

Reflecting on *the workshop*

Sam Davis

I am grateful to be provided with the opportunity to participate in the gathering together of many great people from all over the land who are working towards building up our communities and strengthening the families that make up our society. I was pleased to see how the Australian Government is investing in this important aspect of our lives and to understand the accessibility of these funds for average community members with shared local concerns.

I am inspired to take up local concerns in my own area and help work towards these worthy causes as I do feel that the decimation of community and family supports is the greatest tragedy of modern society and the basis of the majority of chronic problems facing individuals today.

As a researching student psychologist I was quite impressed with the support and resources that the Australian Institute of Family Studies library provides and could see how useful this information would be for projects on the ground who have little time to research various aspects of their programs. However, I also recognised that these resources may be under used due to a lack of understanding of the extent of information available and how it could be used. Perhaps, in addition to subject-based references

on the website, references that cover general issues such as the demographics of volunteers or those who respond best to the targeted interventions etc. could also be included and used by projects to design more effective intervention programs.

The educational session offered into Action Research was useful as it helped me to understand more clearly the importance of a community basis for the implementation and evaluation of our interventions. The novel ways of documenting the project's success were exciting as they allow expression from all community members regardless of age, disabilities, educational level or cultural background. However, in talking to various FaCS departmental staff and coordinators of projects I understood that a discrepancy exists between the needs of governmental reports to provide quantifiable figures to justify the expenditure of the funding and the broad range of qualitative measures used by individual projects to demonstrate the success of their quite varied interventions on individuals' lives.

My viewpoint on this matter is that these two needs are not necessarily mutually exclusive. SFLEX workers trained in psychology would have quite extensive knowledge of ways to formulate and evaluate ambiguous variables into quantifiable measures, and this knowledge would be useful in the

initial stages of setting up projects and designing reporting systems. Many projects expressed their anxiety at having such open-ended reporting measures and suggested that they would appreciate more extensive involvement from SFLEX workers and perhaps more direction into exactly what prescriptive measures on which they need to report.

An individually tailored computer program could be developed which calculates each intervention's attrition (drop-out) and success rates, or standardised measures (perhaps published psychological assessment devices measuring targeted variables) could be developed for each assessment variable which would provide a quantifiable measure of outcome variables (and could be updated in line with the action research philosophy). Standardisation in this manner would allow greater cross-comparison across projects providing similar interventions and more in-depth analysis of various aspects of success within projects.

Overall, the Stronger Families Fund projects offer exciting opportunities for community development, and each project has great potential to provide important data for use in the Institutes research projects.

Sam Davis is a parent participant from the Redland Community Centre's Strengthening Families Project who attended the Stronger Families Fund National Workshop.