Primary Care Partnerships

Strengthening Partnerships
Statewide Development Workshops
2008

Evaluation and Observation Report

Introduction

The purpose of this document is to provide feedback to the organising committee about the Statewide Primary Care Partnerships (PCP) *Strengthening Partnerships* workshops.

Sixteen one-day workshops were held during April, May and June 2008 in locations around Victoria and involved all but one PCP. This PCP was already immersed in a development strategy with a consultant with whom they had built trust; it decided to continue with this approach. In addition, one PCP has only had a partial workshop delivered due to poor attendance. A follow up half day has been arranged for 6 August 2008.

In excess of 430 people attended over all workshops, an average of 28 people over 15 workshops. This included people from a range of community service organisations and sub-sectors including health, education, arts, sport and recreation, community and family support. In addition, local government was well represented and people from the Department of Human Services were present at each workshop. Participants included PCP executives, chairs and project staff, organisational chief executives, senior executives and people within organisations responsible for delivering services and projects across the depth and breadth of health and wellbeing initiatives.

A Steering Group was established to provide advice and guidance to the work. The Steering Group comprised PCP chairs, PCP executive officers and Department of Human Services Staff from central and regional offices. The

Steering Group met on three occasions leading up to the delivery of the workshops, inclusive of the Design Development workshop.

Initiative Purpose

The purpose for the initiative was to increase people's capacity to lead partnership development and support sustainable collaborations in PCPs.

The impetus for injecting new life into PCPs arose from the views of the PCP chairs and executive officers that there was variable understanding of the nature of partnerships and the underlying principles that needed to be in place to ensure effectiveness and community value across the wider membership.

The initial brief for the *Strengthening Partnerships* project was to

> "…develop, including research, consult upon and pilot a four part modular short course and supporting resources that addresses the core competencies of partnership work. Subsequently deliver the short course in venues across Victoria for a total of sixteen sessions."

The *Strengthening Partnerships* initiative is a component of the Department of Human Service's commitment to building the capacity of the primary care workforce.

Our Approach

An initial literature review was conducted, exploring local and international research on effective partnerships within both the public and private sectors. A summary of this research is at appendix 1. This material, together with our experience in working across and within organisations that have partnered successfully (and not so successfully) provided the basis for building the modules for the workshops.

In consultation with the project Steering Group the original approach was slightly modified to include a Design Workshop where representatives of the whole system worked with the consultants to provide advice, insert ideas and build on key concepts of partnership that research and experience demonstrated were fundamental to making partnerships work. Over 20 people participated in this full day designing workshop in January 2008 representing the whole PCP system.

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It was agreed that the original concept of using the pilot approach to developing and delivering the material was not useful, and could result in the pilot group not receiving the full program and being distracted by an evaluation responsibility rather than being fully immersed in the material.

Core lenses were used in each workshop, but some adaptation occurred from workshop to workshop depending on the level of exploration, intrigue and interest that different components attracted from the room. Each region and each PCP was contacted prior to conducting the workshops to ensure that the material could be adapted to meet local needs; increasing the emphasis here and reducing the focus there.

Workbooks were developed and provided to each participant. These booklets provided prompts about each concept and model and used principles of adult experiential learning as their basis, rather than being highly prescribed and detailed. A copy of the booklet is at appendix 2.

The core principles of the workshop centred on the principles identified by Hughes, J & Weiss, J (2007) in their Harvard Business Review Article (Nov 2007 Vol 85 (11): 122 – 131), *Simple Rules for Making Alliances Work*:

Placing less emphasis on.....
- Defining the right *business arrangement*

- Creating *ends* metrics (measurements)
- Eliminating differences
- Establishing formal alliance management *systems* and *structures*
- Managing the *external* relationship with partners

And more on.......
- Developing the right *working relationship*

- Creating means metrics
- *Embracing* differences
- Enabling collaborative behaviour

- Managing your own internal stakeholders

The core lenses/models supporting these principles for deeper partnership understanding and deepening partnering conversations were:
- ℂ **Brain dominance** – how our natural thinking preferences impacts on relationships around us
- ℂ **Working above and below the line** – the tension for partnerships between the formal and the informal
- ℂ **Volunteer model** – helping people stay in a positive energetic space – how energy affects your perception of partners and their actions
- ℂ **Powerful conversations** – influencing partners through conversations
- ℂ Establishing genuine **shared purpose** for partners
- ℂ **Influencing without direct control** – the ultimate partnership skill

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- ℃ Managing and leading in **stable and dynamic** environments
- ℃ **Levels of consciousness** – what really matters to our partnership, from survival to service

The models/core lenses presented were made available to each PCP on CD ROM at the conclusion of workshops. Ideas about how the models could be used and suggested activities for follow up work in organisations and with PCP members not present in the workshops were woven into the presentation.

The literature summary was e-mailed to each participant directly by the consultants within approximately two weeks following each workshop. This direct contact served as a timely reminder of core messages of the workshops and as a prompt to revisit the material and to re-immerse in thinking about core purposes, personal impacts and the value of discretionary effort.

An evaluation form was handed to each participant at the conclusion of each workshop. The feedback from the evaluation form was collated and summarised. A copy of the form is at appendix 3 and the summary transcription for each workshop is at appendix 4. South West PCP is not included due to the workshop being only partially delivered to date.

Workshops Outcomes Summary

Qualitative

The feedback from the workshops was overwhelmingly positive. People's responses centred on the notion of bringing humanity back into the workplace and into partner relationships. They could see themselves in the way forward and had a better understanding of the impact that their relationships had on the success of the partnership. Their antennae were heightened to the obvious truth…that there is no other way to change the nature of the partnership but through establishing and nurturing working relationships that are built upon mutual trust and respect; written documents may formalise agreements but they will not make them stick.

A variety of the models/lenses were cited by participants as being the most useful; that is, different models appealed more to some people more than others and vice versa. All participants were able to identify learning points that were critical to them and all of the models were cited at least once by participants.

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This is consistent with our philosophical view shaped by experience, research and rigorous thinking, that a one size approach does not suit everyone and that workforce or in fact personal development programs such this must be delivered in such a way that they open up ideas and possibilities rather than provide a step by step "how to do it" formula approach.

People cited that they left the workshop feeling more secure about their approach to partnership work; the majority expressed feeling comfortable, in fact excited that the models recognised the complexity of working across organisations; that the models spoke more about managing tensions rather than trying to resolve the unresolvable.

Other indicators of success included informal conversations and comments during and at the conclusion of the workshops. People took the time to talk to us about components they found particularly challenging and/or useful. They also exposed particular issues that they were dealing with and sought counsel on ways of dealing with them.

On receipt of the literature summary that was sent out as a follow up to the workshops, many people took the time to respond and to let us know how useful the material was and how they were implementing components in their own places of work.

*"… a number of discussions fuelled by the workshop have taken place here in PCP land. Was good to be reminded of the material in the workshop. The brain dominance material a good guide to inform expectations about what various approaches/ skills people are likely to be able to bring to partnerships"…… **Leanne**, PCP Employee*

*"Thanks again for such an inspiring and relevant workshop - best I've attended in years! I'm interested in developing for my workplace some of the ideas you presented (confidentially, at this stage)." **Pauline Faye**, Grampians Team Department of Planning and Community Development*

*Just wanted to say thanks so much for a terrific thinking session today. It was refreshingly real, and focused on people – so fundamental to everything but so often absent in much planning nowadays. I would love to get any documentation that you have on the different theories/models if possible. I will spread the word!! **Nicole Beyer**, Public Health & Community Development Unit Glen Eira City Council*

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Many people from a variety of organisations have made inquiries about follow up workshops with their own organisations and a number of follow up workshops have been booked (indeed some have already been run) for a variety of organisation types, including local government, community health services and specific partnerships in care. This indicates that senior and committed people perceived real value and are showing leadership in striving for the development of shared language and common approaches in their organisations and local partnerships.
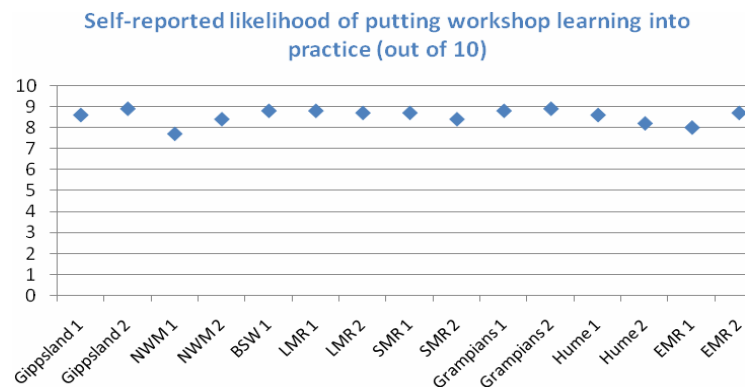
> *"Our unit has been running a series of information/seminar topics for Board members and CEOs of DHS small - mid size funded organisations in Eastern region. Topics have included governance, salary sacrificing, Indigenous cultural respect, insurance, work safety, incident reporting etc. A key focus of our unit (which works across all the regional DHS funded Programs) is supporting and enhancing internal and external partnering.*
>
> *We think there is a great opportunity to support Board members/CEOs in understanding partnering and providing some critical thinking in how and why they may partner successfully.*
>
> *From your session we really liked the icebreaker activity around thinking about our preferred learning/working styles and how this impacts/enhances our partnering opportunities."* **Cate Harris** *DHS Eastern Metropolitan Region*

Quantitative

Limited qualitative data was also collected on the evaluation form. Question 3 asked participants to: *rate the likelihood that you will you put some of your learning from today into practice on a scale of 1 (low) to 10 (high)*, across all workshops the average score was 8.5 (out of a possible 10). The highest score was 10 (given by 82 people) and the lowest score given was 5 (given by 1 person). This question was followed up with an option for free text (summarised in the appendix) which gave some explanation of the reason for the various scores given.

Self-reported likelihood of putting workshop learning into practice (out of 10)

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PCP Development Workshops
Evaluation Report
July 2008

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Workshop Observations

The following observations have emerged over the workshop delivery period; these were consistent from workshop to workshop.

- **People were less concerned with demanding demonstrated empirical "proof"** that partnerships made sense than was originally expected from the discussions with the Steering Committee and the chairs and executive officers.

  Participants, almost without exception, were far more interested in being immersed in current theory and practice and the real life stories used as illustrations than they were in heavy research and data evidence about the rationale of partnership. The material inherently corresponded with their experience and reality; it appeared that the connections made between the models underpinning partnerships were of far greater value to participants.

- **There was high energy in PCPs to move from compliance to shared commitment**. That is participants expressed excitement about a renewed sense of power and control about what they were committing to in PCP work

- **People are feeling bowed down by bureaucracy and formality**. There was a strong undercurrent within workshops that there was another way to go about making a difference which needed to be revisited. The bureaucratic needs around over reporting and over justification are at odds with all current theory and practice around partnering for successful contribution

- **There was a palpable hunger for real learning**, not the usual technical step by step learning associated with leadership and management. Participants immersed themselves in the tensions of leadership and management and their reality in partnership work.

- **There was variable energy** across the workshops and between participants. This was demonstrated in the feedback on the evaluation reports but more importantly, it was obvious in small group discussions both in mixed groups and PCP specific groups.

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- **PCPs that were really energised had a sense of confidence;** in themselves and in their partners. They had worked out ways to make the system work for them at a local level…they had effective relationships in place, including partnerships with the Department of Human Services, that allowed local flexibility in projects as well as establishing capacity to meet the formal requirements of allocated funding.

- **There is a huge desire to localise** and meet the needs of catchment communities.

In addition, many participants expressed gratitude both formally and informally to the Department of Human Services and the PCP chairs and executive officers organising group for hosting the workshops and providing the opportunity to deepen relationships and understanding of partnerships. This spirit of generosity indicated to us a willingness to actively participate in bridge building and that people were pleased that their efforts towards partnership were recognised and were being supported.

Ideas for the Future

From the evaluations, conversations and observations, the following is a list of ideas for future development of PCPs:

- **Richard Barrett's 7 Levels of Organisational Consciousness** captured people's interest and imagination and took them to a further level of thinking about what was possible through the collaborative effort of PCPs. This model was only briefly touched on in most workshops and tended to be used as a way of bringing the workshops to an endpoint that was in effect just a beginning. It could be used in a variety of ways as a planning tool, as a support tool and as a consciousness raising tool to take thinking across PCPs deeper and as an impetus for action.

- **More theory into practice workshops** at the local level. This was a common theme coming through in the evaluation forms. Although the workshops were practically focussed, it appears that people would value more opportunity to discuss implications and practical ways of turning good ideas into practical ways of working.

- **Exploration of PCP *Purpose*** at the local level. The notion of PCPs being the method or vehicle for achieving community health and well-

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being outcomes was for some participants a revelation and worthy of further reflection

℃ **Regular review of the material/models** will enable PCPs to remain focussed on practical approached to building and maintaining partnership relationships. This may be quarterly, half yearly or annually, depending on the level of maturity and sophistication of each PCP.

℃ **More emphasis on curious conversations and illustrative storytelling** including skills development will enable more powerful relationships to be established.

Appendices:

1. Literature and Research Summary
2. Workshop Booklet
3. Evaluation Form
4. Evaluation Form Summaries

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