

COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS WITH PEOPLE WHO INJECT DRUGS IN SOUTHERN SYDNEY

Authors:

Tracey Brown¹, Libby Topp¹, Sarah Smith¹

¹HIV and Related Programs Unit, South Eastern Sydney Local Health District

Background/Approach:

Over a period of six months, SESLHD's Viral Hepatitis and Harm Reduction team conducted three in-depth group conversations with 22 people who inject drugs (PWID) in southern Sydney. Community conversations provide a safe space where people can come together to talk about their aspirations, concerns and how they want their community to move forward.

Analysis/Argument:

Conversations were conducted using the Harwood Institute© approach of "turning outwards". This is a fundamental mindset shift necessary to authentically understand and engage communities. It is rooted in five core ideas: community ownership; strategies that fit the community; a sustainable enabling environment; a focus on impact and belief; and narratives.

Outcome/Results:

This paper will outline the results of the conversations including the kind of community participants reported they want to live in; the barriers they perceive to achieving such a community; the major concerns they have about their community; and their suggestions for actions that might help the community become more like they would like. These included establishing a consumer advisory group and partnering with NSW Users and AIDS Association and the local injecting community to establish a paid PeerLink program where partners work together to improve access to health care, reduce stigma and achieve the targets of the NSW Ministry of Health Hepatitis B and C Strategies. At a subsequent feedback session, participants overwhelmingly agreed that their input had been captured accurately; and endorsed all the actions we proposed to begin to move the community forward.

Conclusions/Applications:

This technique has proven a successful way of engaging with PWID to build public knowledge; and to use those learnings to develop strategies and guide actions. At both the conversations and the feedback session, participants repeatedly stated that they were grateful for the chance to be heard; and requested continuing these conversations on a regular basis.

The authors have no competing interest to declare