Handout 1: What is Research?

Research is the process of collecting information in a logical and systematic manner. Some research is very academic and technical but the research of a community service worker should be logical, simple and straightforward.

Research is about going to the source to collect information and to prove or disprove what you believe to be true. It can be as simple as brainstorming with a group of colleagues, summarising the findings of other people’s research or doing your own social survey.

There are two types of research undertaken by community service workers. These are:

Primary research: includes all information taken from first hand experiences. These include personal observations by witnesses to events. These events may be told to the researcher or recorded in diaries, letters, newspaper articles, reports, speeches, photos, videos or biographical data. Primary research also included the information gathered in surveys and interviews.

Secondary research: includes all information that comes through two channels. It involves making use of sources that have already interpreted events. It includes any reanalysis of reports from other organisations and surveys that have already been undertaken and reported on.

Handout 2: Research as a Community Sector Activity

Community service workers are engaged in research activities more or less on a daily basis.

Some of the research activities community service workers regularly undertake are:

- identifying a need for action or identifying tasks that must be completed if program objectives are to be met
- planning action i.e. Working out what needs to be done & who has the skills to do it
- collecting information to assist in understanding problems confronting the agency or its programs
- reflecting upon tasks once they have been completed and working out better ways to manage similar tasks next time
- finding out what other agencies are doing and if you can learn from their activities
talking to community members about their lives

• researching services and other entitlements for clients

• finding out about pilot program models being used in other countries and in other states

• finding out about policies that impact upon client groups.

When a community service worker turns routine tasks into research opportunities and research experiences into management opportunities this is called **ACTION RESEARCH**.

This way of working emphasises the need for the ‘best practice’ worker to organise all the information that comes to them in the course of their work in a systematic way to improve their work. It emphasises turning routine tasks into professional development and improved practice opportunities. It emphasises using everyday events in your program for effective and reflective practice.

Action research is **participatory research**. It is about including your community or client group in your activities to find out about what they need and how these needs can best be met. It’s not about distant workers intruding in community members lives.  **IT’S ABOUT WORKING WITH THE COMMUNITY.**

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Handout 3: Research Rules

1. Be clear about the question you are asking. Clarify what you mean and be exact about the questions you want to ask.

2. Be clear about why you are asking the questions. Consider if there is any one who has a vested interest in the results of your research. Consider your relationship to these groups.

3. Be aware of the constraints i.e. time, money skills, and access to community, political problems. Its better to design a more modest piece of research which you can be sure you will complete than to be too ambitious and never complete the task.

4. Don’t work by yourself. Interact, listen, share ideas and seek advice.

5. Be questioning and thorough. Don’t be happy with the first answer you come up with. Seek more information and try to look at the same questions in different ways.

6. Be sensitive. Be aware of the political and underlying aspects of your work.
7. Use your imagination. Look at the research problem in different ways. You might want to present your findings in an interesting way such as using art and photography to get your meaning across.

8. Be ethical. Remember the rights of people you are researching.

9. Be flexible. If problems develop be prepared to change the way you are doing your research.

Handout 4: Action Research

When we involve the community in our research it is called action research.

- Action research is about improving what we do by changing it and learning from the consequences of the change.

- Action research involves community agencies such as the Carmen Poldis centre working with the community to improve the quality of their own lives.

- Action research must be collaborative. All groups involved in the research must be responsible for the action in improving it, widening the collaborative group from those most directly involved to as many as possible of those affected by the practices concerned.

Can this be tarted up Maybe with foot prints rather than arrows between the labels???

Identifying a need for action on an issue  Planning for Action on an issue.

ACTION RESEARCH

Reflecting on the Progress Evaluating

Gathering information to enable the plan to be realised.

Taking action
**Handout 5: Participatory Research**

Participatory research:
- challenges the belief that a researcher can separate themselves from the people who are being researched
- is people centered
- does not assume that the knowledge and perspective of the researcher is in any way “better” or more insightful or more truthful than the understanding and perspective of the people being researched
- considers the process of research to be interactive. The acquisition of knowledge occurs through relationships, education, communication and action and reflection
- is linked to social change and working collectively on social problems.

The methods preferred by participatory researchers include:
- Talking with people, using two-way communication rather than the one way flow of information used traditionally in research. This dialogue helps the people being researched to understand what is happening in their lives. The researcher shares their perspective on what they have been told about the person’s life by asking questions that help the participant to critically reflect upon their experiences in the wider social context. This stands in contrast to traditional research methods which do not pass comments on the views of the research participant in order to avoid contaminating or biasing the information.
- Working in partnership with research participants in order to avoid the power imbalance that exists in a traditional research relationship. To do this the researcher has to abandon the idea that they are the “expert”. The researcher must also reflect upon their own professional practice by considering how their own class, culture, gender, beliefs and values can frame the research analysis and the research report.
- Any methods that can be used and understood by all stakeholders in the research. The range of methods which have been used include observation, archival and historical research, narrative, oral history, individual and groups interviews, surveys. If the methods are beyond the material or technological resources of the people involved in the research they can’t be used.

**Handout 6: Cultural Issues in Research**

When undertaking research, as with any activity in the community services industry, it is critical to be aware of and to practice empathic and sensitive cross cultural communication.

Competence in effective cross-cultural communication is critical if the trust and rapport needed for collaborative research is to be established. An awareness of the different ways that people from different cultural groups share information is critical if the researcher is to develop appropriate methods to gather information.
Left brain or Right Brain?

It is useful to consider if the community you wish to work with are primarily left or right brain thinkers. An understanding of this can help the researcher to choose the best research method for a particular community.

Western culture is primarily dominated by left-brain thinking. Left-brain thinking is verbal, analytic, symbolic, rational, digital, logical and linear. It is left brain thinking which dominates the research methods used in mainstream Western social science. It follows that these methods suit the left-brain driven communities but may not work so well in communities who are primarily right brain thinkers.

Right brain thinking is less verbal, holistic, more willing to suspend judgment, spatial and intuitive. Indigenous groups in Australia often display these characteristics (Sayer:1988). It is important when conducting research with any group to be aware of the differences in thinking and communication styles and to plan to use research methods which account for these variations.

“Taufa'ase'e” – Participant Hoaxing

Research, as all of us who have received calls right at dinner time from market researchers who want to bog us down with ludicrous questions, can be an irritating activity for the research participants. The content that fascinates the researcher may be boring, ridiculous, or rude to the participant. The temptation for the participant, when bored or outraged by a researcher, is simply to tell the researcher anything, regardless of the truth, in order to get rid of them. In social research this problem is sometimes described as participant hoaxing. The problem of hoaxing is increased when researching groups where we do not understand the language and cultural traditions of the community. Margaret Mead, the famous American anthropologist, encountered this in her study of sexuality in Samoa.

In 1928 Margaret Mead published her book *Coming of Age in Samoa*. In this book Mead showed that Samoans went through an adolescence that was liberated and free of the types of stresses experienced by American adolescents. She argued that this was because in Samoa the community did not restrict sexual activity.

Derek Freeman almost immediately called the research findings into question he was another academic who, unlike Mead, was fluent in Samoan and used a wider range of information sources to interpret the adolescent behaviours of Samoans. He disputed Mead’s findings.

Mead it would appear had been blinded by her own research objective that was to test if it was culture rather than biology, which determined human behaviour. When she realised the difficulty of proving her research objective she began to spend a lot of time talking to a couple of Samoan companions about their sexual activities. They were embarrassed by her persistent and intrusive questioning and resorted to a customary practice among Samoans call "taufa'ase'e", or prankish hoaxing. They of course didn’t realise their stories would be published and become “academic truth” for 60 years until after Mead’s death. All they did was to deal with Mead’s
inappropriate questioning by creating stories that were funny and the antithesis of Samoan culture.

**Some Things Just Can’t Be Talked About**

It is also important to be aware that among some cultural and linguistically diverse groups not all things can be discussed. There are taboo subjects.

An example of this can be found in the Hindmarsh Bridge affair. This controversy highlighted the issues of secret spiritual business in Aboriginal communities. In this instance the local Ngarrindjeri people argued that the building of the bridge from the mainland to Hindmarsh Island violated “secret women’s business”. They argued that Hindmarsh Island was a sacred site but could not discuss the details of this beyond the group who were the keepers of this tribal knowledge.

As a result the sacredness of the site was disputed. Gareth Evans, the Labour Foreign Minister described the secret women’s business as “bull-shit on stilts”. This case demonstrates the difficulty that some Westerners can have in believing the evidence of other cultural groups. The issue is really that the belief system is not shared and therefore the evidence is perceived to be incredible and untrue.

**Some Guidelines for Working Collaboratively With Different Cultural Groups**

- Use a collaborative or participatory research model
- Work hard to build a meaningful and trusting relationship with the community you wish to collaborate with
- Take time to learn about the communities culture
- Find out about the cultural and political protocols. The possibility of developing a relationship can be destroyed by not following protocols
- Find out whom the right people are to talk with and talk with them right from the beginning of the project. Be guided by them
- Be aware of cultural sensitivities and practice cultural empathy
- Be aware of the communities’ values and consider these with an open mind. A researcher must be open to learn and to change their mind
- Ensure that you are familiar with the issues that the groups is struggling with both at the local, national and international level
- Set up a way of working and learning together - the action research model can help here:
  - Establish and maintain regular meetings so the relationship can grow and trust can be developed; It may be necessary to use a variety of mediums to help here such as phone, e-mail, letter, visits etc
  - Identify a common area of interest to help to focus the research
  - Demonstrate some long-term commitment to working with the community. Try to find ways to contribute to the community. For example helping to write funding submissions for community projects or providing other specialist services to contribute to the communities development
  - Think beyond traditional research methods, be prepared to include different methods of communication into your research strategies such as:
• poetry
• dance
• stories
• visual art
• informal discussions
• observations.

• Be aware of historical, economic, and social issues and how these may shape the research findings.

Sources:


Brunton, Ron *Courier Mail*, 21 July 2001.

Mannaaki Whenua Land Care Research 2002 A collaborative research model for working with discussion paper [www.landcareresearch.co.nz](http://www.landcareresearch.co.nz).


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**Handout 7: Community Consultations**

**What is a Community Consultation?**

A consultation is a process where the views of the community are actively sought. It is an opportunity for the community to talk about their needs, how these needs impact on their lives and the solutions they feel are appropriate.

**The Advantages of Consultations**

A community consultation should achieve a range of objectives that will assist the community you are working towards self-empowerment. These include:

• Informing you and your co-workers about current community needs, problems, expectations, and hopes
• Providing feedback on existing programs and services that you provide so you can improve on current performance and delivery standards
• Developing a positive relationship with the community and other stakeholders so that creative and positive solutions to community problems can be found
• Identifying concerns and priorities for new services, programs, policies and political activities
• To assist in future service planning.
Limitations of Consultations

1. Well organised but not necessarily representative groups can dominate the proceedings
2. Time consuming
3. May not reinforce what the family worker feels are the needs or solutions to those needs (this isn’t really a limitation it may just feel like one)
4. Potential for conflict as different groups with different needs and interest come together.

The Focus of a Community Consultation

An effective consultation should focus upon:

- The needs of the community
- Evaluating policies and programs which effect people in the community
- Planning for new services
- Ensuring that the service is accessible for minority groups within the community
- Ensuring the service is culturally appropriate
- Ensuring the service is respectful of different value systems within the community.

Methods of Consulting

To maximise community participation any of the following methods or combination of methods can be used in a consultation:

- Public meetings which have been promoted and widely advertised
- Small discussion groups
- Consulting with formal or informal groups
- Tapping into existing networks within the community such as playgroups, church groups, Parents and Citizens groups, sporting clubs
- With some communities you must be aware of cultural protocols that such as speaking to Community Elders
- Speaking to other family workers and other community service workers who work in other parts of the community where the families you are consulting live
- Questionnaires, surveys, submissions, case studies
- Phone-ins
- Community social days such as especially organised BBQs.

Communication is the Key to a Successful Consultation

The key ingredient for a successful consultation is effective communication.

Make sure your processes are easy to follow and meaningful to the participants. At all times the consultant must be sensitive to language issues, religion issues, gender issues, historical issues, and other sensitivities within the community.
Considerations When Planning a Consultation

- Have you identified potential constraints such as historical issues or conflicts within the community?
- Is the venue suitable for a meeting? Is it comfortable? Accessible for people with disabilities? Accessible for elderly community members?
- Has the need for transport to the venue been identified and arranged?
- What are the seating arrangements? Are they flexible?
- Can participation be encouraged through personal contact?
- Have community elders been contacted?
- Have you organised a process for the meeting?
- Have you pre-planned your questions and information?
- Has the consultation been widely and meaningfully promoted?
- Have you considered ways to manage destructive or difficult community members?
- Have you organised childcare?
- Do you have clear and achievable timeframe?
- Do you have skilled and knowledgeable people to assist in facilitating the consultations?
- Advertise the consultation in plain English
- Any written material for the consultation must be in plain English
- Ensure that you agenda is transparent
- Provide participants with clear information about the purpose, its outcomes and the ways they can give you feedback on the consultation
- Ensure that mechanisms are in place to safeguard the confidentiality and privacy of community members
- Have you considered the impact of gender, ethnicity and socio economic issues upon the consultation?
- Have you considered how all families in the area can be included in the consultation not just the more powerful or vocal groups of families?
- Have you considered how the thoughts of less powerful community members can be sought e.g teenagers, elderly, people with disabilities.

Handout 8: Ethical Considerations in Research

There are critical ethical issues in the field of research that deserve careful attention of researchers. Research must be conducted in a way that conveys respect and care of the people who agree to be researched. Points to consider include:

- Treating informants as people not objects
- Informed consent
- Using deception
- Withholding treatment
- Cultural diversity
- Confidentiality
- Negotiating the information and presentation
Presenting the final report.

It is important in any research project to not lose sight of the means of finding information. The means of obtaining information in social research is obviously by interacting with the participants. Regardless of the importance of the research and the methodological soundness the consequences for participants must be considered. If the research could harm participants or the group they represent in any way it must be abandoned.

If we don’t see our participants as objects but as partners in a research exercise then as in any partnership we must inform the people about the purpose and process of the research. Before participants agree to be involved in a research project they must be informed of:

- The reasons for the study
- The purpose
- The methods that will be used to collect data
- Whether they will have an opportunity to check the data prior to it being used
- How the data will be represented
- Whether they will have a chance to comment on the final report
- Who will have access to the final report

Confidentiality is also an important issue. This means not only not talking about people involved in the research but also disguising any identifying information in the final report. This means changing their name and any other information that might identify them.

Understanding the meaning of what the participants tell us is critically important otherwise we do a disservice to them and we can also misinterpret the data. It is important that the information you collect is crosschecked either by the participants or else by a follow up interview or observation to ensure accuracy.

The issue of who will read the report also needs to be considered. If the final report could be misused in any way to harm or discriminate against the participants or the group they come from the researcher must seriously consider whether or not to write up the results. The management of this can be difficult.
Handout 9: Selecting a Research Method

When choosing a research method it is important to consider the advantages and disadvantages of the method.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaires</td>
<td>• Can be a survey taken randomly of a total population</td>
<td>• Often has low return rates if mailed</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Can be a variety of question types e.g. rating 1 to 5 that can already be</td>
<td>• Questions not answered accurately</td>
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<td></td>
<td>predesigned or open questions that allow the respondent to express their</td>
<td>• It does not have enough depth to find the cause of the problem or possible</td>
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<td></td>
<td>opinion more fully</td>
<td>solutions</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• May be self administered by sending through the mail in a controlled or</td>
<td>• Much time and skill is needed to develop effective questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>uncontrolled environment or it may require an interpreter or assistant</td>
<td>• There is little opportunity for the researcher to seek the meaning of an</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>being present to help explain the questions</td>
<td>unanticipated response.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>• Can be done in person, over the phone, or at the site</td>
<td>• Unless the interviewer is skilled the client can easily move away from the</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Can use the whole population or just a sample</td>
<td>purpose of the interview.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• It can be formal or informal, structured or unstructured or any</td>
<td>• Time consuming</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>combination.</td>
<td>• It can be difficult to analyse and quantify the results.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• It allows the opportunity for the respondent to express their views and</td>
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<td></td>
<td>be in control of the process</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Respondents can express their feelings and identify the caused of problems</td>
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<td></td>
<td>and possible solutions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Method</td>
<td>Advantages</td>
<td>Disadvantages</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>• Very little interruption of respondents routine</td>
<td>• Potential for responded to feel they are being spied on</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• It gives good feedback at an onsite situation</td>
<td>• Is limited to a restricted area to collect the data</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• When combined with feedback it provides a very good check between what the observer thought they may have observed and how the respondent saw it.</td>
<td>• Requires an observer to be highly skilled in both process and content knowledge (unlike the interviewer who needs mostly process skills).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Groups</td>
<td>• Permits on the spot synthesis of different viewpoints</td>
<td>• Is time consuming (therefore initially expensive) both for the consultant and the agency</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Builds support for the particular service response that is ultimately decided on</td>
<td>• Can produce data that is difficult to synthesise and quantify.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Helps participants to become better problem analysts, better listeners.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Records, reports and print media</td>
<td>• Provide excellent clues to trouble spots and is objective evidence of results of problems collected. Thus the researcher gains this information with a minimum of effort.</td>
<td>• Possible solutions are often not evident. It generally reflects the past position rather than the present one. It needs a skilled data analyst to find patterns and trends if the information is technical.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Observations:
  - May be unstructured e.g. sitting in a shopping centre choosing the most attractive cereal box.
  - Can be very structured e.g. time & motion studies
  - Can be used to identify effective and ineffective structures or processes.

- Focus Groups:
  - Resembles face-to-face interviews
  - Can be focussed on job (role) analysis, group problems analysis or any number of group tasks
  - Uses one or several of the familiar group facilitating techniques eg brainstorming.

- Records, reports and print media:
  - Records and reports consist of: planning documents, policy manuals, employee reports, minutes of meetings and evaluation studies.
Print media includes: professional journals, newspapers, magazines and other publications. Excellent source of information that is current, readily available and is likely to have already been reviewed. Can be a problem to analyse the data and put into a useable form.

Key Consultations
- Collects information from identified people who are in a good position to know about the issues eg chairperson of a management committee, service provider, individual from the service or program.
- Relatively simple and inexpensive to do
- Allows a number of individuals with their own perspectives to contribute
- Communication between the respondents in the research is established and strengthened.
- Built in bias because key consultation is based on those respondents who tend to see the issue only from their own perspective
- It may result in only a partial picture of the issue because these key people are non-representative.

Adapted from Wadsworth, Yoland 1997 Everyday Evaluation on the Run Allen and Unwin, Melbourne.

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**Handout 10: Designing and Implementing a Research Plan**

**STEP 1:** Determine the general aims of the project. Be clear about the purpose of the research how it will be used and who will read it.

**STEP 2:** Determine the time and money to be spent. To do this consider the time to be used to:

- plan the research and develop information gathering tools such as questionnaires
- undertake the research
- write the draft report
- revise the report
- finalise and distribute the report.

It can be useful at this point to draw up an ACTION PLAN to help determine WHAT must be done, WHO must do this and WHEN the activity must be completed.
STEP 3: Undertake research of secondary sources of information in order to become familiar with the general issues affecting the community you wish to research.

STEP 4: Start talking to people. Talk to community members, colleagues in the tearoom, and management committee members about your ideas, your concerns and what you hope your research will achieve.

STEP 5: Form a working group to help you with your research.

STEP 6: Write clear objectives for the project.

STEP 7: Select suitable methods for the research. Ensure that your methods include a representative cross section of the community. Your research must be seen to be an independent and reliable source of information. Choose methods that consider the culture of the community or groups you are collaborating with.

STEP 8: Plan the research and write the plans as a PROPOSAL. Within these planning documents you must outline your objectives, expected outcomes and proposed methods. Resources needed to conduct the research must be determined and allocated. Estimate the budget for your research and identify the possible ethical, social or political implications of your work. This should be submitted to your management committee for APPROVAL before starting the research.

STEP 9: Conduct the research ie collect all relevant information and record the findings.

STEP 10: Information is organised in a form, which is suitable for the purpose of the research.

STEP 11: Information is analysed. Patterns and explanations are explained to ensure validity and reliability.

STEP 12: Report the findings of the research. The complete and accurate details of the research methodology, information and analysis are presented in a form suitable to different audiences. Opportunities are provided for the respondents to make comments for validation of the research findings.
Handout 11: Surveys

A survey involves selecting a group of people and asking them a set of questions. The questions are preplanned and you obtain the answers by asking people in an interview setting or by asking people to write the answers on the questionnaire. Surveys aim to be representative. They do this by asking the same questions of everyone in the community or by selecting participants in a way that allow them to generalise the results.

Surveys have a number of advantages including:

1. lots of information can easily be collected
2. the worker doesn’t have to be involved in collecting the information
3. they can obtain a broad range of opinions
4. results can easily be compared to other studies
5. they can be cheap.

Characteristics of a Survey

Surveys have a number of important characteristics such as:

1. Representativeness. This means the degree to which the results of the survey can be said to be true for the whole of the population. In a census of the entire population the results would be very representative. However it isn’t always possible to survey everyone. In ideal circumstances the survey should be constructed so that people who are typical of the community as a whole are surveyed. The more representative the survey the easier it is for the worker to generalise their results.

2. Standardisation. This is critical in a survey. Standardisation means asking people the same questions in the same order using the same words and in the same manner. It also means deciding upon a uniform way to interpret the questions.

3. Reliability. This means the degree to which the answer you receive from one person in your survey is the same as the answer another researcher might receive if they duplicated your methods, or if the same person was asked the same question but at a different time. Ensuring that your methods are standardised and the sample is representative increases reliability.

4. Validity. This refers to the extent the information found in your survey answers the original questions you sought to answer.
**Steps in Developing a Survey**

1. Become familiar with the issues you are researching. The RE in research implies that you are building upon work already done. The aim of the research is not to reinvent the wheel but to build upon work that has already been done. Therefore the first task is to undertake a comprehensive review of the research that has already been done.

2. Define the research problem i.e. what do you want to find out? Make sure you carefully consider and express the problem:
   - Limit the scope
   - Use concrete and simple language
   - Express the research question in measurable terms
   - Specify the context
   - Restrict the size of the study.

3. Write down the goals of the research. Remember to use the SMART rules for goals setting:
   - Smart
   - Measurable
   - Achievable
   - Realistic
   - Time-framed.

4. Read or speak to other people who have researched the issue.

5. Get to know the community you are conducting your research on. A community profile can help here.

6. Decide upon your methods. Choose a method that suits your question. Consider the population you are studying and the nature of the topic you are looking at. Refer to other people’s research. Which methods worked well for them? Consider your own skills and resources. Don’t be too ambitious. Consider sampling methods making sure you consider the sampling frame and issues of representativeness.

7. Draft your questionnaire ensuring there is a brief description at the beginning, outlining the purpose of the research.

8. Test your questionnaire on some community members and revise it to get rid of any problems.

9. When relying on the questionnaire being returned to you:
   - Include a phone number, fax number, email address or stamped addressed envelop for questionnaire return.
10. Conduct the survey.

11. Compile the results.

12. Write a report.

**Handout 12: Questionnaires**

Questionnaires are a central part of a survey. A survey is only as good as its questionnaire. In designing a questionnaire the following things must be considered:

1. Layout
   - logical organisation
   - avoid clutter
   - leave at least one wide margin
   - make sure it's easy to read
   - place the easy question first.

2. Content
   - keep it brief
   - keep it simple
   - avoid repetition
   - ask only necessary questions.

3. Sequence Questions
   - group questions relating to a similar topic
   - begin with easy questions
   - be thoughtful about the most appropriate place to put the questions.

4. Wording
   - avoid loaded or emotional questions
   - be exact
   - keep your language simple
   - avoid being vague
   - quantify words like never and sometimes
   - be wary of bias.

5. Question Structure
   - short and simple
   - response categories should include a full range of possible answers
   - questions can be open or have precoded responses.
Handout 13: Sampling

Sampling Frame

It is not possible to study everybody in the community because of time and cost limitations. Therefore community service workers who are undertaking research will need to consider selecting a sample to represent the population.

Sampling is used in a survey when it isn’t possible to interview everyone in the community. The sampling method you use will depend upon a number of things:

- time
- the number of people you feel should be included in the study
- how much data you wish to collect
- the culture of your community.

In selecting a sample you try to represent all the features of the total community. The aim is to try to select a sample so that the information you obtain does not differ significantly from the information you might have got if you spoke to everyone in the community.

The best way to do this is to locate a sampling frame. A sampling frame is a list of everyone in the population from which the sample is to be drawn. The choice of sampling frame is dependent upon the type of study being carried out. For example, the electoral roll, which contains the names and addresses of all people eligible to vote in the Macintosh shire, would be an appropriate frame from which to select a sample for a study of voting patterns in New Cedar. However, if the study was about political attitudes of tertiary students in the Macintosh shire, a much better sampling frame would be the personnel lists of TAFE, private colleges and the University.

A small representative sample can provide 'accurate' data on large populations. Fifteen hundred people in an opinion poll can give a good indicator of how twenty million will vote at a general election.

There are many different ways to work out a sample. The following section show how this can be done:

Representative Samples

The best way to get a representative sample is to select people at random. A random sample means that everyone in the community has the same probability of being included in the survey. For this reason these sample are also known as probability samples. To organise a random sample you MUST have a complete list of everyone in the community or in the population you wish to study. This is called a sampling frame. This is often easier said than done particularly if parts of the community have high mobility.
Methods of Representative Sampling

1. Simple Random Samples: this process is similar to a lottery method or drawing names from a hat.

2. Systematic Random Samples: involves selecting every nth person from the sampling frame.

3. Stratified Random Samples: involves dividing the population into different groups and then randomly selecting from each group.

4. Cluster: groups which occur naturally within the population are selected at random and everyone in the group is studied eg. every north primary school is selected for study.

5. Area: a geographic area is selected for study and a random sample of household in that area is surveyed.

Non Representative Samples

Sometimes it isn’t possible to obtain a representative sample. A non representative sample, or non probability sample is one where it isn’t possible to say that all members have an equal chance or probability of being selected for your survey. Non representative sampling does away with the need for a sampling frame but the results are more biased.

Methods of Non representative Sampling

1. Quota: this type of sampling seeks to duplicate the population in terms of certain characteristics that are of interest to the researcher. This is less biased than other non representative methods.

2. Accidental or convenient: this involves talking to people who are easy to access eg. a supermarket poll.

3. Volunteer: this is when participants are recruited through advertising. It is commonly used in market research where people are paid to sample products.

4. Snowball: the survey participants networks are used to recruit a sample ie the only people surveyed to determine gun safety are members of gun clubs.
Handout 14: Observation

Observation is an important way that we get to know about our world. Researchers can use observation to systematically learn about their world, the people in it and the way that these people think, feel and behave.

There are two types of observations: participant and non-participant.

Non Participant Observation

This involves the researcher getting involved in situations where human behaviour, interactions and practices can be observed first hand. Usually the researcher is known to the group although they may not always know they are conducting a study. An example of this might be Clare Williams study of a mining town in Queensland called Open Cut. In this instance the researcher lived and worked in the mining town as an industrial officer with the mining company that had major interests in the town.

What should be included when recording an observation? This very much depends upon what you want to find out. Sometimes it is hard to know exactly what to record until you have done a few observations and can tell what is relevant. If you can when commencing your research record as much as possible.

How should you record your observations? This will depend upon the group you are observing and whether or not they know you are researching them. If they know you are researching them they may expect you to take notes. Remember the way that video and tape recorders can impact upon different people and take this into account when observing.

Writing Up Observations

It is important to write up your observations in detail in a systematic way as soon as possible (while your memory is fresh). Always note:

- **Who** you observed
- **When** you observed them
- **Where** you observed them
- A description of what happened
- A record of your impressions, feelings and understanding of events.

Participant Observation

This method of observation involves the researcher becoming part of the group or social scene s/he wishes to observe. The researcher not only observes people in this situation but also participates in the everyday activities of the group. This may require working covertly or it could be that the researchers own lifepath has lead them to special circumstances that warrant researching. For example Anne Franks Diary. In addition to self observation and observation of others the researcher can also
conduct in depth interviews, analyse other studies in the area etc. This extra research evidence can lend validity to the observations.

**Researcher Roles**

- Complete participant: lives in, fully occupied by the activities of the group
- Partial Participant: part-time researcher engages in some but not all group activities
- Associate member: the researcher adopts a role that allows them to be accepted by the group but not a member Eg. A youth worker can observe young people but may be too old to covertly enter the group.

### Handout 15: Interviewing

Interviews are formal face to face research tools. They are not overhead or chance encounters. Interviews may be conducted one on one or with a group.

The qualitative interview is different to a questionnaire. The qualitative interview does not ask all respondents the same question in the same order. In fact there may be no formal questions at all. The interview is seeking to understand a point of view or a person's perspective by probing, reflecting and encouraging discussion.

Initially the interviewer should attempt to understand the interviewees language and perspective. Over time and by asking more detailed questions the researcher seeks to understand how or why they construct their perspective in a particular way.

### Constructing an Interview Guide

- Draw up a list of possible topics to be covered
- Devise several suitable questions in each identified area. These questions should be open
- The guide need not be rigidly followed rather it should act as a prompt
- Additional topics may be added as more people are interviewed and the researchers understanding grows
- Validity in Qualitative Research.

To ensure the validity of your research there are 6 factors that should be considered

1) *Time:* the more time you spend with people the better the quality of your material
2) *Place:* Consider the influence of the physical setting on actions/discussions. Note the physical environment
3) *Social Circumstances:* The more varied your opportunity see people in different social situations the more you will understand them
4) *Language:* The more familiar you are with the groups language the more able you are to interpret events
5) *Intimacy:* The greater you personal involvement with people the more able you will be to understand and to extract meaning from their words and actions
6) *Social Consensus*: Your ability to interpret cultural meanings within the group is critical to your understanding of the way people interact and interpret social circumstances.

It is also important to take time once you have left the field to reflect upon your observations and experiences. A detailed analysis isn’t possible until you have left the field. The use of other peoples research and theoretical material to interpret your experiences is also paramount.

**Interpreting then Data**

Focus on events to see if they are typical or widely spread. You may need to compare the experience to theories to either prove or disprove these.

### Handout 16: Using Other Peoples Statistics – BEWARE!

**DAVE COULD WE HAVE A BIG RED STOP OR DANGER SIGN HERE**

There are a lot of already published statistics and reports that can be used to assist you to identify and understand the needs within your community. These reports and studies come from a range of organisations including government departments, universities, international organisations and non-government organisations. The resources that come from these organisations can provide useful information that can help you to make sense of what your community needs.

While these resources can be enormously helpful they should be approached with caution. It is necessary to consider carefully

- How the data was collected
- Why it was collected
- Exactly what it is supposed to measure.

Published statistics, even ones that come from reputable sources, are dependent upon the definitions they use and are affected by the ways they are collected. Statistics are not self-evident but depend upon assumptions, conceptions and the priorities of the organisations collecting the statistics. The people collecting the statistics also work with the same constraints as the rest of us – limited time and resources and the will of their political masters.

Statistics and other published research should therefore be approached with caution. They are merely further pieces of evidence for the needs you are trying to establish or the policy or political argument you are trying to advocate or defend.
Critically Reviewing other Peoples Research

To make the most of other people’s research it is best to approach it with a critical mind. Some things you might wish to consider are:

- How useful is the research? Does it present any new information that enhances your understanding of a particular social situation?
- Does it present information to you in a new way? That is does it take information you are already aware of and analysis it in a way that changes your thinking in the area?
- What is the ideology of the research? What political agendas seem to be operating?
- Who conducted the research? Who was the research prepared for and why? Who are the political masters of the project?
- What types of research methods were used on the project? What are some advantages and disadvantages of these methods?
- How are the key concepts defined in the research? Are these appropriate definitions? How do these definitions influence the information that has been collected?
- Did the research develop from a comprehensive understanding of the social situation it is studying?
- How reliable and valid are the research methods?
- How accessible is the research? Is it open to public scrutiny?

Handout 17: Organising and Analysing Information

It is no use merely collecting information. We then need to organise, analyse and present our information in a way that is intelligible and interesting while at the same time ensuring validity and reliability.

Frequently, this task will involve discussion of quantitative data that are crucial to the document but difficult to explain clearly and concisely. Graphics enable the writer to incorporate this material effectively so that the data are simplified and the meaning demonstrated clearly. You may wish to include photographs, diagrams, tables, graphs and maps (to name a few).

What can graphics do?

Graphics:
- Organise information to catch the reader’s attention
- Show relationships, highlight trends
- Help sort, classify and group complex data
- Clarify technical ideas
- Emphasise important points
- Link ideas
- Help the reader understand the information.
# Advantages and Disadvantages of Graphics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GRAPHIC</th>
<th>ADVANTAGES</th>
<th>DISADVANTAGES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tables</td>
<td>Offers a large amount of information to be shown in a compact form. It allows clear comparisons</td>
<td>Difficult to read quickly and hard to recognise relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diagram</td>
<td>Diagrams usually allow the writer to describe some object in great detail</td>
<td>Easy to miss the main point if the diagram becomes too cluttered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Line Graph</td>
<td>Indicates the movement and trends in the study. Simple to draw with the aid of the computer</td>
<td>Difficult to interpret size and proportions. Often labelling is poor or non-existent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GRAPHIC</td>
<td>ADVANTAGES</td>
<td>DISADVANTAGES</td>
</tr>
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<td>--------------------</td>
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<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Column or vertical bar graph</td>
<td>Offers clear comparisons between items, or from one period to the next</td>
<td>Difficult for the eye to interpret size and proportions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horizontal bar graph</td>
<td>Allows clear and direct comparisons in size</td>
<td>Difficult to read when there are too many grouped or stacked bars in one graph</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pie Chart</td>
<td>Shows relative proportion and importance of each part of the unit</td>
<td>Difficult to judge area and size differences</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Handout 18: Reporting the Findings of the Research

#### Influencing Policy and Practice

There is no point in conducting research if you do not ensure that the results are made public and decision makers, policy people, funding bodies or the people involved in the study get to know about them. There is a range of avenues through which you can publish the results of your research. The most prestigious journals are called ‘refereed journals’. The editors of these journals such as national journals of social work send your article out to readers, or referees before they decide whether to publish your work. The readers in turn send in their comments and may suggest changes you should make before your paper is published.

It is particularly important that tables, graphs and other presentations of the results stand out and grab the readers’ attention. They may then want to read about your study in more detail. Similarly the title of your report should be catchy and readable, something that will grab the reader.
Whatever the context for your publication most reports have a similar structure, which is outlined below:

**Abstract**
The abstract is written last and appears first. It is the brief summary, which heads your report. It should be about 3300 – 500 words. It must be written in clear concise terms so that people will want to read your whole report. The abstract should include key word that you expect other researchers to use if they are doing research in your area. This will help librarians classify your research correctly when they enter your abstract on a database.

The research report itself consists of five main elements. These are:

- Introduction/statement of the problem
- Methodology
- Findings
- Discussion/conclusions
- Recommendations.

**Introduction/Statement of the Problem**
Most of the work for this section will have been done at the time you completed your original research proposal. It should include:

- Statement of topic, aims, research questions
- Link it to theory, policy or social issues
- Set out the broad aims of the study
- Define research questions and concepts
- Demonstrate through the literature search how and why you made the decisions that you did
- Describe your own position in relation to the research.

**Methodology**

- Here a researcher needs to include:
- How the study was designed
- Sampling techniques and sample description, design, pilot studies reliability and validity
- Data collection
- Ethical Issues
- Methods of data analysis.

**Findings**
This is usually one of the largest sections of the report. When planning how to present your results, it is a good idea to think of a series of subheadings, which relate to the major themes in your findings, or to the research questions themselves, or to some other logical sequence.

- Present all findings relevant to the research, issues or questions, including contradictory or unexpected results
- Not all results have to be included
- Arrange the findings in a sequence
- Present a description of the sample of people involved in the research
- Start with simple descriptive findings and move on to the more complex results
- Use tables and graphs interspersed with small amounts of text.

**Discussion**

- Summarise, explain and interpret your findings
- Link your findings to your literature review
- Discuss the implications of your findings for current practice, policy and/or theory
- Acknowledge limitations of the study
- Point to areas for future research.

**Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations**

- Summarise key findings
- Make conclusions by firstly linking them to original research question then justify your conclusions in the light of your research design and then discuss the limitations of your study
- Include your recommendations.