



Community Partnering Project

4.COMMUNITY RESEARCHERS

Cameron, J and Gibson, K (2001) *Shifting Focus: Alternative Pathways for Communities and Economies, A Resource Kit* [On line] Available at <http://www.communityeconomies.org/training>



COMMUNITY RESEARCHERS

Introduction

Community researchers are a central element of the Community Partnering process. They are the key to building successful relationships with people who are marginalised, isolated or disadvantaged.

Community researchers will share the experiences and backgrounds of the people that are the focus of a project. Thus a retrenched worker is the ideal community researcher to initially work with other retrenched workers; an unemployed young person will quickly develop a rapport with other unemployed young people; single parents will be able to identify with a community researcher who is also a single parent.

The longer term objective is that people with diverse experiences and backgrounds come together to build community initiatives, but in the first instance community researchers play an indispensable role in making connections with those who are isolated and marginalised.

Community researchers will have a commitment to contributing to their communities and life skills that include:

- An ability to communicate with people
- An interest in working with different groups of people
- Good listening skills
- An ability to think creatively
- An ability to work as part of a team
- An interest in learning new skills.

Community researchers may not have the professional training or educational background of other members of the project team (like community or economic development workers, or social planners). But without community researchers the project team will face an uphill battle to gain the trust of people in the community.

A sample position description for a community researcher is provided in Appendix 1.

When planning for the involvement of community researchers it is important to know about gatekeepers. Gatekeepers may be activists or community workers who claim to speak on behalf of marginalised and disadvantaged groups. Gatekeepers have interests and allegiances that are already well defined. They have established networks and modes of operating. They will frequently have preconceived ideas about other people's abilities and capacities. Indeed sometimes they act on behalf of disadvantaged groups because they believe these groups need their help. Gatekeepers have public reputations that may rightly or wrongly prejudice perceptions of a project.

Community researchers, on the other hand, will not be actively or publicly aligned or associated with stakeholder groups or interest groups in a community. They will be able to build relationships without being hampered by the pre-conceived ideas or expectations of others.

Community researchers may need to work through gatekeepers, but they will not be gatekeepers.

This section of the resource kit discusses strategies for recruiting and training community researchers. The training is focused on the guiding ideas (discussed in Section Two on pages 5 to 27). Although the training is presented as a series of one-off activities, it is important for the project team to revisit the training and guiding ideas at different times throughout a Community Partnering process.

Recruiting Community Researchers

Objective

To recruit community researchers with first-hand experiences of marginalisation and disadvantage.

Key Tasks

1. Recruit community researchers.

Tools and Tips

The recruiting process is a search for people who share the experiences and backgrounds of those who are the focus of a Community Partnering project. Potential community researchers may underestimate their skills and abilities. There are at least two strategies that can be used to find community researchers:

1. Placing a carefully worded job advertisement in the local paper. An example of a job ad is on page 42, along with the reflections of some community researchers on the ad.
2. Networking with agencies and groups that are likely to have contact with people from the target groups.

Time

1-2 months (approximately).

Outcome

A project team that includes community researchers.

Community researchers will have first hand experience of disadvantage

Sample Only

Job Advertisement for Community Researchers

COMMUNITY PARTNERING PROJECT

Have you been hard hit by economic change in the Latrobe Valley and found it difficult to get a job?

We are looking for three people who are familiar with this experience and who are willing to talk to others such as retrenched workers, unemployed youth, and single parents.

Applicants will need to have lots of enthusiasm, be motivated and interested in working with people from many different groups in our community.

The successful applicants will be employed by Monash University but will be based at the La Trobe Shire Council. A current Victorian driver's licence is required.

Each position is for 21 hours/week for a period of 35 weeks.

Community Researchers Reflect on the Job Ad

Yvonne: I was getting really frustrated because I couldn't get any work . . . and I said to a friend "Why can't someone just make use of what I know. I've experienced these different things and wouldn't it be great if someone just wanted to know about that stuff.." So then there was this ad in the paper that said "Have you experienced these sorts of areas – single parenting, retrenched workers and unemployed youth". And I'd pretty much done all of that. That was amazing.

Jenny: And you thought this is the job for me!

Yvonne: Well, actually I'd got to the stage where I'd almost given up applying for jobs because I wasn't getting anywhere. But I stuck it on the fridge and looked at it for a nearly week . . . because I didn't want another knock-back.

Steve: I read it out to the wife and she said "You'll never get a job like that, don't bother putting in for it." And I thought "I'm going to put in for it". So I did. Basically it was the challenge of it.

Jenny: So why didn't she think you'd get it?

Steve: It was so different to what I'd done 90 per cent of my working life – a blue collar worker to a white collar worker. But I'd got the experience the advertisement was asking for. I'd experienced despair, anger, all those feelings and frustrations.

Training Community Researchers: Community

Objective

To introduce community researchers to the idea of people's differences and similarities (see pages 15 to 17).

Key Activities

1. Conduct an introductory activity such as the one on page 44 that introduces all the members of the project team and highlights their differences.
2. Conduct an introductory activity such as the one on page 45 that highlights the similarities between people on the project team.

Tools and Tips

See 'Key Discussion Points' on pages 44 and 45.

Time

½ day (approximately).

Outcome

Community researchers with an appreciation of the similarities and differences between people.

Acknowledging
differences and
finding common
ground

Sample Only

People's Differences

Activity

1. All members of the project team put a different coloured sticker on their collars.
2. All write a response to the following questions on three separate sheets of paper:
 - Something interesting I did on the weekend.
 - Something interesting I've done at work.
 - Something I did as a child that relates to this project.
3. Stick the sheets around the wall.
4. Give each person a set of coloured stickers
5. Working individually each person puts on each response sheet the coloured sticker that corresponds to the person they think wrote it.
6. When everyone has finished going through the sheets, find out who wrote each response, and ask each person to expand on their responses.

Key Discussion Points

- We have all learned something new about each other.
- Our project is like this exercise because it is based on learning new things about people – their interests, experiences, skills and so on.
- We can never assume we know what somebody's abilities and interests are, because people will constantly surprise us.

Responses from one project team

Something interesting I did on the weekend

- This weekend I learnt how to change the oil and spark plugs in my car.
- Marched in the Moomba Parade playing a trumpet.
- Went on a fun walk and spent most of the five kilometres chasing a 75 year old grandmother!

Something interesting I've done in my work

- Worked on Thursday Island in the Torres Strait.
- Driven an overhead crane and removed a generator rotor weighing 100+ tonnes, worth approximately \$100 million.
- I once dropped a raw egg in my cash drawer and spent the next 20 minutes frantically trying to clean the goo off the money.

Something I did as a child that relates to this project

- I fell asleep in the pot cupboard and my mother was out with the police searching the streets for me. Perhaps this project is symbolic of me emerging from the pot cupboard!!!
- Worked in a school project building gardens, rockeries etc.. We all had a lot of fun and gained a lot of experience.
- I was a great goal attack in my primary school netball team—"Sneakers". This relates to working as part of a team as I will be doing in this project.

Sample Only

People's Similarities

Activity

Go around the group and ask each person to talk about why they are interested in working on the project.

Key Discussion Points

- Despite the sorts of differences that we have, like differences in age, hobbies, background, work experience and family situation, we all share a common interest in working with people and a concern for the well-being of our community.
- We all bring something unique and different to the project, but we also bring a common interest and concern for people.
- Sometimes in the project it will be important to draw upon different perspectives and experiences (of each other and the people we meet). At other times we will be building on common concerns.

Some of the responses from one project team

“I'd been working in this job for years and I was so miserable because of all the pressures. You used to be able to chat with people when they came in and really look after them, but now there were all these pressures to sell products. You had to fill out forms to say how many customers you had asked about retirement planning or whatever the product was for the month, and it was ridiculous because most people we saw were on pensions and benefits. And you could see the services were changing and the people who were worst affected were people on pensions and benefits. So I left. And I knew I just wanted to work with people. And I thought that this job was an opportunity to work with people and really do something worthwhile.”

“I thought this job would be a bit different. I've never done anything like this before in my life, I've always had blue collar jobs. And I think that if I can just help one person then I will have achieved something.”

“I can see so much potential in our community, but I look at the sorts of measures that are being introduced and I'm not confident that they will produce worthwhile outcomes in the long term. So rather than focussing on trying to attract big business and industry and investment from outside the region I think that much more emphasis could be placed on trying to work with the things that we already have, starting with people's interests and skills, and starting with the ideas that people have got for things they want to be doing.”

Introducing
action
research

Training Community Researchers: Research

Objective

To introduce community researchers to action research (see pages 18 to 19).

Key Activities

1. Using a whiteboard brainstorm images, words and ideas associated with research. Good prompts to use are:
 - What is research?
 - Who does it?
 - What tools do researchers use?
 - Why is research done?
2. Highlight how this is a traditional model of research in which experts are the researchers, and other people are the researched.
3. Introduce the action research model.
4. Construct images of the two different models of research and discuss their differences

Tools and Tips

An example of the two models of research is provided on pages 47 to 48.

Key points to make during this training activity are:

- This project uses an action research model in which we all participate as experts with our own specialist knowledge and insights.
- We will also learn from each other and together build up a shared knowledge.
- But we will go one step further than just learning new things, we will be using our specialist knowledge and our shared knowledge as the basis for building new activities, actions and realities.

Time

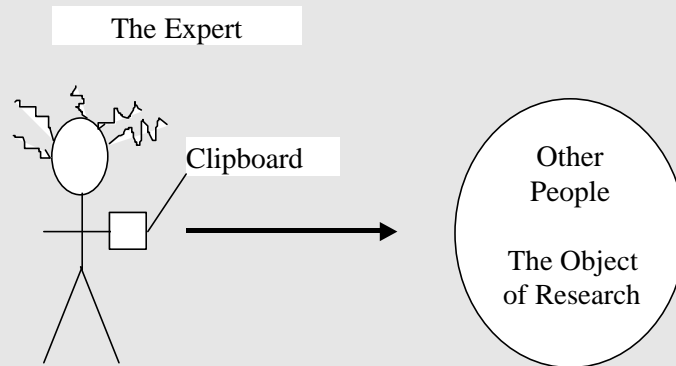
½ day (approximately).

Outcome

Community researchers with an appreciation of an action model of research.

Example of one brainstorm about research

What is research?	[gathering information finding out answering questions investigating existing systems finding answers “the truth is out there”
Who does it?	[mad scientists nutty professors dusty labs, cloistered away, ivory towers
What are the tools?	[other people statistics hypotheses methodology data control groups
Why is it done?	[government policy-makers other experts



Sample Only

Example of one diagram about action research

What is action research?

creating new realities
producing actions
process of interaction
collaborations
conversations between people
changing the world

Who does it?

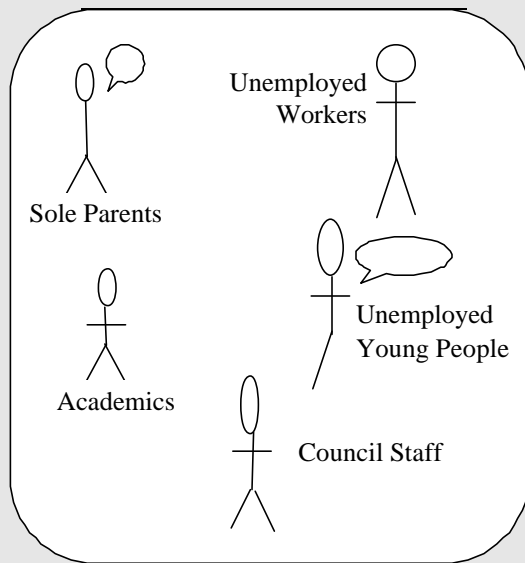
unemployed people
sole parents
academics
council staff

What are the tools?

listening
talking
conversations

Why is it done?

to make things happen
to change things



Everyone involved is an “expert”.
Everyone talks, listens and learns from each other.

Training Community Researchers: Portrayals

Objective

To introduce community researchers to needs-based and asset-based portrayals of the community (see pages 8 to 10).

What aspects
of the
community are
thought about
in terms of
needs or
problems?

Key Activities

1. Working as a team, brainstorm the needs and problems in the community. Write all the needs and problems on a blackboard or whiteboard.
2. Brainstorm all the assets or positive things about the community. Write these on the blackboard or whiteboard.
3. Working as a team sort the needs and assets into categories (e.g. people, physical environment, groups, associations).
4. Use the categories to construct a needs map and assets map.
5. Discuss the differences between the two maps.
6. As a team discuss the work of John Kretzmann and John McKnight (see pages 8 to 10). Chapter One of *Building Communities From the Inside Out* can be downloaded from <http://www.nwu.edu/IPR/publications/buildingblurb.html>. Other materials can be purchased (see <http://www.nwu.edu/IPR/abcd.html>)

What aspects
are seen as
resources or
assets?

Tools and Tips

A needs-based and assets-based portrayal are on pages 50 and 51.

Key points to make during this training activity are:

- The needs and assets maps are two different ways of thinking about and portraying our community.
- This project is based on the assets map. It involves finding out more about the assets in our community and using these assets as the basis for new community projects.

Time

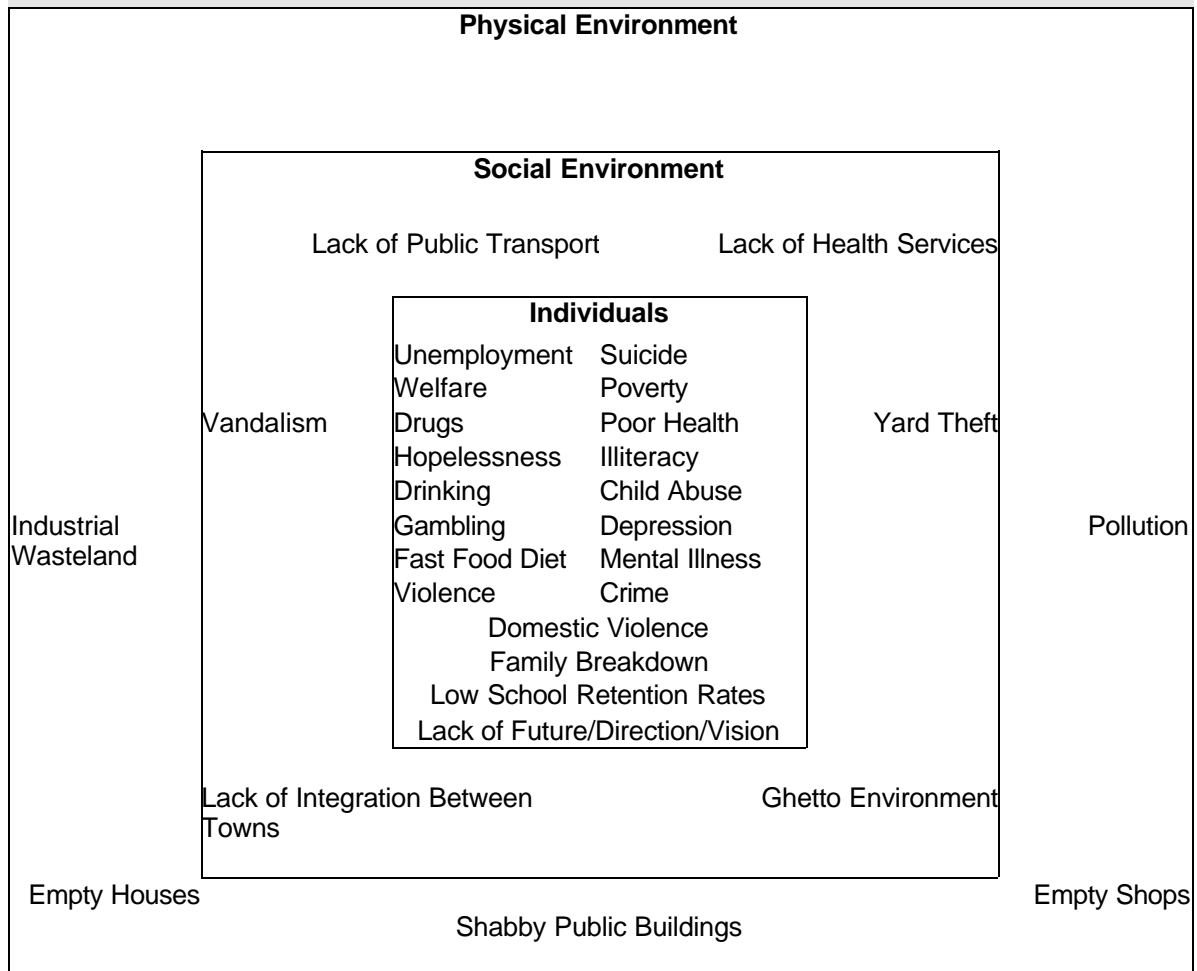
½ day (approximately).

Outcome

Community Researchers with an appreciation of the distinction between needs-based and assets-based portrayals.

Sample Only

Example of a needs based portrayal

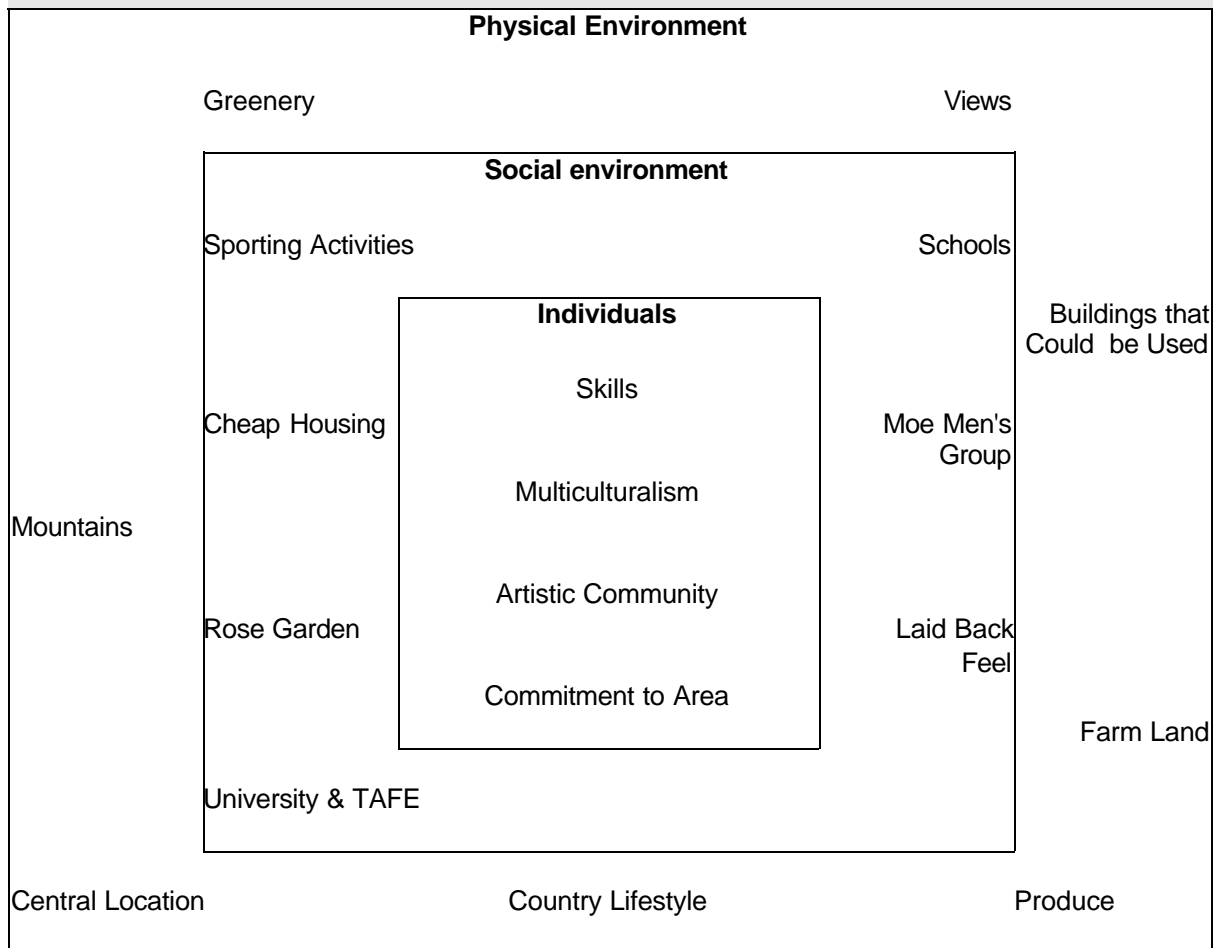


Key discussion points about this needs-based portrayal were:

- The needs and problems of individuals seem to far outnumber other needs and problems.

Sample Only

Example of an assets based portrayal



Key discussion points about this assets based portrayal were:

- The towns and physical environment are seen as the assets.
- Individuals are far more readily thought about in terms of needs and problems than assets or resources.

The project will find out more about the assets and resources of the community, starting with individuals.

Training Community Researchers: Economy

Objective

To introduce community researchers to an understanding of the economy as including unpaid work and non-market transactions (see pages 11 to 14).

Key Activities

1. Introduce and discuss the diagram of the visible and hidden economy (page 53).
2. Each person writes down a list of all the activities they do in a typical day, include all paid and unpaid activities.
3. Working as a team, sort the activities into those that belong in the visible part of the economy and those that belong in the hidden part of the economy.

Tools and Tips

Follow this activity up with visits to alternative economic enterprises in your local area, or have a look at some alternative economic projects on the internet (see pages 20 to 27)

Time

½ day (approximately).

Outcome

Community researchers with an appreciation of the range of economic activities and practices.

Introducing
the hidden
economy.