



Australian Government

**Department of Families, Housing,
Community Services and Indigenous Affairs**

Action Research Induction Kit

This induction kit is designed to support Reconnect and Newly Arrived Youth Support Service (NAYSS) workers to incorporate Action Research in their day to day work. The kit includes an overview of the Action Research process, as well as tips and checklists. It is designed to be an easy to use resource for undertaking Action Research.

This induction kit draws heavily from the Reconnect Action Research Kit written by Phil Crane and Leanne Richardson (2000)

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The basics

Reconnect and Newly Arrived Youth Support Service (NAYSS)

The Reconnect program uses community based early intervention services to assist young people aged 12 to 18 years who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and their families. Reconnect assists young people to stabilise their living situation and improve their level of engagement with family, work, education, training and their local community.

Reconnect breaks the cycle of homelessness by providing counselling, group work, mediation and practical support to the whole family. Reconnect providers also 'buy in' services to target individual needs of clients, such as specialised mental health services.

NAYSS provides a multi-function service to newly arrived young people aged 12 to 21 years from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and their families.

NAYSS providers assist newly arrived young people by providing services relevant to them at all stages along the continuum of assistance from early intervention to transitional support. It aims to increase the participation of newly arrived young people in the economic and social life of the Australian community.

Reconnect and NAYSS providers follow the seven Good Practice Principles:

- ▶ Accessibility of services
- ▶ Client driven service delivery
- ▶ Holistic approaches to service delivery
- ▶ Working collaboratively
- ▶ Culturally and contextually appropriate service delivery
- ▶ Ongoing review and evaluation
- ▶ Building sustainability.

These Good Practice Principles are strategies that services have identified through research as achieving positive outcomes for their clients and communities. For further information on the Good Practice Principles, please refer to the Reconnect Program Guidelines.

Action Research is a key component of Reconnect and NAYSS. For early intervention methods to be effective, services need to respond to their clients' needs using a reflective and improvement orientated approach to service delivery. Action Research is a mechanism used to achieve this and is considered integral to Reconnect and NAYSS.

What is Participatory Action Research?

Reconnect and NAYSS use the Participatory Action Research model as a tool for reflective practice and continual service improvement. 'Research' simply means to find out – investigating an issue or issues you have noticed in your service. Action Research combines getting a better understanding of issues and using this understanding to change some aspects of practice. The participatory model of Action Research used in Reconnect and NAYSS means that all relevant stakeholders, including the clients themselves are involved in the process of finding solutions to address the issues facing them.

In the context of Reconnect and NAYSS, Action Research is used to answer two broad questions:

1. **What would it take to improve the outcomes for those you assist?**
2. **Given the aims of Reconnect and NAYSS, what would it take to improve your practice?**

Action Research builds on the everyday skills people use to make sense of their lives and improve their situation. It involves the capacity to observe what is happening, reflect on how it happened and how it could change, ask questions about how you might do things differently, plan how you might do things and put those plans into action. It involves people who are affected as active participants to bring about change and improvement in your services.

Here is what one Action Researcher said:

This sort of research is not a trained expertise, we can do it every day of our lives. We use our innate abilities to make choices, to make sense of our lives. We do it when we go shopping, we think about the TV ads we have seen, the feedback from a friend about a movie or an event about which we are curious. We notice, describe, listen, we make an explanation, we make our decision.

Expanding our way of doing things into the context of research (Participatory Action Research) involves a singular person or small group of people realising that something in our lives needs changing. A difference is noticed, an ideal is not met, a loss of quality, a foreshadowed change of direction, or perhaps the need for innovation (Goff et al, 1998, p.65 in Reconnect Action Research Kit, 2000).

Why do Reconnect and NAYSS use Action Research?

The value of Action Research in early intervention programs, such as Reconnect and NAYSS, is its capacity to ask questions about how to achieve positive outcomes for participants, seek answers through work practices and then improve those practices on the basis of the insights generated. Action Research aims to be responsive to participants and stakeholders by finding appropriate ways to include them so that the questions, strategies and interpretations of the process are not solely influenced by the service provider.

Action Research also enables experimentation and flexibility, which is important to the development of services that are responsive to the needs of participants and the community. It can provide management with well-founded evidence that points to the need for changes and improvement. In addition, Action Research encourages and enhances relationships with local services responding to the target group, providing opportunities for collaborative strategies in the community.

In the context of Reconnect and NAYSS, Action Research is concerned with innovation and improvement in service delivery outcomes for clients.

- ▶ **Action Research values ‘hunches’ and helps you to explore them in a relevant and useful way** – how often have you thought ‘if only we could do ..., young people/ schools/ parents would respond so differently’?
- ▶ **Action Research helps to answer the big questions that are often missed by busy service providers** – it encourages you to ask and answer the questions that most help to make your work relevant to you, your clients and other stakeholders.
- ▶ **Action Research gives a focus to the things people would be doing anyway** – it gives a framework for you to understand your agency’s operations.
- ▶ **Action Research helps to improve practice** – Action Research strongly encourages you to take time and think about what you actually do and explore new ways of doing things.
- ▶ **Action Research makes evaluation easier and more enjoyable** – information from Action Research can add colour, character and a new culture to the evaluation process. It can provide data and case studies to back-up evaluation findings and it encourages groups of people to offer ideas.
- ▶ **Action Research encourages the sharing of insights and feedback** – both among service providers and with the funding body. This assists in identifying and generating the sharing of good practice for Reconnect and NAYSS.

Ethical issues

Sound ethics and good professional conduct form part of basic education and everyday practice in Reconnect and NAYSS and in Participatory Action Research.

Ethical practice:

- ▶ assists workers to identify the values and principles which underpin their work
- ▶ provides a guide and standard for ethical conduct and accountable service
- ▶ provides a foundation for ethical reflection and decision making.

Ethical practice requires you to examine your personal feelings, morality and social norms and standards to ensure that they are reasonable and well founded. The Good Practice Principles should be considered as some of the primary principles that underpin ethical Participatory Action Research.

Some of the other specific principles and values relevant to Participatory Action Research include:

- ▶ the right to privacy and the right to informed decision making and consent
- ▶ the importance of providing clients with competent services based on research
- ▶ an awareness of potential conflicts of interest.

Engaging in Participatory Action Research is an opportunity to enhance ethical practice through actively seeking feedback from supervisors, colleagues and clients on your work.

Preparing

The use of questions in Action Research

Questions in Action Research help frame the purpose and aim for improvements in services. In other words, questions help to isolate what you are trying to change and what you are trying to improve or find out. Questions also assist in focussing actions. The questions that Reconnect and NAYSS providers develop, explore issues within their local community with an emphasis on improving outcomes for young people and their families.

In the NAYSS context, particular attention should be given to the use of language and the need for translation or interpreter services to enable participation from members of newly arrived communities.

A good place to start would be asking: “What would it take to...?” (Quixley 1997).

Where you start depends on where you are at the moment

When a service is first established, it can be useful to focus on issues like developing working relationships between first to know agencies such as Centrelink, local schools and local youth and family support services.

Another starting point could be to work out how accessible the Reconnect or NAYSS is to young people at risk of homelessness and their families, for example, service opening hours, office location and staff profile. You could also explore some specific questions about service delivery methods, for example, regarding case management, material support and counselling.

Action Research can also offer the chance to reflect on existing outcomes and what it would take to improve services for young people and their families. The key to this is to start with small and concrete questions.

Where to start – starting small but thinking broad

Cycles can start by observing something that has happened or by giving consideration to an issue that has been raised.

Action Research cycles can start with small questions.

‘Macro’ and ‘micro’ questions

Macro questions tend to be a broad area of enquiry and may be pursued over a number of years.

Micro questions are concrete, targeted and smaller in scope – they provide the opportunity and the means to answer broader macro questions.

Examples of macro questions:

- ▶ What would it take to improve early intervention capacity for this community?
- ▶ What would it take to improve the effectiveness of this Reconnect and/or NAYSS strategy?

Examples of micro questions:

- ▶ Should the times the service is open be extended or changed?
- ▶ What does a service need to do to engage young people from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds?
- ▶ What approaches make parents feel they are getting adequate support?
- ▶ What would keep young people out of refuges?
- ▶ What would it take to improve the referral numbers from Centrelink?

Stakeholders

Who are stakeholders?

A stakeholder is anyone who is part of the day-to-day business of the agency and may be affected by the practices or situations that are part of the Action Research. Most importantly, it includes the young people, their families and other people who are involved in early intervention practices. Stakeholders can also include workers, management, other agencies and community members.

Not all stakeholders need to be involved as directly or actively as others. Some stakeholders may need to be part of all stages of the cycles. Others may simply need to provide feedback at certain points (CMYI, 2006, p.17).

It can be challenging to ensure Action Research is collaborative. When seeking to engage stakeholders, think about who could be involved and how you would go about working effectively with them.

Participation

- ▶ Participation is most effective when people feel that they have contributed significantly and have a real influence in the process.
- ▶ Developing a sense of ownership among stakeholders is a very effective way to encourage people to invest their time and energy in working for change.
- ▶ Client participation in Action Research can take different forms and have varying degrees of complexity. Client participation can be something simple like practitioners posing the same question to a range of clients, recording their responses then discussing their observations and reflections to ensure correct interpretation of their response. Participation can also be as complex as establishing multiple focus groups for specific issues with the focus group interrelating and bouncing ideas off one another.
- ▶ Be aware that the language used needs to be 'inclusive' and allow all stakeholders to participate.

Suggestions for encouraging ongoing participation from stakeholders in your Action Research

- ▶ Always do what you say and when you say you'll do it.
- ▶ Follow up on every key interaction formally or informally.
- ▶ Actively acknowledge all contributions.
- ▶ Focus on people's specific interests and don't expect them to sit around for a three hour meeting that spends five minutes on their topic of interest.
- ▶ Several short and focused meetings with small groups may be more efficient and effective than long meetings with large groups.

Ways to facilitate client participation

- ▶ Survey clients once support has ended – this includes young people, their parents and other family members. It would be useful to check with clients while they are engaged with your service whether they would be happy to be contacted in the future to help with providing better services.
- ▶ Be open to discussing your service and the strategies used with clients so that they will feel able to offer observations and reflections on their effectiveness.
- ▶ Ask clients if they would like to participate in group planning sessions – don't assume that they are not interested.

Strategies for working collaboratively with other service providers

- ▶ One facilitator may consult separately with a range of stakeholders.
- ▶ Planning together may occur through the use of email or teleconferences.
- ▶ Observations may be gathered at the end of a pre-existing meeting by setting aside time and space to 'brainstorm' and record them.
- ▶ It is quite acceptable for one person to draw together reflections which have been sourced from various discussions and stakeholders.

Focus questions

What is a stakeholder?

Who are your stakeholders?

How do you engage your stakeholders?

Are your clients stakeholders?

Do some stakeholders have more influence than others?

Whose voices are being heard when you engage with your stakeholders?

Whose voices are not being heard?

Doing Action Research

The Action Research cycle

Cycles provide a useful way of thinking about and describing an Action Research process. Each cycle is made up of four phases – Observe, Reflect, Plan and Act.

Observe

Experience in Reconnect and NAYSS has shown that the observe phase is often the logical starting point for Action Research – you notice an issue that you want to explore and begin by recording your observations.

Reflect

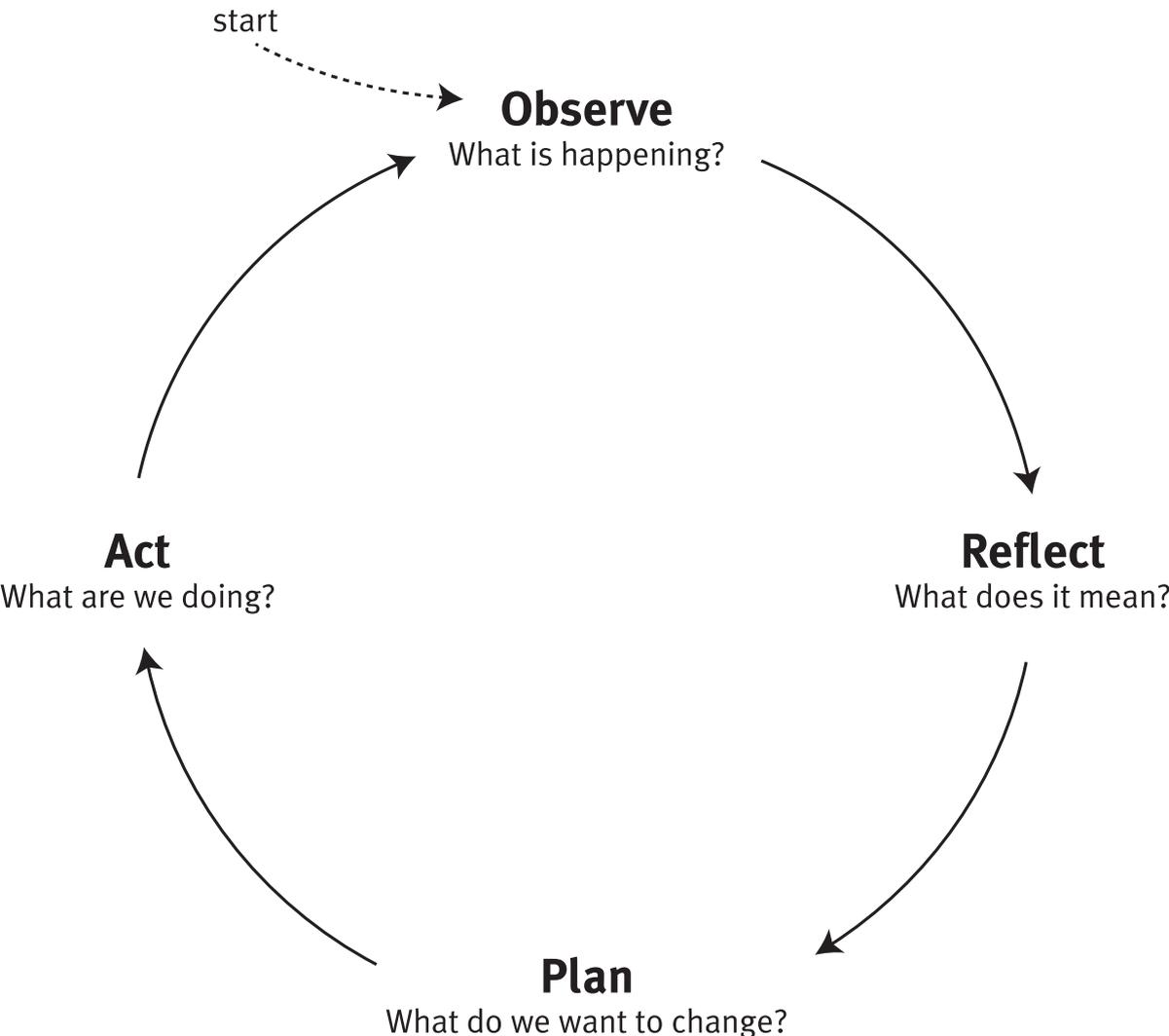
The next phase is to take the time to reflect on the observations and extract meaning from them.

Plan

Based on your observations and reflections, this is the time to prepare a plan of action – what needs to be done and who needs to do it.

Act

This is the part of the cycle where you implement your plans.



Observe

Some stages of observation are:

1. **To look at what is happening**
2. **Describe what has happened**
3. **Record what has happened.**

Good observation requires looking at what is happening and describing it accurately. Its purpose is to provide a sound base for reflection by producing a widely accepted understanding of what actually happened (Quixley, 1997).

Formal and informal data collection strategies

There are a range of ways to collect data. For example, data collection from clients could include verbal communication, such as face-to-face or by telephone. Data collection from other services could be obtained in writing and structured to answer specific questions.

The observe stage can be a good place to start an Action Research cycle by:

- ▶ considering something that is happening or not happening
- ▶ using available information
- ▶ finding out new information
- ▶ involving a range of people to describe what they think is occurring.

Observation tools

- ▶ Questionnaires/surveys
- ▶ Minutes from forums or meetings
- ▶ Informal interviews and discussions and keeping a journal in the agency to track insights, observations, anecdotes and questions raised
- ▶ Group brainstorming
- ▶ Client information, referral sheets, work logbooks and other agency paperwork
- ▶ Email and websites where people can leave comments and ask questions
- ▶ Wall charts/ graffiti boards
- ▶ Information systems such as computer files, coloured folders for different questions and suggestion boxes.

Focus questions

What did you notice?

What were the outcomes of your actions?

What happened?

Did different stakeholders observe different things?

What is going on for your clients?

Is there anything new or different?

Can you enrich your understanding of the situation by talking with your clients and/or different stakeholders about what you have observed and to gain different perspectives?

Reflect

Stages of reflection include:

1. Standing back and looking at what happened.

Take time:

- ▶ involve stakeholders to gain different interpretations.

2. Developing ideas or ‘theories’ about what happened.

Brainstorm by:

- ▶ talking it over
- ▶ sharing insights
- ▶ piecing things together or ‘jigsawing’.

3. Sharing ideas with others so that a range of interpretations and ‘meanings’ can be considered.

Float ideas by:

- ▶ making informed guesses based on the information gathered
- ▶ comparing what you have observed with competing evidence
- ▶ looking at alternative explanations.

This is the stage in the cycle where you need to spend time thinking about the findings of the observations, negotiating meaning with stakeholders and building a shared understanding.

Suggestions for reflecting

- ▶ Have a look at what has been done, the information gathered about it and let it sit for a while.
- ▶ Talk to people to get a range of perspectives.
- ▶ Have some quiet time to work out what you think and encourage others to do the same.
- ▶ Share ideas and be honest about them.
- ▶ Be open about what is going on.
- ▶ Respect different understandings and interpretations.
- ▶ Be aware that people’s values and experiences will influence their reflections.
- ▶ Think about issues in their particular context.
- ▶ Give ideas/theories the opportunity to develop over time.

Focus questions

What does it mean?

What do the results of your actions tell you?

What further action is suggested?

What new knowledge did you generate?

Have you challenged your assumptions and those of your stakeholders?

Who agrees? Who disagrees? And what does this reveal?

Have you reflected on how your observations impact on the young people involved? Their families?
The community?

Plan

Planning includes:

1. **Clarifying the questions being asked**
2. **Identifying the actions to be tried out**
3. **Developing an action plan.**

All stages should be participatory and collaborative and the planning stage is no different. At this point, stakeholders should come together to talk about what they will do and how they will do it. It is important at this point to directly involve those affected by the research question. Each member of the group undertaking the Action Research itself should make active contributions to the plan and work collaboratively with one another.

You will find that a well thought out, flexible and coordinated action plan will prove effective, particularly in serving a wide range of stakeholders. For example, if workers across five community organisations are involved in trialling a new approach under a particular Action Research project, it is critical that they have a clear, agreed action plan that all are committed to implementing.

Planning process

- ▶ Using the reflection and thinking from the previous stage involving stakeholders and different ideas and perspectives.
- ▶ Asking - what do we want to do?
- ▶ Work out a priority of what you want to do.
- ▶ Look at your resources, i.e. what you need to achieve your goals.
- ▶ After looking at your resources you may need to re-think priorities.
- ▶ Collaboratively develop strategies for putting ideas into action – who is doing what and how?
- ▶ Think through the implications of the intended action.
- ▶ Timetable your action plan – when will things be done by?
- ▶ Build in observation and reflection methods - how will we keep an eye on what is happening?

Remember:

- ▶ Planning doesn't need to be difficult.
- ▶ Planning often means clarifying and refining a plan as new and changed understandings emerge.
- ▶ Collaborative planning with stakeholders is important to getting the research question right.
- ▶ Using or adapting existing ways of involving clients in services may assist in planning.

Focus questions

What are you planning on doing?

Who is doing what?

Who is affected?

Who do you need to involve?

What made you think about making this change or examining this particular aspect of the problem?

What improvement do you hope to see?

What knowledge do you hope to generate?

Act

Action includes:

1. **Do what you said you were going to do – systematically and creatively implement plans**
2. **Communicate with others and involve them in the process**
3. **Keep track of what happens.**

Remember:

- ▶ Make sure you have agreement on the who, what, when and how of the action plan.
- ▶ Actions reflect the plan although the plan can be changed or abandoned.
- ▶ Actions are not separate from research - the aim is to test questions in practice.
- ▶ Documenting action as it happens makes describing what happened much easier – record who did what, when and how.
- ▶ Action does not have a particular end point. If it isn't working, it can be reviewed and re-planned any time.
- ▶ It does not have to be complex, technical or flashy. It may involve a small change at first like testing ideas and coming up with an initial strategy. You may have to try a number of things before you feel you are on to something and you will learn something from everything that happens.

Focus questions

What are you doing?

What are your actions?

What is happening?

Who is doing what?

How are you recording this?

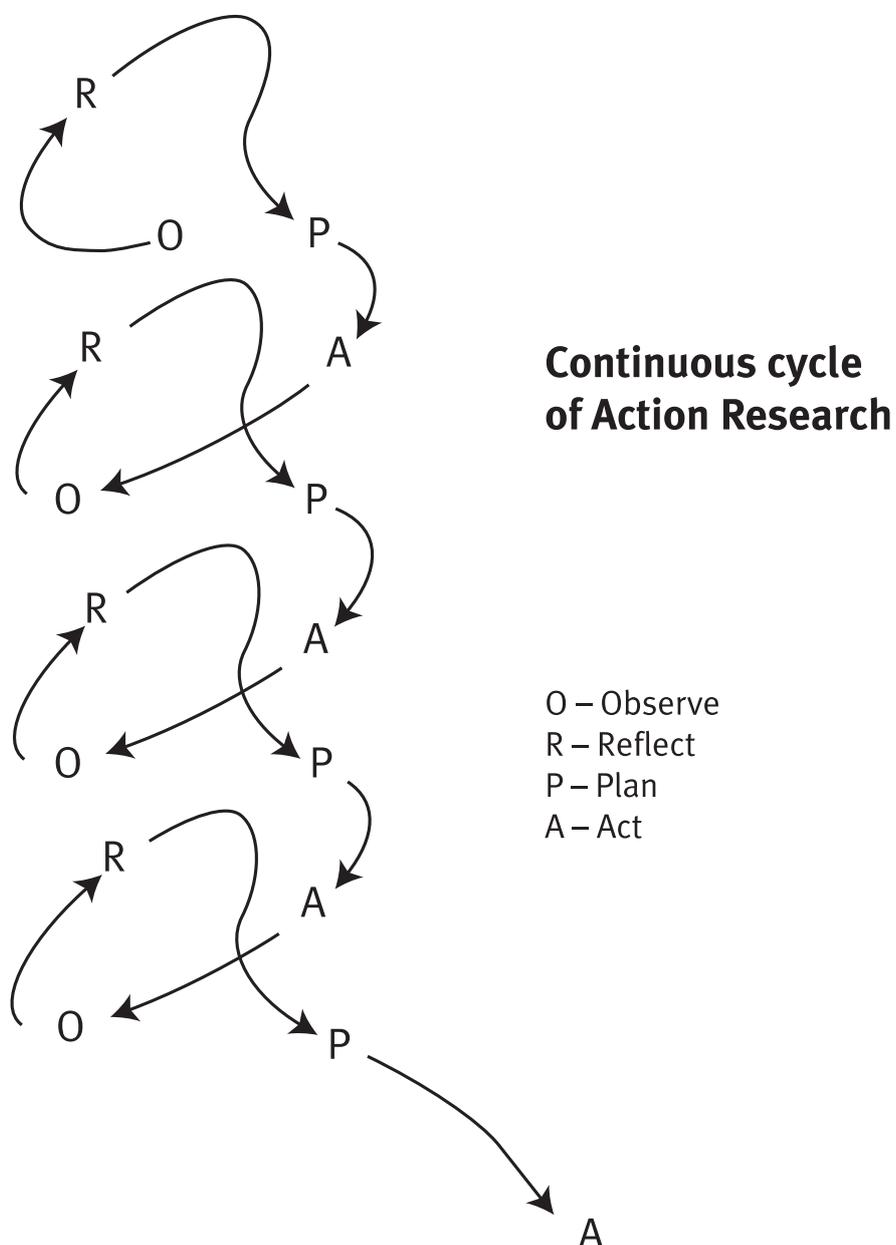
The continuous Action Research spiral

The Action Research cycle is used in your everyday work, for example, looking at what is happening, thinking about what is going on and making plans and acting on them.

Researching a particular question usually involves going through a number of cycles. This allows practices and understandings to be refined or changed over time. It may also mean that the question itself needs refinement or change.

A cycle could take a few hours or a few months depending on the question you are asking. Cycles may not occur in consecutive steps as they can overlap, or be repeated or extended as new understanding emerges.

It is important that you can name the phases you are undertaking at a particular time so that you can be clear about what you are doing. Being systematic and deliberate means that people can see what is going on. The ongoing cycle of action and learning from a number of cycles is illustrated in the following diagram.



Documentation

Forms of documentation

Documentation is about capturing what is being done, how and why it is being done and who is involved in doing it. Given the complexity of client work and the other significant demands on workers and organisations, the ability to record and compile Action Research ‘on the run’ is a key to its successful incorporation into everyday work.

Documentation is about what was discussed and/or done at each stage of the Action Research cycle. There are many examples of types of documentation, such as:

- ▶ minutes from meetings
- ▶ notes from discussions with clients
- ▶ drawings, photos and other non-verbal or written sources
- ▶ surveys, questionnaires and their results
- ▶ butchers paper/ brainstorm notes
- ▶ flyers and information, samples of materials from other services
- ▶ policies and procedures (CMYI, 2006, p.21).

Action Research takes place over a period of time, sometimes even over a number of years. It is, therefore, very important to keep track of and document each stage of the cycle progressively from the outset to ensure that all relevant information on your Action Research is recorded and retained correctly. You will find that this will help you to easily retrieve any required information and make reporting easier. To this end, you should set up and implement a system to keep together information from the start of your Action Research cycle.

The four main reasons for documentation are:

1. To ensure that your information is accessible to your stakeholders as this enables them to learn, participate and be involved in further Action Research cycles.
2. To learn – reflecting and documenting your work will enable you the opportunity to look at the big picture, therefore minimising mistakes.
3. To collect empirical evidence – demonstrating results is necessary for ongoing service improvement and for meeting funding requirements.
4. To share with others – documentation is an important part of your work as it enables you to share your work with colleagues and services conducting similar work. This can help others save time and offers more people the opportunity to improve their work practices and share their learning.

There are many ways to document Action Research. Some examples you may find useful are in the Reconnect Action Research Kit (2000).

Rigorous process

The process of Action Research needs to be rigorous. In other words, services need to be confident that the answers arrived at are sound and accurate. Rigour, therefore, refers to the processes that ensures the research is well founded and reliable. Services do not want to make significant changes to their practice if the research conclusions arrived at through Action Research are not testable, valid and reliable (CMYI, 2006, p.7).

The core elements involved in ensuring rigour include:

- ▶ participation of stakeholders
- ▶ multiple flexible methods
- ▶ ensuring an evidence base
- ▶ transparent processes
- ▶ detailed answers to questions
- ▶ actively seeking different points of view
- ▶ multiple cycles of Action Research.

Action Research involves asking questions in a particular context. Rigour depends on the validity of your answers being accurate in their context.

For further information on this essential element of Action Research, refer to the Reconnect Action Research Kit (Crane 2000).

Further information

Bringing it all together – case study 1

A day in the life of a Reconnect worker using Action Research

(Based on the case study contributed by Connect, Darwin to the Reconnect Action Research Kit 2000)

The following is an example of how a Reconnect worker incorporates Action Research into their day-to-day business.

Being a Reconnect worker means that on any given day you can work across a diverse range of tasks and/or issues.

8.30am – 9.15am

Begin work, receive a message on the answering machine from Rita (Joanne's Mum who I provide case support to) requesting an immediate response. A phone call is made back to Rita after speaking with the other Connect worker, who supports the young person. Rita is asked for her preferred way of receiving support. The result was that the other Connect worker finds out if Joanne would be ok about a meeting between them all.

Action Research component

An ongoing Action Research question is 'whether it is more viable for the young person and their parents to have separate workers'. It was found in the pilot that this was often the case, but with the recognition that every client is different, that is a question that is asked of clients and ourselves every time we engage with a family.

10.00am – 12.00pm

Meeting with a youth detention centre social worker and other key stakeholders regarding the development of a 'Community of Origin Visitors Scheme'. This meeting is to discuss the draft background paper created by a Connect worker and the creating of a timeline that allows for the optimum amount of consultation and contribution by relevant community members.

Action Research component

Within the pilot, it was identified through client feedback and service assessment processes that there was a need for Aboriginal young people in detention to receive visits from other members of their communities with language, family or just community ties. This would be seen as a way to ease the feelings of dislocation and isolation from their communities and families, who are sometimes 2,000km away. In response to this need and in partnership with the detention centre, Connect has drawn together a few key stakeholders in an effort to secure funding and put the beginnings of a model together before further consultation is undertaken with members of the sector and the community.

1.00pm – 2.30pm

Meeting with a young woman who is 14 years old. Went to the shopping centre food court and discussed current issues. These included school truancy, self-harming behaviour and violent behaviour towards other people. On returning from meeting, a few observations regarding our meeting are placed in the 12 to 15 file.

Action Research component

The key to making Action Research successful in terms of client work involves the ability to make it accessible on a daily basis. An example of this is the creation of a file titled 'What works with 12 to 15 year olds?'. This came about as a result of observations by workers and in dialogue with local agencies. This age group's support needs seemed to be different. The aim of this file is to provide a place for the workers after interacting with someone in this age group, to record what is effective, whether it be 'meeting for shorter times' or 'driving the whole time'. This was a time-effective way of collecting information that was later collated. Then it was used at the service level and fed into an inter-agency process for improving access to under 15's. This helped support services and improve their capacity to respond more effectively.

2.45pm – 3.00pm

Return from a client visit and receive a message from the school counsellor at a local high school. Return the counsellor's phone call to accept a referral for a 15 year old male requiring assistance with a mix of issues, which include extreme conflict with parents and the need to look at income support needs. A time is made to meet with him and the school counsellor tomorrow.

Action Research component

The school counsellors and Connect workers have jointly agreed to use Action Research to look at the most effective ways the service and school can work together to optimise the result for the young person. This is at an early stage in which the meeting will provide a good opportunity for observation and reflection on how collaborative early intervention case work can happen. At a practical level, we are asking *'What would it take for a young person and their family to have more options for referral, advocacy and support?'*

3.00pm – 4.30pm

Pick up another client from school and take her to Centrelink in relation to a breach that has been imposed. Exceptional circumstances have come to light in our work with her. During this interview, it strikes me that Connect staff have been regularly providing additional information to Centrelink at the time of a breach and that a collaborative look at communication processes between the agencies might improve the information base for decision making. I make a note to follow this up with Centrelink.

Action Research component

Anecdotal evidence indicated that it was worth looking further into the matter of breaches. This led to establishing communication with Centrelink and it was later decided in a collaborative effort how the service and Centrelink could improve communication, particularly at the time of a breach. A page in the back of the service daybook – a book used between workers to communicate information during the day was created to record client experiences and communication between the worker and Centrelink. This information can then be used in meetings between the worker and Centrelink to improve practice and identify any emerging issues.

4.30pm – 5.00pm

Message in the daybook from the other Connect worker saying that Joanne says she will meet with her mum tomorrow night. Made contact with Rita from this morning and told her that a meeting has been scheduled for tomorrow night after work at the office with her daughter. I help Rita prepare for the meeting and clarify the main issues she wishes to raise and discuss the potential impact on her daughter. At the end of our conversation, I asked Rita how she found phone contact as a way of getting support, explaining that face-to-face was always an option. Rita said she was happy with phone support as the main way of communicating, as it was very convenient for her.

Action Research component

Another Action Research question constantly being explored by Connect is *'What is the most effective way to support families?'* One strategy for exploring this is for phone support to be actively offered to parents, as well as face-to-face meetings. There was some anecdotal evidence that parents often find phone contact a more viable and practical means of support. The worker records Rita's feedback on the Action Research observation sheet which has been set up to look at phone support (a one month focus). So far this is showing that phone support is a viable form of client work and not 'just a phone call'.

Focus questions

Can you see how Action Research could be integrated into your day-to-day work?

Can you think of examples in your own working day where you could think of applying Action Research?

Bringing it all together – case study 2

The Action Research cycle and how the learnings were shared with a wider audience

Colony 47 NAYSS recognised the self identified need of newly arrived families and communities for information and education around parenting and family relationships in Australia. Through Action Research cycles they documented that outcomes for their core client group, newly arrived young people, are greatly enhanced when their parents are informed and engaged with the new lives of their children.

On 22 November 2007, Relationships Australia Tasmania, Colony 47 and a Steering Committee, including representatives from African Australian communities organised a one-day forum, *Strengthening Families In a New Country*. The forum was designed to explore family relationships in Australia with new arrivals from Africa and was attended by approximately 200 people, predominantly African Australians and some service providers.

Through Action Research, Colony 47 NAYSS decided to work with a group of African Australian young people to put on a presentation at the forum, titled 'UNITY UNITED'.

'UNITY UNITED' was a movement/dance piece where the young people shared their experiences, insights, perspectives and hopes for the future. Now 'UNITY UNITED' is also a documentary film.

The first Action Research cycle on this project is documented in the following table. This clearly identifies the question being investigated, as well as recording the key findings of each phase. In addition to the written report, Colony 47 NAYSS produced a DVD that demonstrates elements of the process, such as people talking about their experiences and observations, reflecting on these experiences and suggesting changes to improve the situation for others in similar circumstances. The DVD also demonstrates stakeholder involvement. The DVD, along with the written documentation, is one method of sharing findings with stakeholders and other services more widely.

Question	What would it take for representatives from the NAYSS client group to have their voices heard by their communities?
Observe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Engagement with clients and stakeholders has identified that there are few, if any, mediums for the NAYSS client group to be heard by their own communities. ▶ Acculturation for communities to this new society involves promoting the empowerment of individuals and their right to self-expression for not only individual health but for the health and evolution of the whole community.
Reflect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ For newly arrived young people to successfully settle, they need to feel like they belong and have a positive sense of contribution to the community. ▶ For human rights to be upheld, we need to foster and nurture processes for newly arrived communities to hear the voices of their young people and understand their strengths, issues and perspectives.
Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Include reflections and learnings from previous Action Research projects. ▶ Research what has been implemented in other parts of Australia. ▶ Negotiate with key stakeholders to ensure communication and support. ▶ Develop a process which authentically engages young people from the client group to share and devise a presentation for their wider communities.
Act	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Engaging a young person as Project Officer to co-ordinate the project. ▶ Present at a local college with a large number of new arrival students to explain project and gauge interest. ▶ Workshop sessions and rehearsals with participants. ▶ Development of a presentation which highlights the stories, experiences, perspectives and issues of the young participants. ▶ Present at the <i>Strengthening Families in a New Country</i> forum. ▶ Ongoing evaluation as project evolves and continues.

Tips and checklist

Below are some suggestions to keep in mind while working through and documenting your Action Research:

- ▶ Make your observations and use them as the rationale for your exploration.
- ▶ Develop a clear question.
- ▶ Keep your question clearly in mind as you work through your Action Research cycle/s.
- ▶ Document the extent to which additional sources of information were involved such as literature or other Reconnect services.
- ▶ Keep a clear awareness of which phase of the cycle you are in.
- ▶ Ensure the points you are recording fit within the phase you are currently in.
- ▶ Keep a clear and logical relationship between each phase of Action Research.
- ▶ Document how stakeholders are involved in each phase of the Action Research cycles.
- ▶ The action can vary from the plan to ensure a responsive approach and if this is the case, document whether it still relates to the original issue or if a more appropriate question has emerged.
- ▶ Tie the end point of the cycle back to the question asked.
- ▶ At the end of a cycle, be clear about the lessons learnt through the process, what should be retained and what might be done differently.
- ▶ Provide enough detail in your Action Research reports so that the above points are clear to your readers.

Further reading

The main reference for Action Research in Reconnect and NAYSS is the '*Reconnect Action Research Kit*' written by Phil Crane and Leanne Richardson (Oct, 2000) <http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/housing/reconnect_action_research_kit.htm>

Other references that may be of interest:

Hunter, Faorligh and Francis, Steve, (2006) *A Guide to Undertaking Action Research in the Newly Arrived Youth Support Service (NAYSS)*. Melbourne, Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues

Quixley, Suzi (2008) *Participatory Action Research: An Outline of the Concept*
<<http://www.suziqconsulting.com.au>>

Wadsworth, Yoland (1984) *Do It Yourself Social Research*, Victorian Council of Social Service and Melbourne Family Care Organisation, Melbourne

Reconnect Program Guidelines 2007-08
<http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/housing/reconnect_program_guidelines/>

Websites you may find useful

<<http://www.scu.edu.au/schools/gcm/ar/arhome.html>>

This website contains resources and papers from well-known Action Researchers detailing their experiences.

<<http://education.qld.gov.au/students/advocacy/equity/gender-sch/action/action.html>>

This website contains an example of a Queensland Action Research process about 'Boys, Gender and Schooling'.

<http://carbon.cudenver.edu/~mryder/itc/act_res.html>

This website contains many different sources and references as well as links to articles from 1980s – 2000.

Notes