

Community projects

New partnerships: promoting development in outback towns through voluntary programs for Grey Nomads

Funded by ARC grant, Professor Leonard and Professor Jenny Onyx, University of Technology, Sydney, in partnership with Volunteering Australia, undertook research towards developing the mutually beneficial relationships between grey nomads and the isolated rural communities they visit.

Researchers tracked the movements and interests of grey nomads through surveys and through Volunteering Australia's rural networks. Town meetings in each area were held to draw out each town's concerns and priorities. Researchers also approached caravan park owners, motor vehicle repairers and tourist attraction operators for their opinions. With the aid of this information, volunteer programs relevant to each area were then developed by working parties.

Researchers re-visit the towns a year down the track to assess the volunteer programs and to document changes to the economic, human and social capital in the towns. The research will create opportunities for rural development and will provide an avenue to encourage productive ageing in the grey nomad population.

Finding a common language for the corporate and community sectors

Working closely with the Westpac Foundation (itself a corporate philanthropist), Western Sydney Community Forum (a community group) and several other corporate and community organisations, Associate Professor Darcy, Dr Debra Keenahan from the School of Social Science and Dr Maria Varua from the School of Economics and Finance are exploring and developing a common language for communication between corporate philanthropic organisations and community welfare groups.

'Corporate philanthropy and sponsorship are increasing as sources of funding for small community welfare organisations in Australia', says Associate Professor Michael Darcy from Social Justice Social Change Research Centre, UWS. However, business and community organisations have trouble understanding one another and integrating approaches when it comes to organisational form, planning, evaluation and accountability. Too often, small non-profits are forced to compromise essential elements of their culture to meet the expectations of corporate sponsors.

The research team will employ the tools of social science and economics to advance the understanding of the corporate-community relationship. This will be done through an action research approach, with focus groups and case studies to identify commonalities and barriers to successful development of these relationships and explore the implications of the relationship for civil society and social capital.

The project will result in the development of an integrated planning and evaluation methodology and tools tailored to community projects supported by business. This will aid in strengthening mutually beneficial cooperation between community organisations and their corporate funders.

Assistive Technology in Australia: economic analyses from a user standpoint - methodological implications

Given Australia's ageing population, the number of people with impairments who require Assistive Technology (AT) will increase significantly and with this, the need for affordable AT systems.

AT devices enable people with moderate to severe impairments to engage in paid employment or avoid entering residential care. Despite significant costs, AT can also provide significant economic benefits that need to be evaluated against all the costs involved.

Dr Ingrid Schraner, School of Economics and Finance and Social Justice and Social Change Research Centre is working in partnership with the Independent Living Centre NSW to investigate the costs and benefits of Assistive Technology for people with disabilities and for the growing numbers of older people from the standpoint of users. Personal accounts of those who use AT systems as well as the experiences of those prescribing and selecting AT devices and of those researching and developing AT for Australian conditions will be sought.

The project will lay the ground work for the development of new strategies to make AT more accessible, more appropriate for Australian conditions, and more affordable for more users.

Bringing our dying home: creating community at end of life

For 28 years, HOME Hospice and Cancer Council NSW have supported care for the dying at home by enabling community and local network development. Supporting and enabling carers in this regard has significant economic benefits and alleviates pressure significantly from health services. The extended family and social support which has been strongly linked with enabling death at home in recent research could also provide potential community benefits.

With limited knowledge around community network perspective and end of life care, there is obviously an urgent need to examine community based approaches to end-of-life care and to explore if and how partner work in caring for the dying contributes to the development of social capital.

In partnership with HOME Hospice and Cancer Council NSW, Dr Debbie Horsfall and Associate Professor Rosemary Leonard of the Social Justice and Social Change Research Centre, UWS, and Ms Kerrie Noonan of HOME Hospice will use photovoice, network analysis and focus groups, to explore if and how, being involved in caring for someone dying at home impacts family, friends and the wider community and to what degree.

Dissemination of the results of this work nationally and internationally will impact future care for people at the end of life.

Mental illness and co-occurring substance abuse

Recent research suggests that co-occurring substance abuse and mental health issues are common and yet under-recognised in young people.

For over 10 years the Richmond Foundation NSW Young People's Program has provided a unique program, offering accommodation and high-level support, to young people aged 17-25 with co-occurring mental health and drug/alcohol issues. The program has a proven track record in working well with the complex and challenging needs of the client group, and in achieving successful outcomes and recovery. These achievements have occurred in the context of a close and collaborative working relationship with local mental health services.

Dr Natalie Bolzan, of the Social Justice and Social Change Research Centre and Ms Sharyn McGee of the School of Social Sciences, in partnership with the Richmond Foundation, are conducting case-based research for the total client population (approximately 150) throughout the 10 years of continuous service delivery of the Program, to identify what it is exactly about the program that works so well, and why.

The findings will be used to further improve the program and will also be shared throughout the sector, with the aim of improving early intervention strategies, recovery focussed interventions and future service and workforce planning for these young people and their communities.