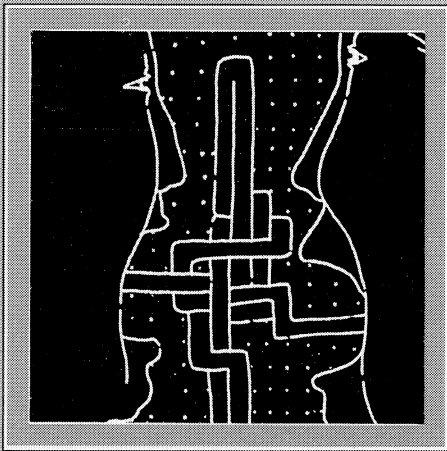


PEER SUPPORT IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Documentation of a process to form a peer support and skill development group for workers involved in community development activities.



The major barrier to implementing a community development approach was the attitude of their committees of management or staff at the centre

*For most people,
attending a meeting or
joining a group which
does not have a clear
purpose, (or at least an
identifiable convenor who
has a purpose in mind),
would be a disconcerting
experience*



I always enjoy coming to the group and go away feeling refreshed afterwards

The group identified a clash of objectives for workers with a 50% casework and 50% developmental role



A Resources Collection

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**PEER SUPPORT
IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**
the story of a group

Produced by PEOPLE PROJECTS
for
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN HEALTH PROJECT

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The Community. Development in Health Project (CDIH) would like to thank the many people who have contributed to the existence of the "Peer Support and Skills Development Group". A Working Group of Rae Walker, Carole May, Philip Marsh and Frossa Mrakas have provided valuable advice and comment on both the original proposal and drafts of the documentation. Carol and Frossa also assisted in contacting potential participants for the group.

Glen Alderson, who was employed to facilitate the group, and Jeremy McArdle, who documented the process, carried out these tasks in a highly skilled manner, which comes from the years of experience they have both had in group and community work.

Angela Hill, CDIH project worker acted as the all-important link between the group and the CDIH committee.

Final acknowledgement must go to the members of the "Peer Support and Skills Development Group" who were willing to explore a new approach with us and allowed their discussions to be written up for the benefit of other community development workers.

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INTRODUCTION

This booklet records the development of a small group of health workers whose common experience was their attempt to apply community development principles in the health field. The group included social workers, community workers, a tenant worker and a doctor. Within their group these workers explored the concepts of community development, shared the concerns and difficulties they were experiencing in their work, and sought and gave mutual support.

This "Peer Support and Skills Development Group" was formed as a pilot project designed to show how valuable such support networks can be amongst community development workers working in the health field. It is hoped that similar networks might be stimulated to form as a result of the documentation of this group's experiences.

The concept behind this pilot project emerged from the national Community Development in Health (CDIH) project and this documentation is part of a larger collection of resources produced through the CDIH Project.

Essentially, the CDIH Steering Committee set out to produce a set of resources which would be of use to individuals and groups applying a community development approach to health issues.

The isolation of practitioners from each other and the lack of opportunities for experience sharing, participatory learning and mutual support were identified as wide-spread barriers to more effectively applying community development methods in the health field. Compounding this isolation, is the image of dubious legitimacy which is sometimes projected onto the community development worker.

The Steering Committee realised, therefore, that it would be valuable for workers to meet and share their experiences, knowledge and insights as well as making use of the more usual written and audio-visual resources. The strategy they chose was to form a support group of community workers as a pilot; to document the development of the group; and to use the documentation as a resource for other workers who might wish to build their own support networks.

This documentation is not simply a 'handbook' or 'How To ...' manual. We hope it may also act as a source of inspiration and advice, of ideas and possible directions for those wishing to undertake a similar venture.

In addition, this documentation can be seen as a 'case study' or 'action research' - it gives the 'inside story' of a group's development. By reading the five sessions documented here we can observe the gradual growth of trust within the group and the delicate process of a group of people finding their way together. The techniques of facilitation used here apply equally well to any group where the main purpose is to empower the group.

From another perspective, the discussions documented here say a great deal about community development and the lot of the community worker. Many readers will find themselves identifying with the experiences of the group members and will find their exploration of the concepts of community development enlightening.



Duplicating the Support Network

Many of the circumstances surrounding the development of this "Peer Support and Skills Development Group" are peculiar to this group. For instance, a highly skilled facilitator was employed to assist the group and the process through which the group initially came together was, to a large extent, artificial (see Background and Setting-up Section). It is also worth noting that no two groups are alike.

Circumstances are likely to be different for groups wishing to duplicate this experience, however, it is hoped that this report may assist others in avoiding some of the pitfalls. The 'Feedback and Recommendations' section in particular, draws out a number of the lessons which the organisers, facilitator, documentor and participants gained from this experience.

The CDIH Steering Committee and workers, the facilitator and documentor, and the group participants encourage others to use this record creatively to meet their own particular needs.



BACKGROUND AND SETTING UP

The decision to auspice and document a "Peer Support and Skills Development Group" arose out of a series of workshops organised by the CDIH project around Australia in 1987/88. These workshops brought together community development workers and provided them with a rare opportunity to discuss community development as it applies in the health field.

These national workshops revealed the wide-spread barriers (outlined in the Introduction [1]) which workers encountered and supported the need for more avenues for peer support amongst community development workers in the health field. In addition, the feedback from the sessions reinforced the value of participatory, self-directed [2] learning opportunities as a useful tool in developing the skills of and support for health workers.

At the Victorian workshop a 'case study' was presented which outlined a 'mentor model' support network. Within this model a number of community workers from different organisations provided mutual support to one another at fortnightly meetings. By structuring time together they were able to share ideas and grapple with the problems each of them was encountering in their work.

Taking this 'mentor model' as a starting point the CDIH Steering Committee started to discuss what may be an appropriate strategy for tackling the barriers identified. Initially, the committee formulated a 'workshop strategy' which was to be piloted in Melbourne, documented and included in the CDIH "Resource Collection". As outlined below, this strategy was later modified and became the "Peer Support and Skills Development Group".

The Initial Workshop Strategy

Once this strategy of workshops and their documentation had been decided upon as part of the CDIH "Resource Collection", a Working Group was established to implement the strategy. It included the CDIH project worker and other local practitioners involved in community development and health education.

In April 1988, the project worker conducted a random phone survey of local community health workers to see what sorts of issues they would like to see covered in a workshop. Initially, a strategy was devised where a program of five all-day workshops covering specific skill-development topics would be run. It would be widely advertised and a mail-out done to agencies in the Victorian Health Department Region 7 area (a very large catchment). Guest facilitators would be paid to come and run different workshops. The sort of topics suggested were:-

- "Understanding community development in health";
- "Networking";
- "Personal survival";
- "Planning, evaluation and needs assessment".

The CDIH Steering Committee responded to this proposal by suggesting an alternative approach, one which was less structured and would provide more opportunity for workers to share experiences, and meet support and networking needs. A joint meeting of the Working Group and Steering Committee was held to hammer out a clear proposal.

The Modified Concept

It was resolved that a more developmental process than the original proposal should be attempted. Instead of a broad advertising approach, participants for the group would be found by going through existing networks. The size of the Region covered would be limited to the North-Eastern suburbs. Key workers in the area would be approached and asked to invite three or four other people to participate in the group. It was hoped that local workers, including those on the Working Group could act as 'key contacts'. One facilitator would be employed to facilitate all the sessions.

The agenda for the meetings would be developed in response to the stated needs/interests of the participants, although the emphasis would still be based on community development theory, sharing experiences and developing skills.

Venue, dates and times of future meetings would be decided by the participants, although it was hoped they could be held weekly for five weeks. The length of the sessions would be reduced from

one day to half a day. The title given to the pilot, which we hoped reflected its nature, was the "Peer Support and Skills Development Group".

Through this process, the potential existed for the group to continue if they wished, after CDIH were no longer involved.

What happened?

At this crucial stage of implementing the strategy (June, 1988), the project worker resigned and another came into the position. This delayed matters slightly as it took some time for the new worker to become familiar with what had happened. Eventually, a first meeting date was set (for three weeks' time) and a one-page information flier was developed, to be given to people invited by our 'key contacts'.

As proposed, two members of the Working Group who worked in the area, were asked to be 'key contacts'. They agreed to this, but both decided they were unable to participate in the group itself, as one member would be on leave, and another was under too much work pressure to participate. Between them, they found five participants from other agencies in the region. Three other local people were approached by the project worker to become 'key contacts'. Two declined the offer, and one agreed. This new contact asked three other people within his centre to join the group. It subsequently turned out that he could not participate in the group either, as he was resigning from his position.

As this gave us only a potential of eight members out of a hoped for fifteen and time was running out, the project worker decided to make a few direct approaches herself to workers in other organisations. Another three takers were found. The final tally, then, was eleven initial group members.

Repercussions

The change in approach for the workshops from educational learning to mutual learning and peer support certainly provided a challenge. It was difficult to explain the concept to the 'key contacts' and they in turn, had difficulty in selling it to potential participants.

The change of project worker also created some difficulties because of the lack of continuity and knowledge at this recruitment phase.

The pressure to get the thing done before the CDIH funding ceased in August meant that there was not enough time for really good networking and discussion between workers to take place before the first meeting. In most community health centres, the worker must seek permission to attend such activities and due to school holidays, some agencies were not having a meeting until after our first meeting! Other agencies who may have been happy to send someone to workshops, could not release their staff at such short notice.

The question was also raised as to why CDIH didn't develop the group within an existing network? Existing networks are not strong in the region, so to use one would have meant virtually 'taking it over'. This was not seen as an appropriate thing to do and it was decided to start from scratch.

The first group meeting of the "Peer Support and Skills Development Group" highlighted these issues through the participants' obvious confusion about the purpose of the group. The fact that no 'key contacts' (or anyone else who had been involved in the planning) were participants was significant. This confusion was exacerbated by the presence of a facilitator, a documentor and a project worker who were not really part of the group, but were apparently the architects of the whole process.

As always happens, some people who said they would come were unable to attend. This was not such a bad thing as it gave participants the opportunity to approach people whom we had missed, but who they believed would be interested in participating, and one other member joined this way.

Four people opted not to attend again after the first meeting. This left seven participants who were committed to the five sessions. The average attendance at every session was six, with no one missing more than one session. This displayed a high level of commitment from those that decided to continue.

Despite the fact that a successful group did form as a result of this pilot exercise, the process of initially bringing the participants together was far from 'developmental'. For those wishing

to replicate the exercise, we would hope that the idea would come from a local worker(s) and not be imposed by a project such as CDIH; that existing network links would be utilised; and that adequate time for prior discussion would be allocated.

Footnotes

[1] Resource Collection Section 1. "Health and Illness in a Social Context and the Role of community development".

[2] Resource Collection Bibliography - Part D, Role of Worker for references to learning and peer support.

AIMS

To provide an opportunity for workers to discuss issues such as community organisation; planning, evaluation and research issues; interpersonal and group skills; and personal survival.

To assist health workers to develop their understanding of theory and practice.

To develop on-going support/learning/teaching networks.

To pilot and document the process as a useful educational strategy,

The workshops would be designed to give emphasis to the principles of:

- learning from each other's experiences to develop a range of problem-solving skills;
- sharing understandings of community development practice through case study presentation; and
- identifying the 'personal is political' in considering the consequences of individual work experiences.

A combination of workshop strategies would be used to enhance discussion of experiential and theoretical understandings of community development.

FACILITATOR'S APPROACH

Prior to the commencement of the sessions the facilitator sketched out her approach to facilitating the "Peer Support and Skills Development Group", as follows:

Facilitation is seen here as the process of 'making easy the wishes of the group'. The group will be responsible for deciding on the content of the sessions. The facilitation will ensure that the process enables the group's chosen activities to run smoothly and reach their goals.

The First Task - Forming a Group

We are hoping that through the process we are undertaking this collection of individual community development workers will become 'a group' - a group who will offer each other some support in their work struggles; share information and skills; identify further development needs; and decide together how they might meet these.

A group is defined here as a collection of individuals who are working together on a common task with reasonable commonality of aims. There will be a degree of co-operation, interdependency and sense of trust and cohesion. This is quite different from a network of people who come together over certain issues from time to time. We set out in the belief that if we can encourage this collection of individuals to work together as a group, they would be able to offer a deeper level of support and skill development to one another.

The first facilitation task, then, is to facilitate this collection of individuals in the process of becoming a group. This will need to happen fairly rapidly because of the time constraints upon both the project and the community development workers themselves, who already have heavy workloads. Techniques such as working in pairs or small groups where people connect with others at a somewhat deeper level are useful. When we have to focus on and listen to one or two people at a time we also form stronger bonds. This can be further enhanced when we are required to feed this information back to the larger group. These activities will be used as much as possible during the early sessions where the aim is to help people to get to know each other and develop trust.

Ongoing Facilitation

Once a group has been formed the facilitation role becomes more clearly to 'make easy the group's wishes'. Here it will be important to assist the group to come to decisions about how it wishes to work together and what issues it wishes to focus on. In such a small group a consensus style should work well. This style also naturally assists the process of group building.

As part of this approach it is important also to ensure that participation is equalised as much as possible. If people do not have a chance to contribute sufficiently they will obviously not feel part of the group. Techniques such as 'brainstorms' or 'round robins' (where each takes a given time to respond to an issue), will be used to assist this participation. It may also be necessary to open up the issue of unequal participation if 'domination' by one or two people is a regular occurrence. It will be important to face up to any conflicts within the group as quickly as they appear. Conflict not dealt with also has a negative effect on a group.

Handing Over the Facilitation

If the group is to continue after the organised, facilitated five sessions, as we hope it may, the group will need to be ready to take over its own facilitation. Many of the participants, we expect, will be experienced facilitators and this will make it more possible for them to take over this role. However, it is not always easy to facilitate a group you are very much part of. It is also an area of skill which is often underestimated.

The method for this handover will need to be negotiated with the group. We may have some particular skill development sessions and some members may gradually take over the facilitator role.

Throughout, the development of the group process itself has a skill development component, so any technique or approach used will need to be made explicit and be shared with the group.

Facilitation Style

If the aim of the facilitation is to help the group with its particular task, the facilitator would use a strong, directive approach. Sometimes a group just wants to be able to concentrate on the business at hand while relying on a competent outside facilitator.

In this instance, however, our aim is to assist the group in becoming self-facilitated. Therefore a 'softer', more empowering approach will be required from the beginning. It is vital, then, that the facilitator avoid a sophisticated style - which might make a particular session go well, but hinder the independence of the group.

Also, if the facilitation appears too difficult to repeat, would-be-facilitators might lose confidence or the group might become dependent on the outside facilitator. This could lead to the group folding once they are on their own.

Flexibility of the style of facilitation will be needed throughout and it will be necessary to check out the process regularly with the participants to ensure that there is a clear ownership of the group, its direction and activities.

So, in the development of groups such as this "Peer Support and Skills Development Group", a balance needs to be struck to ensure the group is formed as a group and runs smoothly whilst independence is also being fostered.

It is an exciting and challenging shared venture to embark on!



THE PARTICIPANTS

Jennifer Airey

I grew up in a country town in the North East of Victoria, where I worked as a Laboratory Technician in a textile factory. In my spare time I was heavily involved in the local community, working with groups of young people, kids' clubs and a 'Drop-in coffee shop'.

Because I have always loved working with people and had a special interest in community groups, I decided to change my career and undertook full time study.

The youth work course I studied had a very strong component of community development and group work within it.

After working with young people in Community Youth Support Schemes, I decided I wanted to work with a community of people in a community development role. I was very fortunate in gaining a position with Craigieburn Community Health Centre as a community development worker. This role involved me working with a young, fast growing community to identify and address their own community health needs and take action to meet these needs.

Glen Alderson (Facilitator)

I had a nursing background before getting into social work in the early '70s where I worked mainly at the Brotherhood of St. Laurence developing a number of projects.

Both in and outside my work I have had a special interest in the effort of groups attempting to get together to take action to change the things which effect their lives.

Somewhat disillusioned with regular welfare approaches, and wanting to make a special commitment to social change, I joined a group of like-minded people to form Commonground.

Commonground is a resource collective aimed at supporting small groups and community based organisations which are working to take greater control over their lives. There are 95 acres at the Seymour property with developing facilities for groups to get away and recover from their struggles or to plot and plan for the next ones.

We run 'tailor made' workshops for groups on a range of subjects related to working co-operatively in groups and we facilitate special meetings on request, when an outsider gives us plenty of real life examples to use at workshops!

I grew up in the country, and it is great to have moved back amongst the fresh air and trees again.

Margaret Ioannidis

The main area of my work as a social worker has been 'casework'. I have worked largely with people of Greek background; firstly at the Australian Greek Welfare Society and currently in the position of Social Worker (Greek Speaking) at a Community Health Centre.

Whilst at the Australian Greek Welfare Society, I researched and completed a paper entitled "Greek Women of the Mass Migration Period". The paper covers three areas - family life, employment and health.

It is through this research and the recurrence of similar problems among my clients, that I became interested in and aware of community development as a way of dealing with such issues.

In the "Peer Support and Skills Development Group", I have been able to exchange ideas on different ways of working within my community. As a social worker, I need to be flexible in my approach to issues that I come across at the Centre and to issues which relate to the well-being of the Northcote community. A range of skills are called upon in my work and in this group I have the opportunity to continue developing my skills.

Anna King

I am 23 years old and am currently working as a community worker in a Community Health Centre (in West Heidelberg).

I studied occupational therapy at the Lincoln Institute of Health Sciences for four years to achieve a Bachelor of Applied Sciences in Occupational Therapy in 1986. Following a three-month student placement in an alcohol and drug rehabilitation centre, I worked for 18 months as a telephone counsellor for DIRECT Line - a 24 hour alcohol and drug information, referral and counselling service. At the same time, I worked as a locum occupational therapist in two psychiatric hospitals: part-time for three months at the Melbourne Clinic and full-time for three and a half months at Footscray Psychiatric Hospital. In both positions I was largely involved in group work.

In September 1987 I began at the community health centre where I work with issues such as domestic violence, public and youth housing, poverty, drug and alcohol use/abuse and personal health and well-being. Here, I am also the resource and support worker for a domestic violence women's group which was initiated by two local women and myself in May this year.

Jonathan Pietsch

Over the past ten years I have been involved in a range of community jobs focussing on young people, families and community development. All of these jobs have been at a grass roots level demanding a community development focus. Presently I am working as a community/tenant worker on a Ministry of Housing Estate. This position has taught me a great deal about how a local neighbourhood can take control of its own situation. Over the years the tenant managed Association has learnt to tackle problems and to work together towards visible solutions.

The variety of settings that I have worked in have been as Youth Worker on the Sunshine Coast in Queensland, in a community based Residential Care Program in Richmond, Victoria and as a Community Tenant Worker in Northcote.

My commitment to community development is based on the facilitation of groups of people, sharing their many untapped skills to meet their own needs and the needs of the wider community. Job satisfaction comes from being involved with people and seeing the process of community control and neighbourhood networking actually happen. My pet hate must be writing endless submissions to the faceless bureaucrats and trying to justify the important role of community development.

Marie Pirotta

I studied orthodox medicine at the University of Melbourne, and undertook my clinical training at St. Vincent's Hospital.

Early on in my student days I realized that I wanted to go into general practice as I like people and enjoy getting to know them. Specialists seem only to see people fleetingly - never developing any type of relationship with them and their families, whereas GPs can still be the true family doctor, and take time to know the 'whole person'.

After working in hospitals for three years, I began looking towards community health centres for my entry into general practice. What attracted me was the multi-disciplinary approach, and the fact that community health centres provide salaried positions, thereby removing financial considerations as a factor in the way medicine is practiced.

After working twelve months at a community health centre, I am very pleased with my decision.

Sue Pratt

Originally, I was trained as a nurse who was well entrenched within the medical model, it was most unsatisfactory! I eventually went to LaTrobe University to do a Behavioural Science degree, which also turned out to be most unsatisfactory. Fortunately, I did some studying in social sciences within my degree, which educated me about other ways of approaching the issues involved in health.

Additionally, I commenced work in the community health field, where I am learning continually about new processes and models which assist positive social change. I'm now working four days a week at the Eltham Community Health service and I am attempting to apply these processes of community development to my work.

Roz Rogers

Hi! I'm a young 31 year old in my first year of social work practice. I did my first year of study at Queensland University and transferred down to Monash to finish it off (Yes ... another escapee from political tyranny!) I live and work in the country - which is where I feel most comfortable. The big city is not for me and working in the Whittlesea area means that riding boots and oilskins come in handy. Some of my best work has been done in a muddy paddock while checking out a client's livestock - it is often easier to get a farmer to open up if you can talk about the price of steers and the hazards of scaly-leg on poultry before starting on the problems he and his wife may be having at home.

Being the only social worker in the area, (approx. 50,000 hectares = 1,000 square miles) means doing a lot of travelling and not having many referral options. All of which means struggling with a "Jack (Jill - sic) of all trades" complex. Fortunately the staff at the Health Centre here are all VERY supportive and caring and this makes life a lot easier. I love my work, grow my own vegetables, miss Queensland's weather, enjoy Melbourne's restaurants.



THE DOCUMENTATION

This documentation is an attempt to impartially record the 'inside story' of the "Peer Support and Skills Development Group" - the way the group developed, the gradual growth in trust, the process of direction setting, the facilitation and the content of the group's discussions.

Five sessions were documented and, together, they constitute the bulk of this report. A 'Summary Agenda' heads-up each session and the contents of each agenda item is documented as follows:

Purpose -	outlining the purpose of the agenda item as planned by the facilitator prior to the session.
Process -	!detailing the method for dealing with the agenda item as proposed by the facilitator prior to the session (for example, discussion, brainstorming, exercise in pairs).
Outcomes -	summarising what was covered under that agenda item, such as the content of discussions or listing out the points recorded during brainstorms.
Observations -	recording the dynamics of what happened within the group and between the group and the facilitator as observed by the documentator.
Comments -	this heading provides an analysis of the agenda item - whether the purpose was achieved by the process, the facilitator's role, the development of the group and explanations for various observations.

Where agenda items recur in several sessions, the 'Purpose' and 'Process' have been deleted to avoid repetition.

At the beginning of the documentation of each session, the attendance is noted along with an outline of any preparatory material sent out to participants. Relevant handouts are appended.

An **Overview** of each session is also included to provide a summary of observations and comments about the session and to draw general conclusions about the session and the development of the group.

THE DOCUMENTATION PROCESS

The documentor sat in on all sessions and, except where the documentation itself was discussed, took no part in discussion.

By and large, this 'fly on the wall' approach was successful, although in the early sessions the very presence of someone not contributing (and writing furiously) created an invasion of the intimacy of the group. By the third session most members of the group had grown used to the documentor's presence.

From the third session onwards, at the group's request, copies of the record of the past sessions were distributed to group members. The group was thus able to read and alter or approve the documentation as it went along. Group members were thus reading the observations and evaluative comments: a fact which may have influenced the group's behaviour. Since this record is not intended to be a rigorous analysis, the effect of this action has not been assessed.

The overall evaluation of the development of the group is included in Summary Section.

SESSION# 1

6th July, 1988
(3 hours)

Summary Agenda

Lunch
Welcome
Introduction to the Project and the Formation of this Group
Agenda Review
The 'Bus' Exercise
Recording Fears and Hopes on Cards
Further Introductions in Pairs and to the Group
Tea-break
How might we use our Meetings?
Evaluation Exercise

Attendance - Nine participants attended along with the facilitator, the project worker and the documentor.

Lunch

Purpose - To assist the 'getting to know each other' process by allowing informal exchanges over lunch, also to create an atmosphere that this was something special.

Process - A simple lunch of cut sandwiches and fruit was provided - the room (a staff room at the West Heidelberg Community Health Centre) was not yet set up for a workshop. No general introduction was given at this stage.

Outcomes - Three participants were staff at the West Heidelberg Community Health Centre and tended to drift in and out during lunch. Participants arrived from 12.45 - 1.30. They struck up conversations over lunch and, as the room was non-smoking, smokers went out periodically.

Comments - As people tended to arrive late and move in and out of the room, the atmosphere was more disjointed than 'something special'. Mingling didn't happen and enthusiasm was low because people didn't know why they were there - there was a feeling that it was just another meeting.

Set-up

Setting - Written agenda on wall; 14 chairs in a circle, white-board available just outside the



circle; facilitator, project worker and documentor were spaced out in the circle; a tape-recorder was used to record the first part of the session. In terms of 'atmosphere' the room was not seen as ideal by the facilitator.

Welcome

Purpose - This exercise was aimed at getting people to quickly remember each other's names; to get used to taking small scale risks with each other; and generally to 'break the ice'.

Process - This exercise involved people standing in a circle and stating their name, an adjective about themselves and where they come from - for example, "I'm game Glen from Commonground". Then each person in the circle repeated what all the others in the circle before them said.

Outcomes and Observations - The exercise was begun by the facilitator, she was followed by "Adventurous Anna from West Heidelberg" and so on around the group. Participants experienced some difficulty in recalling all the names of those who had already introduced themselves - but their attempts, along with the adjectives, encouraged laughter. Everyone adopted the approach of the first participant in stating the suburb they were from, rather than their organisation. A late-comer joined the circle during the process and didn't adhere to the adjective/place approach - he chose not to come up with an adjective for himself, but the facilitator suggested a humorous one for him.

Comments - Advantages: everyone in the group had been given a chance to speak, nervous laughter had been given an outlet, participants and facilitator had learned one another's names.
- Disadvantages: because suburbs, rather than places of work, were offered by the participants, the introductory role of this exercise fell a little short of expectations. Feedback at the end of the session indicated dissatisfaction with this sort of exercise (see 'Evaluation Exercise'). The facilitator felt that three things - name, adjective and location - was too much for people to remember.

Introduction to the Project and the Formation of this Group

Purpose - to give people a clear idea of the background and the reasons for the formation of the group, so that they can make a decision whether they want to be part of the group.

Process - input from initiators and discussion.

Outcomes - An outline of the overall CDIH Project was given and the purpose of the sessions was explored with the group. It included the role of peer group support; the development of trust; the experimental nature of the sessions; the opportunity for skill sharing; and the role of talking to people from other centres. Three key points were made by the facilitator:

- * the importance of building a group which, if desired, could continue beyond the first five sessions without the facilitator from the Project;
- * the identification of learning needs which could then be addressed by any methods chosen by the group such as, discussion within the group or by bringing in a resource person from outside the group;
- * that the sessions are entirely under the control of the group, with the content of future sessions being decided by the group.

Discussion centred around how the sessions came into being, how they were advertised, how they would be structured, timing issues and constraints, and whether the group could be enlarged. Some positive feedback on the CDIH Working Paper was given - some participants had not seen it and requested copies. One participant stated that the sessions and their documentation made it feel like that the participants were 'guinea-pigs'.

Observations - at this early stage, only three participants had spoken up - their input came only after the facilitator encouraged people to interrupt. The emphasis that she placed on the participants' ownership of the sessions also encouraged input.

People's concerns that the sessions were totally unstructured and 'up-in-the-air' were

relieved somewhat when the facilitator made it clear that her role was to assist the group with structuring and facilitating future sessions, based around the needs of the group.

A general uneasiness was evident regarding the proposed timing of the sessions (i.e. 3 hours per week for five weeks).

Comments - For most people attending a meeting or joining a group which does not have a clear purpose, or at least an identifiable convener who has a purpose in mind, would be a disconcerting experience. Similarly, to be told that the direction of the group is entirely up to the group to decide, places a responsibility onto the participants. In this case it was not requested and was a responsibility they had not been prepared for.

As the facilitator had been employed to assist the group set its own directions, she did not act as a convener who had called the group together from within existing networks - thus an understandable level of uneasiness was evident.

Agenda Review

Purpose - to provide people with an opportunity to gain a sense of ownership or at least agreement with the agenda.

Process - To go over the agenda and check it with participants for agreement.

Outcome - no alterations to the agenda were proposed.

Observation and Comments - People, at this stage were still trying to understand what the meeting was all about, and appeared to be willing to go along with anything.

The 'Bus' Exercise

Purpose - to get people to express their 'hopes and fears' in a light-hearted way; to get to know each other a bit more and to become relaxed in each other's company.

Process - working in pairs, people formed two lines and sat on the floor - as if on a bus. The 'Bus' was going to this meeting: on one side passengers are fearful; on the other side they are hopeful. They share these feelings and then swap - thus giving everyone a chance to be both 'fearful' and 'hopeful'.

Outcomes - sharing between partners was private.

Observations - as there was an odd number of participants, the facilitator participated in a pair and chose to pair up with the late-comer.

Comments - This exercise appeared to be very successful as lots of active participation was evident.

Recording Fears and Hopes on Cards

Purpose - this was also an opportunity for people to express fears and hopes and to enable these to be recorded and compared to the reality of the experience at the end of the CDIH's involvement with the group.

Process - cards were distributed so as each person could privately record their fears on one side and their hopes on the other. Participants then placed these cards into envelopes to be looked at during the last session.

Participants were then asked to share their fears and hopes with their neighbour in a circle.

Outcomes - the content of the cards and the paired sharing were private exercises.

Observations - During the paired sharing, one participant (who was the latecomer) left for the afternoon due to pre-arranged commitments - he indicated that he'd like to attend future sessions.

Comments - The exercise appeared successful as participants spent quite a time filling out their cards.

Further Introductions in Pairs and to the Group

Purpose - To allow people to share more 'in depth' information about themselves, their work and hopes for the group. It was left until this time in the agenda, so that some of the 'ice may have been broken' between people and they could share more with each other. It was also considered inappropriate to ask for 'in depth' sharing before people had a clearer understanding of what the group was about.

Process - Participants chose a partner and then talked privately about themselves and their hopes for the group. Members were expected to introduce their partners when the group reformed.

Outcomes - When people rejoined the group they sat in different positions - partners chose to sit next to each other. The facilitator asked each participant to briefly introduce their partner to the group and outline: the type of work they did; what they'd like to get out of the group; and their major skill development needs. People seemed to be unaware that they were expected to introduce their partner. The following points were raised during the ensuing discussion:

CONCERNS - A number of concerns were raised during the report back, including: that many participants did not expect the sessions to be on-going; that future sessions do not just focus on talking about community development; no consultation on how the sessions would be run; the lack of a set of directions for the sessions; no objective or goal setting process prior to the start of the sessions; and that there was no consultation on the documentation process.

FOCUS - Members of the group identified various areas they would like the sessions to focus on: sharing ideas and new initiatives; new developments elsewhere; how to go about identifying community needs and running groups; a clearer understanding of community development; mutual support and skills development; workers' roles in various groups; gaining access to and involving the community; working from the 'bottom-up' rather than having the 'professional's approach'; responding appropriately to community needs; planning and evaluation; and how to educate other workers about health and social issues.

During the discussion, some participants indicated that they were expecting these sessions to be skill development workshops and the group questioned the validity of a regional group when both community development and peer support are really local strategies. Some people were expecting a larger group.

Eventually, the group settled on a desire to use the sessions to hear more about what work each participant does in relation to community development, and what people think about community development - in terms of a practical emphasis; defining communities; and discussion of the political/social change perspective of community development work.

It was decided that these sessions will now be fortnightly meetings of two hour duration.

Observations - the initial response to the concept of the "Peer Support and Skills Development Group" during this report back and discussion appeared to be quite negative. A strong feeling of resentment was evident. The facilitator's response to this negativity was to have minimal input, thus making it clear to the group that she was not defending the concept. Instead, she reiterated her belief that it was entirely up to the group to set its own direction.

Regarding the size of the group, the facilitator contributed to the discussion by pointing out the advantage of starting small and having regular meetings, with the possibility of expanding the group and changing direction later.

At several points the facilitator reflected back the essence of the discussion - "From what you've said, meeting once a week is out of the question"; "Let's look at the regional versus local issue".

The turning point in the discussion seemed to be the facilitator's input that, "There are really two types of networks - local ones and ones which allow you to step back and look at what you are doing". The common theme which subsequently emerged (ie. the sessions having a 'bottom-up', practical emphasis) was further reinforced by an example given by one participant. She explained that she had read a paper about a community health centre, which responded to a mobility problem amongst older people in a community, by putting forward the solution of bringing in the services of a podiatrist: the community forced a change to this thinking and insisted that the community health centre assist by getting seats provided at bus shelters. Consequently, most participants in the group agreed that the focus for the sessions be on "How do you get this sort of response in the community". (Participants requested copies of this paper.)

Comments - Prior to this discussion, the participants had already spent 45 minutes in several 'paired' exercises (i.e. the 'Bus' exercise, 'Fears and Hopes' sharing, and sharing of expectations). This allowed them the freedom to air their concerns and desires, without having to challenge the organisers. These exercises, together with the introductory exercise, had developed among the participants a level of trust, mutual support and ownership of the group which enhanced their confidence to contribute to the discussion, to put forward their own views, and seek out their own direction.

People quite clearly felt that they had not been appropriately included in the developmental processes that had lead up to this meeting. They had also been unclear of its purpose.

By not forcing her views on the group, the facilitator gave the clear message that, despite what might have happened until now, it must be in their control from now on. The facilitator also ensured that the negative messages were heard and that people 'felt heard' by using reflective listening.

Tea-break

Observations - A much greater level of interaction was observed during tea-break as compared to lunch. Later in the afternoon various people commented on the value of these tea-break discussions as providing just the sort of practical discussion of community development that they sought in the sessions.

How might we use our Meetings?

Purpose - To outline a plan for the five meetings and to get specific agreement about what the group would like to do next meeting.

Process - Discussion based on the issues raised during the previous exercise.

Outcomes - The facilitator identified three un-resolved issues left over from the previous discussions:

1. more people Joining the group;
2. a specific plan for the next meeting;
3. the dissatisfaction regarding the documentation process,

As time was short she suggested to the group that the documentation issue be deferred until the next meeting.

1. More people joining the group:

Once again it was emphasised that the size of the group was up to the group to decide. The group was told that two additional people had expressed interest in attending, but were unable to make it to this session. One participant noted that "We seem to be reasonably comfortable as a group". It was decided to expand the group to a maximum of sixteen people. Various names and processes for inviting them were discussed.

2. What style do you want the next meeting to have?

The group decided on the continued use of small groups and exercises in pairs. Topics were clarified as being: people's jobs and what they do; their philosophy on community development; successes and failures; and using the group to get feedback.

The group also decided that introductory exercises were to be kept to a minimum - new participants were therefore to attend the next session early to be briefed by the facilitator.

3. The documentation process was deferred due to lack of time.

Participants requested some preparatory material before the next session including copies of the CDIH Working Paper; the paper about mobility and the bus shelters; and a list of questions for discussion.

A name and address list was circulated.

Observations - This discussion re-affirmed the commitment of the group to the earlier decisions of the group. Discussion was free flowing and involved all participants.

Evaluation Exercise

Purpose - To evaluate how this meeting went, to facilitate ownership of the process and to learn from our experience.

Process - To record on butcher's paper the positive and negative aspects of the meetings and what we could have done differently.

Outcomes - Positive feedback: at first unsure and disoriented/ useful/ Glen facilitated well/ feels more directed now/ stimulation/ positive now - a useful three hours/ enjoyable/ successful joint resolution about what we are going to do/ sense of anticipation for the following sessions.

- Negative feedback: not quite knowing what it was all about/ the flier was not accurate/ no preparation - having to think on the spot/ introductory process a waste of time/ not another name remembering game/ less role play - more direct start/ wanted to know where people work - not suburb/ concern about whether the group will meet my needs.

This last comment was made by the only doctor in the group - she went on to explain that she had encountered a lot of abuse about doctors from community health workers at a recent community health conference. Another participant pointed out that it was much the same for social workers.

Observations - By the end of the session the feeling in the group was of positive anticipation for the next session. People were slow to leave and continued chatting in small groups in the corridors and the carpark for some time.

Comments - This evaluation process appeared to prompt honest comments from the participants.

Overview

Prior to this first session, the facilitator, the project worker and the documentor all had reservations about the process used in calling the group together. In terms of community development, this process was felt to be inadequate - the time lines were short; the development of the group was, to some degree, imposed; consultation was lacking and no prior personal contact had been made between the facilitator and participants.

With such a background, they expected this session to be extremely difficult. The facilitator, therefore, took a position of not being defensive, of acknowledging the group's concerns and of allowing them to deal with the issues, themselves.

As a result, the facilitator felt that 'victory' had been snatched from the 'jaws of defeat'. Given the lack of appropriate process the session was seen as very successful - a good, cohesive group appeared to be emerging.

As it happened, the time constraints (imposed by the project's funding and which had led to the inappropriate developmental process) were blown-out by the group itself. The five sessions were originally due to be completed in five weeks, but the group chose fortnightly sessions - effectively doubling the time-line.

SESSION# 2

20 July, 88
(2 hours)

Summary Agenda

Introduction
Agenda Check
Documentation
Agreements
Where are we Coming from?
Plans for Future Sessions
Evaluation Exercise

Preparation - Several documents were mailed out to participants prior to the session, including:

- Questions for Discussion Sheet
- "Its Our Health - A community development approach to health promotion", by Lesley Hoatson from Our Health Number 2, March 1988, DHC Program.
- "Community Development in Health Working Paper", now entitled "Health and Illness in a Social Context and the Role of Community Development" included in Section 1 of this Resource Collection.
- List of participants' addresses and phone numbers

Two participants attended this session who had not attended the first session, they were asked to come half an hour early so that the facilitator could fill them in on the content of the first session.

Attendance - Six people attended the sessions including:

Four participants who had attended the first session and two new people, One apology was received.

One of the six arrived late.

Introduction

Purpose - To re-introduce those who met last time and to incorporate the new people.

Process - Each person stated:-

- * Their name
- * Where they work
- * What they do (briefly)
- * What they hope to get from the group (briefly)



Outcome - People briefly introduced themselves and outlined what they were hoping to gain from the group.

Several said they were looking for support from the group. Other comments included: "finding out more about what the others do"; "to discuss the theoretical thinking about community development"; "how to develop communities"; "skill sharing"; "how to go about health evaluation".

Observations - There appeared to be some uneasiness about the reduced size of the group. It was noted that at the end of the last session the time for this meeting had been changed so as to accommodate the very people who had not turned up.

Agenda Check

Purpose - To check if everybody agreed with the agenda, both items and times allowed, so as to ensure 'ownership' of the process.

Process - The facilitator, briefly went over the agenda and sought comments and changes and sought group acceptance.

Outcomes - The group agreed to the agenda without discussion.

Comments - The limited time available and a late start meant that the facilitator and the group were keen to get going so the agenda as offered was accepted.

Documentation

Purpose - To allow the concerns raised at the last meeting about the documentation to be fully aired and addressed; to seek agreement on whether documentation goes ahead or not and, if so, to seek an acceptable process for carrying out the documentation.

Process - A discussion and consensus decision-making process was used.

Outcomes - The facilitator began the discussion by pointing out that, at the last session, the group had raised concerns about the concept of documenting the sessions and that the process of documentation had not been clearly negotiated with the group.

The immediate response of the group was that their concerns were more of a reaction to the unexpected, initial shock of having a tape recorder and documentor present rather than a fundamental objection to the documentation. Now that they had been aired these concerns seemed less urgent. Both documentor and project worker provided some background information about the role of documentation in the project, and the facilitator re-emphasised the legitimacy and right of the group to have their concerns acted on. The group then sought and gained clarification about the tape recording of part of the first session, and about the use of specific names in the final document.

The consensus reached by the group was that the documentation should proceed and that drafts of the reports on each session be distributed after each session.

Observations - This discussion was light-hearted and mainly involved group members who had attended the first session.

Comments - By repeatedly emphasising the legitimacy of the group to act on its concerns, the facilitator was able to encourage the group to openly discuss the issues. As the facilitator placed no pressure on the group, it was clear that she had no 'hidden agendas'.

Agreements

Purpose - to allow the confidentiality issue to be raised and to seek agreement about other areas

where people want to make agreements about how the group will work.

Process - the facilitator briefly explained 'agreements' and sought agreements about any issues raised by the group.

Outcomes - The facilitator gained agreement on three 'rules' of group conduct:

- NO SMOKING - as the building is designated as such;
- CONFIDENTIALITY - so that people can say whatever they like in the knowledge that it will go no further; and
- ATTENDANCE - the group was reminded that dates for future sessions had been agreed on at the last session. Attendance, on time at all sessions was encouraged.

A smoker requested breaks of five minutes each hour to allow time for a smoke. The group agreed and several people sympathetically suggested that she may want one now. A short tea-break was agreed upon.

Observations and Comments - One-to-one interviews with some participants had been conducted by the documentor prior to the sessions as part of the documentation process. These, together with the participants' observations that the documentor was noting 'who said what' during the sessions, prompted concerns among the participants that confidentiality may be in danger. These concerns had been reported to the facilitator both by the documentor and participants prior to the session. The previous discussion about the documentation process had already given assurance that individuals would not be named in the report and that the content of the report would be vetted by the group. Thus, the confidentiality issue had, by and large, already been dealt with before this 'agreements' discussion.

Despite the 'no smoking agreement', the group gave a supportive response to the smokers within it. (Two members of the group were smokers).

Where are we Coming from?

Purpose - As suggested from the last session, the purpose of this session was for group members to share, in greater depth, the details of their work, their philosophical stances and frameworks, and how this links to practice. This was to facilitate them getting to know more about each other and their compatibility as a group. It was also to enable them to share ideas and learn from each other's experiences. (See Appendix 1).

Process - Was to consist of 20 minute discussions around each of the three question areas, making sure that everybody had a chance to share.

Outcomes - A wide ranging discussion developed from the participants' outlines of how their work constituted community development. In summary, the discussion covered several broad areas:

SKILLS TRANSFER

A number of people described their role as secretaries/public officers/facilitators/initiators of various community based groups. Most carried out this role of assisting groups by transferring group and lobbying skills to community members and by ensuring that these groups were operating from a shared power base. Some hoped that the groups with which they were working would expand to take on broader issues and to include the more isolated, out lying communities. The eventual withdrawal of the worker was a common desire expressed by those using this approach to community development. No-one reported having achieved such a withdrawal.

PREVENTATIVE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Whilst some workers were taking an approach of working from a broad community perspective to set up community structures, others noted that they were attempting to work with individuals and build up to the broader issues. This latter approach was thought to be a bit late - dealing with clients once they have a serious problem rather than preventing a problem before it arose. Many in the group felt bogged down by case work: true community development was seen as preventative and

awareness raising; case work was seen as responding to individual problems and passing on information.

While information giving was seen as important in helping people take control of their lives, it was suggested that many people in the community lacked the skills and confidence to use the information.

HEALTH AGREEMENTS AND MEASURABILITY

Agreements with the Health Department which set short and long-term OUTCOMES were seen as a barrier to a preventative, community development approach. How do you measure community development? This question was deferred to a later session.

DETERMINING COMMUNITY NEEDS

Another question which arose was: "How do you find out what a community needs?" The use of consultation through surveys, street stalls and public meetings was briefly discussed. Such methods were seen as very limited and open to manipulation by the worker. This question was also deferred to a future session.

NETWORKING/FRIENDSHIP BUILDING

It was suggested that people need opportunities to meet each other and support each other. The provision of 'services' was seen as a barrier to such networking. Many community health centres (CHG) have lost this focus of providing a place to meet and chat. This change in focus may have come about from the pressure on CHG s to provide measurable outcomes. There was some disagreement as to whether CHG s are the appropriate place for this networking function or whether their primary focus should indeed be the provision of programs and services.

The facilitator moved discussion on to the area of philosophical frameworks by asking the group "What are you trying to achieve - changing the world..?" The discussion covered several areas:

CHALLENGING THE MEDICAL MODEL

The group was in full agreement about a desire to fight the medical model, along with its patriarchal and hierarchical approaches and its underlying pursuit of money. Community development was seen to be changing the power relationships inherent in the medical model - shifting the power base so power would come from the bottom-up, rather than the top-down. Giving people control over information was seen as essential in this shift of power.

HANDOUT MENTALITY

It was observed that some people in the community preferred receiving handouts rather than gaining skills and information and taking action. An example was given of a client who regularly received emergency aid, but refused to attend financial counselling. It was noted that many recipients have been 'fed' services and have learned to 'work the system'. A question was raised; "Should community health workers provide money, offer counselling or undertake advocacy?" - that is: "Should we deal in the system or work to change it?"

For many, the provision of emergency aid is an extremely frustrating role - it was seen as a band-aid and a means of social control.

An underlying issue for workers was identified as the following: it is easy to give and in their own lives workers are not used to receiving, but recipients are always receiving. This is a very denigrating position and workers need to find ways where-by recipients can give and have input, that is, to have the opportunity to find solutions to their own problems. The group felt that it was important to work at two levels 1) providing 'handouts', and 2) involvement and advocacy.

Observations

This discussion was slow to get going, but once it got underway, it involved the entire group and covered many issues. Once the discussion started, the facilitator acted merely as a

scribe and placed little pressure on the group - this allowed the discussion to keep going with a flavour of 'having a yarn'. The only male in the group (who was also the only non-health worker) was not listened to at some points, but the facilitator checked things with him in an attempt to ensure that his points were heard. He seemed content with his input to the discussion. In the time available during the session it was not possible to cover the last point: 'Relating this to our practice'. The group decided to pick this point up in the next session. During the discussion, when issues were raised but not dealt with, the facilitator added them to a sheet of butcher's paper entitled "Issues".

Comments

The broad structure for this discussion was provided by the 'question sheet' which was sent out to participants prior to the sessions. It appeared that people had not put a lot of time into pre-thinking the questions, although several people said they had. Discussion was not limited by an imposed structure and was free flowing - this led to a real sense of group ownership of the direction of the discussion.

Plans for Future Sessions

Purpose - Was to enable people to consider how they might like to use the remaining sessions so that, if necessary, planning could be done. There was also a need to make clear plans for the next meeting.

Process - Involved discussion and decision-making.

Outcomes - The group expressed a desire to continue with the discussion and to pick up on the last question on the "Questions for Discussion" sheet - "Relating this to our practice". In addition they wanted to cover: "What is community development?"; "the philosophy of community development"; "measurement of outcomes"; "determining community needs"; and "links between philosophy and practice".

During the discussion, one member of the group expressed concern about her lack of clear philosophical perspective. The group offered her support and encouraged her to explore her concern further. She told of her co-ordinator who has a 'handout' approach and who patronises her. The group encouraged her to recognise the validity of her philosophy and to build on what she hears out in the community,

Her lack of contacts in the community and the fact that she had not been given time to settle into her job and get to know the community, were barriers for her. Some personal support was offered by one member who offered to spend some time with her at the pub, talking.

The next session (#3) was to be a continuation of this session's discussion. Session 4 would focus on the 'measurement of outcomes' issue. Following some disagreement, it was eventually decided to bring in an outsider with experience in this area, who would participate as a member of the group and not give a 'presentation'. Names were suggested.

A new venue for the next session was decided upon. The centre where a participant works was chosen. She undertook to send out confirmation to all members of the group.

Observations and Comments - The willingness of the group to offer support, warmth and affirmation to the 'ventilating' member was evidence of a strengthening group feeling. When the facilitator queried the focus of the group on one member, the group responded overtly that it was legitimate to give such support to a single member of the group.

Several members of the group were uneasy regarding the idea of bringing in an outsider who had experience in the measurement of health outcomes. They felt that within the group such expertise already existed; that it would be a backward step; and that it would be better to start with ourselves.

Further evidence of the growing desire of the members to take on the responsibilities of the group was the offer by a member to send out confirmation of the new venue.

Evaluation Exercise

Purpose and Process - As for session #1.

Outcomes - Positive points noted by the group included: hearing from others; brain-work; ideas sharing, stimulation; time to reflect; time to ventilate; chatting; disappointment that people did not attend.

- Negative points were: getting off the point; people not here.

Observations and Comments - People appeared to have enjoyed the session and the mood at the end of the session was one of anticipation for the next session.

Draft copies of the documented record of Session #1 were distributed.

Overview

Despite the low attendance (six people: including only four of the original nine) the session appeared to achieve quite a lot.

The negativity toward the process used to form the group and toward the documentation was not evident. The central discussion of the session which was based around the 'Questions for Discussion' sheet was very productive - people were able to air issues and concerns they have encountered regarding the implementation of community development. A sense of common experience and common directions seemed to emerge.

The group was, to some degree, dominated by a few more vocal individuals, but such domination is common in the early formation of a group.

The free flow of the discussion was enhanced by the presence of a facilitator who took no direct part in the discussion. Instead, she reflected back and clarified the points people were making in those instances when they were experiencing trouble in articulating.

By establishing an 'Issues' sheet the facilitator was able to record issues which were raised, but not dealt with. This process ensured that issues were not forgotten without breaking the flow of the discussion.



SESSION# 3

10th August, 1988
(2 hours)

Summary Agenda

Agenda Review/Documentation
Catch-up
Brief Recap of Session #2
Why Community Development as a Way of Working?
Tea-break
What are the Links between this Philosophy and our Practice
Next Meeting? How do we want to handle it?
Facilitation
Evaluation Exercise

Preparation - Prior to this session participants received a proposed agenda for the session in the mail. They were asked to consider three questions:

- * Why community development as a way of working?
- * What are the links between philosophy and practice?
- * How do you find out what the community really wants?

A participant in whose centre this session was to be held, sent out a notice detailing the location of the venue.

Attendance - Six participants attended the session, including one who missed the last session due to holidays.

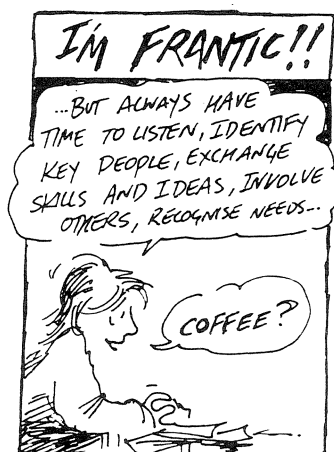
Agenda Review/Documentation

Purpose - To share the facilitator's proposed agenda and get acceptance of this from the group.

Process - The facilitator briefly outlined the agenda to the group.

Outcomes - The group agreed with the proposed agenda.

As few participants had had the time to read the documentation of the first session the facilitator suggested that time could be put aside in the next session to discuss the documentation. The group agreed with this proposal.



'Catch Up'

Purpose - To give people a chance to catch up with each other; to share briefly how they have been going since we last met. It also aimed to build supportive relationships.

Process - Going around the circle, each person said in turn how they had been and shared any significant work news that they felt was important.

Outcomes - Several participants mentioned that their centres were undergoing moves to new or expanded premises. Some were pleased with the result, others found the process hectic and stressful. Other participants reported: gaining funds for a major transport study; working intensively on a wide 'issues group'; making many stressful court appearances; and organising the launch of a 'Domestic Violence Campaign' with the State Premier.

Observations and Comments - This 'catch up' was fairly light-hearted with participants giving a run-down of the significant work events since the group last met three weeks ago.

As a 'round-the-group' introductory exercise with a difference, this exercise was quite successful as it got the participants to focus on their work right from the beginning.

Two participants had not met before (one joined the group whilst the other was on holidays) and this 'catch-up' did not provide an opportunity for these two to find out who each other was. They rectified this themselves during tea-break.

Brief Recap of Where we got up to Last Time

Purpose - Was to act as a reminder to those who were there and to bring those who were not there, up to date, so that everyone has the same level of information.,

Process - Summary comments were sought from those who were at the last session; these were to be pulled together by the facilitator.

Outcomes - Few participants could recall much of the content from the last session. Eventually, some remembered the preventative community development vs case work discussion; whilst others recalled that they had not discussed the practical aspect of their work in any great depth.

Observation - As only two members of the group had any clear recollection of the content of the last session, some embarrassment and discomfort was evident in the group. The facilitator, too, only had vague recollections. In response to the evident discomfort of the group the facilitator moved on from this topic swiftly by saying: "They (recollections of the last session) will arise as we go along."

Comments - This exercise proved to be fairly unsuccessful. It seemed to be perceived by the group as a 'test' and resulted in a feeling of failure. In addition, it did not succeed in briefing the person who missed the last session as to what had been discussed - at several points throughout the rest of the session she had to ask for clarification of what happened at the previous session. The long break (of three weeks) may have contributed to the group's poor recollection.

A pre-arranged, preparatory meeting between the organising team, prior to this session, had not occurred. One result was the facilitator's lack of preparation for this session and thus her inability to enlighten the group as to the content of Session #2. This exercise would have been more productive if a summary sheet of the conclusions from the previous session had been up on the wall, or handed out.

Why Community Development as a Way of Working?

Purpose - To put community development into a 'value and philosophy' framework,

Process - Prior to the session the facilitator set the process as:

A 'brainstorm' to begin with (this will be checked out with the group) and then a discussion. In fact, a discussion and writing-up process occurred (see Comments).

Outcome - The main points from this discussion as written up during the discussion were:

- * community development focusses more on prevention;
- * too much frustration with 100% case work;
- * community development is a better way of finding out what the community needs;
- * community development empowers the community to tackle issues;
- * community development is more effective in the long-term;
- * developing a community prevents isolation and alienation;
- * we use community development because it helps create social justice;
- * community development involves working with groups and results in collective action;
and
- * community development brings about networking and involves outreach.

Other points which came out during the discussion, but which were not written-up, included:-

- community development work means acting as a catalyst and thereby helping people solve their own problem and through community development people can eventually by-pass the community worker and apply their skills to other situations;
- community development workers are aiming to do themselves out of a job;
- community development is more 'cost effective' than case-work;
- community development can help slow down the current disintegration of families and create a renewed sense of community;
- illness (such as ulcers) have been linked to loneliness and isolation;
- Ministry of Housing estates have a better sense of community than many other areas;
- community development reaches people who are not normally seen in community health centres and;
- community development helps bring about significant changes to existing structures and processes.

Observations - At the start of this discussion one of the participants offered to write-up the main points. All participants had input, but one person tended to dominate.

The facilitator was very active during the discussion in reflecting back to the group the essential elements of the discussion. At several points she re-focussed the discussion: "So, why do you do it?" "Why else do we do it?", and at some points she brought the discussion back to a point made earlier by a participant: "You were saying developing a sense of community?"; "Did you want to disagree with what said earlier?"

The discussion tended to bring itself to a close as people seemed to have nothing further to say on the topic - the facilitator then called a tea-break.

Comments - The facilitator chose a discussion format with writing-up rather than simple brainstorming to encourage people to delve into their own experience.

The discussion format (rather than brainstorming) meant that a number of valuable points were not recorded by the group member who was writing up, as it was really up to her and the facilitator as to what points were considered significant enough to be recorded. This selective writing-up may have diminished the effective input of some members of the group. In addition, the group had to wait at several points whilst she put points up, thus making discussion a little disjointed.

Although the actual outcomes seemed reasonable to the observer (and facilitator), at the time this discussion seemed rather directionless and 'empty'. As a result the facilitator checked the group's direction immediately following tea-break.

A number of people remained in discussion well into tea-break and the two who had not met before used the time to introduce themselves.

Direction Check

Immediately following tea-break the facilitator checked with the group as to whether the session, so far, was proving useful. She reinforced the fact that these sessions were their sessions and that, if the group felt it was a waste of time, the direction could be changed.

The response of the group was that it was useful and that "people often talk about community development, but rarely get down to the basics".

What are the Links Between this Philosophy and our Practice?

Purpose - Was for people to look critically at their work practice in light of what they believed they were trying to achieve.

Process - Prior to the sessions, the facilitator outlined the process as: discussion, sharing details of work practice and linking these to beliefs.

Outcome - A lengthy discussion covered five broad areas of how the philosophy of community development could be implemented in work practice.

Five key statements were written up by the facilitator as they were raised during the discussion:

1. We need mechanisms to be accessible to the community, and to engender community 'ownership'.

People noted that committees of management (C/M) are often not representative of the community and they can become a new power base in themselves. The worker has a responsibility to ensure that they are working from a broad community base - therefore the composition of the C/M is a reflection on, and a responsibility of, the worker. The worker should seek to empower people by letting them know that they need not be experts to participate on a C/M.

2. Doing one's case work differently - linking people together; getting them to do more for themselves; linking them to groups.

It was stated that applying a community development philosophy to case work changes your approach - it means that the worker must encourage the 'client' to do things for themselves rather than adopting a 'professional control' approach (such as getting clients to come in for counselling too often). It also means 'plugging' clients into groups where they exist or starting new groups where they don't.

3. It is important to make sure you leave time to be 'where the people are' and to create facilities for people to get together.

It was noted that a danger in community work is of getting too involved in case work and policy issues and forgetting about the basics. Being accessible and involved with people was seen by the group as the 'guts' of community development - but staying in the office and doing case work is easy and tempting. Time constraints, low levels of staffing and unco-operative staff make the community development approach difficult.

4. Working with people to help them understand the way things (the 'system') work(s), so that they can use these structures.

One worker actively assists the community in working to change the local council through articulating people's rights, giving information, explaining how the council works and by acting as a facilitator. Others saw themselves as acting as community advocates, or used the media as a means of informing people. The key to helping the community understand structures, like council, is to be in contact with people, but some in the group such as the doctor said, they lacked good access to people. The group pointed out that to create this access, one needs to be ingenious - eg. door knocks; visiting foster care and infant welfare centres; speaking to youth groups or the like.

5. The organisation and its people may in themselves be a barrier to community development and may therefore, be a target for community development work.

Following discussion several people in the group realised that the major barrier to implementing a community development approach was the attitude of C/M's or other staff at their centres. Staff often prefer case work because it involves less accountability and failures are not as 'public' as failures in community development work. The need to develop greater awareness of community development and the need to generate a community development philosophy and practice within these centres was identified as a possible starting point in applying the theory to practice. Thus, applying community development techniques to bring about change within one's organisation was seen as a high priority by some.

Observations - All the group participated in this discussion, but again with one or two members dominating. The key points (listed above) were written up by the facilitator during discussion. The last point appeared to be a major realisation by two members of the group.

At one point, the facilitator noted that it was time to move on to the next item on the agenda (How do we find out what the community really needs?), but the group was keen to keep going with this discussion. A member of the group suggested that the discussion proceed by going around the group with each member explaining how they apply the theory in practice. This method was adopted, but only three members had their turn before the process lapsed back into the general discussion format.

Comments - This discussion (as with the pre-tea-break discussion) seemed slow and superficial, but the participants seemed to be happy with the pace and were finding it useful. Afterwards, the facilitator noted that these differing perceptions of the value of the discussion may have been a function of differing expectations and levels of experience.

How do you Find Out what a Community Really Needs?

Purpose - Was to look at community needs assessment at a very practical and basic level relevant to people's current work experience.

- (this item was deferred due to lack of time).

Next Meeting? - How do we want to handle it?

Purpose - Was to go over people's expectations for the next meeting and to check whether they wanted some outside people to attend so as to share their experiences. If so, who and how will they be handled; who will contact these people? This process was seen as important to encourage 'ownership' of what was to be done.

Process - Discussion and consensus decision-making.

Outcomes - It was agreed that Session #4 would focus on community needs, (deferred from above) and that, session #5 would focus on 'measurement' and will involve an outsider, as was decided at the last session.

The choice of who would be brought into Session #5 was put to the group as their decision - the decision, though, was deferred until next Session as time was running short.

Observations and Comments - The group still seemed indecisive about the use of an outsider in the group.

Facilitation

Purpose - Does the group wish to take this over? How would they like to use the CDIH facilitator? This was linked to the above topic. The purpose was to get people to think about the idea of taking over facilitation in light of the end of the agreed upon five CDIH facilitated meetings and the group's possible ongoingness.

Process - Discussion and consensus decision-making.

Outcomes - The facilitator put these questions to the group and explained that funding for facilitation had been committed for only five sessions - after that it would be up to the group as to whether they would continue and if so, how they would organise themselves. If further funding became available, and if the group desired, it may be possible to continue the facilitator beyond the five sessions.

The group's response was overwhelmingly that the facilitator should continue in that role for as long as possible. Comments included that: this was the best session; that without a facilitator's input they would tend to get off the point; that organising facilitation within the group would take too long; and that members of the group have taken a role in facilitation by organising the venue and refreshments.

Observation and Comments - Little time was available to explore these questions further, but the

response was clearly in favour of keeping a facilitator. It seemed that the group's perception of how it might take over the facilitation role was that they would have to spend time at the start of each session planning the session as a group. No-one suggested delegation as a technique.

Evaluation Exercise

Purpose and Process - As for Session #1

Outcomes - Positive points noted by the group were: coming to Eltham!; establishing why we do community development; looking at links; the small numbers in the group - it feels we're together; enthusiasm; constructive ideas about where to start (applying community development to our centre).

- Negative points included: not enough time; heating; a bit of interrupting.

One of the two more outspoken people in the group asked the other: "Did we dominate too much?", in response the other asked the group "Would you tell us to shut up?". Some members of the group responded that they would, whilst others said they wouldn't. The facilitator pointed out the value of such feedback.

Homework was set as 'If you have time, think about how you find out what the community needs.'

The documentation from Session #2 was handed out.

Observations - The honesty that was evident in this last exchange suggested that the members of the group were growing more comfortable with each other.

Overview

The organisers felt that discussion, in general, was slow and superficial and thus, they felt that the session fell short of their expectations. Feedback from the participants contradicted these perceptions. The participants made it clear that they had enjoyed the session and had found it useful.

Nonetheless, the facilitator decided that at the next session, she would use some more paired exercises to help the group members focus their thoughts.



SESSION# 4

24th August, 1988
(2 hours)

Summary Agenda

Catch-up and Name Reminders
Agenda Review
Documentation

Funding News - the future of this group and its facilitation
How do You find out What the Community Needs?
Evaluation Exercise and deciding on Next Venue

Preparation - a notice of change of meeting time was sent out prior to the session.

*Attendance - Six participants attended the session, one was late. One participant sent apologies.
The session got underway 20 minutes late.*

Catch-up and Name Reminders

Purpose - to encourage people to get to know more about each other through the sharing of more personal work related issues and to allow support possibilities to be explored.

Process - An 'around the circle' sharing of how people are with some time allowed to work out an appropriate support follow-up time if it appears needed.

Outcomes - People re-introduced themselves by name. One participant had been knocked-back regarding funding for a food co-operative whilst another had had great success in gaining funding for a transport study and was in the process of organising a visit by the State Health Minister. Others mentioned hectic work loads.

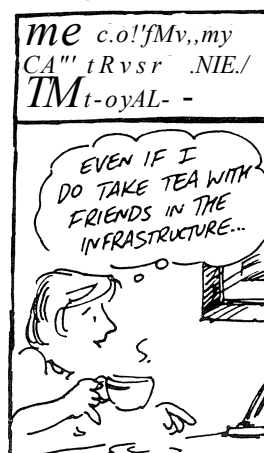
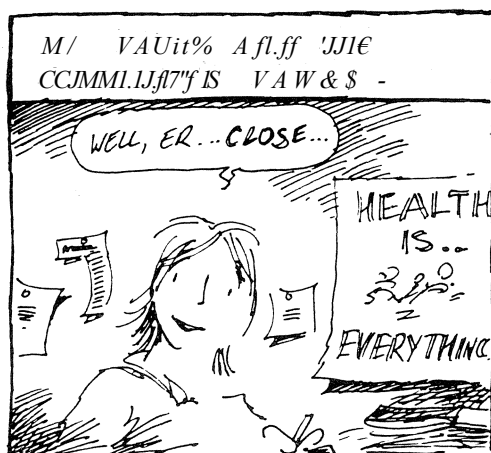
The facilitator noted that time management appeared to be a big issue for most in the group.

Comments - These 'catch-up' sessions were received well by the group.

Agenda Review

Purpose and Process - As for Session #3.

Outcomes - The group agreed to the proposed agenda without discussion.



Purpose - For people to give some feedback about the documentation drafts presented so far.

Process - to elicit specific comments relating to the perceived accuracy of the documentation; and to ask for general comments about the documentation as it looks so far.

Outcomes - Various queries were raised about particular parts of the documentation of earlier sessions. These were discussed and clarified by the group with some input from the documentor and the facilitator. The documentation was seen as an accurate account of the sessions. The group decided that any additional comments on the documentation should be sent direct to the documentor.

Members were asked to provide personal profiles and photographs for inclusion in the report. The facilitator agreed to provide her own profile to the group as an example of style. The group decided that the photos not be connected with the profiles or with individual names.

Observations - Few of the group members had read the documentation of past sessions, thus discussion was fairly limited.

During the discussion the latecomer arrived and the facilitator stopped discussions to allow for group re-introductions.

Funding News - the future of this group and its facilitation

Purpose - The facilitator felt that people would be keen to know the CDIH funding news as it affects the group's future. It also seemed important that they consider this as soon as possible so the facilitator role withdrawal can be clarified and negotiated.

Process - A brief input from the project worker about the funding and then a discussion outlining the possible options. Then to decide on an option and negotiate a role for the facilitator if they chose to have one.

Outcome - The facilitator began this discussion by asking "Are you interested in an ongoing group without a facilitator; is the group worthwhile to you?"

Several people said that the group was worthwhile and that it had only "scratched the surface" so far. Most of the group indicated that it would be useful to continue with the group provided that the whole group wanted it and that the venues could rotate allowing easier access for workers from out-lying suburbs.

A number noted that the group had not yet had sufficient time to 'gel' as a self-sufficient group and that without ongoing support from the CDIH project it would probably disintegrate.

The project worker explained that funding was only available to employ the facilitator for one additional session (beyond the initial five). Beyond that the CDIH project workers could provide the group with back-up, but the group would have to facilitate itself if it were to be ongoing. The CDIH timeline required that the documentation would be wound-up following the next (ie. the fifth) session.

One group member noted that the group appeared apathetic and non-committal. She suggested that the discussion be deferred. The facilitator questioned this in light of the already expressed desire of all group members to make the group ongoing. In response people noted variously that: this was only the fourth session; "the group is a false group"; and "that the group needed more members".

It was decided to use the facilitator for one additional session and that this discussion would be continued toward the end of the next session.

Tea-break was called.

Observations - Although people said they saw value in making the group ongoing, no strong feeling, enthusiasm or commitment was evident. Two people were hesitant in answering the facilitator's initial question.

At one point the facilitator fed back: "You all want the group to be ongoing, but you have

some fears that, as the group hasn't gelled yet, it may not work. And you feel that you may be able to take on the facilitation role yourselves later on?" Several people echoed that those fears were major fears.

Comments - It was noted both by the group and the facilitator that this discussion might have been more appropriate at the end, rather than the beginning of the session.

How do You find out What the Community Needs?

Purpose - To share experience and wisdom on the subject and to explore new options for assessing community needs.

Process - Prior to the session, the facilitator outlined the process:

- firstly, to clarify as a group what we are doing;
- then to have five minutes thinking/writing time for people to reflect on their experiences in assessing needs and the needs they would currently like assessed;
- depending on the number of people present, to then we break into small groups of three or four to share these experiences and to list suggested techniques and strategies;
- these would then be shared in the large group and a list of suggestions would be generated;
- then to seek a volunteer to take these away to be typed up and distributed.

Outcomes - The group altered the proposed process to a discussion format. The main methods for assessing community needs were drawn out during this discussion :

1. Talking to people in banks, at community health centres and so forth. For example, asking leading questions whilst waiting in a bank queue such as "... having trouble with the kids... ?"
2. Reading the local newspaper.
3. Interviewing and spending time with committee of management members.
4. Living in the neighbourhood vs. being an objective visitor - both have advantages. Living in the area may lead to 'burn-out'.
5. Visit places where people gather such as infant welfare centres, street parties, door-knocks, welcoming committees, theme activities, etc.
6. Talk to local workers.
7. Listen to clients.
8. Go on outings with groups.
9. Make home visits and observe local conditions such as the location of bus stops, GPs, shops, etc.
10. Organise workshops or special interest groups - such groups can provide a forum for other needs to get raised.
11. Questionnaires have both positive and negative aspects; people might not return them or simply copy one-another's responses, or people might be frightened off by 'being asked'; if a questionnaire is administered by the committee of management it'll get them to meet the people; short, one page questionnaires with only four questions are best,
12. Provide a gathering place which is 'owned' by the user - such as a community room or smoking room.
13. Consult needs studies done by council or government departments.
14. Talk to local councillors, local MPs and their secretaries.
15. Talk to local people who are in contact with the community such as hairdressers, vets, post office workers, GPs, etc.
16. Gain input from people through a 'network' system where the worker talks to two people and they are asked to talk to two others and so forth.

Observat - The facilitator tentatively suggested the first step of the process outlined above, but participants suggested a preference for an 'around the group' sharing of methods for finding out community needs. The facilitator conceded to their suggestion and called for someone to act as 'scribe'. Two people volunteered and one who felt she had the least to contribute to the topic, was chosen.

Comments - The process proposed by the facilitator was rejected by the group. The facilitator had proposed such a process in an attempt to deepen the level of discussion.

By the start of this discussion, the group had fallen 25 minutes behind the schedule as set by the facilitator and as a consequence, the facilitator felt it would be futile to spend more time discussing the process rather than simply getting on with it. As a 'workshop

leader' the facilitator could have 'imposed' this process on the group, but in the context of these sessions she had adopted a more low-key, facilitation role and thus didn't want to push the group in any pre-conceived direction.

Evaluation Exercise and deciding on Next Venue

Purpose and Process - As for Session #1

Outcomes - Positive: content was valuable and interesting; feedback on the second session; people want to keep going; facilitation for another session.

- Negative: starting with discussion about the future of the group before the group had had time for re-cohesion; not starting on time; we hadn't done our 'homework' so documentation discussion was 'wishy-washy'; needed more time on the 'needs' discussion; didn't cover anything we didn't already know; should have handled the documentation discussion another way; too much 'other business'.

The venue for the next session was chosen.

After the session had wound-up and two people had left, those who remained realised that no decision had been made about who would be brought into the group for the next session. Names were discussed and one person was decided upon - one member of the group undertook to contact her.

Observations - The evaluation resulted in few positive comments and quite a number of negative inputs.

The two group members who had discussed this, were not coming to a firm time to get together.

Comments - By and large the level of discussion fell well short of the facilitator's expectations - this seemed to be reflected in the feedback from participants.

Overview

In general, this session was far less successful than the previous two sessions. Several factors may have contributed to this, the main ones being:

- the late start
- the amount of time taken up by the 'documentation' and 'future of the group' discussion;
- that the group was being pushed to decide its future and for the group members to 'commit' themselves; and
- the nature of the main topic. It seemed that this topic was too 'matter of fact' and didn't allow people to deepen their thinking.

Not all groups replicating this pilot exercise would have the need to decide their future with such urgency and would not have the need to discuss a documentation. The negativity which emerged as a result of these pressures and the time that it took to discuss them may have reduced the group's receptiveness to the facilitator's proposed process for dealing with the main topic. This process (of thinking time and small group discussion) was designed to deepen the level of discussion of needs assessment.

After the session the facilitator maintained that the discussion may have been improved had such a process been followed.

SESSION# 5

8th September, 1988
(2 hours)

Summary Agenda

Agenda Development by the Group
The Future - us
Sharing our Work Stories and Difficulties - pooling our ideas
Evaluation Exercise
Plans for Next Session

Preparation - Prior to the session a guest with some expert knowledge in 'measuring community development' was invited to join the group for this session. At the last minute the guest pulled out.

- a participant organised the typing up of the list of needs assessment methods developed in the last session.

Attendance - five participants attended on time,

Preliminary Discussions

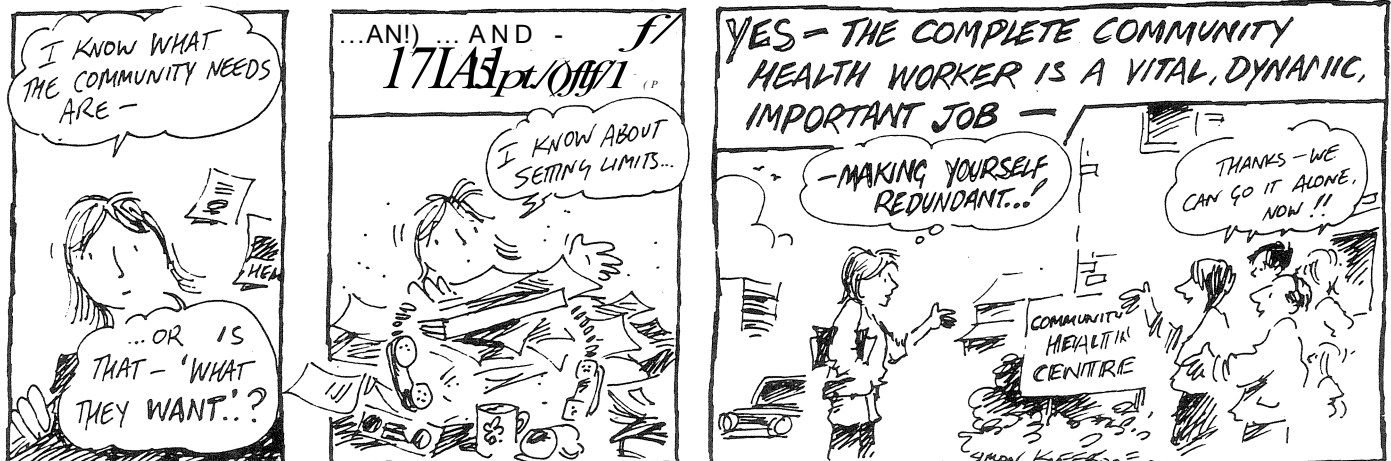
Some concern was expressed about the whereabouts of the sixth group member. The facilitator suggested that perhaps she was not finding the sessions useful and had pulled out. A couple of participants maintained their concern and noted that the venue and meeting time change had not been communicated to her. Others noted that she was aware of the meeting date and could have rung to check the venue. Several people said this relieved their guilt in not having contacted her.

The two who had discussed having lunch together mentioned that they had done so since the last session.

• observations and comments - the facilitator's analysis of the situation provided evidence of the development of a 'group feeling'.

Agenda Development by the Group

Purpose - The last-minute cancellation by the guest meant that the facilitator's plans for the sessions were of no use: the facilitator therefore began the session by encouraging the group to design the agenda.



Process - The facilitator put the situation to the group and sought to stimulate the group's thinking by making suggestions and feeding back the group's responses.

Outcomes - The facilitator suggested that the group could pursue the topic of "How do you measure community development" or do something else - perhaps concentrating more time on the peer support aspect of the meetings by sharing and discussing the difficulties participants are experiencing in their work.

The immediate response of one member was to suggest that the group move outside into the spring sunshine, but the facilitator discouraged this step for the time being.

Other members of the group sought clarification of how many more sessions were left and the date and venue of the next session. The facilitator converted these questions into an agenda item and began writing an agenda on butcher's paper (first item - "The Future - us").

One member suggested that the 'measuring community development' item be held over and the facilitator again suggested the peer support topic. Much uncertainty was evident with people saying "I can't think" and "It could get waffly". The facilitator assured the group that she could keep the discussion from getting 'waffly'.

As no other ideas were presented, the facilitator elaborated on the peer support topic - "... talk in reasonable depth about what I do and what I find difficult". She added this item to the agenda (second item - "Sharing our Work Stories and Difficulties: pooling our ideas").

Finally, she completed the agenda by adding a third item - "Evaluation Exercise" - with the uncertain approval of the group.

During the discussion the missing member telephoned to explain her delay and indicated her enthusiasm to get there as soon as possible.

Observations - The unexpected withdrawal of the guest meant that the group was being asked to plan its own agenda. The participants clearly had no idea of which way to go, and lacking any alternative, they accepted the suggestion of the facilitator. When questions about the future of the group arose, the facilitator, rather than simply answering them, used these questions as an indication of the group's desire to pursue this topic and included it in the agenda.

The "I can't think" responses of members suggested that people were balking at the new responsibilities and were 'caught on the hop'.

The suggestion that the group move outside was initially resisted by the facilitator because her 'facilitator's instinct' was that sitting out in the sun, although pleasant, is usually disruptive. Rather than showing her disapproval the facilitator deferred the suggestion by saying "Let's choose the topics first." This soft deferral gave her time to consider an appropriate way of handling the suggestion.

The phone call from the missing member was put through to a phone in the room - in another situation such a private call might have been disruptive, but here the positive input from the absent member raised the spirits of the group.

Comments - The fact that the group was forced by circumstances into taking some responsibility for the session had a very positive effect on the rest of the session. By having to deal with a 'here and now' problem together, the group's cohesion seemed to strengthen and confidence in the group's power to run itself was enhanced.

The Future - us

Purpose - As the group had decided on this topic on the spot, the purpose was to inform the group of funding developments and clarify the group's plans for the future.

Process - The process adopted here evolved as it went along. Initially the project worker outlined the latest developments regarding the CDIH project funding.

Outcomes - The project worker reiterated the commitment of the CDIH Committee's desire to support the group if it wished to continue, but that it was up to the group to put a proposal to it.

The group discussed the possibilities of self-facilitation - some, felt that facilitation

would not be too difficult if the group set the agendas; one suggested that if she were to try, she might 'muff it', but the rest of the group would 'rescue' her; another said that the group had been talking about self-facilitation for several sessions so why not just "give it a try".

A second phone call came from the absent member during this discussion - she could not get a car and therefore could not make it to this session. Her opinion of the discussion was sought - she wanted the group and the facilitation to continue,

The facilitator pointed out that the handing over of the facilitation should be a gradual process, over several sessions. To aid the group's decision making, she drew up a sheet of butcher's paper into quarters and asked the group to brainstorm positives and negatives.

Self-Facilitation

Positive

- Empowerment
- Save \$
- Prod - itull ck>tlo
- Mem utuo
- F tQt AAVP

Negative

- Waffle
- Fall apart
- Group not ready
- Hard when trying to participate and facilitate.

Facilitated with Handover

Positive

- M0lt duuhen.
- More time to establish as a group.
- Someone to tie-up loose ends
- Skill development

Negative

- Cost.

All members of the group contributed ideas and once the group had exhausted their input, the facilitator asked: "Is that enough information to make a decision?" The group chose "Facilitation with gradual handover."

Once this decision had been made, the group was able to decide on how many more 'facilitated' sessions were needed, who would facilitate and the timing of the sessions. They decided to keep the current facilitator, to have five more "handover" sessions and for the sessions to go from weekly to fortnightly and eventually to monthly. They also decided to draft a written request to the CDIH Committee during the next session (# 6). Several people exclaimed: "We've made a decision!"

The facilitator then focussed the group's attention on the process of handover. Options included: co-facilitating with a group member; the facilitator acting as the 'second in command' to a group member/facilitator; or half and half. A group member pointed out that it would depend on which group member was involved.

Two group members volunteered themselves to work with the facilitator - one because she had never facilitated before; the other because she had a quiet voice.

The facilitator asked the group if they would like to move the group outside after the tea-break. The group chose to do so.

Observations and Comments - This discussion centred on concrete roles, practicalities and decision-making. Throughout the discussion and particularly during the positive and negative brainstorm all group members had significant inputs - including the typically quieter members. People were putting forward concrete, constructive suggestions and some individuals were prepared to undertake significant risks.

At the previous session when the topic of the future of the group was raised, a degree of negativity was evident. During that discussion the group had made it clear that the topic should not be discussed until the end of the next session. Yet the group chose to raise this issue early in this session. This may have been due to the increasing confidence within the group.

The facilitator's introduction of the positive/negative brainstorm technique proved very effective. It provided a structure for the group to think within and brought about a quick, firm decision.

The commitment of the group to continue on and gradually take over the facilitation was clearly very strong.

Once the issue of the future of the group had been dealt with, the facilitator raised again the suggestion of moving outside. By this time both the group and the facilitator had had time to consider the suggestion. If the facilitator had argued against the move when it was first suggested (in line with her initial impulse) many of the gains in the group's cohesion and autonomy may have been lost.

Sharing our Work Stories and Difficulties - pooling our ideas

Process - Once the group had convened out on the grass in the sunshine, it quickly decided on a process. This was achieved by the facilitator pointing out that there were 50 minutes left and five group members - "that makes 10 minutes each!" the group said in unison. The facilitator then suggested that one particular group member (who the facilitator suspected had particular concerns) begin.

Outcomes - The discussion began by focussing on one person, but as two others shared similar problems the discussion tended to move from one person's work difficulties to another's and back again. Many specifics were discussed including problems with particular co-workers or committees. Broadly, the areas discussed included:

- the lack of time to get involved 'with people in more developmental way'. This was caused by a general lack of control over one's job; lack of availability of staff to make referrals of case work to; the worker's own reluctance to say 'no' to clients; bad feedback from other staff when the worker goes out to attend meetings; directives from senior staff to be 'available' to clients at all times. Fundamentally, the group identified a clash of objectives for workers with a 50% case work/50% community development role; doing case work alone means nothing will really change and means you're letting down half of your job.

- the need to educate the committee of management (C/M). A question was raised by a group member - "Why does a C/M allow a worker with a 50% community development role to do more than 50% case work?" Lack of understanding by the C/M; need for C/M and staff workshops; tabling of literature (such as the CDIH working paper); encourage the C/M to develop a community development philosophy; if one already exists, use it and challenge the C/M regarding its non-implementation; make friends with the C/M; encourage the community to put pressure on the C/M; the C/M may feel a threat to its power.

- overcoming interference by C/M and staff. Some C/Ms pay only 'lip service' to community development philosophy and go ahead and employ more medical professionals and so forth; the staff 'team' approach can tend to create bureaucracy; at staff meetings community development proposals generated by the community are rejected because 'the staff know better'; remember that the social workers' code of ethics supports self-determination of the client; and too much supervision and interference suggests a lack of trust.

- action by the worker. The workers must get their own community development philosophy clear in their own mind; take action early - if you let things go, then they get harder to change; ensure your job description is not too broad; to take action the worker will need to develop personal supports; make use of the time you are acting as the staff representative on C/M; put yourself on the agenda; and calling on things like the social worker code may feel threatening, but may be necessary.

- acceptance of community development among staff. Other staff often ask: "What does she do?"; some believe community workers are rare in CHCs; there is a general lack of knowledge regarding community development; community health nurses and community development workers are both 'breaking the ground' of community work - this may result in resentments; and there is often confusion between health education and community development.

- statistics collection. Community development can result in a drop in client statistics; people who attend meetings or groups could be counted as statistics; administrators often say "... but that does not fit the computer"; the "CHIRS" (Community Health Information Recording System) computer program is more flexible; the district health council program provides a computer resource person.

This last topic was seen as more appropriately left until the session on "Measuring Community Development".

Observations and Comments - compared to previous weeks this discussion had a completely different feeling - there was a real sense of sharing and openness. The more experienced group members were responding by listening and discussing rather than 'problem solving'. There was a feeling of care for one another and people were genuinely listening and working to resolve problems together. The suggestions and strategies being put forward were far more sophisticated. Overall, the discussion was more animated and there was a much stronger 'sense of group' than in the past.

The focus of discussion was continually returning to specific strategies for action and recipients of the suggestions seemed to be taking them as an action they would, in reality, carry out.

The informal setting and the fact that the group had survived a small crisis together may have enhanced the sharing of practical personal difficulties.

Evaluation Exercise

Purpose and Process - The usual evaluative process was employed, but before beginning the facilitator pointed out that past evaluations had been fairly superficial. She asked the group to be more analytical this time. The group moved back inside so butcher's paper notes could be taken.

Outcomes - Positive points: informality/hit on core topics/risks were taken/meaty issues/concentrating on one topic only/exchange of practical ideas from various centres/good mix of professions committed to community development/good cohesiveness/more opening-up.
- Negative points: too short/I missed the input from the two who couldn't make it today/I'm a bit nervous about the risks I took.

This last point arose when one member said: "I am a bit worried about having spoken about problems I am having with particular people and having used names." The group re-affirmed

their commitment to confidentiality. It was noted that the structure of this session allowed a more in-depth discussion which encouraged people to air personal work issues. Some group members observed that a session like this one would have been impossible earlier on, because the group had not yet 'gelled'.

Comments - The concern about confidentiality suggested that risks were indeed, taken and that trust and support within the group was building.

Plans for Next Session

Purpose and Process - The group needed to clarify the content of next session and who would be co-facilitator. Discussion was used.

Outcomes - One participant wanted to spend time looking at "What is community development", but other group members pointed out that this was covered in the second session which she had missed. Others wanted to continue the discussion started today.

These two ideas were amalgamated and the outcome was to look at one another's programs in a community development perspective and critically analyse them. (Is the program 'pro-active' or is it community development? How could it be more developmental?)

One person undertook to contact the missing group members. Another volunteered to act as co-facilitator because "I don't do community development". A group member who was familiar with her work pointed out that some aspects of her work were developmental. It was decided that the facilitator and co-facilitator would meet a half-hour early prior to the next session to prepare.

Observations and Comments ♦ The group came to a consensus on choosing the content of the next session very easily. The feeling towards the end of the session was one of growing friendship and support,

Overview

This session represents something of a landmark in the group's development - decisions were made, people's commitment was firmed-up; risks were taken by individuals; and people opened-up and began to reveal the real difficulties they were experiencing in their work. In effect, the group had reached a beginning.

Many factors contributed to this success:

- circumstances had forced the group to fall back onto its own resources and in the process the group had discovered that it could indeed take control and set its own agenda;
- the undercurrent which had plagued previous sessions of "Is it worth continuing when CDIH withdraws?" had finally been tackled and the group, for the first time, had made a clear, long-term decision. The pressure for this decision had previously come from the facilitator (it had been her 'agenda'), but during this session the group had raised it themselves;
- positive input from outside (in the form of the phone calls from the missing member) seemed to 'give the group heart' and to legitimise the group's desire to make a decision about the future of the group;
- the focus of the session on sharing work stories, rather than on a specific subject (such as 'needs assessment') allowed people to lower their defenses. No-one in the group was an 'expert': everyone had worthwhile contributions to make. The move to a less formal setting (out on the grass) and the precedent which had been set by the 'Catch-ups' used in previous sessions may have enhanced the genuine sharing which followed; and

- as the facilitator's planned agenda could not be used (because the guest had pulled out) a much greater sense of equality was apparent between the facilitator and the participants. The facilitator had interpreted the absence of the group's missing member as an indication of her lack of satisfaction with the group. Several group members disagreed with this interpretation and they were proved right by the first phone call. It seemed that the group now knew more about its members than the facilitator.

FOLLOW-UP SESSIONS

During the fifth session, the group requested that the facilitator be funded to continue working with the group for a further five sessions. The CDIH Steering Committee agreed to this request, but was unable to find sufficient funds to document the additional session in detail. Between the completion of this documentation and the publication of this report, the first three of these meetings have been held.

These meetings have had several purposes: to continue the development of the group; to share information about community development; and to hand over the facilitation of the group from the paid facilitator to the group members. Before these additional sessions commenced the facilitator made the following notes about how she would try and hand over the facilitation.

Facilitation Handover

"If the group is to continue meeting to offer each other ongoing support and skill development, it needs to become independent of its paid facilitator. Therefore, a handover process is needed which will enhance the facilitation skills and confidence of the group members and prepare them for running the group alone."

"As part of this process I will spend a half-hour briefing session with the person taking on the facilitation at each of the sessions where facilitation is being handed over. I will go over the aspects of facilitation which need to be watched, answer questions and we will prepare the agenda together. Once the meeting starts, I will act as back up to the new facilitator, offering support as asked for or if I see something important being overlooked. The evaluation at the end of each session will be aimed at obtaining constructive criticism about the facilitation process in order to bring the details of facilitation more to people's mind and to learn from mistakes and successes."

Possible Pitfalls

People tend to see facilitation as simply chairing and as a task which can be easily shared around. While being ideologically attractive, the 'rotating chair' can be a disaster. This is especially so if the subtleties of group processes are to be attended to and facilitated and something more than a single meeting is desired. The group may not get the most out of its potential as a 'group' (rather than a collection of individuals at a meeting). Some people may get lost or left out, power imbalances may be ignored, agreements may be forgotten and a shallowness may prevail.

This is why it is important to have a hand over process where these skills are acknowledged, and transferred as much as possible.

This skill development will be difficult given the time limits. Getting people to engage in evaluation in a meaningful way over a short period can be difficult. They often fear that their comments will be taken as criticism of the facilitator rather than the process and so are inclined to focus on the positive in a rather superficial way.

In embarking on the sixth session with the group the facilitator expressed the concern that the handover process may be limited by time constraints and the fact that group members do not necessarily see the importance of facilitation skills in the same light as herself.

What has happened?

Hand over facilitation

Every week the facilitator has met with a different group member (who is to be trainee facilitator for that day) half-an-hour before the session, to plan the day's agenda and talk about facilitation strategies. The trainee runs the session, with the facilitator intervening where she feels it is appropriate. At the end of the session both the content and the facilitation of the session are evaluated.

All of the trainee facilitators have had difficulties in guiding the discussion and keeping to the time schedule. In fact, in all sessions, the facilitator has made some timely and important interventions which has enabled the discussion to stay relevant and lively, rather than becoming 'waffly'. The end of session evaluations have indicated that trainees want to participate in the discussions and find it difficult to keep in the facilitation mode.

This suggests that facilitation is indeed not easy and that the handover process probably requires more time and practice than we were able to give it.

Content

The sessions have followed a similar format to the first five, starting with a 'catch up' and 'agenda review' before the main issue for the day is tackled. Sessions always conclude with an evaluation.

Topics covered have been "Looking at our (community development) practice". "Dealing with the difficult client when you are a community developer" and "How do you measure community development"?

In the main, topics have been explored through discussion and brainstorming, with the exception of an exercise in pairs which became part of the 'difficult client' session, and the participation of a guest with a lot of practical experience in community development in the "Measuring Community Development" session.

As a source of information and ideas, all these sessions have been worthwhile.

Group development

As foreshadowed in Session #5, the group has continued to 'gel' and become more supportive. The regular 'catch up' has encouraged this process. Particularly encouraging comments made in these more recent sessions were: "I always enjoy coming to the group and go away feeling refreshed afterwards" and "It is nice to be here with everyone, both personally and professionally".

In late November, the group will spend a day together at a venue in the country. This will be the last session with the paid facilitator. Both individual and group plans for 1989 will be discussed there. This is a day which everybody is looking forward to with anticipation.



SUMMARY

The documentation covers the first five meetings (over three months) of the group's existence during which eleven individuals took part. Participation stabilised at seven people.

By the fifth session a cohesive group had emerged - the summary below outlines the growth of this group:

CONTENT	PEER SUPPORT	GROUP FORMATION
<p>#1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Introductory session; mixer exercises and clarification of CDIH project purposes * Concerns about process raised * Eventual realisation of positive benefits of the group continuing <p>-----</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Group members supported one-another in voicing their concerns about the process by which the group was called together and about the documentation process <p>-----</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Initial hostility toward the project turned to a sense of control over the group's direction * Some participants chose not to continue as they felt the group would not meet their needs <p>-----</p>
<p>#2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Further clarification and addressing of concerns raised in the session #1 * Sharing of views on CD and problems encountered in applying CD <p>-----</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * The group gave particular support to one member experiencing problems in her work * An individual suggested lunching with her <p>-----</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Members began to identify a commonality of experience, concerns and views about CD <p>-----</p>
<p>#3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Discussion of the values and philosophies of CD and the links between philosophy and practice <p>-----</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * 'Peer support' in terms of honest feedback about two dominant individuals was given in the group <p>-----</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Participants began taking on group tasks such as organising venue, tea and coffee, mailouts and writing-up * Feedback from group evaluation suggested a strengthening in group cohesion <p>-----</p>
<p>#4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Discussion of the future of the group created some resentment * Needs Assessment topic explored, but in no real depth <p>-----</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Little overt peer support was evident <p>-----</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Group tasks continue to be shared by participants * Group formation appeared to have taken a backward step in this session; but in hindsight this may have been a normal part of group development <p>-----</p>
<p>#5</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Agenda developed 'on the spot' by the group itself * Decision making about the future of the group * An in-depth sharing of work problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Emphasis on peer support * Open sharing and discussion of work problems * Risk-taking by individuals was evident 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Greater equality between participants and facilitator was evident * 'Ownership' of the group strengthened * Commitment for future sessions affirmed

Several conclusions can be drawn from this documentation:

Group Formation

The group followed a fairly typical pattern of group development: [1]

- [] 'Forming' - in Session #1 during which the group members found out who each other was through a series of imposed, introductory exercises and became familiar with the range of possible benefits such a group could provide;
- [] 'Norming' - occurred during Sessions #2 and #3 as the group members sought out and discovered a degree of commonality between them and established a style of operation, gained a direction for the group and set standards about the contribution members should make toward group tasks;
- [] 'Storming' - which occurred to some extent during Session #4. In this session resentment voiced earlier (in Session #1) regarding the imposed timelines for the group re-surfaced. For the first time, the group rejected (or rebelled against) a process put forward by the facilitator and feedback on the session was un-characteristically negative; and
- [] 'Performing' - evidenced in Session #5 by the group's preparedness to make decisions, take risks, and equalise the role of participant and facilitator. The group was now ready and able to perform the task it had set out to do.

[1] Crawley, J., "Living Cycles of Groups" in Small Group's Newsletter, Vol 1 No 2, 1978.

Content

By and large, the content of the sessions can be divided into four main areas:

1. Understanding Q community development. This was achieved by discussion of philosophies and sharing the experiences of the members in their attempts to apply those philosophies in their work.
2. Airing of problems and difficulties in applying community development in the health field and in working in community-based settings. Ideas, suggestions and experiences were exchanged and built-upon.
3. The and the future. A significant amount of time was given over to discussing the group's direction; timelines; hand-over of the facilitation role; and planning future sessions.
4. The documentation. Discussion of the documentation process and feedback on the actual record of the sessions was necessary, but time-consuming. Groups elsewhere wishing to replicate the experiences of this group would not be troubled by such discussions.

In the sessions which followed these, a fifth area of content - the development of facilitation skills - was added,

Peer Support

Mutual, professional support, both within the group and outside it, took many forms:

- constructive feedback on one another's work style;
- encouragement to take action on various issues;
- mutual support ("you're not alone") regarding difficulties participants were facing in their work;
- a safe place to 'bitch';
- personal contacts outside the group to act as 'sounding boards';
- a break from work to reflect;
- a group to test out ideas on; and
- constructive criticism regarding individual styles within the group.

FEED BACK AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Feedback

A simple, confidential feedback sheet was distributed to participants following Session #5. The resulting feedback confirmed the benefits of the group outlined in the 'Summary' section.

Regarding the future of the group six of the seven group members were very clear in their desire for the group to continue, whilst one expressed some reservations as to whether a group spread across such a broad region could maintain its momentum.

On the nature of the group into the future, the feedback was evenly split with some members desiring the group to continue as a peer support forum and others wanting it to move towards a more issues-based, or project oriented group.

All members indicated the value of the group as a source of professional support and noted that the group meetings were enjoyable experiences.

Feedback from the four participants who discontinued their involvement with the group was also obtained. One of these participants was a student whose placement finished after the first session. The other three felt they could not justify their continued involvement with the group. For one, this was because another staff member was attending. Another was seeking assistance in planning new community development activities - this worker felt more experienced in community development than others in the group and that the level of input the group could give would be inadequate. The other worker already had an effective support network to call on and was expecting specific skill development workshops.

Recommendations

The facilitator, project worker, documentor and group members have drawn out a number of lessons and 'things to watch out for' from their experience with this pilot program. They include:

* The Formation Phase

This phase is not an easy one: a certain process is needed to turn a collection of individuals into a 'group', with the required features of common purpose, commitment and a degree of trust and interdependence. In other groups this process may not be seen as important or the appropriate skills may not be present. If this is the case, it will be unlikely that the participants will actually become 'a group' able to offer a meaningful level of peer support to one another.

Group building and 'getting to know you' exercises are useful in helping to build cohesion and trust. These are often difficult to conduct unless the facilitator is fairly confident. There are bound to be one or two who "don't like that sort of thing", but these exercises are still useful in group building even if a small number of people do not particularly like them.

* Length of Sessions

Trust is difficult to establish in small time slots especially if these are spread more than a week apart. Trust is needed, however if people are to feel safe in sharing their 'problems' and 'failures' with each other.

A group such as this needs as much time together as possible, particularly during the group formation phase. A desirable option would be to take everybody away for a weekend early in the process, although this is not a very likely possibility. Sessions need to be held at least weekly and for as long in duration as possible.

* Being too general and 'intellectual'

There is a danger that people will not take issues to the personal level. This could mean that the group operates more like a meeting than a peer support and skill development group. People may talk more on the general and intellectual level without relating it to their actual practice or personal difficulties. Alternatively, members of the group may push for an action oriented

group and overlook the value of applying the community development approach of 'mutual support' to themselves. Another possibility here is that the group could focus on the skill development aspect only and begin organising 'workshops' with 'experts' to run them.

If this occurs, the need for support, which community development workers have so clearly identified, will not actually be met. This could be offset by making clear agreements about the purpose of the sessions, and agreements to bring discussions to a more personal 'practice' level if they get too 'intellectual'. The facilitator (and others) would then need to look out for this.

Some skill development workshops with outside leaders may be appropriate later on once the group has established its identity and strength as a sharing, supportive group.

* Getting put off by people dropping out

There are bound to be a few drop-outs in the early stages. This is a natural part of the group formation process as people select the appropriateness or otherwise of the group for them. This can be taken as a failure of the group and could cause people to feel disheartened.

Seven to ten people is a good number to end with for a group of this nature. This enables the desired level of sharing and support. It is a good idea to begin with a few more people to allow for the natural attrition rate - a starting size of ten to fifteen people seems appropriate.

* Bad sessions

Groups can have bad sessions! These can be caused by anything from widespread lack of energy, poor choice of topic or group dynamics to inadequate facilitation on that day. It is important not to despair! This is one of the major reasons evaluations at the end of every session are so useful. People can talk about what went wrong and how they might have done it differently. This means that negative feelings about the session are not left unsaid and carried away with people and that the group can learn from its mistakes (and successes).

It is important to remember that groups have certain predictable patterns and cycles which they go through as was demonstrated by this group (see 'Summary' section). These are extensively documented in various books and articles about groups. It could be useful for the group members to familiarise themselves with some of this group theory or to remind themselves if they have already studied it. It is useful to remember that what we are going through as a group is not happening 'just to us'.

* 'Underfacilitation'

The skills associated with group facilitation are often underestimated and underdeveloped in workers in the community development field. In general, people's expectations about how meetings and group sessions might function are low. In people's experience, most meetings go fairly poorly, so they learn to expect little better. The concern here is that such attitudes may prevail when attempting to establish another peer support and skill development group.

With some knowledge, practice, support and critical evaluation people can develop their facilitation skills. However, they must firstly recognise the importance of these skills and their own need to develop them.

It may help to use an outside facilitator for the formation phase if a good one can be found. If this is not possible, it might be best to begin with the most experienced facilitator in the group.

After this, a handover process should be identified and facilitation skills developed within the group. It would be important to have agreements about the role of the facilitator in helping the group do what it wants to do rather than as a position of power over the group.

Recommendations made by the members of this pilot group

- ensure adequate emphasis is given to the process of group formation;
- ensure that the focus is continually brought back to examples of community development drawn from the different members' work;

- build on people's work experiences such as barriers to community development, policies of the workplace and how to balance community development with other work (such as case work);
- include people from different backgrounds such as youth workers, community workers, social workers and so on;
- the group could initially be called together around a common theme such as "The future of community development in the health field in the . Region" as a means of ensuring that workers can justify their presence. Peer support and skill development could then arise as an issue to work on which has come out of the group itself;
- ensure that the initial facilitator has canvassed potential members as to what they would see as valuable for the group;
- provide thorough information prior to group formation about aims, processes and goals;
- members should actively participate because much can be gained from such support networks; and
- don't forget to have fun while you're doing it!

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APPENDIX

Questions for Discussion Sheet
(to be considered in preparation for Session #2)

- * TYPE OF WORK - TYPICAL WEEK.
 - . What do you do?
 - . How is this 'community development'?
 - . What are you hoping to achieve?
- * PHILOSOPHICAL FRAMEWORK.
 - . What is your view of the world? - power relationships in society, causes of ill health and poverty, etc.
 - . What needs changing?
 - . Why 'community development' as a way of working?
 - . How does it relate to 'social change'?
 - . What theories or philosophies are useful to you?
- * RELATING THIS TO OUR PRACTICE.
 - . What are the links between your philosophy and your practice?
 - . How do your community development aims fit in?
 - . If you are trying to bring about change, how are you doing this?
 - Here is where the mini case studies could be useful.

FURTHER READING

on Group Development

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