



Inquiry into Community Enabling

A Review of the Mt. Druitt Enablers Program

**Report to the Ian Potter Foundation
May 2006**

Dr. Lesley Kuhn and Dr. Robert Woog



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The research was conducted by a research team comprising:

Chief Investigators

Dr. Lesley Kuhn

Dr. Robert Woog

Research Assistants

Ms. Sarvenaz Ghahreman and Mr. David Levick.

The commitment, enthusiasm and creativity of the research team are thankfully acknowledged.

Finally we express our sincere appreciation to all of the people who gave information to the project, sharing of their time, experiences, hopes and dreams.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report outlines the ways in which the Mt Druitt Enablers Program has developed community leadership and contributed to more extensive self determination in the Mt Druitt area.

The views of the Enablers participants were gathered as 'fractal narratives'. These were put together as a single-voice composite narrative representing a broad description of the whole body of narratives. These are presented as an 'Enablers' Indicative Narrative' (see Figure 1 on next page).

The research found that the Mt Druitt Enablers Program has developed community leaders and contributed to more extensive self-determination in the Mt Druitt area through developing:

1) *Personal, autonomous agency:*

- Increased awareness of oneself and others;
- Improved capacity in relating to others.
- Increased self-esteem, self-acceptance and confidence.

2) *Enhanced community participation:*

- Expanded networking of people active in agencies and services in Mt Druitt;
- Fostered a sense of professional competency;

3) *Learning about leadership:*

- Understanding that the core of leadership is embedded in the community;
- Strengthened sense of responsibility to serve the community;
- Heightened critical autonomy (ability to critique status quo).

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

1. The Enablers' trainers continue to treat the Enablers' participants as leaders; as those most knowledgeable about their situation.
2. The Enablers' trainers seek the advice of those who have participated, for the future of the program and related initiatives in Mt Druitt.

Figure 1: Enablers' Indicative Narrative

The program brought together a culturally diverse but like-minded group of people; people, who were interested in helping themselves and helping others and who in that way, were serving the community.

I felt safe and rewarded in working with Enablers. The program has given me a sense of purpose and I have gained self-esteem and confidence from it. I think the program has potential in supporting the individuals who participate in working with and supporting marginalised and disadvantaged members of the community. It may have potential for operating in the school system for Year 8 or Year 9 students.

The program has been very beneficial to me in that it has made me more aware of both myself and others. It has helped me recognise my strengths and weaknesses, and from this I can recognise strengths and weaknesses in the community.

The program has improved my contact and networking with others. It has served to broaden my experiences, even my social life, and has helped me build closer relationships of trust within the family and with other people.

Enablers was definitely part of my self-development. It enabled me to really grow in confidence and I reflect on the program as a true growth experience.

Participation in the program has helped me in broadening and understanding my participation in the local community. I have built up relationships and networks with other people and with various service organisations in the Mount Druitt community. The networking has been useful in that it has increased my awareness of what services are needed and are available in the community.

My participation in the community has been enhanced because the program has given me a belief in myself and now I can do my job better. I also feel I have more control over my life and work activities. I have become more assertive in my role, but at the same time, sensitive towards the needs and circumstances of others.

I have learnt that core leadership is in the community; it is embedded within the community itself. Leadership activities develop as an evolutionary process, as one deals with individuals, groups and varying circumstances. It is necessary to understand yourself if you are to understand other people. When I understood myself and others better, I was able to be a better leader. Having a sense of leadership allowed me to feel more connected, to find a sense of place, in the Mount Druitt community.

I have also learnt that there is a responsibility to serve the community. Working and serving the community requires sensitivity and an ability to listen to people's needs. It also requires the ability to recognise what exists within the community, in terms of needs, and the resources and services that may be mobilised or accessed to provide for those needs.

I think we need to broaden and bring in more people so that Enablers becomes a broader-based and more community-centred activity. The program needs to be more inclusive and to take care in not being selective or exclusive in its participating membership. The program deserves to grow and to be extended further into the whole community.

I would like to think that the participants in Enablers can use their relationships and networks to influence government activities and government policy. I would like to see people accept roles and responsibilities in policy and government activities, such as the local council.

INTRODUCTION

The Enablers Program is a community leadership development project initiative of the Chain Reaction Foundation. The Enablers Program focuses on 'enabling' community development through assisting local people in becoming more confident in their capacity as community leaders. In Mt Druitt the Enablers Program has been offered in partnership with local organisations each year since 2004.

An evaluation of the Mt. Druitt Enablers Program was commissioned by Chain Reaction and funded by the Ian Potter Foundation, under the auspices of Chain Reaction. The evaluation inquiry process, developed and conducted in consultation with a reference group comprising Chain Reaction and Mt Druitt Enablers representatives, has resulted in this research report.

The process of evaluation focussed on gaining the views of those most knowledgeable about the effectiveness of the Enablers Program. Thus this research report provides documented evidence of participants' interpretations of their experiences with the Enablers Program and their views about the current and potential effectiveness of the program as a means of building a more lively and resilient community.

Background to the research

The establishment of the Enablers Program in Mt Druitt represents an intersection between the needs of people in the Mt Druitt area and the aims of the Chain Reaction Foundation.

Mt Druitt

Mount Druitt is located in the Blacktown City Local Government Area (LGA) of Western Sydney. Mt Druitt includes the suburbs of Mt Druitt, Shalvey, Bidwill, Willmot, Hebersham, Lethbridge Park, Tregear, Emerton, Dharruk, Blackett and Whalan. The suburbs are clustered as distinct villages each with its own primary school and shopping centre. In addition, some have secondary schools, community centres and child care services.

Blacktown is the most populous LGA in NSW and the third largest in Australia. Blacktown's population is culturally and linguistically diverse with over fifty countries and sixty-three languages represented. It contains the largest Indigenous population in NSW. The urban population is young: 42% of Blacktown residents are under the age of 25 years. Of the Indigenous community, 29.9%, aged 5-14 years and 17.7%, aged 14-25 years (2001 census), clearly indicating a youthful Indigenous population. The median individual income for Blacktown LGA is slightly higher than the Australian poverty line (Blacktown City Council 2006; Knox 2006).

The Chain Reaction Foundation

The Chain Reaction Foundation is a not for profit public company focussed on developing a stronger more inclusive and sustainable civil society in Australia. Chain Reaction offers:

- A way forward for engaging people in the development of their own communities.
- Leadership development at local, state and national levels.
- Building alliances across Partnership Organisations always striving to strengthen local institutions, organisations and communities. (www.chainreaction.org.au)

The Chain Reaction Foundation states that its objectives are to aid directly in the:

- A. provision of relief of individuals or groups of individuals in the community requiring assistance such as the poor, new ethnic groups, Aboriginals, the disabled, the aged, abused and neglected;
- B. identification of solutions for the relief and alleviation of poverty, disability, sickness, suffering, distress, helplessness, isolation and undue hardship, by means of consultation with the poor, new ethnic groups, Aboriginals, the disabled, the aged, abused and neglected, and particularly in rural and regional Australia and within multicultural communities:
- C. prevention and mitigation of poverty, illness, disability, distress, helplessness and isolation by education, training, provision of advice, support and information; ... (Chain Reaction Foundation Constitution, page 1)

Financially the Chain Reaction Foundation is dependent upon trusts and grant-making foundations, corporation and small government grants, partnership donations and individual gifts in-kind and in-cash.

Chain Reaction has a small staff team of three, with 40 volunteer specialists and 25 partner organisations.

Between 2001 and 2003 Chain Reaction undertook a participatory research project focussed on understanding citizens' views about: engagement in their communities; harmony in communities; and how to go about building new and diverse leadership in communities. This project, entitled 'People's Voices', consulted citizens from a variety of different backgrounds; employed, unemployed, young people, women, men, people of culturally diverse backgrounds, indigenous people, those with varying ability levels, retired and senior citizens, as well as those passing through the community.

The People's Voices project was conducted in Kempsey, Illawarra and Mt Druitt. In each area citizen leaders were identified as those community members seen as being 'natural leaders' –people in whom others have confidence, because of their capacity to enable and encourage others. The report for People's Voices also identified sets of demands from each of the communities involved in the project. Participants from Mt Druitt were identified as demanding:

- Immediate assistance to achieve self determination
- Community Leadership Development Programme
- Youth Mentoring Scheme
- An Aboriginal meeting place
- Establishment of Mt. Druitt Development Consultative Committee
- Improved transport and public facilities
- Community Consultation and Action Plan on Mental Health, Substance Abuse Prevention and Family Violence
- Recognition of the diverse multi-cultural society. (People's Voices 2003:1)

The Enablers Program

Chain Reaction began the Enablers Program in Mt Druitt in response to citizen demands as stated above.

In Mt Druitt Chain Reaction works in partnership with:

- ❖ Mt Druitt Enablers
- ❖ Holy Family Centre
- ❖ Hebersham Aboriginal Youth Service
- ❖ Mt Druitt Community Ministry
- ❖ Combined Residents Action Group

To become an Enabler, people need to:

- Be willing to participate in the 25 week program.
- Already be engaged in the community in some way (paid or voluntary).
- Be recommended by a community organization, government agency or church.
- Be between 15 – 90 years of age.
- Care about Mt Druitt.

Brochures advertising the Enablers Program also state that 'You are particularly welcome if you are an Aboriginal person, thus part of Australia's first nation or if you come from any of the 136 different ethnic backgrounds that live in the Druitt'.

Involvement in the Enablers Program involves meeting weekly for 25 weeks. A brief description of what is involved follows, based on interviews with the two leaders, Margaret Bell and Joan Modder. They describe the Enablers Program as a 'self enrichment program' where:

Each individual would have an opportunity to examine their own person anew from the points of view of their physical, intellectual, emotional, social and spiritual development. The design of the project was that they should do that in an atmosphere of deep respect and that the whole learning between facilitator and participant would be designed on a participatory basis ...

Further, they state that it was designed so that participants would:

...know more about Mt Druitt, about the whole area ... what is needed and how they can play a role in that ...

Over each of the 25 weeks of the program, Enablers work on 'the five me's'; physical, intellectual, social, emotional and spiritual, utilising person centred, experiential and participative learning philosophies. For example, for the 'physical me', participants reflect on and share their views regarding their own physical appearance:

... what we think of how we look, who we prefer to look like and why; which features have been acclaimed by our family members and which have been disowned ...

The Enablers Program is based on the philosophy that self understanding and acceptance of oneself leads to understanding and acceptance of others:

Our belief is that if people are comfortable in their own skin, and they can relax in their own person, accepting themselves as they really are, not as they wish they were, then they will have an opportunity to do the same for the other.

The second year of the program, comprising a further 25 weeks of meetings, focuses less on personal development and more on developing awareness and understanding of community activities. Participants undertake a number of visits to different agencies to gain understanding of what the agency does and how it undertakes its activities and responsibilities. Participants then critically reflect on their observations. These reflections may lead to a variety of involvements with the organisations – for example letter writing or further meetings with key personnel to offer suggestions about alternative strategies that may be used.

RESEARCH APPROACH

Project Description

The project comprises a formal evaluation of the Mt. Druitt Enablers Program. The evaluation is based on a complexity informed 'Appreciative Inquiry' ethnographic approach that focuses on identifying the 'best of the present' so as to strengthen and improve the initiative. The research spans many recognised domains of scholarly inquiry, including those of personal, organisational and community development; leadership; and personal and community empowerment and self determination.

The key question guiding the research is:

In what ways has the Mt. Druitt Enablers Program developed community leaders and made a contribution to more extensive self-determination in the Mt. Druitt area?

In evaluating the Enablers Program, the project seeks to:

1. To find out what happened.
2. To inform key and/or relevant people about what happened.

The reason for the second objective is that informing key and/or relevant people is a powerful way of nudging complex social systems towards self-managed improvement. A Complexity perspective suggests that the only viable long term strategy for the development of a complex social system, such as the Mt Druitt community, is for the system to learn about itself.

Past and present participants, along with the leaders of the Enablers Program were interviewed for their reflections on the program and its effects on them personally and professionally.

Aim of the project

The aim of the project is gain the views of Enablers participants and leaders, about how the Enablers Program has enhanced their lives and enabled them to more effectively contribute to the development of the community.

The project seeks to contribute to:

- the cultural development of the Mt. Druitt area;
- theorising about community development;
- theorising about community development evaluation approaches;
- Complexity Science approaches to social inquiry;
- Complexity informed Appreciative Inquiry approaches.

Value and benefits of project

The value and benefits of the project are best addressed in reference to three major groupings: Chain Reaction and the Enablers Program; other social organizations; and the University of Western Sydney (UWS) researchers.

For Chain Reaction and the Enablers Program

The research provides:

- New information and evidence about the effectiveness of the Program.
- Increased understanding of what gives 'life' to the Program.
- Strengthened capacity to anticipate, apprehend and heighten the positive potential of the Program.

For other social organisations

Through research disseminations the research may:

- Build understanding of how a program can be collaboratively designed, developed and implemented in a complex setting.
- Reveal the potential for replicating Enablers style programs in other local/regional areas, state-wide or nationally.

For the UWS researchers

The research provides:

- An opportunity for theory testing and development through practical engagement with the community.

Research Methodology

This inquiry constitutes a form of qualitative research. Within this broad category are many variations on theoretical and methodological paradigms. The choice of methodological framing influences the findings. It is, therefore, important to be clear about the reasoning leading to the choice of particular theoretical traditions and resultant methodological strategies. A brief integrated explanation of theory, method and research procedure follows.

The selection of methodology has to be such that it generates and captures the richness and variety of data and leads on to meaningful and valid interpretation. In order to meet these requirements the methodology drew from and incorporated elements from a number of qualitative inquiry traditions. The most prominent among these were: ethnography, dialogue and hermeneutics. These formed the broad robust theoretical and methodological base for the inquiry. A brief characterisation/description follows:

Ethnography

Ethnography is the study of the applied and aesthetic interpretations of lived experience of individuals who describe and shared their stories, understanding, hopes and dreams.

The research constitutes a complexity informed postmodern ethnographic approach (Kuhn and Woog 2005), in that it records and seeks to make sense of lived experience and life as narrated to the researchers.

Ethnography has since its inception, been concerned with facilitating social improvement. This project took an Appreciative Inquiry approach, an approach to doing evaluation that is 'suited to the task of providing both the data and mental inspiration through which human systems can fashion new affirmative projections on a dynamic and continuous basis' (Cooperrider 2005).

Appreciative Inquiry is based on a 'reverence for life', and is an inquiry process 'that tries to apprehend the factors that give life to a living system and seeks to articulate those possibilities that can lead to a better future' (Cooperrider 2005). This approach to evaluation focuses on apprehending 'what is' rather than 'what is not' 'and in this represents a rigorous cognitive ability to bracket out all seeming imperfections from that which has fundamental value (Cooperrider 2005).

Dialogue

Dialogue emphasises the discursive, conversational way in which meaning is created by human beings.

Appreciative Inquiry assumes that dialogue with those involved in the situation (here the Enablers participants), about strengths, values and hopes is in itself transformational. In this project, dialogue as a series of conversations was facilitated, between different representatives of ideas and concepts as Coherent Conversations and individual interviews.

Coherent Conversations are a form of focus group where the aim is for the conversation to be accepting of the breadth of information brought to the conversation. The interviews were conducted as qualitative depth interviews where the researcher purposefully, intuitively and sensitively guides the conversational partner in an extended conversation. With qualitative interviews it is expected that while there will be main questions and probes worked out in advance, each interview comprises a unique conversation.

Participants were invited to speak about their experience in participating in the Enablers Program. The conversation invited reflection, and sought to explore the participants'

experience of the educational process, the learning relationship between participants, knowledge gained, usefulness and application of material learnt, and how they felt about having participated in the program.

Representatives from all parts of the Mt Druitt Enablers Program were involved. The dialogue involved examination of experience from many perspectives. Research participants were encouraged to build rich individual and collective narratives which aimed at times to identify shared experiences and illuminate unifying explanations or principals.

These were recorded as narrative texts. The texts may be thought of as a summary of the individual and collective experiences of those engaged with the Enablers Program.

Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics refers to the art and science of studying and interpreting texts.

Through cycles of inquiry with different groups and individuals, the researchers sought to discover what the individual and shared experiences were of those engaged with Enablers. New data and findings were regularly reviewed by the research group. With each cycle, new understanding emerged, the findings expanded and explanations became more substantial.

The constructed texts and their analysis are often expressed as multiple truths. The texts were discussed, reviewed, analysed and synthesized by the research team through many iterative cycles. It was through this review process that the patterns of the participants' experiences were recognised and explanatory themes began to emerge. The techniques used for the analysis/synthesis were Fractal Narrative Analysis and Attractor Analysis.

Fractal Narrative Analysis

The idea of fractality is that organic systems such as humans as individuals or in groups may be examined for patterns of similarity. The key principles are:

- Fractals exhibit the same degree of irregularity at different scales.
- Observing a fractal you get information proportional to the scale.
- The small scale remains an equally complex microcosm of the whole.

Fractal Narrative Analysis is a useful way of making sense of narratives generated through Coherent Conversations as by examining and identifying a fractal in a narrative so generated, despite the proportional limitation of the scale focussed upon (as represented by the group involved) one can glimpse the macrocosm.

Attractor Analysis

Attractor analysis of narratives enables researchers to make sense of the narrative without simplification. Identification of an attractor or number of attractors assists in building an understanding of a complex system. From the attractor one can make inferences about the self organising character of the system including interpretation of form and dynamics.

Research Procedure

Enablers trainers, past and current participants were invited to take part in individual and group qualitative interviews utilising Complexity Science informed methods.

Participants were recruited through invitation via the Chain Reaction Foundation, comprising (appendix A):

1. Letter and phone call (past participants in Enablers program)
2. Spoken invitation (at an Enablers meeting) followed by written letter (current participants).
3. Spoken and written invitation to the two Enablers trainers.

Interview schedule:

Enablers' trainers: 1 hour face to face interview.

Enablers past (2004) participants: 1 hour face to face interview

Enablers' current (2005) participants: 1 1/2 hour coherent conversation (as a group, or as 2 separate groups).

All interviews were aurally recorded.

In addition to the interviews, the research included an invitation, issued during the individual or group interview, for all research participants to join a reflective conversation (a meeting) reviewing and commenting upon the findings of the research.

The guiding questions asked at the interviews with Enablers past (2004) participants were:

In what ways do you see yourself developing through your participation in the Mt. Druitt Enablers Program?

Do you think that participation in the program has helped you personally?

Do you think participation in the program has helped your participation in the local community?

*Would you please tell us about some of your learning in this program?
What have you learned about leadership from participating in this program?*

The guiding questions asked at the interviews with Enablers current (2005) participants were:

In what ways do you see yourself developing through your participation in the Mt. Druitt Enablers Program?

Do you think that participation in the program is helping you personally?

Do you think participation in the program is helping your participation in the local community?

Would you please tell us about some of your learning in this program?

What have you learned about leadership from your participation so far in this program?

The guiding questions asked at the interviews with Enablers trainers were:

In what ways do you hope that participants will develop through participation in the Mt. Druitt Enablers Program?

Would you please tell us about some of the overall learning aims of this program?

Please would you talk about the teaching and learning philosophies and strategies for the Program?

What perspectives on leadership does the Program bring?

Do you think that participation in the program helps people personally?

If so, could you comment on how people are helped personally?

Do you think participation in the program helps participation in the local community?

If so, could you comment on how community participation is enhanced?

Participant Sample Description

Research participants comprised:

Fourteen (14) 2004 Enablers Program participants;

Six (6) 2005 Enablers Program participants; and

Two (2) Enablers trainers.

The participants were all adults from the Mt Druitt area. The sample consists of a representative distribution of community members, without domination of any particular ethnic grouping.

The sample size sought to closely mirror the total number of participants in the Enablers program. This strategy of endeavouring to interview all/most participants is supportive of

the Appreciative Inquiry approach, as it is thought that through engagement and reflection with participants the project will grow and develop.

FINDINGS: FRACTAL NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

The findings of the inquiry are organised and presented as fractal narratives in relation to the five key research questions:

1. In what ways do you see yourself developing through your participation in the Mt. Druitt Enablers Program?
2. Do you think that participation in the program has helped you personally?
3. Do you think participation in the program has helped your participation in the local community?
4. Would you please tell us about some of your learning in this program?
5. What have you learned about leadership from participating in this program?

In the course of the conversations with participants, many shared their views about the future of the program. These views are presented as fractal narratives under the heading 'Participants' recommendations for the Enablers Program' following the fifth key research question.

Involving a number of participants with different cultural backgrounds and experiential history in a complex act of inquiry will generate many forms of interpretation. The declaration of preferred interpretation and arguments often leads to the adoption of polarised positions. Reaching such a position and its defence is an integral part of the dynamic of human sense-making. The challenge for those wishing to move to a position of shared understanding or to commence some form of unified action is to move beyond combative, polarised thinking to a position of collaborative agreement-seeking and sense-making. Some form of theory that is capable of bringing coherence and conciliation to the far-reaching discourse may provide the serenity of mind to move those involved beyond an adversarial position towards a shared construction of reality. For this purpose researchers have used a concept drawn from Complexity Theory: Fractal Narrative Analysis, to guide the inquiry and the following analytical techniques.

In answering the research questions, a significant body of 'narrative' was developed. Within this, certain recurrent themes or explanatory fragments of statement can be recognised, which we describe as 'fractal' comments.

The nature of a fractal is that the 'fragment' you are looking at is representative not of a part but of the whole; each fractal is always the 'whole' but at a different scale of detail. The properties found at different scales of complexity are considered as being equivalent, in that while the properties are universal, the labels (detail) are considered scale or level-dependent.

In the analysis, we have selected fractal comments that are indicative of the character of the narratives from each respondent. At the end of each fractal summary, we have put together a single-voice composite narrative that represents a broad description of the 'whole' body of narratives.

By looking at the individual fractal comments and the composite fractal narrative, the reader is able to gain an appreciation of the richness of detail as well as an emergent, coherent meaning.

In narrative terms, this gives the elusive character sought after by narrative analysts: that of evocative, suggestive richness along with clarity and validity of explanation.

What follows then is the question asked of respondents, cumulative fractal comments drawn from their responses, and a constructed, composite response for each question. The reason for constructing a composite response is to combine the fractals (an enfolding of the fractals) into a singular narrative. Such a narrative represents coherence and an emergent understanding as a commonsense reality. In this way it is hoped to generate, within the reader's consciousness, an informed understanding as well as a provocative response.

1) In what ways do you see yourself developing through your participation in the Mt. Druitt Enablers Program?

In response to this question, we have identified three sub-themes in the narratives of the respondents. These are:

- Comment on what the program does.
- An explanation of how it made the participant feel.
- A reflection about where the program may lead.

Fractal comments from the narratives are drawn out below (in italics) to add depth and clarity to explain these sub-themes.

What the program does

People coming together in community and taking responsibility
Courses often nurture intellect, this, rather, nurtured imagination
New learning because we are so relaxed and informed
Different ways of learning
Sharing your life experiences
It provides service around the area
We all help each other

You get better insight

Safe environment

It embraces diverse peoples, diverse cultures and leads to respect and diversity.

Helps and supports the marginalised

Welcoming atmosphere... gave affirmation

How it made me feel

Feel like I'm going on a holiday

I actually feel validated

Peaceful; good for reflection

Accepted and credible

Very creative

It was like a family

It gives confidence and self-esteem

I felt really, really good

Really beneficial

A true growth experience

Comfortable in the group

Where the program may lead

People don't irritate me the way they used to

Working with the marginalised and disadvantaged community

It should be aimed at young people, particularly Year 8 and Year 9

The composite narrative about the ways people see themselves developing through participation in the Program.

The program brought together a culturally diverse but like-minded group of people; people, who were interested in helping themselves and helping others and who in that way, were serving the community.

I felt safe and rewarded in working with Enablers. The program has given me a sense of purpose and I have gained self-esteem and confidence from it. I think the program has potential in supporting the individuals who participate in working with and supporting marginalised and disadvantaged members of the community. It may have potential for operating in the school system for Year 8 or Year 9 students.

2) Do you think that participation in the Program has helped you personally?

Sub-themes within this question were based around:

- Awareness of self and others.
- Relating.
- Learning and development.

Awareness of self and others

It has made me more aware, much more aware

It makes me reflect back into myself

Aware of different people within the family

You can't do 'all' for everyone

Validation... developing a belief, albeit slowly, in my own capabilities

Recognising my strengths, my weaknesses; my community strengths and weaknesses

Aware of my own prejudices or my own thinking

To explore myself better by sharing your life... look at myself

Really opening yourself up

Relating

Got me closer to my nieces and nephews

Gave me more confidence... I felt more trusting

I talked to them more

Gives you more of a social life

Building of trust with people

Learning and development

Enablers was definitely self-development

It enabled me to really grow in confidence

It was a true growth experience

The composite narrative about how participation has helped personally.

The program has been very beneficial to me in that it has made me more aware of both myself and others. It has helped me recognise my strengths and weaknesses, and from this I can recognise strengths and weaknesses in the community.

The program has improved my contact and networking with others. It has served to broaden my experiences, even my social life, and has helped me build closer relationships of trust within the family and with other people.

Enablers was definitely part of my self-development. It enabled me to really grow in confidence and I reflect on the program as a true growth experience.

3) Do you think participation in the Program has helped your participation in the community?

The sub-themes were of the fractal comments were:

- Networking and communicating.
- Self-esteem and confidence.

Networking and communicating

There has been a lot of building up of networks with other people and different services in Mount Druitt

I guess in the Mount Druitt area it has widened my networks and contacts

Just being aware of networking more and that I enjoy community work

I guess the networking part of it was very helpful

I used to sit in the office a lot, but I have now started going out to the refuge park outreach... and referring people

You just start networking, sharing with other people

Be more aware of services and be more concerned

Be open to learning new ways of doing things and networks

I also communicated and worked with other Enablers

Self-esteem and confidence

Has given me belief in myself

I can go and do my job better

I can say 'no'

Probably makes us more humane

The composite narrative about how Enablers participation has helped participation in the local community.

Participation in the program has helped me in broadening and understanding my participation in the local community. I have built up relationships and networks with other people and with various service organisations in the Mount Druitt community. The networking has been useful in that it has increased my awareness of what services are needed and are available in the community.

My participation in the community has been enhanced because the program has given me a belief in myself and now I can do my job better. I also feel I have more control over

my life and work activities. I have become more assertive in my role but, at the same time, sensitive towards the needs and circumstances of others.

4) Would you please tell us about some of your learning in this Program?

The sub-themes in this narrative were:

- Leadership
- Serving the community.

Leadership

You can have a small number of people taking leadership in a community I found, in Mount Druitt, it tends to be a small, more concentrated group of leaders

Leaders would be able to know what exists in the community

Core leadership is in the community, it is embedded in the community itself

Leadership is an evolutionary process

It helped me identify the qualities that you look for in a leader

Dealing with the whole, whole person... it is really helpful

Understanding yourself, it really helps you to understand other people...

found I was able to use leadership

It gave me a sense of power, of place, a connect to Mount Druitt

Serving the community

I have a responsibility to serve and be part of the community

Working with others in the community to listen to what their needs are

To be able to know what exists in the community

The composite narrative about learning.

I have learnt that core leadership is in the community; it is embedded within the community itself. Leadership activities develop as an evolutionary process, as one deals with individuals, groups and varying circumstances. It is necessary to understand yourself if you are to understand other people. When I understood myself and others better, I was able to be a better leader. Having a sense of leadership allowed me to feel more connected, to find a sense of place, in the Mount Druitt community.

I have also learnt that there is a responsibility to serve the community. Working and serving the community requires a sensitivity and ability to listen to people's needs. It also requires the ability to recognise what exists within the community, in terms of needs, and the resources and services that may be mobilised or accessed to provide for those needs.

5) What have you learned about leadership?

The sub-themes identified in the narrative in response to this question were:

- Growing the community
- Having political influence

Growing the community

I mean that's how a union started out: they started out as a small group and became larger and larger

Take the practice of Enablers into the wider community so that we have many people

I think it needs to broaden and bring in more people

To have more community people involved, sitting on the reference group

Not just a couple of people at dinner

You need to further grow this program

Having political influence

I would like to see the big group of all the people who have been through

Enablers come together to look at how we can influence Government policy

I'd also like to get into... the council

The composite narrative about learning about leadership.

I think we need to broaden and bring in more people so that Enablers becomes a broader-based and more community-centred activity. The program needs to be more inclusive and to take care in not being selective or exclusive in its participating membership. The program deserves to grow and to be extended further into the whole community.

I would like to think that the participants in Enablers can use their relationships and networks to influence government activities and government policy. I would like to see people accept roles and responsibilities in policy and government activities, such as the local council.

Participants' recommendations for the Enablers Program

Some of the comments (fractal narrative statements) could not be particularly confined to thematic presentation in relation to the five pre-set questions. The questions (as above) served as a convenient organisational device at the time of interview and at the time of the categorisation of the findings. Equally, a small number of fractal narrative comments did not conveniently fit the major themes, but are recorded because they carry explanatory impact and 'energy'. These fractal narrative comments relate to the

participants' ideas about the future; in particular the future of the Enablers in Mt Druitt and the future of 'Learning Ground', an initiative that grew out of the Enablers program.

We should dare to allow Enablers and these other local community groups to make mistakes... to put it bluntly: 'stuff it up'

I think they need to get something more concrete; they need to get some trials going... to continue the project

Chain Reaction is doing great, but there is concern about the postcode, where Chain Reaction's office comes from, which is Neutral Bay.

It's actually about servicing the same existing operations and then expecting them to be creative and imaginative

Chain Reaction has a long way to come before they can actually pick up something and say 'this is the learning ground and this is ours'

A lot less theory; it would have to be very basic: a lot more participation at the group level

There are a lot more areas around Mount Druitt they could focus on.

I think they are a little impatient in thinking something will come out... we are looking at five years at least...

The composite narrative of participants' recommendations for the Enablers Program.

There are a number of sensitive issues around the Enablers program. It needs to be recognised as something from and of the Mount Druitt community and not be seen as an import from a more exclusive location or the activity of an outside group of people on and with the locals. Enablers and Chain Reaction needs to be patient and allow its influence and activities to develop and spread through the community. It needs to achieve recognisable, successful outcomes rather than just to continue the teaching-learning psychological processes. There are many, many areas of need around Mount Druitt than those currently being addressed. There is a risk that Enablers ends up servicing the same organisations and activities that currently exist without taking creative or imaginative steps to develop in new areas and to offer new strategies.

Attractors of meaning

The patterning of fractals around an attractor allows us to identify the attractor. From the attractor, one can make inferences about form, function and processes that have and may continue to occur. There are three sets of attractors: the personal (esteem, identity and enjoyment), empowerment (action, task and purpose) and relationships (networking, leadership and community engagement).

These sets of attractors can be represented diagrammatically (see Figure 2) to show their interrelationship and their co-dependence, which influences the organisational dynamics, value system and purpose of the community.

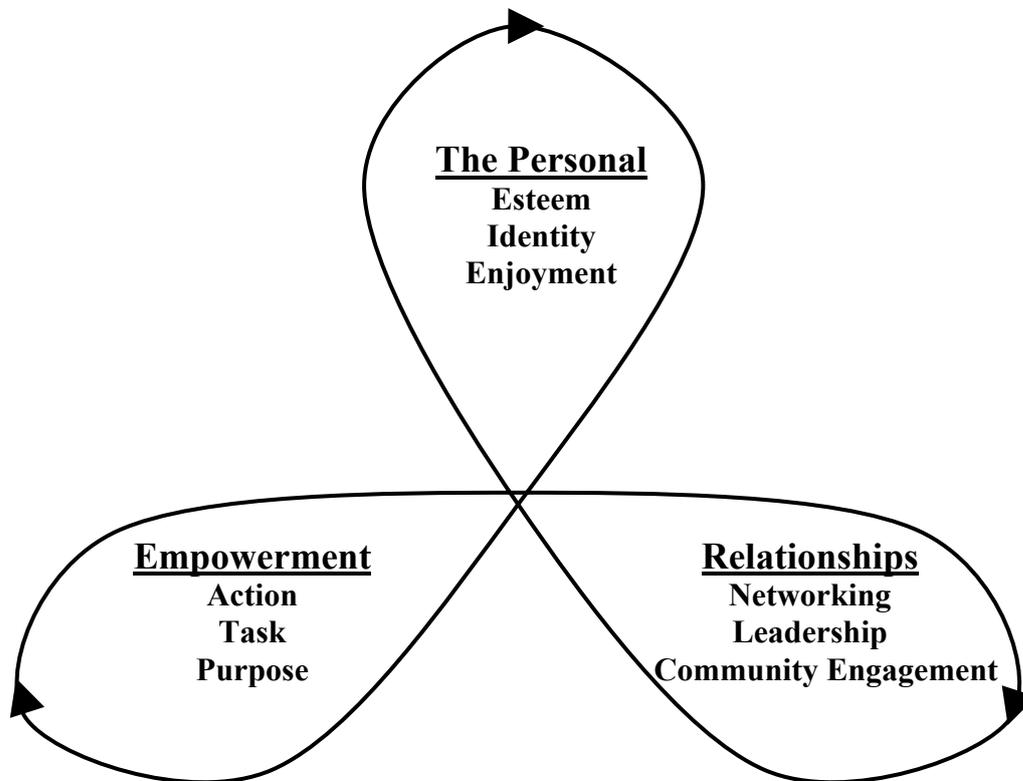


Figure 2: The three inter-relating attractor sets.

One can identify a sequence of activities that the Enablers process uses to 'seed' the attractors. This sequence can be described as:

- Discourse about life experience.
- Narrative events that are, in some way, stylised and formalised and may have input either from particular people or of particular content.
- Generation of co-narratives, the identification of themes of interest and emergent, shared understanding.
- Narratives of complicity, that is, narratives of significance with others. This is the recognition of purposive, task-related activities.
- The composite experience becomes the narrative to live by.

It should be recognised that during the conduct of the program the steps of this process, as identified above, are not strictly in sequence but may follow an iterative pathway.

DISCUSSION

The participants' comments indicate that the major attractor for them to continue their involvement in the Enablers was that the program provided a safe and supportive atmosphere that engendered personal growth and awareness. This sense of comfort, acceptance or safety actually provided a sense of community empowerment and self determination within the Enablers participation group.

The patterning of fractal narratives around particular attractors indicates that participation in the program developed and enhanced self esteem and a sense of personal acceptance, and that concomitantly, through this the participants saw themselves as more accepting of others. This enhanced acceptance of self and others meant that they were better able to work in community; to work with family, clients and to network with others active in the community. Certain tasks or priorities for action and projects were subsequently recognised and agreed upon. The identification of attractors shows that the participants' comments can be grouped according to three sets of focus (the personal, empowerment and relationships), where on one level, it could be said that one led to the other: that personal acceptance led to acceptance of others. However, it can also be seen that as people participated in the Enablers Program in a social way (with a diverse range of other members of the community), that their participation (in a safe atmosphere) supported a sense of community and acceptance of others, as modelled in Figure 2.

The participants' voices can be represented in summary form through bringing together all of the composite narratives into one indicative narrative. This composite narrative clearly depicts the value of the program to the participants.

Enablers' Indicative Narrative

The program brought together a culturally diverse but like-minded group of people; people, who were interested in helping themselves and helping other, and who in that way, were serving the community.

I felt safe and rewarded in working with Enablers. The program has given me a sense of purpose and I have gained self-esteem and confidence from it. I think the program has potential in supporting the individuals who participate in working with and supporting marginalised and disadvantaged members of the community. It may have potential for operating in the school system for Year 8 or Year 9 students.

The program has been very beneficial to me in that it has made me more aware of both myself and others. It has helped me recognise my strengths and weaknesses, and from this I can recognise strengths and weaknesses in the community.

The program has improved my contact and networking with others. It has served to broaden my experiences, even my social life, and has helped me build closer relationships of trust within the family and with other people.

Enablers was definitely part of my self-development. It enabled me to really grow in confidence and I reflect on the program as a true growth experience.

Participation in the program has helped me in broadening and understanding my participation in the local community. I have built up relationships and networks with other people and with various service organisations in the Mount Druitt community. The networking has been useful in that it has increased my awareness of what services are needed and are available in the community.

My participation in the community has been enhanced because the program has given me a belief in myself and now I can do my job better. I also feel I have more control over my life and work activities. I have become more assertive in my role but, at the same time, sensitive towards the needs and circumstances of others.

I have learnt that core leadership is in the community; it is embedded within the community itself. Leadership activities develop as an evolutionary process, as one deals with individuals, groups and varying circumstances. It is necessary to understand yourself if you are to understand other people. When I understood myself and others better, I was able to be a better leader. Having a sense of leadership allowed me to feel more connected, to find a sense of place, in the Mount Druitt community.

I have also learnt that there is a responsibility to serve the community. Working and serving the community requires a sensitivity and ability to listen to people's needs. It also requires the ability to recognise what exists within the community, in terms of needs, and the resources and services that may be mobilised or accessed to provide for those needs.

I think we need to broaden and bring in more people so that Enablers becomes a broader-based and more community-centred activity. The program needs to be more inclusive and to take care in not being selective or exclusive in its participating membership. The program deserves to grow and to be extended further into the whole community.

I would like to think that the participants in Enablers can use their relationships and networks to influence government activities and government policy. I would like to see people accept roles and responsibilities in policy and government activities, such as the local council.

The participants' reflection on their learning in the program emphasises that their confidence was developed and their social involvement enhanced. The relationship between personal acceptance and growth, and social involvement has been discussed in

particular by feminist scholars, as a relationship between agency and social, political citizenship (Lister 2003).

These two entwining needs (for agency and citizenship) have been theorised as being essential human needs (Doyal and Gough 1991). Gough (1992) argues that an element of basic human need is that of 'autonomy of agency - the capacity to make informed choices about what should be done and how to go about doing it' (1992:9). Where people are not accepting of themselves, not viewing themselves as people having agency, they in effect, do not value themselves as people who can make informed choices and decisions about their social/ political world. Concomitantly, it can be seen as critical to personal autonomy that people have opportunity to participate in 'the social roles of production, reproduction, cultural transmission and political authority (1992:9). Gough goes on to argue that this participation is necessary if people are to develop 'critical autonomy – the ability to situate, criticise and, if necessary, challenge the rules and practices of one's society' (1992:10).

The Enablers Program contributes to the participant's capacity to develop autonomous agency as well as critical autonomy by supporting effective political participation; their involvement in agencies and organisations relating to the Mt Druitt area. This critical capacity in turn supports the participants' sense of empowerment in contributing to the self-determination of the Mt Druitt area.

CONCLUSION

From the perspective of the Enablers participants, the Enablers Program has clearly been very successful in developing community leaders and thus contributing to more extensive self-determination in the Mt Druitt area.

Contribution of the Enablers Program

The Mt Druitt Enablers Program has developed community leaders and contributed to more extensive self-determination in the Mt Druitt area through developing:

1) *Personal, autonomous agency:*

- Increased awareness of oneself and others;
- Improved capacity in relating to others.
- Increased self-esteem, self-acceptance and confidence.

2) *Enhanced community participation:*

- Expanded networking of people active in agencies and services in Mt Druitt;
- Fostered a sense of professional competency;

3) *Learning about leadership:*

- Understanding that the core of leadership is embedded in the community;
- Strengthened sense of responsibility to serve the community;
- Heightened critical autonomy (ability to critique status quo).

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

1. The Enablers' trainers continue to treat the Enablers' participants as leaders; as those most knowledgeable about their situation.
2. The Enablers trainers seek the advice of those who have participated, for the future of the program and related initiatives in Mt Druitt.

REFLECTIONS

Issues relating to the carriage of this project

This section highlights some issues and difficulties that relate to, or impacted on, processes involved in undertaking this research project.

For whose agenda are we working?

The conduct of the research remained true, in theoretical and methodological identity, to the epistemic stance as declared in the research proposal. The maintenance of methodological integrity has a moral trajectory which is the responsibility of the researchers. This is what differentiates researchers from consultants.

In constructing this report we have sought to establish a balance in terms of the position we find ourselves in, of both working for and serving the funding auspicing organisation and maintaining methodological integrity.

Some stories cannot be told

In conducting qualitative ethnographic inquiry we have sought to record life as told and life as experienced. This was done by recording narratives from which we have built a composite constructed text. This text is a code which tells us much about the experience of those concerned.

Our data gathering encountered what are well recognised, almost traditional difficulties of ethnographic research. Some lived experiences (those of disadvantaged Aboriginal people for example) cannot be told; many cannot tell it. What we have found hardest of all is that target groups do not hold still for their portraits, not even for ethnographic portraits.

Problems encountered in making appointments

The research team has had extensive experience in setting up field interviews with individuals and groups. The established practice is a two-step contact approach process. An interview was organised by phone, where the interview time and place was set up. A brief background about the project and an explanation of why the participant was selected was given along with an explanation of the participant's expected contribution. Some two or three days prior to the interview a reminder call was made or a message left confirming the appointment.

We experienced what was for us a higher than normal incidence of people not keeping the interview appointment without explanation. Our follow up at times led to another appointment with similar results or loss of contact without explanation.

It needs to be stated that this was characteristic of some, but not all of the participants. In seeking an explanation for this, we surmise that the people we were dealing with may not have experience of the relatively strict protocol associated with various professional service appointments.

This in itself is a finding. Not keeping to the confines of expected appointment protocols may be expected to have significant implications for the capacity of people to work effectively with the public and private service sector.

On the other hand, this finding may be interpreted as pointing to the need for dominant structures to become more flexible to accommodate the diversity of Aboriginal (and other) cultural groups. This may take time and willingness to enter into deeper conversations, leading to more informed consciousness of all stakeholders.

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Appendix A

Letters of invitation and permission

Information Statement and Letter of Invitation to 2004 Enablers Participants

Locked Bag 1797
Penrith South DC NSW 1797 Australia



Dr. Lesley Kuhn
School of Management
Building U2, Blacktown Campus,
Locked Bag 1797 Penrith South DC
NSW 1797, Australia

[Date]

Dear [Name]

Re: Invitation to participate in the project: Inquiry into Community Enabling: A Review of the Mt. Druitt Enablers Program

Researchers from the University of Western Sydney including Dr. Robert Woog and myself, Dr. Lesley Kuhn, are undertaking a research project titled: Inquiry into Community Enabling: A Review of the Mt. Druitt Enablers Program.

This project has been commissioned by the Sir Ian Potter Foundation NSW under the auspices of the Chain reaction Foundation. It is being developed and conducted in consultation with Chain Reaction and Mt Druitt Enablers representatives

The aim of the project is to evaluate the Mt. Druitt Enablers Program, a program that you undertook in 2004.

The evaluation is based on a research approach that focuses on identifying the 'best of the present' so as to strengthen and improve the initiative. The key question guiding the research is:

In what ways has the Mt. Druitt Enablers Program developed community leaders and made a contribution to more extensive self-determination in the Mt. Druitt area?

The project seeks to gain the views of Enablers participants and leaders, about how the Program has enhanced their lives and enabled them to more effectively contribute to the development of the community.

I am writing to invite you to participate in the project by becoming a person who gives information to the project. As a participant in the Mt Druitt Enablers Program we are interested in your views. Participation would involve you taking part in a one hour interview, and a following reflective meeting with other participants in the project. The conversation in the interview will be on your experiences with the program and how you think it has benefited you and your involvement in the community. With your permission, interviews may be audio recorded.

To conclude the project, you will also be invited to a meeting where the findings of the research will be shared with all of the research participants, and where your views and further reflections will be welcomed. This invitation will be made at during your interview.

The information you provide will be treated confidentially and securely stored at UWS. You have the right to withdraw from the research at any time. No reasons for such a decision will be required, nor will you be subject to any adverse consequences as a result of your withdrawal. In the research, we commit to:

- Honest and open communication
- Respecting the welfare, rights, beliefs, views, values, customs and culture of all participants
- Reviewing the research design or process if there is a risk of harm to any participants.

If you would like to participate in this project, please complete the attached Consent Form and return this to me. If you would like more information, please contact me by phone on 0298524172, or email me, l.kuhn@uws.edu.au, or write to me at my mail address.

Sincerely,

Lesley Kuhn
Senior Lecturer
Building U2, Blacktown Campus
University of Western Sydney
Locked Bag 1797,
Penrith South DC, 1797

NOTE: This study has been approved by the University of Western Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the Research Ethics Officers (Tel: 0247 360 883). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

Consent Form for 2004 Enablers Participants

Locked Bag 1797
Penrith South DC NSW 1797 Australia



Dr. Lesley Kuhn
Building U2, Blacktown Campus, UWS

Inquiry into Community Enabling: A Review of the Mt. Druitt Enablers Program **Agreement to Participate in Research**

I _____ have read the Information Sheet about the above research project and agree to participate in face to face interviews and in the group conversation.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may choose at any time to withdraw my participation and /or have any contributions I may make withdrawn from the project, without any adverse consequences.

I agree to having my interview audio recorded.

I do not agree to having my interview audio recorded.

I agree to having my participation in the meeting audio recorded.

I do not agree to having my participation in the meeting audio recorded.

Signature _____

Date _____

Please keep a copy and return original to:

Dr. Lesley Kuhn
Senior Lecturer
Building U2, Blacktown Campus
University of Western Sydney
Locked Bag 1797, Penrith South DC, 1797

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Information Statement and Letter of Invitation to 2005 Enablers Participants

Locked Bag 1797
Penrith South DC NSW 1797 Australia



Dr. Lesley Kuhn
School of Management
Building U2, Blacktown Campus,
Locked Bag 1797 Penrith South DC NSW 1797,
Australia

[Date]

Dear [Name]

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Researchers from the University of Western Sydney including Dr. Robert Woog and myself, Dr. Lesley Kuhn, are undertaking a research project titled: Inquiry into Community Enabling: A Review of the Mt. Druitt Enablers Program.

This project has been commissioned by the Sir Ian Potter Foundation NSW under the auspices of the Chain reaction Foundation. It is being developed and conducted in consultation with Chain Reaction and Mt Druitt Enablers representatives.

The aim of the project is to evaluate the Mt. Druitt Enablers Program, a program that you are currently undertaking.

The evaluation is based on a research approach that focuses on identifying the 'best of the present' so as to strengthen and improve the initiative. The key question guiding the research is:

In what ways has the Mt. Druitt Enablers Program developed community leaders and made a contribution to more extensive self-determination in the Mt. Druitt area?

The project seeks to gain the views of Enablers participants and leaders, about how the Program has enhanced their lives and enabled them to more effectively contribute to the development of the community.

I am writing to invite you to participate in the project by becoming a person who gives information to the project. As a current participant in the Mt Druitt Enablers Program we are interested in your views. Participation would involve you taking part in a one hour group discussion, and a following reflective meeting with other participants in the project. The conversation in the group discussion will be on your experiences with the program and how you think it is benefiting you and your involvement in the community. With your permission, this conversation may be audio and visually recorded.

To conclude the project, you will also be invited to a meeting where the findings of the research will be shared with all of the research participants, and where your views and further reflections will be welcomed. This invitation will be made during your interview.

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Consent Form for 2005 Enablers Participants

Locked Bag 1797
Penrith South DC NSW 1797 Australia



Dr. Lesley Kuhn
Building U2, Blacktown Campus, UWS

Inquiry into Community Enabling: A Review of the Mt. Druitt Enablers Program

Agreement to Participate in Research

I _____ have read the Information Sheet about the above research project and agree to participate in face to face interviews and in the group conversation.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may choose at any time to withdraw my participation and /or have any contributions I may make withdrawn from the project, without any adverse consequences.

I agree to having my interview audio recorded.

I do not agree to having my interview audio recorded.

I agree to having my participation in the meeting audio recorded.

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Signature _____

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Information Statement and Letter of Invitation to Enablers Trainers

Locked Bag 1797
Penrith South DC NSW 1797 Australia



Dr. Lesley Kuhn
School of Management
Building U2, Blacktown Campus,
Locked Bag 1797 Penrith South DC NSW 1797,
Australia

[Date]

Dear [Name]

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The aim of the project is to evaluate the Mt. Druitt Enablers Program, a program that you led in 2004.

The evaluation is based on a research approach that focuses on identifying the 'best of the present' so as to strengthen and improve the initiative. The key question guiding the research is:

In what ways has the Mt. Druitt Enablers Program developed community leaders and made a contribution to more extensive self-determination in the Mt. Druitt area?

The project seeks to gain the views of Enablers participants and leaders, about how the Program has enhanced their lives and enabled them to more effectively contribute to the development of the community.

I am writing to invite you to participate in the project by becoming a person who gives information to the project. As a trainer in the Mt Druitt Enablers Program we are interested in your views. Participation would involve you taking part in a one hour interview, and in a following reflective

meeting with other participants in the project. The conversation will be on your experiences with the program and how you think it has benefited participants and their involvement in the community. With your permission, interviews may be audio and visually recorded.

To conclude the project, you will also be invited to a meeting where the findings of the research will be shared with all of the research participants, and where your views and further reflections will be welcomed. This invitation will be made during your interview.

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- Honest and open communication
- Respecting the welfare, rights, beliefs, views, values, customs and culture of all participants
- Reviewing the research design or process if there is a risk of harm to any participants.

If you would like to participate in this project, please complete the attached Consent Form and return this to me. If you would like more information, please contact me by phone on 0298524172, or email me, l.kuhn@uws.edu.au, or write to me at my mail address.

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Consent Form for Enablers Trainers

Locked Bag 1797
Penrith South DC NSW 1797 Australia



Dr. Lesley Kuhn
Building U2, Blacktown Campus, UWS

Inquiry into Community Enabling: A Review of the Mt. Druitt Enablers Program

Agreement to Participate in Research

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I agree to having my participation in the meeting audio and visually recorded.

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