



For Action, Analysis and Training

REPORT

on

Economic and Social Participation Workshops

for staff of

South East Community Links

1/3/16 and 12/4/16

Springvale Victoria

Report by John Bonnice and Denis Sheehan

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1. Introduction

The workshops were organised in conjunction with Jinny McGrath from South East Community Links and Peter Gartlan from the O'Sullivan Centre. Jinny viewed the training as an opportunity for staff of the recently merged agencies to explore agency methodology and values as a community organisation. Jinny had also read the O'Sullivan Centre resource kit "I Just Want to Work" and was enthusiastic about its focus on economic and social participation outcomes.

The training was held as two separate workshops. The purpose of this report is to provide feedback to senior management of South East Community Links on the content of the workshops and the specific recommendations from staff on building social inclusion practice within the agency.

2.0 Outline of the Workshops

- **Workshop One (held on 1/3/16)**

The purpose of the first workshop was for participants to reflect on their own experience of education and work, their role as workers in supporting economic and social participation outcomes and to identify opportunities to build economic and social participation outcomes. The session also included an outline of what is meant by social inclusion, economic and social participation and the factors which support workers and agencies in developing a greater focus on economic and social participation.

- **Session One**

The first question asked and discussed in small groups was: ***What is the meaning of education and work in your life?*** Listed is a summary of the feedback from the five small group discussions.

Education

- Increase knowledge, opportunities to learn
- Increase chances of employment
- Provides opportunity to upgrade skills
- Essential for employment in a specialised work environment
- Education brings open mindedness and enables us to give back to the community
- Education enables up to date knowledge, personal and professional experience
- Life-long learning, staying current with new technology
- Learning at an older age can be more attractive and more relevant.

Questions and issues raised: Impediments to education includes cost of courses, language barrier, high stress levels, and low self-esteem. The education system is not geared to hands on learning and for

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young people there is too much focus on scores and VCE. Young people also experience pressure on to achieve, competition, parental pressure and society expectations.

Work

- Work provides income, independence, contribution to community, increased self-esteem, decreased isolation, and increased social participation
- Work is essential for basic needs and supports families
- Work gives meaning, constant learning, updated skills, self-identity, social engagement, community connection, and helps keep your mind active
- Need work to keep busy/focussed
- Work/education makes one feel valuable and builds social/economic engagement and personal happiness; 'It is nice to come home feeling a sense of achievement'.
- Work means being more organised, occupied, a sense of achievement, satisfaction, feeling more capable, an opportunity to share knowledge, more choices, financial security, and an opportunity to move forward
- Working in different sectors opens up opportunities and assists in smooth transition to another work field
- Work contributes to well-being, self-worth and self-confidence, being values, identity and place in society
- Work enables a person to contribute to country's economy
- Work brings other dimensions to life, enriching and empowering, self-expression
- Helps maintain health in a good way.

Experience of unemployment

- Unemployment caused mental and physical stress, self-doubt, lack of access to services, lack of financial support, vulnerable to wrong options, general sense of insecurity, feeling down, limited choices in employment and social isolation
- Financial burden to other, loss of self-esteem, feel disadvantaged, frustration, low level network interaction.

General Group Discussion

The discussion involved reflecting on the value of education and work to participants and the current issues facing the people they worked with. It was concluded that outcomes that arise from education and work are not available to the people the agency works with. This raised the question of whether the issues facing clients of the agency can be addressed through greater focus on achieving economic and social participation outcomes through the day to day work of staff.

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- **Session Two**

This session focused on the role of workers in building economic and social participation outcomes. Participants reflected on the questions: ***What is the role of workers and agencies in building economic and social participation outcomes and what are the barriers and opportunities to economic and social participation outcomes that exist within current service models and the agency?***

Feedback on the role of workers from small group discussions included:

- Yes, it is integral to the work and is achievable
- Secondary....there are other ways to benefit and find work
- 'Not on my radar'
- 'Hesitant – where do you take it'
- The work is crisis focused eg. emergency relief
- Encourage participation, community links and social/sport participation
- Youth services are focused on social inclusion
- It is the role of workers to enable clients to be self-sufficient and to provide education
- Workers are assisting clients with (money) management, providing opportunities, community linkages , scholarships and budgeting
- Workers have a knowledge of local area and services
- Yes...workers support/link clients with employment opportunities and training
- Link clients with job networks/agencies, information sessions...interview skills...resume writing...work readiness training T
- There is work with potential employers
- It was felt that workers offer more practical support than job network agencies.
- It was identified that there were challenges in getting people into work including language skills, and matching clients to appropriate job opportunities.
- Other challenges included lack of funding and resources and there is a need for support to take issues with Job Active agencies.

Barriers identified to achieving economic and social participation outcomes included:

- ER – feels like band aid work
- Working in silos (can be the nature of a diversified organisation) and this may create info sharing barriers
- Funding bodies i.e. DSS are very prescriptive about the role of the service and this does always include economic and social participation outcomes
- 'Clients' perception of organisation due to services sought is a factor

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- There are time constraints to discuss economic and social participation with clients
- Difficulty in engaging clients in social/community participation
- Lack of client motivation
- Stigma by employers of the people we work with
- Irregular contact with clients impacts on achieving economic and social participation
- Getting access to other agencies
- Workers have to be able to recognise/social participation issues and opportunities within the conversations with clients
- Lack of funding to provide practical support to achieving economic and social participation
- Limited training and skills on how to address lack of economic/social participation and possible outcomes/solutions
- Government policy gets in the road
- Corporatisation of Centrelink
- Does the culture of our organisation support economic and social participation outcomes?

Opportunities to build economic and social participation

- Using our expertise within the agency to support economic and social participation outcomes
- Centrelink co-location
- Support clients to do something about the situation (i.e. lack of economic and social participation opportunities)
- Use opportunities to influence eg funders, Centrelink, other agencies
- Develop staff training and support on social inclusion outcomes
- Take our expertise to others eg employers.

At the conclusion of Workshop One participants were asked, as part of the preparation for the next workshop, to speak to five clients and seek their advice by asking the following question: *What is their (your) advice on how you and your service could better support clients to get into work(paid or unpaid) and /or education/training?*

Participants were also asked to speak to two colleagues from other agencies about what their agencies were doing to support economic and social participation outcomes.

- **Workshop Two (held on 12/4/16)**

Workshop Two focused on hearing the feedback from clients and colleagues, understanding practice frameworks underpinning economic and social participation and the planning actions for the future. The workshop was dependent on the “homework” that participants were asked to complete. As detailed each participant was asked to interview five clients and colleagues. In previous training with other

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agencies many of the staff have not done this work or have asked the questions in a different form. This was the case in this workshop also. Of the 13 participants in the workshop only three had sought advice of clients on how the agency could better support people into education and/or employment. Listed below are the responses that were received from staff who did ask the question.

- **Session One**

Feedback from clients

- *“work harder”* (the clients became emotional when asked for her advice. Her response ‘work harder’ appeared to refer to the agency)
- *“Support with educational expenses”*
- *“Extra support to get into placements as a volunteer or a job”* (Job Agencies are not helpful)
- *“Someone to help with ‘the enemy’ - Job Agencies and Centrelink*
- *“I have good skills as a welder that I could contribute. “I am a really good welder..I would be a good teacher”.*

Feedback from colleagues

- *“The Agency tries to advocate but there is no interest from the funding bodies and bureaucracy”*
- *“There is no funding for advocacy”*
- *“It is ‘tricky’ to speak out as an agency because of contractual agreements”*
- *“The State Government in Victoria has intervened with some options for work and education strategies that are worthwhile”*
- *“The education system is wrong in that it neglects practical/hands on learning”*

The session discussed responses from both clients and colleagues and explored these responses, what this advice was telling us and how this advice could provide a stepping stone for further discussions with clients. Participants were asked to provide feedback to clients who had offered advice and explain what had been done with this advice. Participants were also asked to continue the exercise of seeking advice from 5 clients.

- **Session Two**

The workshop facilitators presented an overview of the characteristics of a socially inclusive agency and the practice frameworks that underpin social inclusion. Those frameworks included a rights based framework, community development framework, social justice framework and a strengths based framework.

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The session then focused on exploring the paradigms of how we see the people we are working with (using the attached handout) and the impact of these paradigms on practice and our response to building economic and social participation outcomes.

Participants were asked to explore the following questions:

- What are your thoughts and reflections on these two paradigms?
- What are the implications for the way we work with people and deliver services if we hold a traditional view point? A social inclusive viewpoint?
- Where do we ourselves as workers across the two paradigms?
- Are our programs and our agency working from a traditional or socially inclusive paradigm?

The presumption in these question is that most agencies are locked into a structured model of service delivery because of funding requirements or other constraints. Yet there is often a strong belief that social inclusion is being valued. Is this the case?

Feedback from the workshop participants

- *Funding bodies determine our approach. The language in documentation and forms reinforces the service user as a victim or recipient. This approach 'rubs off' on staff.*
- *'We have to be careful in our language and attitude' and the message this gives.*
- *The asylum seekers program is inclusive and builds connection.*
- *How do I frame the initial conversation...to create a narrative? Can we change the language of the forms we use?*

The session discussed the client who gave advice to a worker and how they identified their skills as a welder and how these skills could be used. This example gives a model for developing appropriate questions that we can explore with people e.g. What are you good at? What are your skills? What makes you feel better?

The session also explored the following questions:

- How do we use a different language to describe the people we work with rather than using the terms like 'clients' or 'consumer'. Is an alternative is 'people we serve'.
- Do we refer to our clients as 'challenging' and 'complex' and how can we avoid such loaded descriptions?
- Where does our organisation sit along the continuum of traditional or social inclusion approaches? And what moves our organisation along the continuum towards social inclusion?

- **Session Three**

Participants were asked to meet in small groups to develop an action plan and explore the question: *What actions can I and the agency take (to build social inclusion) as a follow on from this workshop?*

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Feedback from participants included:

- *Review the language we use to describe the people we work with. Language is determined by funding bodies but we can:*
 - *Change terminology to become more socially inclusive*
 - *Negotiate with funding bodies*
 - *Change exclusive language*
 - *Systematically undertake a process of review of language used - check assessment forms and broaden to be more social inclusive*

- *Maintain our energy*
 - *Speak to our manager about social inclusion*
 - *Discuss social inclusion practice at service delivery team meetings*
 - *Decide on a social inclusion item for the agenda at staff meeting*
 - *Talk with fellow workers*

- *Break down the service silos and communicate across work teams*

- *Make a commitment (to build social inclusion responses)and explore how this will happen*

- *Incorporate social inclusion approach into the work through:*
 - *Create a poster using social Inclusion words from today's workshop*
 - *The poster can be creative and include positive descriptions of the people we work with i.e. 'client as an advocate, an artist, family builder, a teacher'.*
 - *Improve the waiting room, better seating, posters in different languages, mission statement, aims, client consent and rights*
 - *Do we have a structure for building social inclusion? Do we need support from experts to assist with social inclusion strategies?*

- *Build our critical thinking about our work*
 - *Clients are the experts.*

- **Conclusion**

Our conclusions from the workshops are:

- There was an enthusiasm to build social inclusion practice into everyday work of the agency.
- There is a strong base and experience among the staff who participated in the workshops.
- There was a depth of understanding of social inclusion and practice to build on.

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- The ideas suggested in the action plan are an important starting point and can be built upon to develop a comprehensive agency wide action plan that supports economic and social participation outcomes.

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(Facilitators)

19/5/16

HANDOUT – WORKSHOP TWO

HOW DO WE VIEW THE PEOPLE WE WORK WITH?	
IS THIS OUR TRADITIONAL VIEWPOINT?	A SOCIALLY INCLUSIVE VIEWPOINT?
Clients of services	Partners in service delivery
Consumer of services	Contributors to the service and community
Victim	Leader
Wounded	Healer
Beneficiaries of services	Expectations and belief in capacities i.e. employment and volunteering
Receivers of surveys about our services	Designers of services
Sources of information for agencies	Gathers of information to enable change
Unskilled	Experts and educators
Participating in the community	Changing the community and civic contributors

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Challenging	Chutzpah and entrepreneurial
Complex	Resourceful

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