



SACOSS

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Justice, Opportunity and Shared Wealth for All South Australians

*Providing a strong and independent voice for fair and
just public policy.*

*A representative organisation that advocates for the
progressive improvement of the quality of life for
those most vulnerable in our community.*

Australasian Evaluation Society

Building Evidence for Welfare
Interventions: Evaluation, Programs
and Policy Development

Definition of evaluation

- According to Weiss (1998);

“Evaluation is the systematic assessment of the operation and/or the outcomes of a program or a policy, compared to a set of explicit or implicit standards, as a means of contributing to the improvement of the program or policy”

Evaluation methods commonly utilised in the community sector

- Questionnaires
- Interviews
- Focus Groups
- Ethnography

Why Evaluate? – Community sector

- Whether valued resources are being used appropriately and efficiently
- To determine whether the agency is achieving organisation goals and objectives
- To fulfill the requirements of funding and service agreements
- To determine the effect of service on the target population
- To identify areas of service or organisational framework that needs to change to improve service

Why Evaluate? – Government sector

- To determine the social effect of policy decisions
- To identify areas within policy that need to be changed or amended to provide better social outcomes
- To determine if government is achieving strategic goals.
- To provide an evidentiary base

Welfare to Work policies in the US and Australia

- Welfare to Work is one of the most encompassing and socially altering pieces of legislation that Australia has seen
 - Borrowed from the United States
 - Informed by neo-liberal/neo-conservative ideology
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Has effective evaluation informed Welfare to Work policies in the US and Australia?

- Cost benefit studies demonstrate savings for government but does not lessen poverty
- Why is this legislation which has been indicated as harmful for vulnerable groups being implemented in Australia?

Welfare to Work – How many effected

- 550,000 people receiving unemployment payments, including 325,000 people who have been unemployed for 12 months or longer.
- Around 700,000 people on disability support pensions (DSP), many of whom want to work.
- Around 600,000 parents on parenting pensions (Parenting Payment), many of whom want to work

Welfare to Work – Policy changes from July 2006

- New applicants for Disability Support Pension and Parenting Payment will be on lower payments (Newstart Allowance and Austudy).
- Single parents on the lower payments will have \$30 less per week
- People with disabilities will have \$45 less if they are jobless.
- Single parents who study full time will get \$110-165 less and people with disabilities \$60 less per week.

WorkChoices Legislation

- WorkChoices legislation intersects with Welfare to Work
- Those being forced to find work to fulfill mutual obligations (e.g. Sole Parents, People with Disabilities etc) are now competing in and employment market that is rife with instability, low wages and poor conditions

WorkChoices Legislation

- There is already evidence of increased hardship as a result of WorkChoices legislation
- Clearly, employers are exercising their rights under WorkChoices legislation to exclude, modify and reduce the conditions of workers that were previously protected by the award.
- The legislation continues to be rolled out across the country

The challenge for the community sector

- There are presently 700,000 community sector organisations within Australia
- Many of these organisations are under-resourced and vulnerable
- There is little collaboration and resource/information sharing between organisations across the sector
- There is no common stand on evaluation

The challenge for the community sector

- Funding and service agreement reporting procedures a burden upon services
 - Reporting procedures based upon successes and financial performance, rather than appropriate policy and program delivery and social capital building
 - There is much to be gained from effective evaluations
 - “Evaluation culture”
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Questions that organisations should ask when evaluating their service;

- Are the goals being met?
- Is the service cost effective?
- What are the outcomes of the service?
- Are the programs sensitive to diverse populations?
- How accessible is the program?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the program or service?

Summary

- Evaluation contributes to quality improvement within services and agencies
- Evaluation is critical way in which the community sector can inform policy development & strategic planning
- It increases the knowledge base of the community sector
- The knowledge created by evaluation increases the capacity of the sector
- Contributes to transparency & accountability

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