history of skills gained in participating in my own natural communities including voluntary management of community organisations and at a leadership level in my professional organisation. (I have recently completed a term as an elected member of the board of directors of the Australian Psychological Society.)

MAYA HAVILAND

What do you most enjoy about working in the team?

I really enjoy working directly with projects in their own communities. On a personal level, I am getting to meet people and go to places I could not have dreamed of. On a professional level, I enjoy the opportunity to work on projects that are seeking to have meaningful and local effects.

What do you hope to learn from working in the team?

Through working in the team I hope to learn how to support processes and collaborations between different stakeholders that value local knowledge and that communicate and learn across social and cultural differences. Our team has a wealth of diverse experience and skills, and as the youngest team member (at the moment!) I hope to learn from my “elders” (!) and to continue to develop my own skills in the wide-ranging areas needed to work with so many diverse people and projects.

What is your contribution to the team/project?

I hope that my contribution to the project is a creative approach, supporting the

development and management field for a number of years, I have gained insights into some of the difficulties and complexities of trying to make a difference. For me, it is an inspiring experience to work with others who are passionate and committed about this work.

What do you hope to learn from working in the team?

Working in the team is providing me with new insights and understandings about a range of subjects including early intervention, project management, and community development. It is a great opportunity to gain different perspectives and knowledge from a group of people who have a wealth of experience. As with many of the projects that we are working with, we are also “learning as we go” and I enjoy the creative experience of building the Stronger Families Learning Exchange project from the ground up.

What is your contribution to the team/project?

I have come to this team with a background in education and community development. I have worked in the government, local government and community sectors in a variety of locations around

about what’s effective in that location. I think action research is a great tool for projects to use to help them learn with and be more responsive to their communities.

What do you hope to learn from working in the team?

Since the team has come on board I’ve been awed by the depth of knowledge, skill and experience the members bring from such a range of areas. I’m constantly learning from them as I share what I’m doing. I really like our cooperative, action research-type team principles so we’re all making the effort to practice what we preach, and I look forward to learning more about this. On a more personal level, as we progress with the project I hope to learn more about action research and about early childhood programs and early intervention.

What is your contribution to the team/project?

I have worked on a wide range of women’s issues in ten years of teaching and researching in Women’s Studies in universities. My areas of focus have been family violence, political activism and friendship networks (which connects up with research at the Institute on social capital and community



The SFLEX team pictured outside the Australian Institute of Family Studies. From left: Adam Tomison, (Manager of the Training and Support Team), Tania Lienert, Liz Branigan (Acting team leader), Sandra Billard, Anne Garrow, Richard Munt, Colleen Turner. (Maya Haviland is not present in this photograph).

use of different methods and mediums, ways of speaking and ways of listening that open up learning and communication between all those involved. My background is in health promotion, community development, youth arts and multi-media, natural therapies, social ecology and inter-cultural communication.

RICHARD MUNT

What do you most enjoy about working in the team?

One of the most enjoyable aspects of working in the projects is visiting communities that have undertaken a Stronger Families Fund project. Having worked in the project

Australia. My particular interests currently lie in the areas of developing participatory and collaborative platforms for community based project management and developing community capacity.

TANIA LIENERT

What do you most enjoy about working in the team?

I most enjoy working on the ground with the projects. I was lucky to visit quite a few in the early stages of the project, and as I’m now a part-timer I’m just working with *Families Now* at Beenleigh in Brisbane. It’s very rewarding learning about what they’re doing, and working together to learn more

capacity building). I’ve also worked on a research project with new mothers on infant feeding and home visiting as a form of early intervention. I’m interested in alternative family forms and have done research on lesbian family and friendship networks. I’ve got a background in community development, specifically community arts in rural South Australia. I’ve always been active in my community in different organisations such as community radio, women’s and environmental groups. It’s rewarding that so many of these experiences on so many different levels are relevant and useful to the Stronger Families Learning Exchange project.

