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Non Government Organisations' Development Program

Introduction

NGOs provide a valuable service to their communities of interest. In the Northern Rivers region, Health-funded NGOs contribute a great deal to the health and well being of the community.

The Northern Rivers is an area of high need with a predominant low socio-economic status, large ATSI population and associated health issues, poor public and private transport services, high levels of poly substance abuse, poor access to specialist services and an increase in dual diagnosis disorders.

Thus, an integrated approach to health service provision is crucial to address these health needs.

Subsequently, the Northern Rivers Areas Health Service (NRAHS) has stated interests in:

- Enhancing existing partnerships with community organisations in the areas of health service delivery, planning and development
- Strengthening practical and material support for Health-funded organisations to address government policies and requirements
- Considering community based organisations as potential providers when new or enhanced health services are proposed

The NRAHS NGO development Program was established to address these issues.

Presentation objectives

The objectives of the presentation are to give an overview of the NRAHS NGO Development Program and in particular, describe the model adopted for program implementation.

The presentation will:

- Give a brief overview of the NGO Development Program;
- Explain the background behind the program establishment and why there is a need for NGO infrastructure development;
- Describe the partnership model used for all facets of program establishment and implementation. This model has been based on better practice by involving NGOs in consultation and decision making processes;
- Look at the actual structures employed to ensure collaboration between the NRAHS and the NGO sector;
- Summarise the annual implementation of the program; and
- Conclude by briefly discussing the positive effects of the program that will guide future relationships between the NRAHS and the NGO sector.

NGO Development Program Overview

The NRAHS NGO Development Program is a 3-year pilot that was launched in 1999. It is a local initiative and aims to increase the infrastructure capacity of the 18 Health-funded NGOs in the Northern Rivers to ensure quality services to the community. The objectives of the program are:

- To strengthen the capacity of Health-funded organisations, enabling them to provide effective and efficient services in partnership with NRAHS;
- To enable NRAHS to work with the NGO sector on improving management capacities with the aim of placing organisations in a stronger position to contribute to community health and well being in the Northern Rivers area;
- To provide a range of support mechanisms enabling the NGO sector and NRAHS to work effectively together; and
- To provide a flexible source of revenue allowing innovative approaches to service delivery.

The program has an annual budget of \$180 000 to assist NGOs in addressing infrastructure needs predominantly around achieving the identified standards associated with accreditation.

Why a need for development?

The devolution of the NGO Grants Program from NSW Health to AHSs in 1996 prompted AHSs to work more closely with NGOs to establish local networks and integrated health services.

In the Northern Rivers, the NGO Health Network, (an NGO interagency group), was established to facilitate the processes of devolution and provide an ongoing consultation forum between NRAHS and the NGO sector.

Discussions between the NRAHS and the NGO Health Network highlighted the infrastructure needs of NGOs.

NGOs were expected to work towards accreditation and remain viable service providers, however, did not have the resources needed to fulfill the required obligations.

To address the infrastructure development needs of the NGOs, a proposal for the Development Program 3-year pilot was approved by the NRAHS Board of Directors in 1998.

Partnerships and Good Practice Model

As per consultations and prior dialogue between the NRAHS and the NGO Network, it had already been established that the Development Program would be based on a partnership model. Although the structure had not been defined prior to plan implementation, the philosophy and protocols to be used included:

- meaningful consultation between the NRAHS and the NGO sector;
- NGO involvement in decision making processes; and
- NGO contribution to area planning.

An appropriate structure incorporating the above points was established in the 1st year of program implementation.

Diversity of Services

The Northern Rivers region is a large area and the NGOs are situated from Tweed Heads in the north, Grafton in the south and Urbanville in the west. The NGOs provide a diversity of service provision and models. This consists of services in the areas of 5 mental health, 3 Aboriginal health, 2 women's health, 2 family planning, 3 community transport, 1 drug and alcohol and one consumer support group.

Due to the diversity of NGO service provision and the growing health needs of the area, the best practice model of partnerships and collaboration provided a challenge in establishing an appropriate model in which to structure the program.

Several options were explored and the model of an advisory committee adopted to ensure participation across the diversity of services.

DPAC Structure

The Development Program Advisory Committee, (DPAC), was established in the first year of the program. To ensure that the program remained relevant and inclusive of the NGO sector, it was decided the program needed to be guided by the major stakeholders being the NGOs and relevant AHS staff. Subsequently, the partnership model of the DPAC was decided to be the best practice model for program guidance.

The DPAC consists of 14 members. The chair position is filled by the Director, Policy and Health Services Development and to ensure that the diversity of NGO service types is represented, general membership includes an NGO representative and NRAHS program manager from each service type being mental health, women's health, Aboriginal health, drug and alcohol, and consumer support services. The remaining members of the DPAC are the Director, Primary and Extended Care Service, (responsible for the NGO portfolio), and the NGO DP Project Officer, (attendee).

DPAC responsibilities

The DPAC meet on a six-week basis and undertake the following commitments:

- Promote collaboration between the NRAHS and the NGO sector;
- Guide program implementation;
- Assess and recommend funding applications; and
- Advise on annual program priorities.

At times, the DPAC are involved in discussions concerning broader policy issues of the NGO sector and Grant Program.

Year 1 - Analysis of Needs

The first year of the program consisted of developing the program plan in conjunction with the NGO sector. A needs-analysis ensued which began with a survey completed by all NGO services. The survey was followed up by interviews.

In addition, focus groups occurred with relevant NRAHS staff and the NGO Health Network. The results of the surveys, interviews and focus groups were collated into draft infrastructure development priorities. This draft was then discussed further with the NGO sector and NRAHS staff and a final program plan developed.

All steps of program development occurred in close conjunction with the NGO sector.

Program priorities

The development priorities identified through the needs assessment process are as follows:

- Governance
- Planning
- Quality systems
- Volunteer recruitment
- Training
- Networking

- Assets management
- Management practice

The priorities for development formed the basis of the NGO Development Program and a plan for implementation was scribed.

Year 2 - Core Infrastructure Development

Year 2 of the program concentrated on practical and financial assistance for NGOs to improve service systems and compliance with relevant legislation. The infrastructure needs met included:

- Reviewing and updating policy and procedure manuals
- Provision of volunteer training
- Provision of staff development activities including attendance at training and relevant conferences
- IT upgrades and relevant training
- Addressing OH&S issues

In year 2 many of the 18 NGOs engaged in accreditation processes. The infrastructure development provided through the program assisted services meet the requirements.

Year 3 - Sustainable Development

The NGO Development Program is currently in its final year. Subsequently, the focus is on the provision of sustainable development that will continue to assist NGOs beyond the lifespan of the program.

The focus of this year includes the following:

- Holding a 2-day planning forum with an aim to strengthen the partnerships between the NRAHS and NGO sector and to define strategies for NGO contribution to NRAHS planning processes;
- Provision of governance training for management committee members. This is to include development of a training manual and orientation packages for future members;
- Provision of staff appraisal training. This will allow NGOs to systematically identify training needs for future staff development; and
- Provision of strategic planning training to assist NGOs in adequately planning service provision in the longer term.

Where to from here...

A triennial evaluation of the NGO Development Program is currently underway. The evaluation will pinpoint future directions for partnerships and better practice between the NRAHS and NGO sector.

The sector is currently facing challenging times with the impending SACS Award increases, the push for services to engage in accreditation processes and the need to address growing community health needs.

The partnership models established in conjunction with the Development Program will continue to provide an effective avenue for continuing dialogue to occur. Through this, we will be able to best address future issues with a collaborative approach.