



Northam

Case Study Evaluation Report

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6.0 The Act-Belong-Commit Mental Health Promotion Campaign Northam Case Study

6.1 Overview

6.1.1 Northam, York and Toodyay: demographics and background

The Avon Valley region comprising the towns of Northam, York and Toodyay was the focal point of the Wheatbelt Act-Belong-Commit project. The Act-Belong-Commit office is located in Northam, the largest of the three towns. Northam is an agricultural town located one hour east of Perth, Western Australia, with a population of 10,321.¹ Northam is a regional centre, supplying the outlying farming communities with services and provisions. The town's population comprises 50.7% males and 49.3% female. A total of 2.3% of the population are Indigenous, consistent with the national average. The median age range in Northam is forty-one years, compared with thirty-seven years for persons in Australia.¹

The most common industries of employment in Northam are Sheep, Beef Cattle and Grain Farming 11.2%, Road Freight Transport 4.1%, School Education 3.6%, Public Order and Safety Services 3.2% and Supermarket and Grocery Stores 2.7%.¹

Located along the Avon River catchment, Northam, York and Toodyay provide recreational opportunities such as skydiving, hot air ballooning and the infamous white water event the Avon Descent.

The Avon Valley relies heavily on the agricultural industry which has recently been faced with the impact of the drought. Other pressures associated with regional lifestyles include access to services, isolation and transient populations.

In 2007 males in the Avon Valley region were more likely to report suffering a mental health problem (14.1%), compared to the rest of Western Australia (8.4%).³ 14.3% females reported suffering depression, anxiety, a stress related or other mental health problem, similar to the state percentage of 14.9.

The Act-Belong-Commit Campaign encouraged individuals to take action to improve their mental health and wellbeing by adopting the Act-Belong-Commit guidelines for positive mental health. The local Project Officer worked with groups and organisations to plan and implement activities and events that promoted active participation in community life, social interaction and volunteerism. Activities and events were branded with the positive mental health message of Act-Belong-Commit.

The project targeted adults living in the towns of Northam, York and Toodyay. Youth aged twelve to twenty-four in the towns were a secondary target group.



Wheat field in the Shire of Northam.
Photo courtesy of:
Wheatbelt Development Commission 2007

6.1.2 The developmental phase

In July 2005 the Act-Belong-Commit Project Officer was appointed by Avon and Central Primary Health Service to plan and develop the Act-Belong-Commit Campaign. While the campaign was managed by Curtin University, the Avon and Central Primary Health Service undertook local management and housing of the Project Officer.

During the first three months, before the official pilot period commenced, the Project Officer met with a range of organisation representatives and community people, delivered presentations to a diverse range of groups and generated interest in the up-coming community forum. The fact that the campaign was a world-first put the project in good standing for media attention.

From the very beginning, there was a 'buzz' in the air. The community was ready to embrace the campaign messages and make a difference through providing opportunities for active involvement, promoting inclusion and building a stronger, more cohesive and resilient community.

6.1.3 The official launch and community forum

The Act-Belong-Commit Campaign was officially launched by Deputy Mayor Cr. Denis Beresford on Wednesday 2 November 2005 at the Campaign's initial community forum held at Rivers Edge Cafe overlooking the Avon River. Forty community members and organisation representatives came together to celebrate the launch of the project and participate in the community forum. Professor Rob Donovan and Dr Ray James provided evidence of the need for mental health promotion, explained the Campaign messages and proposed strategies. Participants were asked to brainstorm strategies to engage individuals and groups, and encourage them to Act, Belong and Commit. The ideas generated from the forum formed the basis for the 2006 Action Plan. The forum also provided the opportunity for interested community members to become involved in project activities and link with other organisational and community representatives to strengthen current community projects and activities.

"I still remember the launch of the Campaign at Rivers Edge in 2005, that was brilliant! The enthusiasm when you are bogged down with everything else to then devote yourself to another campaign that is not core business, you need some spark to keep you going and I think you've (Amberlee) provided that spark." Peter Mahler, Managing Director CY O'Connor TAFE October 2007.

6.1.4 One year on

During the first year of intervention some strong partnerships were developed with a diverse range of community groups and organisations including the Northam Over 60's Group (social group for seniors); CY O'Connor College of TAFE; the Northam Recreation Centre and the Wheatbelt Public Health Unit. A variety of activities were organised in partnership with these organisations to encourage community participation, social interaction, and to motivate people to take action to become more mentally healthy. Events and activities included the Inter-Generational Experience Concert, Stress Less Walk and Picnic, Volunteering activities, Community Bike Ride and BMX Demo Night, 'Have a Go Day' at York District High School, Walking events and activities, a Teddy Bears Picnic and more. (Table 4 provides a complete list of activities implemented during the first twelve months of project intervention).

"The community has responded very well to the Campaign in the first year. People seem very open to the message and have taken the Campaign principles on board in planning community events and activities." Regina Michel, Manager Avon and Central Primary Health Service, August 2006.

6.1.5 After twenty-four months of intervention

After twenty-four months of intervention the Campaign maintained momentum. Twenty-two major partnerships were developed with a diverse range of community groups and organisations, with a total of fifty major activities and events, held under the Act-Belong-Commit banner, thirty-two of which attracted more than forty people (Tables 4 and 5).

The Bring it On youth rock concert, Northam Recreation Centre circus workshops, Aged Care Games, and Active Ageing Expo, concerts at the Over 60's Group, mosaic projects and Inclusive Practices workshops were some of the initiatives implemented in the latter stages.



Mosaic tile created by the Oolaman Nyinyiny Ladies Group, 2007

6.2 The Steering Committee

Members of the Northam Steering Committee provided expertise and links to their networks to add strength to the project. The recruitment of members was relatively straightforward. Key stakeholders were identified and approached, or in a few cases individuals volunteered for the position. Steering Committee members were recruited based on their organisational representation, commitment to community health and wellbeing and passion and interest in the Campaign.

As an initial activity, the Steering Community worked through a needs assessment tool developed by the Victorian Health Department (Vic Health Partnership Tool available at www.vichealth.gov.au). The tool enabled the committee to identify areas that were not working so well and develop strategies to improve the partnership. Results of the partnership analysis undertaken as part of this activity are detailed in [Appendix 3](#).

Successful coalitions are those that enact formal governance procedures, encourage strong leadership, foster active participation of members, cultivate diverse memberships, promote collaboration between member agencies and facilitate group cohesion.⁴ The Vic Health Partnership tool assisted the Steering Committee to revise terms of reference, share information and resources, achieve interagency collaboration and increase workforce development.

Members of the Steering Committee mostly held senior managerial positions (Table 1). This influenced the amount of time they were able to allocate to the Campaign and assist with strategies. The members acted as a link to the community and their respective organisations providing resources and ideas to the local Project Officer. The senior positions held within their organisation enabled them to advocate for the Campaign and promote the messages within their organisation and/or community group. For example, some organisations offered the use of function rooms within their departments for Act-Belong-Commit activities and events, published articles in in-house newsletters, partnered with the Campaign to host activities, and provided networks and links to further strengthen strategies.

Towards late 2006 and early 2007 the attendance at monthly meetings began to drop. This may have been due to the busy end of year period, Christmas events and many people taking annual leave. Towards mid 2007 attendance stabilised again.

Members have been fairly stable throughout the Campaign. The commitment of the organisations to the Campaign was evident throughout the Campaign intervention. If a Steering Committee member resigned or was unable to attend a meeting, a representative from the organisation joined the committee.

Table 1: Northam, York & Toodyay Act-Belong-Commit Steering Committee members

Name	Organisation	Position
Amberlee Laws	Act-Belong-Commit	Project Officer Intervention & Evaluation
Regina Michel	Avon & Central Primary Health Service	Manager
Jill Jarvis/Chantelle Jeffery	Wheatbelt Public Health Unit	Manager
Heather Bennet	Avon Valley Advocate	Reporter
Tracy Meredith/Pip Shield	Wheatbelt Development Commission	Board member
Belinda Kenney/Jeni Collins	Dept Sport & Rec (Wheatbelt region)	Regional officer
Peter Mahler	CY O'Connor College of Tafe	Managing director
Alison Turnbull	Girl Guides Northam	Community representative

The success of the Steering Committee is largely due to the commitment of the individual to mental health promotion and community development, and the enthusiasm the members had for the Campaign.

6.3 Key partnerships

Table 2 lists the major partnerships developed after the twenty-four months of intervention. A major partnership was classed as one that involved regular liaison and collaboration throughout the intervention period. It is important to note that many groups were involved in the planning and implementation of Act-Belong-Commit events and activities, however for the purpose of this report they were not identified as a major partner as they were not the primary contact for such events.

Table 2: Major partnerships developed

Community Groups	Organisations
Northam Over 60s Group	Wheatbelt Public Health Unit
Avon Valley Arts Society	Department of Sport and Recreation
Avon ROAD	Wheatbelt Development Commission
Northam Girl Guides	CY O'Connor TAFE
Church of Christ Oolaman Nyinny Women's Group	Midlands Department of Education and Training
Volunteer Action Group	Wheatbelt Disabilities Services Commission
Toodyay Health, Healing and Harmony Inc.	Toodyay Herald
	Northam Town Council
	Recreation and Sport Network
	Northam Recreation Centre
	Seniors Recreation Council (Avon branch)
	Avon Valley Advocate

The most successful partnerships seemed to be established when both parties identified a need and mutual benefit for the partnership.

"I work as Physical Activity Health Promotion Officer for the Wheatbelt Public Health Unit. Everything I do links in with the objectives of the Act-Belong-Commit Campaign, so I work closely with Amberlee to plan and implement projects in the community. I have really enjoyed being involved in the Campaign, mainly because it links in so well with my role to promote active lifestyles." Tracy Fuhrmann, Physical Activity Health Promotion Officer, Wheatbelt Public Health, August 2006.

There have been several organisation and community representatives who embraced the message and seized every opportunity to further raise awareness of the health message and promote positive behaviour change. In particular the:

- Coordinator of the Northam Over 60's Group;
- Recreational Services Coordinator at the Northam Town Council; and
- Physical Activity Health Promotion Officer at Wheatbelt Public Health Unit

A prime example of community collaboration resulted from the partnership formed between the Northam Over 60's Group, Act-Belong-Commit, the Wheatbelt Public Health Unit and the local Recreation Centre. These organisations worked collaboratively to coordinate several events including Northam's Community Walk, the Active Ageing Expo and the Aged Care Games.

"We have worked together on a number of initiatives. The good thing for us is we are all achieving our goals through working collaboratively on projects. We may have different objectives on what we are trying to achieve, but the way we have worked it is that we have all been able to achieve our goals working together." Craig Wall, Recreation Services Coordinator, Town of Northam.

The people directly involved in working with the Campaign have reported making a conscious decision to actively improve their mental health.

"I took the ABC advice and made my NYR (New Years Resolution) to be more mentally healthy, and has resulted in me being much kinder to myself, much happier, less stressed and more centred. I'm doing yoga and meditating every day—just feel great. So there you go...hope you take this as another little sign of achievement of the ABC goal." Anonymous female, aged twenty-three.

6.4 Media, marketing & promotion

6.4.1 Marketing Events

A variety of strategies were used to promote Campaign events and activities and concepts, including:

- Posters and flyers
- Editorials in local newspapers (Avon Valley Advocate, Toodyay Herald, York Community Matters)
- Community Announcements on Hot FM and Radio West
- Radio Interviews on Hot FM, Radio West and ABC Geraldton
- Advertisements in the Avon Valley Advocate
- Newsletters distributed via health, organisational and community networks
- Notices posted to email distribution lists of key stakeholders
- Presentations at community groups, meetings, general word of mouth.

See [Appendix 1](#) for an example of media promotional materials.

6.4.2 Email distribution lists

The Act-Belong-Commit email distribution list was an effective and efficient means to disseminate Campaign information. Over one hundred email addresses were collected from health professionals, service providers and community members throughout the Campaign at events, meetings and forums. Over one hundred email addresses were collected over the two years. An Act-Belong-Commit distribution list was collated and regular emails were sent promoting Act-Belong-Commit/Community events, mentally healthy tips, journal articles and other updates as deemed relevant by the local Project Officer. Members of the list reported feeling more 'connected' to the community, as they were up to date with current community events and activities.

"Thanks for sending the info on Happiness, Amberlee! It is a treasure, something I'll share with many others." Jane Grant, Toodyay 2006.

6.4.3 Media contacts

Each of the three towns has a major community newspaper, although all three newspapers are distributed throughout the region:

- Avon Valley Advocate (local Northam newspaper – weekly publication)
- Toodyay Herald (local Toodyay newspaper – free monthly publication)
- York Community Matters (local York newspaper – free monthly publication).

Strong partnerships were established with reporters and sales officers for the Avon Valley Advocate. The reporter for the newspaper was a member of the Steering Committee from November 2005 to June 2006. This proved valuable to gain support from the newspaper to report concisely what the Campaign is about without ambiguous quotes and misguided information. Unfortunately a high staff turnover at the newspaper resulted in the need to develop new partnerships with new reporters and new sales officers in the remainder of the Campaign. Nevertheless, strong media relations were established and as a result the Campaign was reported in the media on a regular basis, promoting events, activities, concepts and partnerships ([Appendix 1](#)).

The paid advertising was a key factor that influenced the ability to gain editorial coverage. Provision of free editorial space was regularly granted in the Avon Valley Advocate during weeks where paid media advertising was published. Therefore, the ability to undertake a paid advertising strategy enabled broader coverage of the Campaign throughout local media channels.

On several occasions throughout the pilot project, generic media releases were written from Curtin University, or other regional sites, and amended for the local area and published in local papers. The editor at the Avon Valley Advocate preferred media releases to be written with a local perspective, with quotes from local project officers. Therefore most quotes and statements were made from a local perspective, the Project Officer acting as a local spokesperson for the Campaign. This proved to be an effective way to promote campaign messages and distribute information about the Campaign throughout the region.

Community newsletters are also an important medium to disseminate information locally to a specific target group.

6.4.4 Paid advertising strategies

Act-Belong-Commit advertisements appeared in the Avon Valley Advocate on a fortnightly basis at intervals throughout the Campaign. The reception of the adverts in the community has been very positive.

The Television advertisement was launched in February 2007 on the GWN network in regional Western Australia. However, while the majority of Northam residents are able to access Perth television broadcasts, an estimated fifty percent of residents do not receive GWN reception. This may have impacted on the total awareness of the Act-Belong-Commit message in Northam, York and Toodyay.

6.4.5 Messages on Hold

Several different scripts were written and broadcast on the Northam Regional Hospital's Messages on Hold throughout the pilot period ([Appendix 2](#)). These scripts aimed to change perceptions of mental health to be more positive, and provide a 'call for action' to encourage people to be active and participate in community activities. The Act-Belong-Commit Messages on Hold will continue to be broadcast at Northam Regional Hospital.

6.5 Summary of results

At the end of the twenty-four months of intervention, community groups, organisations and individuals were familiar with the Campaign messages and understood the concept of positive mental health, particularly the sorts of things you can and should do to be mentally healthy. This was a result of constantly delivering Campaign messages through a wide range of presentations, community events, projects and media (Table 3).

A total of seventy-four news items have been published in local newspapers, with many more that describe project partners, publicising community events, activities and groups.

The total count of attendance at Act-Belong-Commit branded events, activities and projects equated to over twenty thousand during the pilot period (Table 4, 5 & 6).

Twelve Healthway Sponsorships have encouraged groups to get involved in the Campaign and work collaboratively with the local Act-Belong-Commit Project Officer to hold events and activities. This resulted in more individuals and groups embracing the message and raised the awareness of the health message in community groups through the delivery of education, promotion, and structural strategies. For example, signage, merchandise, public announcements and media promoting the Campaign message at sponsored events extended the reach of the Campaign to a level that could not have been achieved without the support of the Healthway Sponsorship Program. Events sponsored by Healthway generally attracted a greater number of attendants compared to events that did not receive sponsorship support (Tables 4 and 5).

Several projects were sustained throughout the pilot period and will continue to be delivered in 2008 (Table 6). All of these projects will continue to be branded with Act-Belong-Commit health message.

Table 3: Channels of message delivery October 2005 – October 2007

Mode	Number
Presentations	74
Major events	41
Minor events	33
On-going projects	9
News items (unpaid)	74
Newsletter articles	24
Sponsorships`	12
Radio interviews	7



Northam BMX Club Demo Night as part of BikeWeek, March 2006

Table 4: One-off or short-term activities and events implemented in the first twelve months of project intervention

Event	Partner organisations	Healthway sponsored	Attendance
Avon Valley Art Society 2006 Program	Avon Valley Art Society	√	3000
Health, Healing & Art Project	WA Festival of Health, Healing & Harmony	√	2000
Toodyay Jazz Festival	Toodyay Jazz Society	√	2000
Toodyay Family Festival	Awakening Australia	√	1000
All Stars Extravaganza	Northam Over 60's Group	√	190
WA's Giant Walk	Wheatbelt Public Health Unit		109
Inter-Generational Experience Concert	Northam Over 60's		100
York "Youth Have a Go" #	Department of Sport and Recreation, York District High School		100
Circus performances	Town of Northam		100
Royal Theatre at Over 60's	Northam Over 60's Group	√	90
Toodyay Religious Education	Awakening Australia		80
Teddy Bear's Picnic	Northam Over 60's Group, Avon Vale Primary School		80
BMX demo night #	Northam BMX Club		50
TAFE Harmony Concert #	CY O'Connor TAFE Northam Over 60'd Group		50
"What Keeps You Mentally Healthy?" photo comp			45
Mental Health Week display and photo exhibition #	Wheatbelt Public Health Unit		45
Launch and community forum #			40
Bike Week community ride	Town of Northam Wheatbelt Public Health Unit		40
DET 10,000 Steps	Department of Education and Training Wheatbelt Public Health Unit		40
Turning on the Xmas lights	Town of Northam		33
One Year celebratory morning tea #			30
Wheatbelt carer's expo	Disability Services Commission		26
St Johns Ambo's Thank-A-Volunteer #	St Johns Ambulance		25
Stress Less walk and picnic #			15
Stress Less day yoga #			6
Total attendance			9389

Denotes activities that would not have happened without Act-Belong-Commit Project Officer
Please note: Many of the contacts were multiple counts of the same individuals.

Table 5: One-off or short-term activities and events implemented in the second twelve months of project intervention

Event	Partner organisations	Healthway sponsored	Attendance
Avon Valley Art Society 2007 Program	Avon Valley Art Society	√	3000
Healing Tree of Life Mosaic Project and Healing Festival	WA Festival of Health, Healing and Harmony	√	2500
Toodyay Agricultural Show	Toodyay Agricultural Society	√	2000
Awakening Australia Toodyay Family Festival	Awakening Australia	√	2000
Bring It On #	Town of Northam	√	1000
York Society Art and Craft Awards	York Society	√	500
Active Ageing Expo	Seniors Recreation Council (Avon Branch) Town of Northam		200
Circus Performances	Town of Northam Northam Over 60's		200
Native Rymes	Town of Northam		120
Walk around the Bridges	Wheatbelt Public Health Unit Town of Northam		100
Aged Care Games	Seniors Recreation Council (Avon Branch) Town of Northam		100
ABC Generational Experience Concert	Northam Over 60's Group	√	80
End of Pilot Celebratory Morning Tea #			40
Oolaman Nyininy Mosaic Launch #	Oolaman Nyininy	√	40
Community Bike Ride	Town of Northam Wheatbelt Public Health Unit		39
Walk the District Pedometer	Wheatbelt Public Health Unit Dept. Education & Training		30
Bib Track Challenge	Northam Girl Guides		20
Centrelink Expo	Centrelink		20
Mosaic Project #	Oolaman Nyininy Ladies Group	√	15
Volunteer Recruitment Centre Community Meeting #	Church of Christ		15
Chat and Chomp (ABC)	Wheatbelt Health Promotion Network		13
Sportslink Seminar #	Recreation & Sport Network Disabilities Services Commission		14
Cultural Walk and Picnic #			9
DSC Forum #	Disabilities Services Commission Town of Northam		5
Total Attendance			12240

Denotes activities that would not have happened without Act-Belong-Commit Project Officer.

Please note: Many of the contacts were multiple counts of the same individuals.

Table 6: Sustainable projects

Projects	Partner Organisation	Attendance
Physical Activity Program	Department of Education & Training	35
Physical Activity	Girl Guides	20
Walk Northam	Town of Northam Wheatbelt Public Health Unit	50
Volunteer Recruitment Centre #	Church of Christ	10
Over 60's Program	Northam Over 60's Group	300
Walk for Your Health	Wheatbelt Public Health Unit	30
Circus School	Town of Northam Local schools	150
Sportslink Program #	Recreation & Sport Network	25
Total Attendance		636

Denotes Activities that would not have happened without Act-Belong-Commit Project Officer.
Please note: Many of the contacts were multiple counts of the same individuals.

6.6 Difficulties encountered

6.6.1 Issues surrounding mental health

Most of the challenges encountered during the first six months of the project intervention surrounded mental health literacy. 'Mental health' is continually associated with 'mental illness', both in the health sector and the community. This proved difficult to change in the first six months.

During the second six months of intervention the difficulties surrounding the above issues seemed much less prevalent. Karen Ducat, Northam Over 60's Coordinator commented:

"I feel that people didn't respond in the first six months as it takes a while for the message to get out. But in the following six months there has been a difference and people are starting to get to know the message of act-belong-commit."

Towards the latter stages of the first twelve months the partnerships were well developed and people involved in the program understood the positive connotations of mental health. This was evident from observations in the community, interviews with key stakeholders and general community acceptability of the Campaign.

Engaging support with the Wheatbelt Mental Health Service also presented a challenge, particularly since the Wheatbelt Mental Health Service held the belief that Campaign funds should be spent on clinical services. The clinical objectives of the mental health service and the prevention focus of the Mentally Healthy WA Project were at different ends of the health continuum. Therefore, the mental health service did not see the Act-Belong-Commit Campaign as being relevant to them. This created a significant barrier to engaging with mental health service providers to work collaboratively on any aspect of the campaign. It became obvious, after numerous attempts to do so, that a collaborative partnership would not be achieved. However, Campaign material continued to be sent to this organisation via our email distribution list.

6.6.2 Combining three towns as one intervention site

Another challenge identified early in the intervention stage was combining the towns of Northam, York and Toodyay to comprise the intervention site. Previous assumptions had been made that the three towns would work together to support project activities. After liaising with stakeholders in each of the towns, it was apparent that a separate focus on each town would be necessary to increase ownership of the Campaign within each community.

In addition, all three towns had independent local newspapers and not all community members read the Avon Valley Advocate. This created difficulties with the media component of the Campaign, as limited funds were available to advertise in each newspaper. Therefore, the decision was made to advertise in the Avon Valley Advocate based in Northam, as this is where the largest population resided. Hence, the majority of advertisements were directed predominantly to the Northam community and consequently the quantitative evaluation of the Campaign also focused on the town of Northam. In addition to this advertising strategy, media releases were distributed to both the York

and Toodyay Community Newspapers in attempt to disseminate Campaign messages to these towns.

6.6.3 Ownership of co-branded events

At the twelve-month mark, some organisation representatives seemed hesitant to partner with Act-Belong-Commit. The main reason for this was that they did not want observers to attribute an activity or event they had organised as an initiative driven by the Act-Belong-Commit Campaign.

To address this issue, logo placement or branding of events was negotiated on a case by case basis. For example, some events were promoted as being “sponsored by Act-Belong-Commit” and others were promoted as being “supported by Act-Belong-Commit”. This allowed the community group or organisation to receive the most prominent brand placing to recognise that their organisation was the core body responsible for delivering the project, event or activity.

During the latter stages of the Campaign, organisations, groups and individuals seemed less concerned that the Act-Belong-Commit message was overpowering. People may have become used to the promotion of Act-Belong-Commit messages in the community and accepted the promotion more readily.

6.7 Facilitators

6.7.1 Readiness of the community

The most positive aspect of this Campaign was the readiness of the community to contribute to the Campaign. There have been several key stakeholders who have embraced the mentally healthy message and worked together to develop strategies to promote the message. The people working on the ground in the community have the skills, contacts and passion to develop strategies to increase participation in community life and successfully filter the mentally healthy message throughout the wider community.

In addition, there have been a diverse range of community groups and organisations involved in the project. Each partnership has opened new doors and provided new links to further filter the message and work cooperatively with the community to ensure the community takes ownership of the campaign.

“They love it. Especially the seniors—they look at it so positively and really get involved. Most people seem to know about the Campaign and love the concept.” Tracy Fuhrmann, Physical Activity Officer, Wheatbelt Public Health Unit, August 2006.

6.7.2 One full-time Project Officer

The Avon Valley intervention site was the only region participating in the pilot project that employed a full-time Project Officer to implement and evaluate the Campaign. Therefore the person implementing the strategies also evaluated them, which reduced the time invested in communicating Campaign history.

Northam was also one of the few sites that retained the same staff member throughout the entire pilot project. This improved continuity of the Campaign, maintained the momentum and enabled strong and diverse partnerships to be developed.

“I think we have been very fortunate to have one person doing the Campaign from the beginning so we had the continuity of staff. I’m not sure what would have happened if we had had a bigger staff turnover.” Regina Michel, Manager Avon & Central Primary Health Service, October 2007.

6.7.3 Healthway sponsorships

The provision of Act-Belong-Commit sponsorships from Healthway to regions participating in the pilot project provided a vehicle for engagement and assisted to raise awareness of the positive health message. Healthway sponsored twelve projects and events in Northam, York and Toodyay over the two-year pilot period totalling \$39,000 in funding enabling community groups to hold events and activities under the Act-Belong-Commit umbrella. Additionally, Healthway provided a further \$12,750 for Act-Belong-Commit signage and merchandise to support the sponsorships.

The local Act-Belong-Commit Project Officer built the capacity of community groups to attract funding and deliver community development activities by assisting in the sponsorship applications and supporting the implementation of the event and sponsorship plan. Sponsored organisations reported the Act-Belong-Commit message fit well with their art, recreational and community activities and provided meaningful participation opportunities for their members and wider community members.

6.7.4 Providing opportunities for meaningful participation

There has been a notable increase in the 'commitment' of members of Northam Over 60's to community activities during the latter stages of the Campaign and the Act-Belong-Commit/Over 60's partnership.

Members volunteered to assist with a variety of Act-Belong-Commit activities and events. For example, a group of ten Over 60's members volunteered to assist in the Aged Care Games. Duties consisted of judging activities, scoring, assisting carers as well as making and serving morning tea and lunch. In addition, Over 60's members have assisted with promotion of events such as the Community Walk and Active Ageing expo, by distributing the flyers by letterbox drop in the town of Northam. This increase in participation and 'commitment' results in increased physical activity levels, improved sense of self worth and satisfaction through community service, increased social networks and help to strengthen the partnerships between Northam Over 60's and the community.

6.7.5 Reorienting health services

The Mentally Healthy WA Campaign has a good profile within the health service. Regular promotion in the WA Country Health Service Health Promotion Newsletter, Population Health Newsletter and other internal channels provided staff with updates on project activities and raised awareness of the campaign messages. As a result of this collaboration, the Regional Director and Population Health Director were aware of the campaign and supported the Campaign by attending launches/forums/functions.

The Campaign created and strengthened links between the health service and the community. The Steering Committee particularly provided an opportunity for the managers of primary and public health to liaise with other managers in organisations such as the Department of Sport and Recreation, the Wheatbelt Development Commission, the local paper and CY O'Connor TAFE.

6.8 Lessons learned

7.8.1 Shifting perceptions of mental health away from mental illness

Shifting people's perception of mental health is an integral part of mental health promotion. It was evident through the early stages of this Campaign that both the health service and the community associated 'mental health' with mental illness. The Act-Belong-Commit Campaign in Northam, York and Toodyay has been successful in shifting these attitudes to be more positive.

This was achieved through using the words 'mentally healthy' and continually defining 'mental health' as a state of wellbeing. "Everyone has a state of mental health, and everyone can protect and promote their mental wellbeing," was a common phrase used to counteract associations of mental health with mental illness.

Mental health was often compared to physical health. To be physically healthy we eat healthy food, exercise, avoid smoking and limit alcohol consumption. Mental health can be framed from a similar perspective. That is, there are things we can and should do to promote mental health. Improving knowledge and understanding of positive mental health is an integral part of mental health promotion, and there is a need to improve mental health literacy.² The Act-Belong-Commit framework provides a call for action for individual and community mental health and successfully positions mental health to be more positive.

6.8.2 Building Effective Partnerships

Involvement of key community leaders was an integral part of this Campaign. Involvement of community leaders enabled the Campaign to capitalise on their endorsement, skills, networks and passion for the community throughout the development of delivery of various strategies.

The Project Officer invested many hours to attend community meetings, events and concerts associated with the Campaign. This enabled the Project Officer to develop a close rapport and

respected position within the community. The people in the groups respected the time and effort that was invested in their group, and were then more likely to support the Campaign and be receptive to Campaign messages. The time dedicated to developing these partnerships within the community was critical in establishing the foundations for a successful project.

Once partnerships were established, less time and resources were required to maintain the partnership. This enabled more partners to be identified, recruited and sustained. Trust and rapport were gradually built, and this enabled the Project Officer to work with new groups, organisations, and individuals to expand the Campaign.

6.8.3 Responding to community needs

Project Officers were given autonomy and flexibility in coordinating the Act-Belong-Commit Campaign in the regional sites. This was an imperative component of the structure of the Campaign. The success of the project can be attributed to the flexible and responsive nature of the Campaign coordination and the capacity to develop the project as per the needs of the community.

The community was consulted and engaged in all stages of planning, implementation and evaluation. The community forum and launch held at the commencement of the pilot project provided an opportunity to identify and engage key stakeholders, and ideas generated at the forum provided the basis for the two-year action plan. Community members and organisational representatives were able to identify local problems and plan local solutions. The community forum also provided the community with a sense of ownership, which enabled the successful development of partnerships and targeted strategies.

The local Steering Committee, and the one and two year celebratory functions, also provided the community with ownership over the Campaign.

Difficulties that arose throughout the Campaign such as the saturation of the Act-Belong-Commit message in the community and the reluctance of potential partners to work collaboratively with the Campaign because they did not want to lose ownership over an event, or associate their event as an activity driven by the Act-Belong-Commit Campaign, were overcome by talking with community people and organisation representatives and negotiating appropriate logo placement and sponsorship naming rights. The Project Officer was responsive and worked with the community to overcome these problems.

To successfully implement a community development project, the Project Officer must be flexible and responsive to community needs and work with the community to plan, implement and evaluate strategies. Health, education, employment, community and non-government organisations must work collaboratively to deliver mental health promotion.

6.9 Challenges for the Future

Future strategies that engage hard to reach groups such as Indigenous people, youth, and those not currently participating in community life may prove beneficial. In 2007, several strategies were implemented to engage Indigenous people. These strategies were effective in promoting participation and assisting with reconciliation between the traditional owners of the land and the Caucasian population. Culturally appropriate strategies could be developed to better suit the Indigenous population in Northam. The newly established Wheatbelt Aboriginal Health Service may provide an opportunity to reach Indigenous people and promote positive mental health amongst this target group.

Additionally there are many more opportunities to promote the Act-Belong-Commit message to youth. Events such as the Bring It On Youth Rock Concert, the 'Have A Go' Day at York District High School, and the Northam Recreation Centre Circus Program positively impacted youth through building self-esteem, leadership and providing active opportunities for community involvement. The partnership with Act-Belong-Commit and local primary and high schools could be developed further to assist the reach of this message to youth.

Some of the major partners of the Act-Belong-Commit Pilot Project in Northam, York and Toodyay have received much assistance in event planning, grant writing, implementation and support of events, activities and projects. Future effort needs to be invested to ensure the capacity of groups and organisation is built and skills are transferred to achieve sustainable outcomes.

6.10 Conclusion

The Act-Belong-Commit Campaign in Northam has been successful in raising awareness of strategies to protect and promote mental health and shift attitudes towards mental health to encompass wellbeing. Project strategies encouraged people to take action to improve their mental health and wellbeing through being active, physically, socially and cognitively; connecting with their community, having good social networks; and providing meaningful opportunities for community involvement. A range of local community groups and organisations have partnered with the Campaign to promote positive mental health. This resulted in mental health being put on the agenda in non-health settings such as senior social groups, recreation centres and arts societies. The Northam community has ownership of the Act-Belong-Commit Campaign and is committed to sustaining the Campaign past the pilot phase.

"I think the strategies have worked, there is a positive buzz in the air... and I think it is because of the Campaign." Steering Committee Member, November 2006.

"I honestly believe I have seen more people walking; more people participating in community activities, and the mood of the community improve...People have taken more of a responsibility to get out there and be active." Steering Committee Member, November 2006.



Members of the Northam Over 60's Group at a Healthway Sponsored Event, October 2006.

6.11 References

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