

Margins 2 Mainstream Submission Template

A LOCAL RESPONSE TO WELFARE TO WORK

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ABSTRACT

In 2006, the Australian Government introduced legislative changes relating to the payment of disability support and parenting benefits (the "Welfare to Work" changes), including new activity requirements for people receiving these benefits, and changed activity requirements for mature aged job seekers and very long term unemployed people. Community agencies were concerned about the impact these changes would have on our most vulnerable citizens, who faced increased obligations, reduced income and punitive measures to enforce compliance.

Member agencies of the Inner South East Partnership in Community and Health (ISEPICH), and the ISEPICH Community Advisory Group developed a local consultation and advocacy project to monitor the impact of the changes and develop a local response to them.

The local nature and grass roots connections of the project suggested a complementary approach to the more statistics-driven ACOSS case study library. The project's focus is on the experiences of individuals affected, asking them to tell their own stories.

This approach presents its own challenges, including identifying Welfare to Work related Centrelink issues, and ensuring that isolated people know about the project. Our presentation will expand on the methodologies we have used to address these challenges and the factors that made them effective.

The project has been successful in three key areas: collecting stories, advocating with government and broader community through the local media and creating linkages between agency peak bodies and grassroots service delivery agencies.

The project addresses in particular theme 2 of the Conference Methodologies: Advocacy, policy-making and systems strengthening in mental health promotion activity; and, Access to Economic Resources as a Determinant. It also relates to themes 1, 3 and 5, and to Social Participation as a Determinant.

The key recommendations we make for the Charter are:

- Support community based agencies to have greater input into federal advocacy campaigns. (Methodology 2 – effective advocacy ...);
- Develop an accessible, user-friendly ethics approval processes for research to encourage the engagement of marginalised groups. (Methodology 1 – research ...);
- Build strong links between advocates and service delivery workers and managers to promote education and empowerment. (Methodology 3- building coalitions and 5- building workforce capacity).