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TOPIC: Social Inclusion; Community Perspectives
INTRODUCTION

City of Onkaparinga is a southern, metropolitan Local Government Area of South Australia where I am currently employed in the capacity of Community Development Officer, Neighbourhoods (0.7 FTE). This Local Government Area is the largest in South Australia, covering 518 square kilometres, with a population of approximately 151 400 (www.onkaparingacity.com, 2003). Due to the large geographic area covered this Council has a varied demographic in all aspects, including household occupancy, property values, income levels and education levels. There are sections of this community that are, however, widely recognised as being among the most disadvantaged in metropolitan Adelaide. This is evidenced by the fact that this Local Government Area has the highest level of gaming machine revenue in the State and that 30% of residents are receiving some form of income support through Centrelink (www.onkaparingacity.com, 2003).

The Neighbourhood Development Program is funded through the South Australian Government’s Department of Human Services and City of Onkaparinga and sits within the Community Development section of the City of Onkaparinga, supporting 2.3 (FTE) workers. The portfolio targets its programs and projects at supporting disadvantaged groups within this Council area using Community Development practices, rather than direct service provision. The Neighbourhood Development Program works in partnership with government and non-government service provision agencies, along with local community groups.

After the Australian Labour Party’s (ALP) victory at the last State election, that government established a “Social Inclusion Initiative” and began using language around this consistently. The South Australian ALP states;

“This is a different way of doing things. Instead of looking at the symptoms of problems we will examine the complex and interrelated causes of disadvantage and adopt a whole of government, and more importantly, a whole of community response.” (www.sa.alp.org.au/policy/community/social_inclusion June 2003)

This practicum topic came about through discussions with others, around what the Social Inclusion Initiative would mean for local communities. The communities the
Neighbourhood Development team works with are often talked about in respect to their ‘levels of disadvantage’ and have been the ‘target populations’ for government initiatives including Community Capacity Building, Social Capital Building and community leadership projects. Social Inclusion was a new form of language, that we felt was again being directed at these communities and we were interested in what sort of practical implications it might have and how these would be implemented.

We were also interested in how local community members viewed the concept of Social Inclusion, whether they had considered it at all and how this would match with the views being put forward by the State government. We were particularly interested in how local people view themselves within this concept, what they might like to be ‘included’ in and how they felt this could be achieved.

This paper discusses the approach being taken by the South Australian Social Inclusion Initiative. It will also explore the attitudes of a small group of community people who live in the Onkaparinga Council region, in relation to the concept of Social Inclusion, how they see themselves within that concept and what they feel it is important to consider when addressing this issue.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The term Social Exclusion originated from France and was being used there in the 1970’s and 1980’s by the French Socialist government. The concept emphasises weaknesses in infrastructure and highlights the risks associated with allowing a two-tiered society to develop, through default. The focus is on the ‘systemic’ problems, rather than problems with the individual (Luxton, 2000). This is an acknowledgement that exclusion can arise from dominant ideologies of a culture, including institutionalised racism and gendered role division (Jacobs, 2002).

A major problem is the lack of definition of the concept of Social Inclusion, and that the “…broad and vague definitions can render Social Exclusion useless.” (Farrington, 2002, pg 9). There also seems to be a tendency to, instead, offer definitions of Social Exclusion.
“Social Inclusion is the process by which efforts are made to ensure that everyone, regardless of their experiences and circumstances, can achieve their potential in life. To achieve inclusion, income and employment are necessary but not sufficient. An inclusive society is also characterised by a striving for reduced inequality, a balance between individual’s rights and duties and increased social cohesion.” (Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion, 2002).

“Social Exclusion is a shorthand label for what can happen when individuals or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems, such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environment, bad health and family breakdown.” (Social Exclusion Unit, 2003)

However, some of the dimensions identified with Social Exclusion include;

- Economic - unemployment and poverty.
- Social - family breakdown, teen pregnancies, homelessness, crime.
- Political - people’s ability to participate and influence outcomes.
- Neighbourhoods - environmental degradation, decaying housing and withdrawal of local services.
- Individual - all of the above can impact on the individual, along with physical and mental health, low self-esteem and low skill levels.
- Spatial - areas of disadvantage. This does not relate to the individuals themselves, but is a characteristic of the area.
- Group - those who differ from the dominant culture or because of their position within society. (Percy-Smith, 2000)

Social Exclusion looks at what was previously termed poverty, or inequality, and considers that problem to be more than a lack of income. It is an issue that is multi-dimensional and usually the disadvantages associated extend to numerous aspects of the individual’s life (Radio National, 2002).

The Centre for Economic & Social Inclusion (www.uuy.org.uk) states there are three models of discourse associated with Social Exclusion;
- Redistributionalist discourse. The emphasis is on income inequality, poverty reduction and “progressive universalism”.
- Moral underclass discourse. Poverty and exclusion are caused by the individual and their sub-culture.
- Social integrationist discourse. Equal participation, and access to opportunities, with the emphasis being on labour market participation.

The literature does raise some concerns around the concept of Social Inclusion in that it can be seen to challenge diversity. Hassam (1999) suggests, “Inclusion is about invisibility and the enjoyment of an ordinary life”, raising questions around who decides the parameters of “an ordinary life”? This statement also raises the possibility that to be included individuals need to conform to wider society’s norms and there is little space allowed for choices they may want to make that fall outside these norms. This could lead to the temptation to ensure people change their behaviours to ‘fit’ the rest of society that they are to be ‘included’ in and if they do not, they need to be somehow removed (Brown, 1999). An alternative to removal might be that of viewing those individuals as ‘deviant’ and needing to be treated as ‘problems’. One way of overcoming these issues could be to include the consumers of services, in the process of creating solutions to their problems.

There are also difficulties around defining when Social Exclusion is actually voluntary and whether people should be able to chose to exclude themselves (Percy-Smith, 2000). This might relate to ‘alternative’ lifestyle choices or those people who would describe themselves as comfortable living in isolation from the community around them.

A key point to the success of using the concept of Social Inclusion has been described as the need to look at the ‘processes of exclusion, rather than using it to describe an ‘end result’. Thinking in these terms, is a preventative measure allowing us to identify and address the underlying causes of exclusion and will prevent the cycle from continuing within a given community (Farrington, 2002).
The model used in South Australia has been adapted from British approach. The language used by the British government, however, is around Social Exclusion and in 1997 a Social Exclusion Unit was established. The focus for the British approach is;

- Unemployment. Skills and discrimination.
- Housing. Bringing it up to standard and resolving neighbourhood disputes.
- Young people. Schooling – improvement of standards, basic skills and retention rates.
- Access to services. Shopping, finance and Information Technology.
- Government. Strategies, clear goals, provision of better information.


In South Australia, a Social Inclusion Board (the Board) has been established, along with a Social Inclusion Unit (the Unit) and the structure is that;

“The Board advises on collaborative action by Government and collaborative initiatives between State Government and other sectors, and reports to the Premier on the impact of these actions.

Lead Ministers through Inter-Ministerial Committees which include Ministerial, Chief Executive and Treasury membership provide the means of implementing Government action following Cabinet agreement on priority directions. Multilateral budget processes are in place to support cross sectoral action.

The Board comprises community leaders bringing together experience and expertise as well as established linkages across non-government organizations, the business sector and the broader community. These enable the Board to build partnerships, to work with all spheres of government and maximise the cross sectoral use of resources.

The Social Inclusion Unit supports the work of the Board in achieving these objectives and is located within the Department of the Premier and Cabinet.”

(www.socialinclusion.sa.gov.au)

(See appendix 1 for Social Inclusion Board members)
The three initial focus areas of the South Australian approach are:

- Homelessness
- School retention rates
- Drugs

To date, there have been community consultations carried out in the areas of Homelessness and School Retention Rates and the information drawn from the State Drugs Summit is also being utilised. There has been a reference group established for the Homelessness focus area and this is comprised of community agency and government departmental staff. There is also a reference group for the School Retention Rate focus area, comprised of departmental staff and both of these groups meet with the Social Inclusion Unit. There is currently no reference group for the Drugs focus area. It is expected that for each of these focus areas action plans will be developed that will direct the work of government departments in these areas and these will then be posted on the Social Inclusion Unit’s website. This has not happened to date.

The South Australian Department of Human Services (DHS) has commenced using the language of Social Inclusion in policy documents, suggesting it will foster the inclusion of communities and service providers in decision-making, planning development and evaluation (Department of Human Services Strategic Directions 2003-2006). There has been no mention as to how this will be carried out.

The approach taken with the South Australian model, fits with the recommendation from South Australian Council of Social Services (SACOSS) that a social policy council be established to provide advice directly to cabinet and taking an across government approach, rather than an approach of individual portfolios (SACOSS, 2003)
METHOD

This research project has used qualitative methods of data collection because the project focussed on exploring the personal perceptions of community participants in relation to the concept of Social Inclusion (Silverman, 2000).

The first step in this process was to carry out an interview with a staff member from the Social Inclusion Unit. Preparation for the interview involved web-based research, leading to the development of a series of questions aimed at exploring the structure of the approach, the underlying thinking of the Social Inclusion Unit and how community members were being viewed within this process. The data collected from the interview was then transcribed and organised into themes. This interview then provided a basis for the development of focus group and interview questions (see Appendix 2 for questions).

The sampling method used for this project was non-random. The focus groups involved self-referral of individuals, in response to a flier that was distributed through the networks of the workers involved in carrying out the focus groups (See Appendix 3). The individual interviews carried out were the result of a direct approach from the researcher involved.

Two focus groups were held for community members and these groups were specifically targeted. The first group involved people who had been consumers of Mental Health services and the second Aboriginal women. The groups were conducted separately as an acknowledgement that each would have different issues from the other and a key to the success of focus groups can be the compatibility of group members (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990), although this does not imply homogeneity within the group. These two communities were targeted as it was felt that they are often identified and described as being marginalised and disadvantaged within the broader community. The members of these communities might also be those who have experienced ‘living’ the effects of the focus areas of the Social Inclusion Initiative. Some of the participants of these groups would be identified as people who were heavily engaged within these communities and active community advocates in the issues affecting them.
The focus groups involved two workers, one to facilitate the conversations and the other to scribe. They were reasonably unstructured, using an introductory process as not all group members had previously met. The tone of the process was conversational, allowing for as much exploration of perceptions as possible, but revolved around a series of themes. This allowed people to feel comfortable with the process but ensured that the facilitators were not distracted from the focus for the group (Blaikie, 2000). (See appendix 4 for focus group structure.)

The individual interviews were targeted at community members who were identified, by the researcher or colleagues, as already being engaged with their local community. They were people who were involved in numerous and various community groups and would probably be identified by some as ‘community leaders’. This approach was again, an attempt to see how they viewed themselves within the concept of Social Inclusion and also to identify whether there were substantial differences between their attitudes and the themes arising from the focus groups. The questions for the interviews followed the themes used for the focus group structure, in an attempt to ensure the data collected in the two processes was compatible. (See Appendix 5 for questions.)

The data collected throughout the process was recorded in written form, with all participants being given the opportunity to view what was being put down and suggest changes if they felt the information to be inaccurate. This data was later transcribed under themes, although there was no formalised coding system developed to assist with this process.

**FINDINGS**

**Interview with Social Inclusion Unit**

Following are the main points from this interview, organised under themes, that add to the information available via the Social Inclusion Unit’s website.

(See Appendix 6 for the full transcript)
Structure. (See Appendix 7)

- The “stakeholders” referred to at the base of the diagram are the clients of government agencies working with disadvantaged groups within the community.
- The Inter-Ministerial Committees meet on an “as needs” basis.
- Any initiatives developed are run by mainstream agencies already in existence.
- The structure of the Social Inclusion Initiative is described as a “top-down” approach.

Focus areas for the Board

- Action plans for School Retention Rates and Homelessness will be available in June via www.socialinclusion.sa.gov.au
- The consultations carried out via the State Drugs Summit, have led to a focus on harm minimisation rather than punitive approaches.
- The focus areas for the Board will change over time, but there has been no time frame developed for the current focus areas.

How does the community have an input?

- Having completed the community consultations, there is no further mechanism for information to be fed to the Board by individuals who might be affected by the focus areas in their personal lives, or non-government workers dealing with those client groups.
- A more interactive website will be developed featuring forums and chat-rooms.

How will the work of the Board be measured or evaluated?

- There is no evaluation process at this time.
- The action plans may produce “results chains”, but there are no firm plans for the development of these.

How will the “joined-up solutions” occur?

The website promotes “fostering partnerships from the community sector”.

- Partnerships are being considered from the government agency level, rather than including non-government agencies.
• It is unclear how non-government agencies would make the Board aware of programs already in existence, or whether the Board would be interested in hearing about those.

The Board will promote collaboration between government agencies through the introduction of performance measures, at a senior executive level, that force collaboration.

Focus group and individual interview themes.

(See appendix 8 for full transcripts)

There was little awareness of the existence of the Social Inclusion Initiative within the communities involved in this project. Only one person had heard about any of the consultations, but had not participated.

Initial discussion around “What is Social Inclusion?”

• How do we maintain diversity, whilst including people?
• Is it right for others to make judgements about how you feel about your situation?
• Who decides the parameters of inclusion?
• Do we all have to be included at a level decided by someone else, who knows nothing of our lives?
• Social Inclusion is about your own sense of ‘belonging’.
• Everyone will have a different perception of Social Inclusion; it is very subjective.

Barriers to Social Inclusion

• People may be afraid of what will happen if they try to ‘re-enter’ the community.
• They may be concerned about whether they will be accepted.

How do we help those who have been ‘excluded’ get ‘back in’?

• Encouragement from others. Even if this is rejected at first, keep persisting.
• Building trust with people.
• Creating a safe place for people to visit when they feel able.
• Building confidence within someone that they are valued.
Discussions related to an attempt to come up with a definition of Social Inclusion.

What would be important to include if we were going to do this?

- An element of trust that you will be accepted if you are trying to ‘re-enter’ is needed.
- People being involved in communities is an important aspect.
- We have to find the balance between an individual’s right to live their life as they want and society’s responsibility to provide support and opportunities.
  - We need to provide choices.
  - We need to help people develop the confidence to make those choices.
- Trust and generosity are important for communities.
  - This also relates to not embarrassing people, or creating situations where people may feel intimidated (through fear of failure).

What would you say to the Social Inclusion Board if you had the opportunity?

- Do not use jargon, use language that people will understand.
- Community people are not included in this process.
- You need to be providing community people with opportunities to have their say.
- How can you understand the experiences of the community members you are supposed to be helping, when you are so far removed from them?
- The Social Inclusion Board does not understand community members’ problems properly.
- How will the Social Inclusion Board and the Social Inclusion Unit know what is going on in the community if they do not make themselves available and visit communities?
- Using high profile people as members of the Board creates problems.
  - It has the effect of patronising those people the Board is supposed to be representing.
- Frustration for community people comes from hearing themselves described as ‘problems’. Sometimes workers view the people they are paid to help in this way.
- There seems to be an “ivory tower” mentality.
  - The Board is keeping itself separate from the process of doing the work.
  - There is a need to talk to the workers involved in the focus areas.
Use and acknowledge knowledge that already exists within the community.

DISCUSSION
As stated in the introduction the aim of this project was to explore the attitudes of a small group of community people who live in the City of Onkaparinga, in relation to the concept of Social Inclusion, how they see themselves within that concept and what they feel it is important to consider when addressing this issue.

When looking at the findings above it can be seen that there is a major difference with respect to how the community and those working within the Social Inclusion Initiative discuss the concept of Social Inclusion. At government, bureaucratic and Board level it is discussed in terms of improving access to mainstream, government provided services for the three focus areas. The idea being that if people have the opportunity, ability and confidence to access these services they will be seen as ‘included’. There is, therefore, a focus on how those services can be provided in a more collaborative, coordinated way to ensure that gaps are minimised and the best use is made of the resources available. This is obviously an important aspect when considering whether an individual is a ‘member’ of society.

The community members involved in this process, however, very clearly talked about Social Inclusion from the perspective of whether people felt they ‘belonged’ or had connections within their local communities. Their definitions of Social Inclusion related to whether an individual was experiencing social isolation and one of the participants stated that

“Social Inclusion is about people’s everyday happiness. It should not be thought about as ‘something special’”. (Focus group, May 7th)

Generally, these participants did not raise issues around access to services, although some talked about the fact that as consumers of particular services they could be seen as ‘outside’ the community as a whole. Examples of this included consumers of Mental Health services talking about the stigma that can be associated with that and welfare recipients discussing the impact of not being part of the labour market.
Access to services and connection and participation in local community life are both important and valid aspects of whether an individual feels they are ‘included’ in our community. However, these two groups obviously have very different perspectives on what Social Inclusion is and this lack of a common starting point for discussions could be problematic in terms of how people view the success of the Initiative.

The lack of opportunities for community people and non-government agencies to participate in this initiative could also be a concern. The interview with the Social Inclusion Unit made it clear that there was no mechanism for this to occur and there were no plans to change this approach. From the Board’s perspective, it was felt that the community consultations that had been carried out in respect to the three focus areas were adequate and that these consultations constituted community participation. There are many concerns about these consultations including levels of participation, locations, opportunity, access and information distribution. Ideally community consultations would be carried out using processes that are culturally appropriate for those communities, setting up an environment where people are comfortable telling their stories in whatever format that might be. A key to this involves creating a space for people to have their say without dominant values, opinions and meanings being imposed (Akinyela, 2002). Community Development literature also tells us that participation involves much more than consultation (Ife, 2002). It involves community input throughout every stage of the development of projects. This approach is a recognition of the skills and knowledge that already exist within the community and helps us, as workers, to resist the temptation that we are being brought in as experts to ‘do something to’, rather than ‘work with’ the community concerned.

Community participants felt that another issue was the remoteness of the Board and the Unit from the people in the community most affected by the focus areas. This impression relates, again, to the lack of community participation and contact with direct service workers discussed above. It also relates to the membership of the Board and comments made included:

“Using high profile people as members of the Board creates problems. It has the effect of patronising those people the Board is supposed to be representing.” (Individual interview, 2nd June)
Along with;

“People with wealth are listened to in a different way, than those without. An example of this is the membership of the Board, why does it not include ‘ordinary’ community representatives?” (Individual interview, 3rd June)

A key to this, and something that appears unclear, might be in understanding how the role of individual Board members is viewed by themselves and government. Board members, who see themselves as representatives of the people affected by the issues around Social Inclusion, will ensure their understandings are correct through continued contact and consultation with those involved in those sectors, either as consumers or workers. This is an acknowledgement of the expertise and knowledge individuals have in respect to the issues that affect their lives and communities. Board members who see themselves as experts providing advice on how issues can be resolved, will not see the need to engage in that process and run the risk of being seen as patronising.

Another barrier to community participation is that the reference groups being used by the Board for consultation, do not involve people outside of government departments. This seems to be at odds with the stated South Australia Labour Party opinion that addressing Social Inclusion:

“Involves not just experts but hands on community workers who work directly at the coal face. In other words it adopts a bottom up approach rather than pronouncements from on high by academics or consultants.” (www.sa.alp.org.au/policy/community/social_inclusion)

Whilst it may be difficult to persuade community members to participate at Board level, there are non-government agencies offering services in the Initiative’s focus areas that would be able to provide consumer representation from the “coal face” level. It was very clear from the community focus groups and interviews that there was a feeling that participation from a community level was important for the success of the Initiative. Illustrations of these feelings from participants (Focus group, May 5th) include:

“This seems to be operating in isolation from the people it’s most supposed to help.”
“There needs to be a way of ‘hooking up’ (making links) with workers or community members in those areas you are focused on.”

The South Australian Labour Party has stated that government needs to learn how to build local partnerships to solve local problems in respect to Social Inclusion. (www.sa.alp.org.au/policy/community/social_inclusion) This approach sits very firmly with theories around the development of Social Capital, in that it aims to enable communities to work together to solve common problems “…using shared norms, values and understandings, and the wide range of social connections that constitute good Social Capital.” (Maude, 2002) Again, it is unclear how this aspect will be approached if there is no way communities can be involved in the processes of the Social Inclusion Initiative.

One area where the State’s approach and the community opinions met, was the need for government agencies to work together to improve access to services and minimise gaps in service provision. The Government talks about this in the language of “providing joined up solutions to the joined up problems.” It is stated that this will be achieved through promoting partnerships and stronger collaboration between government agencies, an approach that some agencies do not usually employ. In the past, governments have actively discouraged collaboration through promoting competition for funding and new programs, forcing agencies to work in isolation from each other. This competition based approach has become quite firmly entrenched and will be difficult to overcome in the short term. The Government intends to address this problem by using the Inter-Ministerial Committees where various, senior representatives from relevant portfolios, will discuss where collaboration needs to occur and come to agreement with each other. Performance measures for senior executives will also be introduced (Social Inclusion Unit interview, April 17th), adopting a punitive approach to ensuring collaboration occurs. It is uncertain how, or whether, this new collaborative approach will filter down to local offices and the workers who have direct contact with clients.

Community members involved in the focus groups and interviews also saw a need for agencies to work more collaboratively with each other and they discussed this within the context of gaps within services. Many of them had experienced being referred
from one agency to another, having been told it was the responsibility of another agency, only to discover that the service they required was not being offered by any agencies;

“Agencies have reputations for ‘passing the buck’ in terms of their responsibility to their client. How will this be different under Social Inclusion?” (Focus group, May 7th)

It would appear that if greater collaboration between agencies can be achieved through this initiative that would be seen as a welcome outcome by both the community and Government.

As stated in the findings, there was little awareness of the existence of the Social Inclusion Initiative within the communities involved in this project. None of these people had participated in the consultation process, although this was to be expected as no consultations had been held in the Southern metropolitan area. There seems to have been little, if any, promotion of the Initiative and its focus areas in this local community and until this occurs it is unlikely that it will have a profile within them. There was also a high level of scepticism from participants about whether they would see any tangible outcomes. One participant talked about the need for outcomes to be ‘real’, not intangible, and that some should be quickly achieved to promote a sense of confidence in the Initiative.

Another concern for the people interviewed, and one that was also raised through the literature review, was how the issue of diversity was being considered within the Initiative, particularly as the concept was seen as a subjective one. Whilst this was discussed from the perspective of community involvement, given that this was how these groups defined Social Inclusion, the points made are still valid in respect to accessing services. Some participants pointed out that levels of ‘inclusion’, or participation, varies for individuals throughout their life depending on circumstances at the time and how well they were dealing with those. It was felt that participation should be a choice, not something forced upon them, and we should respect a person’s right to exclude themselves at times. It was also felt that forcing an individual to participate could be detrimental to their mental or physical health, as it would increase the level of stress they were experiencing.
The interviewees also pointed out that some people are not engaged in activities within their local communities, but would not describe themselves as isolated, and so, could not be called excluded. It was suggested these people might not feel the need to interact with others in the broader community and should be allowed to make that choice. This point was particularly relevant when considering the comment that;

““There are different layers of inclusion – immediate community (that could be geographic or cultural), family and broader society.”” (Focus group, May 7th)

This issue does, however, become more complex when considering aspects such as participation within the labour market or mutual obligation requirements for welfare recipients. People are obviously given less freedom to choose in those situations because of the economic cost to the broader community. In both situations however, the issue seems to come back to whether individuals feel they have the opportunity to participate if they should choose to do so.

It is also interesting to consider the fact that there is no evaluation process for the work of the Board. In a climate where government services and agencies are being made more accountable in terms of achieving outcomes and targets within set timeframes, this seems to be at odds with current practices. It is difficult to see how the government will gauge the effectiveness of the role of the Board without this mechanism. It also serves to further set the Board apart from the agencies they are supposed to be working with.

Limitations

There are a number of limitations to this research project, but it should be stated that it was never intended to be a rigorous design. The intention was to do some initial exploration of community attitudes in relation to the concept of Social Inclusion and the design has reflected that aim. There has also been no development of a formalised coding system for categorising data into themes.

Another limitation of the research would be the sample group involved, particularly the small number of people participating and the composition of the groups. All of the participants are living in geographic areas that have been described as ‘disadvantaged’ and the majority of them would also be described, through their personal experiences and backgrounds, as marginalised. These individuals may also
have had, or currently be experiencing, issues related to the focus areas for the Social Inclusion Initiative. However, the majority of them are also already involved in their local communities and described themselves as “included”. There is always a difficulty in making links with those people who consciously or through personal experience are the most isolated, or ‘excluded’, from the broader community. There are also many other sub-cultures, or community groups, who would be experiencing issues around the three focus areas that were not approached for this research project.

The data collection also involved the use of non-standardised instruments leaving it open to variation or manipulation by the researcher, however inadvertent. Another factor that may undermine the reliability of this data is its subjective nature. It relies on the personal perceptions, at a particular point in time, of the individuals participating and these will change given their personal experiences.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this project was to explore the understanding and attitudes of community people in respect to the concept of Social Inclusion, particularly in comparison with how the concept is being discussed at government level. It can now be seen that there is a distinct difference in respect to what these two groups mean when they use they talk about Social Inclusion. The Government is discussing access to mainstream services and the community people are focussed on community participation. It could be argued that, inherently, there is no problem with the two groups holding these differing opinions, however this difference could result in them talking at cross purposes with each other and it may be useful if a common understanding could be developed and promoted.

The community members involved in this project were very clear that they felt they had something to offer in respect to the way in which services could be delivered. They were also clear that they would like the opportunity to participate in that process. It was also evident that the Social Inclusion Initiative does not include a mechanism to help promote the aspect of community participation. It is difficult, therefore, to see how government can legitimately promote Social Inclusion, when community members are consciously excluded from the Initiative’s process.
Additionally, there is a distinct lack of awareness around the Social Inclusion Initiative within the Southern community. This is a community that is acknowledged as having pockets of disadvantage and so would be expected to be a target for programs developed through the Initiative. However, there seems to have been little, if any, promotion of the Initiative and its focus areas in local communities and until this occurs it is unlikely that it will have a profile within them.

As stated, this research project has been carried out on a small scale and the method used has not been overly rigorous and so suffers from the limitations acknowledged above. However, it has been useful in identifying some issues for the Social Inclusion Initiative, at least from the perspective of community members, who had very clear views in respect to how they thought the process being used by this Initiative could be improved. Another positive aspect to the project, is that it has opened up the possibility of some partnership work between the Social Inclusion Unit and City of Onkaparinga and that aspect is currently being pursued. The project could, therefore be viewed as a useful beginning.


CITY OF ONKAPARINGA
www.onkaparingacity.com


SOCIAL EXCLUSION UNIT.  

SOCIAL INCLUSION UNIT  
www.socialinclusion.sa.gov.au

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