

Yarning Up! Community Development Australia



Type of intervention



Group Work

Target group, level of prevention and sub-groups:



Primary prevention

Young Adults (18-20 Years), Adults (21 Years +) | Male & Female | English

Target population

Indigenous communities, with scope to be replicated across a range of other culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

Delivery organisation

Phoenix House, Bundaberg, Queensland, Australia

Mode and context of delivery

Yarning Up! incorporates community development and community capacity building. It was decided that in order to work in the most ethical and culturally sensitive way, the Yarning Up! programme would utilise a community based participatory approach. Research is viewed with suspicion by many Aboriginal people; some are tired of researchers coming into their country, asking a lot of questions and leaving, with no benefits to the communities.

“It is well known that Indigenous people worldwide have been over researched, with little thought given to culturally safe methods of engagement” (Bessarab & Ng’andu, 2010, p.37). Others see theory-driven research as being colonising practice and most research has historically been driven from a top-down agenda, often by the government (Guilfoyle, Coffin, & Maginn, 2008). In particular, research *“remains an extension of the dominant culture’s base of western values, ethics and norms”* (Stewart, 2009, p.2).

Level/Nature of staff expertise required

Locally, the staff involved had tertiary qualifications and/or a background in human services/community development work. However, it would work equally effectively using a 'grass roots' approach.

A steering committee made up of five Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and South Sea Islander community members are key 'drivers' of the programme.

Intensity/extent of engagement with target group(s)

The initial phase of the Yarning Up! community development employed a project worker who worked within the community full time. Fortnightly steering committee meetings were held, with all decisions being made by and through the steering committee and project worker. The work of the steering committee continues.

Description of intervention

The Yarning Up! programme began in May 2013 and was funded by a small funding grant. Its first task was to conduct the Yarning Up! research project. The project aimed to identify the key issues in relation to sexual and family violence faced by the Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and South Sea Islander communities of the Bundaberg area. Phoenix House was keen to identify how sexual and family violence impacts upon the communities, the barriers that prevent Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and South Sea Islander people from accessing organisations when they have been impacted by violence and existing gaps in services and knowledge about these issues. It was hoped that this information would then lead to improved responses to assist people to heal from trauma.

A total of 62 male and female members of the Bundaberg Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and South Sea Islander communities took part in the research. This was composed of 29 general community members and 33 community workers employed in mainstream and Aboriginal community organisations. Yarns and open-ended questions (through unstructured interview or survey) were used to collect the data. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. To address issues related to vigour and subjectivity, a consensus approach was used. Initial coding of themes was completed independently by the project worker and report writer, who then came together to reach a consensus. This was then audited by a qualitative researcher at CQUniversity and then finally by the steering committee.

A total of eight key themes were identified within the data, each with a number of sub-themes. These themes were:

- Social taboo and shame
- Issues surrounding privacy, trust and confidentiality
- The normalisation of sexual and family violence
- The impact of historical, social and structural factors
- Increased presentation at services
- A lack of culturally appropriate services
- A lack of knowledge, education and training about sexual and family violence
- The deterrents to reporting sexual and family violence

Four key recommendations were made to address these themes, each also having a number of sub-recommendations within them. The main recommendations were to strengthen community action, educate the community and the community workers, provide culturally appropriate and safe organisations and staff and to address the legal responses to sexual and family violence.

It is hoped that these findings will stimulate further research in other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander settings. Some examples would be to explore the experience of different Queensland communities, more urbanised communities and within a remote community. This would broaden the understanding of the impact and context of sexual and family violence across Queensland and further demonstrate that different experiences will call for different types of interventions.

The Yarning Up! research has resulted in successfully gaining funding to provide state wide training initiatives for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community workers, which was identified as a significant gap. The Yarning Up! steering committee continues to guide the work of Phoenix House within Aboriginal communities and to address the recommendations of the research findings.

Evaluation

The Yarning Up! research project is available in its entirety by emailing the author below.

References

Bessarab, D., & ng'andu, B. (2010). Yarning about yarning as a legitimate method of Indigenous research. *International Journal of Critical Indigenous Studies*, 3(1), 37-50.

Guilfoyle, A., Coffin, J., & Maginn, P. (2008). Make sure there is a shady tree: Participation and action research with Australian Aboriginal communities. *Studies in Qualitative Methodology*, 9, 213-240.

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