Reviewer's report

Title: 'People pull the rug from under your feet': barriers to successful public health programmes

Version: 1 Date: 4 December 2007

Reviewer: diane J abatemarco

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'People pull the rug from under your feet': barriers to successful public health programmes
Ritchie et al
Reviewer: D. J. Abatemarco

The manuscript presents the results of a qualitative process evaluation of a community intervention. The paper is interesting and well written. There are a number of issues that the authors should consider in revising the manuscript.

1) The abstract indicates that the methods included a quasi-experimental design yet there is no description of this in the body of the paper. The abstract also describes methods that are not in the body of the paper such as: observations, focus groups and documentary analysis. Was this information part of a larger study not described in this paper? If this paper was based only on the 56 interviews how did the authors decide not to use the other data?

1) The findings suggest that numbers of staff dwindled. The paper does not describe how many or from which agencies/organizations.

1) The introduction and background make a good case for the importance of the research conducted in this study. However, in the final paragraph of the background the paper's purpose is noted as to describe the process evaluation. The background would be more complete if it included a description and definition of process evaluation.

1) In the third paragraph of the methods the authors state that the transcripts of the interviews were used in conjunction with other data sources. What other data? The methods should include a detailed description of all data used in the study and an explanation as to how the data were merged and analyzed.

1) Additionally, how was it determined that the programme lacked fidelity? It is unclear from the paper how the programme failed.

1) The paper is unclear as to how this is to be considered a community-based intervention. The intervention seems to be a multi-agency based intervention and less a community intervention. It appears that the lack of fidelity to the
intervention had more to do with the hierarchical nature of agency leadership and the loss of the original leadership of the programme. Typically community interventions would include individuals and organizations that represent more that agency directors and leaders. Again, this sounds more like a multi-agency coalition than a community based intervention. If it were more community-based it would have been less dependent on hierarchical leadership and thus there would have been others in the organizations to have taken the roles of those who left. Thus, this paper describes stakeholder change more then the failure of a community intervention. Community interventions generally include community engagement and ownership. Lastly, a description of the lack of programme fidelity â## explaining how the programme did not succeed would make the paper clearer. Process evaluation usually includes more than qualitative data and describes how the programme attempted to meet its objectives. This paper would be stronger with a description of the intervention and the process evaluation findings.

What next?: Accept after discretionary revisions

Level of interest: An article of limited interest

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.