

Engaging Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities in Responsible Gambling: An Action Research Project

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Slide 2

Centacare Townsville's Gambling Help Service provides community education and counselling / support services in the Northern region of Queensland. This area includes Townsville, Ingham, Ayr and Charters Towers. The region has a population of over 200,000 people of which 175,000 live in Townsville.

Slide 3

There are fourteen GH Services across Qld

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In 2006 at the GH Directors and Coordinators Meeting of the QLD GH Network, the need to engage with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities was identified as a high priority.

Slide 5

There is limited Australian research on gambling in CALD communities. However the available literature recommends a number of strategies when working with CALD communities. One recommendation is for preventative strategies such as community education to promote responsible gambling and raise awareness of gambling issues in CALD communities.

Slide 6

The research literature also suggests providing counselling in a more culturally appropriate way, such as a more personalised service with chats in informal situations.

Slide 7

A partnership approach with communities is also advocated.

Slide 8

Along with hiring culturally and linguistically relevant staff, all of these recommendations are of value, however the literature does not tell us how to deliver community education or form partnerships with CALD communities.

Slide 9

In 2007 the Gambling Help team comprised of:

- a bilingual worker with links to the Filipino community
- an experienced community development worker who has credibility within the non government sector

- myself as team leader
- and an openness to explore possibilities and opportunities.

A number of conversations took place on how to raise awareness of responsible gambling in CALD communities. The team took their lead from issues arising in the community. One such issue was gambling by migrant contract workers.

Slide10

In 2008 the GH team and members of the Filipino Australian Affiliation of North Queensland (FAANQ) wrote two papers documenting their collaboration with the Tsv Migrant Resource Centre (MRC) to address gambling related issues with 457 Visa Holders. These papers were delivered at the Unity and Diversity Conference in Townsville in Aug 2008. Two outcomes resulted, the first was an invitation to the president of the Filipino Australian Affiliation of Nth Qld to present one of the papers on 457 Visa Holders in Hawaii. The second was the expressed willingness of the Migrant Resource Centre, the Townsville Multicultural Support Group and key members in the community to work together to address gambling relating issues in their communities.

Slide 11 A proposal:

After much discussion it was decided that an Action Research Project with a Community Advisory Group to guide the process would meet the goals of all concerned.

Slide 12

The aim of the Action Research Project was to form partnerships with service providers and community members. An additional aim was to document and evaluate the process, the strategies developed, their delivery and the outcomes produced.

Slide 13

The objectives of this project were to:

- To identify community education strategies
- To provide counselling to meet the needs of the community

Slide 14

- To identify the principles and values which have enabled the research to progress
- To identify a framework of practice

Slide 15

Action Research was chosen as it is a “*qualitative research paradigm*” which “*enables people to find effective solutions to problems they confront in their everyday lives*” (Stringer 2007, p.19&1).

Slide 16

Action Research, is a cyclical process which involves creating connections with individuals and groups, forming trusting relationships, mutual action, gaining knowledge, reflection and evaluation.

Slide 17

Action Research has a number of branches two of which have been instrumental in informing this research project: Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) and Participatory Action Research (PAR).

Slide 18

These branches share a number of principles. Primarily community members are involved in the process from the beginning; they have a say in how, when, where and what the research will look like and what it hopes to achieve. Essentially these approaches share power, so that the knowledge that the community brings to the research is valued. (In the October review we were delighted that feedback indicated people felt valued and listened to.)

Slide 19

The principles of sharing power and the communities' involvement in the research influenced the way in which this research project was conducted. Accordingly the ethics and the integrity of the research process were discussed with the community. In the consultation process the gaining of Ethics Approval from an outside body to ensure the integrity of the research project was questioned. An incident was spoken about where a researcher, who had ethics approval from a university had been introduced to a particular community by a leader of that community. As time went on the leader, who introduced the researcher, felt increasingly uncomfortable as it seemed that the researcher now considered that ethics approval was the only criteria for entering that community and conducting their work. Some members of the community felt that the researcher was "*condescending*", "*rude*" and "*intrusive*", which left the community leader feeling "*embarrassed*" (CAG Notes 30th October, 2008) and hesitant to engage with researchers or research projects.

Slide 20

Other researchers have noted that "*action research has the potential to raise many questions of ethical practice, both for the researcher and the 'others' engaged in the process*" and reflected that "*there are no simple or prescriptive ways of answering these questions or of dealing with these issues*" (Cherry, 1999, p.14).

Slide 21

The main premise of ethical research is to do no harm. Ethical bodies have been set up to prevent abuse and to ensure that research is undertaken in an ethical manner. However universities and hospitals do not have a monopoly on providing ethical guidelines, particularly, when we explore ethical practice in working with CALD communities in an action research paradigm.

Slide 22

Ongoing discussion continues within the Gambling Help Team and with the community in regard to the project and what is ethical practice. Other researchers have noted "*that most ethical problems in social research can be traced to the subject's power deficiency and that we must seek mechanisms for overcoming this deficiency*" (Pease, 1990, p.89).

Therefore it is imperative “*to increase the subject’s power over the research*” (Pease, 1990, p.89).

Slide 23

The action that we have taken is two fold: Firstly, service providers in Townsville have been invited to consider forming an Ethics Committee to assist community based research. Uniting Care, Burnside, New South Wales has produced a Research Code of Ethics and discussion is taking place to set up a similar committee and guidelines in Townsville. Secondly, it was decided that the Community Advisory Group would guide the ethics of the research. In other words we respected the wishes of the community as we believe that communities are experts in relation to their own situation and finding solutions to meet their needs.

Slide 24

Stringer (1996) in discussing the notion of respect in action research explores Marxist theories and the works of Foucault. In Stringer’s analysis the understanding of power and the way in which it is used is crucial to the notion of respect. Thus, it is the way in which we use power that we show respect. Heron (Cited in Pease, 1990, p.89) states “*that the moral principles of respect for persons is most fully honoured when power is shared in the generation of knowledge*”. The honouring of the communities wishes to form a CAG and work in partnership with them as opposed to partnering with a university and undergoing ethics approval demonstrates our commitment to the community. We may of course have been able to do both. However our energy and time would have been divided, and in the end it was the principle of respect; the way in which we work that was paramount. “*Action research strives for transparency and mutuality in the way human beings work together*” (Cherry, 1999, p.14) therefore what we say and what we do need to be the same.

Slide 25

The CAG comprises of:

- Townsville Multicultural Support Group
- Migrant Resource Centre (from 2009 TIC*)
- Catholic Diocese of Townsville
- Centacare
- Key members of CALD communities.

Slide 26

The importance of the need for trusting and respectful relationships in working with communities was discussed at length. It was decided that members of the CAG would advise “*the Gambling Help team of possible opportunities to meet with groups in an informal capacity as a starting point in the relationship building process*”. Thus strategies to engage were often simply, introductions, being seen and being invited. Anecdotally, Gambling Help Educators report that gaining access to vulnerable groups is a challenge thus the Gambling Help Team were very much aware of the value of these strategies.

Slide 27

On International Women's Day we were invited to have a stall at the luncheon.

Slide 28

We were involved in the planning of Mental Health Week and in activities on the day.

Slide 29

At the Harmony Day celebrations Gambling Help were invited to have an information stall and perform a skit as it was thought that information needed to be provided in a fun and non threatening way. The Gambling Help team were aware that street theatre had been used in other countries to deliver messages to communities. Even so a skit regardless of whether it was meant to be serious or funny presented challenges for the community educators and counsellor who were much more comfortable with power point presentations or simply talking to people. Despite going outside of our comfort zone, we recognised it as an opportunity. An adventurous team member wrote a skit about gambling on poker machines, losing all your money to Lady Luck and contacting the friendly Gambling Help Team. Team members made poker machines from cardboard, donned wigs, and provided Lady Luck with a wand and lots of bling. The skit was interactive with lots of noise and participation from the audience. The feedback during the skit, i.e. audience involvement and feedback afterwards was very encouraging.

Slide 30

A gambler and Lady Luck – counsellor and community educator.

Slide 31

The community educators and counsellor attend as many functions as possible – this gives people the opportunity to talk to the team in an informal way. E.g. ERF, Mental Health Group

Slide 32

The Action Research Project is in its infancy, and it is acknowledged by the CAG that for mainstream service providers "*working with CALD communities can be a bit daunting. It takes time and patience*" (CAG Minutes 26th February 2009). It is difficult to measure the strategy of "*introduction, being seen and being invited*" other than recording invitations to attend forums and activities and requests for resources. It is also useful to document responses from the various community groups:

"People present were very supportive of the work being done and encouraged Gambling Helps involvement in the community and suggested increasing community activities." (CAG minutes 27th August, 2009).

Slide 33

When viewing the counselling statistics for 2007, 2008 and up to 31st October 2009 there is some evidence that more people are accessing counselling. In 2008 the number of CALD clients accessing counselling doubled from 4 in 2007 to 9. In 2009 we have maintained the increase with 9 already to the end of October. In addition the number of sessions per client has increased from 2.78 in 2008 to 4.44 in 2009. Further in 2008 we

introduced recording the informal support sessions or chats that occurred in community settings. In 2008 we recorded 47 support sessions 21 of which were CALD based. In 2009 we have recorded 115 up until October. CALD numbers are lower (11) but Indigenous numbers have increased from 3 in 2008 to 64 in 2009. This sharp increase is an added bonus. We believe that this has occurred due to our presence in the community, assisting in Emergency Relief Services and talking about gambling. There are increases in Indigenous people in formal counselling sessions as well. In 2007 we had 3 Indigenous clients, in 2008 there were 12 and so far in 2009 there have been 13. Again the number of sessions per client has increased from 1.10 in 2008 to 2.15 in 2009. (We believe the CALD worker has been a factor in this.)

Slide 34

The Action Research Project has been a journey for all involved in the Community Advisory Group:

- GH team members reported that some strategies suggested by Community Advisory Group members took them outside their comfort zone and caused them to reflect on the value of being outside their comfort zone
- Service providers and community members said that they had been confronted by gambling issues in their community

Slide 35

It was acknowledged by all that finding strategies to engage was tricky and that the issues involved were very complex. Furthermore that we needed to continue to be flexible in our approach and that while the word flexibility was often used with little meaning, flexibility was the key to our work in the community.

Slide 36

What does “a more flexible approach” look like? It includes an awareness of:

- The use of language
- Where I go
- What I do
- And how threatening it is

Slide 37

The people involved in the Community Advisory Group are busy people. Even so an effort is made to attend each meeting – 8 in total for the year. It was commented that people keep coming back because they are being listened to. Thus see themselves as partners in the process and the outcomes.

Slide 38

A decision was made to continue our work in 2010 as we had only scratched the surface and those present felt that we need to keep going.

Slide 39

The following Draft Recommendations have emerged:

A grassroots Community Development approach be examined as a model of practice for the Gambling Help Network in Queensland.

Slide 40

A number of principles be adopted to guide interactions with service providers and communities:

- Relationships are built on trust and respect

Slide 41

- The community is seen as the expert
- Communities are an integral part of the manufacture of knowledge and information
- Partnerships are the foundation of work in the community.

Slide 42

To conclude

- We are on a journey
- We have partners on board
- Our project will continue in 2010

Slide 43

Thank You

Questions??