



SIP Leadership Training



Why are we doing this?

It is important for us to place residents from marginalised backgrounds right at the centre of SIP's governance and activities to achieve a project that is truly responsive and inclusive.

Past experience has taught us that these residents need to be properly trained and supported to participate confidently in the public arena, especially the SIP committee. Residents can often feel overawed being in the same room as government officials and service providers.

We wanted to provide a course that boosted their confidence in contributing their ideas and promote a sense of belonging and entitlement by being surrounded by peers. There was also a longer term aim to train this group as community researchers to gather information about what social inclusion really means on a practical level from their networks to feed into the aims, values and activities of SIP.

Who were we targeting?

We targeted residents from marginalised backgrounds who were at a stage of readiness in terms of wanting to contribute to the community. They were interested in learning new skills and ready to take up challenges such as becoming a community researcher.

Some of our participants were already leaders in the indigenous community or involved as volunteers in local organisations. Many were ready to take a step up into paid employment but just hadn't had the right opportunity.

How did we find them?

All of our participants except for one, who self referred, were recommended by local services or known to Robyn through our starter SIP activities such as the Jackson St Mural or Local Drug Strategy projects. We put the word out through our networks and Community Connections, Inner South Community Health Service referred many of our participants. This was a great help to the success of the project as not only did many of the participants have extra support, the case worker was also able to let the trainer know if there were any concerns that could be addressed subtly behind the scenes.

Who else was involved?

We were initially approached by a South Melbourne Toastmaster's member Kathie Wachsmuth who needed to run a community based course in order to progress through their ranks. After discussions with Kathie, it seemed the curriculum of the Youth Leadership course with its emphasis on public speaking and meeting participation was the best fit. We decided that it should be incorporated with personal skill development such as conflict management and communication skills which Gabby Skelsy from RhED delivered for the first two weeks. It was important to lay the foundation and expectations for professional behaviour from the start. In the second week of delivering the Toastmaster's course, the trainer became sick and Robyn Szechtman and Peter Streker took over the training, continuing to use the Toastmaster's framework. Sarah Rose from Good Shepherd also participated in the course to act as extra support to both the participants and the trainers.

What we did

Originally we contacted 14 people about the course and 12 people attended, with 11 graduating. The emphasis of the eight week course was on participants understanding their personal communication style, learning how to write a presentation, public speaking, contributing respectfully to a

meeting and impromptu speaking. The course aimed to improve people's overall confidence and ability to advocate for themselves and others. Guests were invited to the final session where participants presented a 3 minute speech and the Mayor handed out certifications of completion.



What we found

Only one person did not fully complete the course due to personal circumstances but has since returned to participate in the Community Research Course. We evaluated people's experience of the course through a questionnaire. Everyone reported that they were very satisfied with the course and that it had improved their confidence and communication skills. (See appendix for individual comments)

As trainers, we observed people's interpersonal skills and speeches improving each week. Most presentations were of a personal nature. The standard was high with a mix of poignancy and humour in their stories that broke down barriers as people learnt more about each other. As a result, the group became closer and more supportive of each other, even when their points of view differed.

What others can learn from our work

Getting the right mix of trainers and participants is crucial. It is important that the trainers really understand the issues and culture of the group and have the flexibility to deal with unforeseen circumstances and at times challenging behaviours when they arise.

The Toastmasters model worked well overall, but was a little too formal in its original structure. While the departure of the original Toastmaster trainer caused us some anxiety, we were able to follow the original format with some amendments. These were to make it less formal and to increase the number of group discussions with a focus on different aspects of social inclusion. The idea was to increase people's confidence about this topic in readiness for the steering committee discussions they would be involved in at a later date.

The most conflict in the course occurred during the group discussions and this was handled by individual discussions behind the scenes. It was very useful to be able to refer back to notes on communication and body language when addressing problems. Having strong relationships with referring

workers who could provide casual feedback about their client's feedback was very helpful and provided great support to the trainers.

Only accepting participants who are known personally or referred through agency workers helps the success of the training. They need to be motivated by contribution to community and improving their lives rather than earning money.

What happens next?

Since the leadership group have graduated, nine participants have elected to become involved in the SIP Steering Group and have shown great commitment to the project overall. This is where the success of the course has really been demonstrated as they all actively contribute to and form the core of this committee. Residents from marginalised backgrounds need training and time in order to gain the necessary confidence and sense of efficacy to create a truly inclusive governance structure.

Ten members of the original group have gone on to complete a four week Research Training Course and will start collecting information from the community in the next few months.



Appendix

In your view the most valuable part of the training was:

- The opportunity to practice speaking in public
- Talking on the spot – answering or giving opinions on unprepared questions
- Training and working with people from all walks of life and seeing the improvement in their lives
- Participating
- Learning how to plan a talk
- Interacting with the group and being aware of how groups form, develop and grow
- Public speaking of own ideas was a beautiful twist
- Realizing there might be a future for us
- Different views in group from community
- Increased confidence in public speaking
- Being part of a group who were all developing personally and had really insightful stories to share.
- Practising public speaking.
- Increased communication skills

The training could have been improved by:

- I think the training was excellent and doesn't need improving
- Don't think it could have been better
- Run more and increase community involvement
- Could have benefited from training in minute taking
- More training around governance

Any other comments:

- It was great to see people of different confident levels all given a chance, as well as people who find speaking a little easier.
- Very enjoyable
- Have younger people
- Loved it – great to meet others from the community
- Thank you for the opportunity and for the way I was approached by Robyn. Invaluable skills learnt that I can confidently put into day to day practice. Thanks for helping me grow into a better mate