



Health Outcomes International Pty Ltd
HEALTH, COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT CONSULTANTS

DRUG FREE AUSTRALIA LTD
COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE
EVALUATION REPORT

FINAL

MAY 2009

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BACKGROUND

1.1 THE DFA COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE

The Drug Free Australia Limited (DFA) Community Partnership Initiative was a project which sought to deliver an anti-drug message to key stakeholders and the Australian community. The project was funded by the Department of Health and Ageing (DoHA), and initially had a three-year timeframe ending in June 2008. However, due to a delay in the initial funding allocation, this was extended to 30 April 2009.

The project's main focus was on issues related to illicit drugs and how they relate to young people. While the project concentrated on the prevention and elimination of illicit drugs in Australia, it also addressed issues relating to legal drugs and alcohol abuse when they impact either directly or indirectly within the project's scope.

The primary target group for the project was young people, but also included other individuals and groups in the community who interact with young people in their social environments.

The project's implementation strategy operated within the framework of a 10-point Implementation Plan. This Plan formed the basis of the preliminary and subsequent progress reports provided by DFA to DoHA under the conditions of their funding contract.

1.2 THE EVALUATION

As part of the funding agreement with the Department of Health and Ageing (DoHA), DFA engaged Health Outcomes International (HOI) to undertake an independent evaluation of its activities against its Implementation Plan. The evaluation is a process evaluation, and examines and comments on the processes and activities undertaken by DFA over each reporting period relative to the Implementation Plan, having regard to the stage of development and maturity of DFA as an entity and its program. It should be noted that the evaluation does not extend to an evaluation of the content of the program per se and its relative merits, but rather examines whether or not DFA has done what it said it would do, and the relative effectiveness of its activities in pursuing its aims and objectives.

1.3 SOURCE DOCUMENTATION

This report presents the evaluator's comments on the activities of DFA as presented in its Final Report to DoHA, dated April 2009, its associated Attachments and Addendum materials. It should be noted that there has been no external review or validation of the contents of these documents, and their contents have been accepted as being factual.

This is the final evaluation report, the previous reports being submitted in January 2008 and January 2009 based on materials provided in Progress Reports 2 and 4 by DFA. This final report covers the full period of the project, consistent with DFA's Final Report.

FINDINGS

The following comments are offered in regard to each of the 10 points that comprised DFA's Implementation Plan.

2.1 POINT 1: ESTABLISH A NATIONAL DATABASE OF ORGANISATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS COMMITTED TO THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT'S ANTI-DRUG POLICY.

Throughout its operation, DFA was active in first establishing, then extending, its organisational infrastructure and network of affiliates (both at individual and corporate levels) within Australia and overseas. Examples of their activities in this area include:

- Appointment of a 10 member Board, with representation from all Australian States and Territories;
- Establishment of a Secretariat supporting the activities of DFA;
- Preparation and presentation of Annual Financial Reports to DoHA;
- Appointment of Dr Margaret Court, AO MBE, as Patron in March 2007;
- Appointment of 16 Australian Fellows in Australia and 10 International Fellows as at 30 April 2009 who acted as advisors in their respective fields of health, education and alcohol and other drugs;
- Appointment of 8 Youth Advisors who provided advice and perspectives on health and drugs representative of the 14-25 year age group;
- Establishment of affiliates in Australia and overseas, with approximately 75 organisations having established reciprocal website links;
- Establishment of a Harm Prevention Supporter Group;
- The establishment of Community Communication Networks (pilot); and
- An invitation from two international groups (the International Task Force on Strategic Drug Policy and the World Forum Against Drugs) to become part of their Harm Prevention organisations; and

In combination, DFA claims a membership base of approximately 13,000 individuals and organisations. The 126 organisations included in this membership represent some 212,000 people. On this basis, DFA claims to have direct links with families and individuals representing 220,000 people.

It is clear that DFA's efforts have been effective in extending its organisational and networking capacity to reach a wide audience. Of particular note is the establishment of contacts and affiliates at the local, national and international levels with whom both formal and informal relationships have been established.

2.2 POINT 2: TO COMMUNICATE WITH THESE ORGANISATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS ON A REGULAR BASIS THROUGH ONLINE AND PRINTED PUBLICATIONS; TO MOBILISE THEM WHEN THERE IS MEDIA DEBATE REGARDING DRUGS ISSUES.

The communication strategy implemented by DFA comprised a number of elements, such as:

- A weekly communiqué to Board members;
- Website development (see www.drugfree.org.au);
- Media releases;
- The appointment of Media Monitors to monitor broadcast and media releases;
- Four quarterly newsletters, with distribution increasing from 4,000 recipients in 2007 to 8,000 in 2008, with further access available via the DFA website;
- Weekly e-zines to members;
- Correspondence to potential supporter groups and individuals;
- Presentations to community groups, schools and sporting groups;
- Presentations at national and international conferences;
- Sharing of information and media releases with international affiliates;
- Meetings with international consortia to share common policy and strategy; and
- Submissions to various reviews and inquiries.

A number of examples of these activities are presented in the attachments to the DFA Final Report. The various communication approaches have been both proactive (e.g. the quarterly newsletters and media placements) and reactive (e.g. presentations to various groups) in nature. Processes within the communication strategy were developed to ensure that DFA was able to provide a timely response to issues as they emerged, and media coverage of the DFA perspective on issues increased over the life of the project.

The combination of communication methods has enabled DFA to communicate its message to a wide audience at a range of levels. The increased coverage via radio, television and print media of DFA's perspectives increased over the life of the project, illustrating the rising profile of the organisation.

2.3 POINT 3: TO ESTABLISH AND MAINTAIN A DYNAMIC WEBSITE.

DFA established a website (www.drugfree.org.au) that is both appealing and informative in its design and content. The website hosts newsletters and information sheets, as well as linkages to other sites with which DFA has established reciprocal rights. Over 500 websites were reviewed for their compatibility with DFA's philosophy and objectives, and a further 312 drug and alcohol NGOs listed on the United Nations website. Currently, 77 sites have established formal reciprocal linkages. A research library is included on the DFA site, which may be accessed via password by DFA members. The library includes references to a range of research articles that are reflective of the DFA philosophy.

HOI has examined the data provided on access to the DFA website for the period 1 January 2009 to 30 April 2009 (similar data is also provided in Appendix 6 to the DFA Final Report), and found:

- There were 5,780 visits by 4,708 visitors;
- There were 12,464 page views, an average of 2.16 pages per visit;
- The average time spent on the site was 1.47 minutes;
- 74% of visits came from search engines, 20% were direct searches, and 6% came from referring sites; and

- 82% of visits were from Australia, 5% from the USA and 13% from other countries (especially the UK, New Zealand and Canada).

The average monthly visits to the site in this reporting period was 8% higher than in the previous 4 month reporting period of 1 March to 30 June 2008. However, when consideration is given to the fact that the most recent period includes the traditionally "quiet" month of January, the real rate of access is more likely to be higher. Interestingly, the proportion of visits that were direct searches rather than through search engines increased noticeably (up from 8% to 20%) indicating that visitors to the site were sufficiently familiar DFA to access it directly. The average number of pages viewed and the time spent on the site suggests that visitors to the site were more than casual browsers, and had an interest in its contents.

The data indicates that the website contributed to DFA's strategy to raise its profile, and to attract the attention of its target audience.

2.4 POINT 4: TO CONDUCT AND COORDINATE RESEARCH ACTIVITIES REGARDING DRUG ISSUES; PRODUCE APPROPRIATE PAPERS AND PUBLICATIONS REGARDING SAME.

DFA's Research Coordinator worked directly with DFA's 26 Research Fellows on research and publications. Priority areas for research were identified through discussions between the Coordinator and the Fellows, with publication processes determined by the Board.

The following publications are identified in the Final report as having been developed through research contributions by DFA Fellows:

- *The Kings Cross Injecting Room – a case for closure.*
- *DFA Policy Position paper for NSW State Politicians.*
- *Submission to the Commonwealth Parliamentary Inquiry into the Impact of Illicit Drugs on Families.*
- *Submission to NCETA for the ANCD research into Drug Detection in Schools.*
- *Progressive Reports into the Impacts of Federal and Northern Territory Government Interventions on Indigenous Communities in the NT.*
- Two papers published in the *Journal of Global Drug Policy and Practice*:
 - *When harm minimisation is not harm minimisation – Australia as a case study; and*
 - *Putting ethics in its place – right at the heart of drug policy debates.*
- A submission to the National NSP Strategic Framework, July 2008.
- A submission to the National Preventative Health Taskforce, January 2009.
- A research paper titled *Cannabis – suicide, schizophrenia and other ill effects.*

The list of publications and submissions cited above indicates that DFA has been particularly active in this area, and sought to contribute its views on topics of interest and concern in the field of illicit drugs in both the media and in public forums addressing these issues.

2.5 POINT 5: TO COORDINATE VISITS OF OVERSEAS DRUG EXPERTS FOR THE PURPOSE OF FACILITATING SEMINARS; INVOLVE LOCAL/NATIONAL EXPERTS IN REGULAR SEMINARS; ARRANGE ASSOCIATED MEDIA ACTIVITIES.

The main conference activity over the past four years was the first DFA International Conference held in Adelaide in April 2007. Seven international and 12 Australian speakers addressed the conference, which was attended by approximately 150 delegates from NGOs, political parties and the general community. Feedback from delegates to the Conference was very positive and supportive.

In February 2008, Trevor Grice (NZ author of *The Great Brain Robbery*) presented to two community forums in Sydney and also attracted media interest.

DFA's involvement in the International Task Force on Strategic Drug Policy provided greater opportunities to network with international specialists at regular intervals. Examples of such opportunities included participation by DFA representatives at conferences in Ecuador in June 2008, in Vienna in July 2008 and in Sweden in September 2008.

The DFA Executive Officer liaised with a number of community organisations, including Rotary, the RSL the Women's Federation for World Peace and the Universal Peace Federation. RSL State offices in NSW, Tasmania, SA/NT, Victoria and WA allowed DFA to address their State congresses.

DFA also commenced the first of its business seminars *Promoting Health and Wellbeing in the Workplace* in April 2009 in SA. Feedback provided by participants in a follow-up survey demonstrated a very high level of interest in, and satisfaction with, the session. Typical of the comments received was:

"Most informative and enlightening. Well presented, easy to understand and process."

A number of school communities in NSW, ACT and SA have also expressed interest or taken up DFA's Youth Leadership program which presented information to students and also aimed to train teachers to use the resources in their classrooms. A pre- and post- survey of participating students demonstrated that the session had a positive impact in regard to both their knowledge of and attitudes towards alcohol and other drugs. A letter of appreciation from one school at which 150 Year 9 students attended a DFA presentation on drugs stated:

"The information was extremely valuable and presented in a way that maintained the student's interest. It was an excellent way of educating students of this age group."

DFA reports that it is now in a position to arrange forums through sponsored support from a range of community-based organisations, and cites a number of examples where such forums have been held or are planned. In the main, these forums were managed by the DFA Directors in their respective State or Territory.

2.6 POINT 6: TO COORDINATE A NATIONAL MEDIA RESPONSE TO PRO-DRUG ACTIVISTS WHEN THEY ARE ACTIVE IN THE MEDIA.

The Executive Officer of DFA also had the role of Media Coordinator, with DFA spokespersons nominated according to their area of expertise. QA processes were established and the services of an external media/PR company engaged to assist in this activity. In 2008, this media assistance was sought on an "as needed" basis, as the media by then was contacting DFA directly for its comments and views on drug issues. DFA members have also been active in submitting to newspaper 'letters to the editor' columns.

DFA's patron (Dr Margaret Court) produced 15 community service announcements that were distributed in CD in all states and territories by their respective DFA Board members.

2.7 POINT 7: TO FACILITATE REGULAR MEDIA RELEASES TO ALL SUBURBAN AND METROPOLITAN MEDIA REGARDING LOCAL ANTI-DRUG ISSUES; KEEP LOCAL MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT FULLY INFORMED.

Monitoring of key trends in the drug debate was undertaken by the Executive Officer using Update and the ANCD e-mailed summaries. A "bank" of media releases was established to facilitate rapid responses to local issues, with a consistent message and philosophy conforming to DFA's underlying ethos. All DFA releases were placed on the website.

In 2008, DFA sought to be active in the international media, linking with overseas affiliates. A number of topics are identified in the Final Report which illustrate specific areas of interest.

Board members were responsible for establishing links with their local members of parliament. In 2007, a delegation of Board members presented evidence to the House of Representatives *Inquiry to the Impact of Illicit Drugs on Families*, and was cited in the report from the Inquiry. A response to the report was compiled by DFA, which received a high level of endorsement from its members. A letter was subsequently sent to the Prime Minister.

A delegation of DFA Board members met with NT politicians, indigenous elders and families representing a wide range of stakeholders affected by the NT Intervention legislation. The reports from this study have been previously referred to in Section 2.4 above.

Several other activities are identified in the Final Report that illustrate DFA's proactive role in engaging with politicians at both a local and national level to promote DFA's philosophy and perspective on key issues.

Each of these activities indicates that DFA has been effective in expanding its public profile, and in attracting both media and political attention to its activities and views.

2.8 POINT 8: AS REQUIRED, LIAISE WITH AND ASSIST GOVERNMENT AND OTHER GOVERNMENT AGENCIES REGARDING THE GOVERNMENT'S ANTI-DRUG MESSAGE AND OTHER ANTI-DRUG INITIATIVES.

DFA established links with other relevant agencies and officials, largely using its Board members' networks of contacts and those of its Fellows. Access to various reports and media releases were also used as a mechanism of information distribution.

Board members were provided with resources to disseminate to Government agencies when meeting with their representatives. Letters were sent to Federal politicians, particularly new Ministers, and a number of meetings were held with them and their advisors at different times over the past four years.

The first of a range of business seminars was piloted in April 2009, with the aim of assisting workplaces with their drug policy development.

The activities cited illustrate that DFA was proactive in engaging with politicians, Government agencies and other key stakeholder groups to transmit its message and engage in the drug debate.

2.9 POINT 9: PREPARE DOCUMENTATION AND SUBMISSIONS TO PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRIES.

Advocacy, project initiatives and submission writing was a significant activity for the duration of the project. As previously noted, DFA prepared a number of submissions to parliamentary inquiries. Other relevant activities of this nature cited in the Final Report include:

- A submission to NIDRI's research into Amphetamine-type Stimulants Strategy, with a face-to-face meeting attended by DFA in each capital city.
- DFA's Executive Officer was appointed as a member of the Australian National Council on Drugs.
- Two DFA nominations to the 2020 Summit.
- The AFL invited DFA to participate in a 'round table' to discuss proactive initiatives for football players to support a healthy career by developing a school/community program for players. Approaches were also made to other sporting bodies, including the Australian Cricket Board, about promoting drug-free role models.

- DFA participated in the United Nations NGO Survey (coordinated by the ANCD) and was accepted as a delegate at the VNGOC forum in Vienna.
- DFA joined the International Taskforce in Strategic Drug Policy and the Consortium of NGO's at the World Forum Against Drugs in Stockholm.
- In 2009, DFA representatives attended three of the National Preventative Health Taskforce focus groups (In Queensland, SA and WA). A written submission on the Discussion Paper was also provided to the Taskforce.

2.10 POINT 10: INFORM AND RESOURCE LOCAL MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT AS APPROPRIATE.

The Board of DFA and its Fellows have had considerable links and networks that they used to access local Members of Parliament, and developed resources they used to inform their discussions. DFA quarterly newsletters were provided to all parliamentarians as a matter of course.

A number of communications and meetings were held with local politicians in several States and Territories in which DFA informed politicians of its perspectives and views, and contributed to the debate on drug policy. Copies of the DFA Cannabis research paper is to be circulated to all politicians in May 2009.

2.11 SUMMARY.

The Final Report from DFA indicates that the organisation was effective in establishing its profile in the community in the debate on drug use in Australia. Significant progress was reported against all ten elements of its Implementation Plan. This was achieved through the establishment and operation of its corporate infrastructure and processes, and the development of a range of resources and media that facilitated the dissemination of its views and ideals. DFA has also been proactive in contacting Members of Parliament at State and national levels.

The networks and linkages established with a range of individuals and organisations capitalised on the profile of its Board members and its Fellows in Australia and overseas. In the past 12 months, DFA expanded its overseas network, and established both formal and informal links with a number of international entities sharing a common philosophy with DFA.

During this period, DFA became more active in providing information and conducting forums at a local level, as evidenced by a number of community-based forums, meetings in schools using its Youth Advisory Team, and the commencement of business seminars. These activities serve to illustrate DFA's efforts to engage with all sectors of the community.

The need to be able to respond rapidly to emerging issues in related fields was recognised and processes were established to facilitate this activity. Monitoring the use of its website indicates that there has been a consistent increase in the number of visits, including a noticeable level of overseas interest. The proportion of direct visits to the website indicates that people are aware of its DFA's existence.

All indicators provide evidence to support the conclusion that DFA has followed its 10 point Implementation Plan, and has been effective in establishing a profile at both local and national levels, enabling it to participate in and contribute to the drug policy debate.

In the course of its work in the drug and alcohol field, HOI has had occasion to meet with many workers in this field at a range of levels. Whilst the large majority of those in the field were aware of DFA, it is fair to say that not all agreed with the stance taken by DFA on some issues. Nevertheless, despite this opposition, DFA has been effective in establishing its position in many areas, and in communicating that position to a wide audience. In this regard, it should be seen as having provided a voice at the community level encouraging further change necessary to curb illicit drug use, an essential primary health prevention measure. It has also contributed to the debate on illicit drugs in Australia, and brought another perspective and focus to that debate.