REPORT PREPARED BY

HEALTHY COMMUNITIES RESEARCH CENTRE

THE UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND

MERCURY RISING

AN EVALUATION

BUILDING CAPACITY FOR MENTAL HEALTH
SELF-HELP GROUPS IN QUEENSLAND

APRIL 2010

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Acknowledgements

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An Overview

The *Mercury Rising* Project

The aim of Self Help Queensland's (SHQ) *Mercury Rising* project is to "build the capacity of current mental health support groups across Queensland and to assist the development of new and emerging groups." (SHQ, 2008). As part of the capacity-building process, the Healthy Communities Research Centre at the University of Queensland was invited to provide an independent evaluation of the programme.

Through a scoping report that drew on the experiences of members of self-help groups, SHQ has identified four priority areas for its *Mercury Rising* Project that act as a guide for the evaluation. These are:

1. Networks: with the goal of identifying groups and drawing them into networks.

2. Training: identification of training needs and provision of such training.

3. Small grants: provision of money to groups.

4.   Relationships: building relationships between individuals, groups and networks.

The focus of this evaluation is the way and the extent to which SHQ is helping to build capacity in these four priority areas and the kinds of effect this appears to have among the many self-help groups who have become involved in the project's activities. For example, the extent to which self-help groups experience increased stability, report greater support and are better connected within a variety of networks. At an individual level, the extent to which people feel happier and more part of groups can also be considered. At a project accountability level, consideration can be made of what changes might have occurred in groups and the implications of this for future funding and potentially different ways of supporting self help groups.

Overall, this evaluation seeks to answer the question of whether the *Mercury Rising* project has helped mental health self-help groups in Queensland to be able to function in a more sustainable way, to address issues that arise and to operate in a practical and effective manner.

The evaluation process included discussion of capacity building based on the social science literature; documentation gathered by SHQ in the course of its project; information gathered from key personnel, observational data of network meetings; interviews and written commentary gathered from network meeting participants.

Key Findings

The *Mercury Rising* project built capacity of self-help groups in Queensland. The following key findings demonstrate these capacity achievements:

- Project meetings have helped groups make connections between each other.

- Improved connections have helped groups' sense of worth and value.

- Many groups were not connected with other groups or with government agencies in the past.

- Groups that are too small to speak for themselves can be empowered through joining networks.

- Networking can lead to the sharing of resources and mutual support and encouragement between groups.

- Groups linked into networks are more recognised by other organizations. This is tied to increased self-confidence for group members and can potentially decrease the chance of group failure.

- There is a need for paid facilitators.

- Training of group leaders can lead to increased confidence in leadership and facilitation skills.

- Training can increase skills and decrease group tensions that lead to better group function and increased group cohesiveness.

- Small amounts of grant money make a big difference to self help groups.

- All grant-related administrative and acquittal processes need to be within the capabilities of all groups.

- The availability of grant money can increase participation in network meetings.

- Group participation in discussion and consultation over funds distribution and "best use" increases ownership of the project and decreases perceptions of unfairness.

- Grants are linked to increased group confidence and feelings of self-worth ("being able to do things").

- Grants increase resources and a group's ability to function.

- Better relationships lead to decreased isolation, increased confidence and ultimately better group functioning.

The importance of evaluation and practice working together

Evaluation is an important part of any project in order to assess performance, help organisations make decisions, show progress, allow effective use of resources and provide accountability to funding organisations (Eoyang and Berkas, 1998). Measuring progress should not be a focus in itself. Instead it can provide valuable affirmation and feedback to groups, showing that progress has been made or that systems may need to be changed in order for a group to achieve its goals. It can also be a way to demonstrate professionalism to funding organisations by showing how goals have been achieved over the course of a project.

It is useful to remember that organisations have different stakeholders and that each may have different goals and expectations of outcomes for the same organisation. Within the *Mercury Rising* project the stakeholders include individual members of self-help groups, self help groups, the Project Advisory Group members, the SHQ mental health project manager, the sponsor organisation (SHQ) and the granting agency (Disability Services Queensland).

Groups such as mental health self-help groups do vary in size, membership and purpose. Some are more vulnerable than others. Some are connected to other groups while others are not connected. However, all groups generally adapt and change over time for many reasons. These changes are sometimes planned and predictable and at other times are unplanned and unpredictable. This in many respects is the value of community life. Thus by the end of the project groups involved are likely to have changed in one way or another. How they have changed and what they have discovered by becoming involved are the outcomes discussed in this evaluation.

Mental health self-help groups are a particular kind of group that relies largely on volunteers drawn together out of their own life experiences. These life experiences primarily include mental health issues and these are often combined with a suspicion of the medical establishment. Thus a primary hope and goal of the *Mercury Rising* project has been to draw these groups into relationships with each other, with SHQ and with DSQ (the funding agency). Simply establishing some kind of linkage between groups has been a major task, and indeed one of the major successes of this project.

This evaluation seeks to address how and to what extent capacity for mental health support is being achieved through the *Mercury Rising* project. It seeks to do so by examining the scenarios or hopes identified by SHQ for this project in the light of some of the different stakeholders, specifically individual participants in the process, the oversight body (SHQ) and the granting agency.

The evaluation process is intentionally reflective and follows the simple rules identified by Eoyang and Berkas, 1998:

1. Evaluate to inform action.

2. Communicate findings to others in terms they care about and understand.

3. Focus on "differences that make a difference."

As such the report can be read at different levels: for individual reflection; for assessment of group goals and directions or for project accountability.

Capacity building is seen as a "process to build sustainable capacities..." (VicHealth, 2004) or as a process that helps to ensure longer-term survival of groups through skills, resources and networking. Furthermore capacity is defined as the "ability of individuals, organisations or broader social systems to perform appropriate functions and address issues and concerns effectively, efficiently and sustainably." (VicHealth, 2004). Dower and Bush (2002, 28) suggest that capacity is built when mechanisms are developed "in order to create specific change." Change can come through building partnerships, transfer of knowledge, increasing the ability to solve problems and the development of infrastructure such as social, human and financial capacity. The higher the level of capacity in each area, the greater the potential sustainability of the project or group.

Dower and Bush (2002) identify a number of factors critical to the success of capacity building. At local-level projects, such as *Mercury Rising*, relevant enabling factors include:

• Clear identification of the relationship between the development of the empowerment processes used in the project and its impact on the wellbeing of participants.

• Well developed interface between SHQ and a wide range of mental health support groups across the State.

• Evidence of groups 'ownership' of the project and its outcomes.

• Training incorporated.

• Perceived importance of project by local groups and others.

• Built-in evaluation.

• Joint planning between the key stakeholders.

• Willingness to change across the groups and local organizations as discoveries are made during the life of the project.

• Evidence of an emphasis on empowerment of individuals and groups.

• Use of energies, expertise and resources of communities and other organisations.

• A recognition that true learning requires action followed by additional analysis.

Disabling factors include: financial constraints; poor administration; little experience working together; where power imbalances are not acknowledged and addressed; values are not shared; lack of strategies to sustain interest; lack of consensus between organizations; over-emphasis on awareness raising and staffing and communication difficulties rather than practical activities.

The Evaluation

A scoping report for the project was developed by Diana East, SHQ Project Manager for *Mercury Rising*. As part of this report, discussions were held with various groups to ascertain the needs and potential direction for the project. According to this report initial meetings were held in 2002-03 and again in 2008. Following these discussions and the scoping report, SHQ began contacting groups about participation in the project. In addition, SHQ used a preliminary survey of self-help groups to identify areas of concern to the groups themselves. In the scoping report, 82 groups were identified. Later, this number settled to around 69 groups who were from in the Brisbane, Gold Coast, Toowoomba, Sunshine Coast, Far North Queensland and Burnett-Wide Bay area. The project is currently working with 74 groups in various parts of the state with 21 groups (28% of total) being for people from CALD communities (East, personal communication, 2010.)

Networks

In the survey of Brisbane and Gold Coast groups at the commencement of the project, of 17 groups that answered the question about "degree of connectedness," four groups responded that they were strongly connected to other organisations (East, 2008). Of these four, only two had connections with more than one other organisation. 13 groups have loose or no connections with other groups or government organisations.

Of the four priority areas, the creation of networks received the lowest priority ranking by the respondents in the survey, although with only 17 responses, a minor variation of ranking (e.g. one or two respondents) may not be significant. The project was able to reach will beyond those connected to mainstream services by government services. This information is thus able to act as a baseline for determining progress.

Training

In the survey responses there was a lack of clarity regarding the question of training. Nine groups ranking the need for training as "very high" but did not elaborate as to what this might comprise. This may be due to the lack of a specific question regarding training. The Draft Working Document (SHQ, September 2008) suggests that training comprise "equipping people as facilitators and co-facilitators," "linking existing training" and "specifically designed programmes."

In the survey response, more attention was paid by respondents to the need for trained volunteers and the need for having paid facilitators. This is a key finding that demonstrates the value of seeking information from groups about need.

Small grants

A small grants programme attracted the greatest number of positive responses in the survey (12 very high, 4 high). In an open-ended question regarding the main difficulties faced by groups and suggestions for how to overcome these, personnel, resource and promotional needs predominated.

Notes from two of the early regional meetings held (Gold Coast and Brisbane) indicated that the proposed small grant programme dominated proceedings. In the first network meeting (Brisbane), three groups were formed to discuss three priority areas: training, small grants and building linkages. In this way, a range of issues was discussed. In the second meeting, participants remained in one group and only the small grants programme was discussed.

The agreed upon funding process was that all groups could apply for initial funding by invoicing SHQ for the amount of $700 and providing banking details. Acquittal would be a simple description of the use of the funds. A second round of funding was proposed, for a larger amount of up to $3000 that would be by formal application. Groups could submit an application together with another group and receive larger amounts of money. Acquittal of these grants was suggested as taking the form of a story, poem or artwork expressing how the money has been of assistance. This was in order to ensure that the administrative and acquittal processes were within the capability of all groups.

Relationships

SHQ's goal was to use the networks that have been developed as part of the *Mercury Rising* project to assist in building relationships between groups. This in turn is expected to lead to sharing of resources including physical and emotional/psychological. Many of the survey respondents saw promotion of the group as falling under the umbrella of development of relationships. This is perhaps not the most obvious aspect of relationship building.

If one thinks of this in the context of setting in place relationships between service providers or medical professionals and self-help groups, this notion of relationships is more evident. In the words of one survey response: "Politicians, bureaucrats, health professionals, GP's, educators all need to recognise the inestimable value of mental health support groups." (Brisbane/Gold Coast survey results, 2008).

PHASE ONE

The evaluation of *Mercury Rising* took place in two phases. The goal of the first phase was to gain an overview of the beginnings of, and the background to, the project. The aim of the second phase was to revisit this initial snapshot and to examine the development of the project in later stages. After the first phase, a preliminary report was given to SHQ in order to generate discussion and encourage questions around the project. After the second phase of investigation, a draft final report was sent to groups participating in the project. Feedback and commentary from the groups and individuals involved in the project was encouraged at each stage. The final step was the production of the evaluation report.

Networks

1. Do mental health self help groups have connections between themselves and with external groups? At this initial stage it appeared that many self-help groups operated in relative isolation from each other and that the meetings organised in the project were for some groups a new opportunity to build connections. Other groups were not able to take advantage of the network meetings due to issues within the groups themselves.

2. Do group members feel connected to other groups? Many group leaders felt that participating in the project helped them to form a network and to "develop a feeling of progress."

3. *Has participating in the network meetings increased people's perceptions of and reality of connectedness?* People appreciated the connections with other groups and also the connections with resource groups and health professionals that have attended network meetings. For some groups, only a few connections have been made while other groups have taken full advantage of the opportunity to link up with other groups.

4. What is the perceived benefit of being connected to other groups and the community? One of the perceived benefits of being connected to other groups is that some of the groups felt too small to speak for themselves and now feel empowered to do so.

5. Have there been unexpected results as a result of increasing group networking? One unexpected result to come out of increased group networking is the formation of a new group to work on the development of a Gold Coast network to continue working together after the end of the *Mercury Rising* Project.

Training

1. *Are people participating in training?* Most group leaders were interested in receiving training although not everyone was able to participate.

2. *What benefits are they receiving from this?* Of those interviewed who participated in training, the response was positive with people reporting increased confidence in leadership and facilitation skills. 87% (55) of participants in facilitator's training rated the training as "excellent" and 13% (8) as "good" or "very good." (n=63)

3. *What issues might be preventing people from participating in training?* Some issues that might prevent people from participating in training are that with a group of largely volunteers, it is hard for people to commit to the additional time. Other concerns that might be relevant are for the practicality and potential cost of training to individuals.

4. *Is there a link between training and group stability?* In some cases, training has led to resolution of long-term in-group conflict that has increased the stability of the group.

5. *What kinds of new skills do people say they are learning and how are they applying them in a group setting?* Some skills that people have reported learning are conflict resolution, general leadership and ability to prioritise and "let go" or share responsibility.

Small grants

1. *How many small grants were applied for and how many were granted?* 57 groups were invited to apply for first round funding (of $700). 53 applied and received payments.

2. *What were the funds used for?* Funds were used for a wide variety of resources and costs from advertising to securing meeting places for the group to bus fare reimbursements and art materials. See Appendix A for details.

3. *What role has the small grants program come to play in the project?* In some ways it seems as if the small grants programme has come to dominate the project with one interviewee suggesting that the prospect of money had increased their group's interest in participation in the network meetings. Significantly the participants' approaches to the development and roll out of the grants have demonstrated the participatory nature of the project. The inclusion of groups in discussions and consultation on roll out is a model to follow in participatory community development.

4. What are people's perceptions about the value of small grants and the processes adopted to administer the grants? Not one of the groups has complained in any way that the distribution of the funds has been anything other than fair and equitable.

5. Has receiving funding had a measurable effect on group capacity to do things, to organise and for self-perception as a group from the perspective of the participants? There is a perception that received funding has been vital in contributing to group capacity to do things and for group confidence.

6. In what way does it appear funds that have been acquitted contributed to the growth of group resources and relationships from their perspective? It has been suggested that money contributes to credibility, access to volunteers, resources, security and access to training.

7. What does the range of funded projects say about groups' aspirations and needs? The huge variety of funded projects shows the range of aspirations and needs within groups. Some groups have fairly sophisticated needs such as insurance and access to grants while other groups simply need a place to meet and a way to get there.

8. How does the Project Advisory Group (PAG) add value to building capacity in the project? The PAG is made up of representative volunteers from each of the geographically-based networks. One way it has the ability to add capacity is through the provision of "in-house" assessment of second round grant applications. Applications were assessed not by SHQ or agencies but by representatives of the groups themselves.

9. Are there any adverse or unexpected outcomes from the funding process? One possibility is that the availability of grants may have distracted from other key elements of the project. However, the availability of grants can, and does, increases the capacity to access a variety of resources, as it does for any community programme.

Relationships

1. What relationships have been built between groups? Most of the people interviewed have suggested that they plan to pursue further linkages and contacts. For many groups, it is the first time that they have come into contact with other groups and been acknowledged.

> *The meeting was very productive for networking purposes and morale!*
> *I was pleased to know of the African women's group as there are many*
> *African families at my son's primary school in Yeronga. John from*

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> *Brookred said I was welcome to drop in which I will do. I am passing on*
> *Pauline Adam's group to my sister-in-law who is a G.P. at Jimboomba.*
> *So thank you for the opportunity to meet those amazing people.*
>
> *It was interesting and informative to hear people's stories and to*
> *network. I gained a lot from the day.*

2. Are resources being shared? One way that the project helped with this was by encouraging groups to apply jointly for second round funding to share the costs and use of resources.

3. How are people from different groups supporting each other? It appears that people from different groups are supporting each other by meeting and sharing recognition of each other's presence and efforts. The network meetings have shown high levels of mutual support and encouragement for the work of others.

4. What links have been set up with service providers, medical professionals or the wider community? Several interviewees mentioned their appreciation of finding out about resources from other groups and health professionals that have attended network meetings. Observation of meetings has suggested that many people value greatly the connections made at these meetings and are encouraged and excited by finding out what other groups are doing.

Other

1. *What other areas of need have been identified by groups?* Suggestions about other areas of need have included the need for access to specialist professional services such as CALD counselling; advice and training on getting members and raising group profiles. Advice on helping groups obtain registration so that they can access government-provided assistance was another suggestion.

Early snapshots

Appendix One shows the range of activities and resources that were funded in the first round of grants. It illustrates the many things done by groups and also demonstrates some commonalities. Grants were most commonly used for (in descending order): a social event or excursion, promotional material, equipment and a workshop or speakers. This is similar to findings from other evaluations that suggest that the greatest barrier to non-profit organisations' ability to carry out health

promoting activities is resources (Boyle et al, 2007). Indeed, for self-help groups access to resources is a fundamental first step in successful capacity building. Access to these basic resources help groups function better within themselves and build better links to other groups (Boyd 2004). This is one thing SHQ is trying to do through the *Mercury Rising* project. In terms of satisfaction with training received, positive feedback from groups, monies spent and the establishment of networks, the *Mercury Rising* project is laying the groundwork for these processes.

PHASE TWO

Initial findings from the second round of grants (Appendix 2) showed positive indications of increased capacity in mental health self-help groups who participated in *Mercury Rising*.

Networks and relationships

The first round of grants allocated a small sum of money ($700) to 53 groups. Most of these groups used the funds to cover immediate expenses and needs such as promotion, workshops and equipment. The second round of grant money was allocated to 29 grants covering 40 groups. Many of these grants were to newly formed networks of groups such as the Gold Coast Mental Health Network. Groups such as the Africa Women's and Home to Home; the Nabaah Women and Sudanese Family Services; and the Congolese, Sudanese and Single Mother's groups banded together to submit joint applications.

The *Mercury Rising* project has clearly helped groups to forge links not only with outside organisations such as SHQ but also with each other. In their own words:

> *Without...Diana we would still be suspicious of other groups trying to access our resources instead of working together and sharing them.*

> *Having the grant for our visits to the hospitals (Logan and Princess Alexandra Hospital) during Mental Health Week has made our group stronger through increasing their commitment to the network's goals of education, awareness and peer support.*

> *Our group has been strengthened as this project has brought many group facilitators together and a network has evolved which means that as groups we are no longer alone and can work towards mutually beneficial goals...*

A number of groups are using their funding for such things as incorporation, insurance, securing long-term meeting places, contingency money in the bank, moving to establish new groups to meet increasing need – in short, the actions of groups developing organisational and institutional capacity and moving away from ad hoc random actions.

The *Mercury Rising* project has also contributed to morale and an increased sense of self-worth amongst a range of self-help groups. Feedback includes comments like:

...the morale is really high again...the members of the day groups and the resident's faces beam when they see their photos, using equipment, being surrounded by friendly people, you can actually see the feeling of belonging...certainly has helped boost self esteem, and the urge to have a go, try doing something different – getting more involved.

Group members have bonded and are working together to improve their lives.

Having the funding has helped strengthen group friendship, allowing group members to spend more time together...

The workshop strengthened the ties we have with each other by allowing us to enjoy an atmosphere of trust, understanding and acceptance.

Feedback from network meetings

As part of the process of learning through the use of feedback loops, the draft report was verbally presented by the evaluator to the Gold Coast and Brisbane networks. It was also emailed by the project manager to Project Advisory Group members with feedback requested by email and telephone. At the meetings and in the email, SHQ asked participants to reflect on the following questions:

1. To what extent does this report reflect your experience with/your view of the *Mercury Rising* project?

2. What did you hope to get out of participation in this project? Was this achieved?

3. What have been the main outcomes (positive and negative) for you/your group from participating in the project?

4. What have you valued most, if anything, about the process?

5. What would you most like to see happen for groups in your region/groups generally in the next 12 months?

6. If the project continues, what can SHQ do, if anything, to help make this happen?

Some observations from the network meetings

Participants found the tables in the appendix of spending a useful way of visualising needs for groups. Particular note was made of the prevalence of social occasions and excursions and the importance that this has for self-help groups. The comment was made that not only do groups need social occasions where they can relax in each other's company but also that social occasions provide good opportunities for outreach to the wider community and more specifically, non-threatening opportunities for newcomers to these groups.

A new participant in the Gold Coast network commented on how when he started attending the network meetings, he was impressed by how organised and welcoming they were. This was in contrast to the experience of early participants who did not know other people and were anxious about the prospect of working collaboratively. This illustrates the progress made by the Gold Coast network in a short period of time. However, the network had not recently met due to the illness of one of its members which illustrates another aspect of self help groups, that is, their dependence on individuals and their vulnerability to personnel changes or disruptions. Two Gold Coast groups were reported to be not currently meeting due to changing circumstances of participants and leaders.

The benefits of forming a network were discussed. These included the achievements of getting a grant and groups agreeing to forgo their own immediate needs in order to plan collaborative projects. Members talked about how the network meant that skills and resources were able to be shared. One example was the computer skills of one member who was able to design and layout brochures for the network and for the individual groups. Participants highlighted the positive aspects of members getting to know each other, planning and working together.

The main benefits identified from participation in *Mercury Rising* were: validation of goals and support of hopes and dreams; inclusion and connection to the wider community; sharing values of trust and self-help; and getting to know other people. Participants talked about the value of the simplicity of the grant process which was neither complicated nor time-consuming. A particular focus was that groups' goals did not need to be changed in order to acquire funds, that is, the funds were not seen to be tied to certain expectations. One individual spoke about the sense of excitement and empowerment that came from not just being offered money, but also being asked what they wanted to do with it. Participants also appreciated training not only in "best practice" but also in practical skills such as the upcoming training in mental health first aid.

Concluding thoughts on what we have learnt

<u>Individual</u>

On an individual level, since participating in the *Mercury Rising* project, groups report increased self-esteem and positive feelings in members and an increase in regular group attendance. In some cases, the changes are very slight, though personally significant. For example:

> *We no longer have to bend down to get milk out of the fridge,*
> *and defrost it. The large stainless steel urn is wonderful, because*
> *it holds more water and doesn't taste like plastic.*

> *Through hearing others share of their struggles and triumphs,*
> *group participants overcome a sense of isolation and discover a*
> *sense of belonging and hope.*

<u>Small group</u>

Group capacity has increased along with self-esteem. Groups report that such things as being able to pay rent, make regular bookings for venues and even assist other groups with expenses has strengthened independence and group cohesiveness. One group reports that "it is already evident that supportive relationships are forming within the group and a sense of group ownership and membership has quickly developed."

Participants in training reported that learning about tools such as strength cards, understanding group dynamics and peer support and communication skills all contributed directly to improved functioning of their groups. By identifying a need for training of facilitators, SHQ was able to provide valuable and targeted training without a great expenditure of money.

A number of groups used funding to provide workshops whether art therapy, crafts, or on specific mental health related issues.

<u>Project and Funding</u>

The *Mercury Rising* project illustrates that in working with diverse, fractured and fragile groups, implementation of a small number of goals (targeted provision of training, building relationships, creating networks and small grant program) can be effective as long as the self-help groups themselves are involved in planning, decision-making and allocation of resources. That is, that any project empowers through participation and ownership rather than simple distribution of funds or

top-down reorganisation. One of the strengths of this project has been the establishment of the Project Advisory Group that drew its members from within the self-help groups. By staying true to the ideals and aspirations of self-help, the capacity of mental health self-help groups was increased both by internal action and through institutional development.

The groups that were part of this project showed a capacity to identify their own needs, to obtain funds and to effectively manage these funds. Many of these groups were able to do this by aligning themselves with groups with similar interests (by forming networks) and by targeted use of small grants.

The fact that SHQ was able to design and carry out such a project in a timely and efficient manner demonstrates its own internal development of capacity as a professional organisation. This was further illustrated by their use of an outside evaluator.

Implications for the future

This has important implications for future funding of such projects. First, a need was identified. Many mental health self help groups have operated "under the radar" simply by the nature of their loose and independent structure. Identification and contact with these groups was a major first step for *Mercury Rising*. The provision of opportunities for groups to meet together proved to be an effective way to build relationships and networks and to strengthen the internal and external cohesion of these groups. Training assisted in self-management and development of group structural capacity. Funding enabled groups to cooperate with other groups, identify and articulate their own needs and interact with the wider community.

In conclusion, the *Mercury Rising* project has demonstrated that it has been able to help mental health self-help groups in Queensland to build links with each other and with supporting organisations, to address internal operational issues, to extend themselves through training and provision of services and support once financial resources were made available and for these groups to generally operate in more sustainable ways over the life of this project and possibly beyond.

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Appendix One: First Round Grants

	Workshop or speakers	Transport	Place to meet (venue)	Equip-ment	Promo-tional material	Art or craft materials	Coun-selling	Social Event or excursion	Resource & reference materials	Feeling valued	Start-up new group	Incorpor-ation	Money in bank or financial security	Starting a business	Emergency relief
Nabaah (Sudanese) Women	x														
Multicultural Mental Health Consumers Network		x													
Southside Anxiety Disorders				x	x										
Mind in Art						x									
Suncare Art Group						x									
Suncare Music Group				x											
The Shack Home Away from Home							x	x							
Kickstart					x									x	
People Surviving Psychiatry	x		x					x							
Hands Up Depression & Anxiety Support					x			x	x	x					
Hands Up Support		x						x	x	x				x	
You're Welcome		x		x	x	x		x	x		x				
Cairns Depression Support									x	x				x	
Brisbane Southside				x	x										
Cambodian Women's Support								x							
Congolese Women's Support						x		x							
Fighting Laziness (Burundian Men's Support)														x	
Bundaberg Women's Support	x			x	x									x	
Freedom & Friendship (Gladstone)	x							x							
Biloela Rainbow Connections	x			x											
Hervey Bay/Fraser Coast GEMS SH				x	x			x			x				
HB-FC Recreation, Social & Craft				x	x	x		x			x	x			
African Women Friendship	x							x							
Jimboomba New Horizons Depression Support		x						x						x	x
Oasis Peer Support									x						
Africa Home to Home Support			x	x											

	Workshop or speakers	Transport	Place to meet (venue)	Equip-ment	Promo-tional material	Art or craft materials	Coun-selling	Social Event or excursion	Resource & reference materials	Feeling valued	Start-up new group	Incorp-oration	Money in bank or financial security	Starting a business	Emergency relief
Gold Coast Depression Support		x			x										
Congolese Men's	x							x							
Kurraby Depression Support					x										
In the Meantime Day				x					x						
In the Meantime Night				x					x						
Sandgate Community Connect						x									
Single Mother's								x							
Brainwaves Artworx			x		x										
Myriad													x		
Gold Coast Eating Disorder					x										
WECH Bipolar & Depression	x							x							
Sunshine Coast Walking															
Marborough GEMS Gentle Doves & Men's								x							
Spanish-speaking Women	x							x							
Rainbow	x				x				x						
Townsville Muslim Women's					x			x							
Salvadorean Family Support	x							x							
Gold Coast Anxiety Support															
TAGA					x										
Maryborough GEMS Gentle Doves & Men's				x									x		
Liberian (Mandingo) Women								x							
Sudanese Family Services							x								x
PADA													x (Insur-ance)		
Anxiety Self Help Gold Coast			x						x						
Open Studio Nambour	x				x						x				
The Shack Creative Writers				x											

Appendix Two: Second Round Grants

	Workshop or speakers	Transport	Place to meet (venue)	Equip-ment	Promo-tional material	Art or craft materials	Counsel-ling	Social Event or excursion	Resource & reference materials	Start-up new group	Incorpor-ation	Money in bank or financial security	Starting a business	Emergency relief	Insurance
New Horizons Depression Support	x			x	x				x						
Oasis Peer Support			x	x	x					x	x				
Brainwaves Art Worx			x	x	x	x									
Hervey Bay GEMS				x				x							
Biloela Rainbow Connections		x				x		x							
Freedom & Friendship		x		x				x							
Sandgate Community Connect	x					x				x					
GC Mental Health Network					x							x			x
Multicultural MH Consumer & Carer Network		x						x							
Myriad	x					x									
Southside Anxiety Disorders		x		x	x								x		
Bundaberg Women's				x					x						
Muslim Women's				x	x										x
Family Well-being		x		x	x				x						
Hand-up & Ayr		x			x				x	x	x				x
You're Welcome				x	x	x									
In the Meantime Evening				x					x						
In the Meantime Morning	x							x							
Kickstart				x											
Suncare Music	x			x											
Suncare Art						x									
Burundi Men	x								x	x					
Karen Men	x			x					x	x					
Jimboomba New Horizons				x					x						
Kuraby Depression				x											
Myriad	x	x													
Bipolar & Depression	x		x						x						
Africa Women's & Home to Home	x	x	x	x				x							
Nabaah Women & Sudanese Family Services						x		x							
Congolese, Sudanese & Single Mothers	x					x									

Appendix Three: Summary of feedback received from draft final report

*All comments are direct quotes from written feedback unless otherwise noted and are grouped by subject/theme.

Overall project

- The Mercury Rising project was an excellent way to learn ways to interact and network with other groups, learn new ideas also have an understanding of the positives and negatives of an strategy that is used by other groups.

- I do not believe there was any negative outcome but positive outcomes.

Networks

- The networking and sharing of knowledge between groups has led to all participants has been empowered and has helped remove the mindset that "we are *just* a support group". It has affirmed our value to each other and our community.

- The Mercury Rising project was an excellent way to learn ways to interact and net work with other groups, learn new ideas also have an understanding of the positives and negatives of an strategy that is used by other groups.

- The networking and training with other groups has greatly increased awareness of what others are doing and where they are based. To a limited extent 4 to 5 instances we have been able to tell enquirers about other groups that might better meet their specific needs. No knowledge if these referrals were followed through.

Training

- Because of the training received under this project, one of our group members now feels confident and capable to act as Coordinator if I am absent from the group. This is a huge outcome for a person with dual disability issues who has never been anything more than participant in [...] activities; he can and does now happily lead and co-ordinate our meetings.

- As Coordinator myself I also have gained greater confidence in my leadership role within the group. I am sure that this is a result of both the networking and training gained under this project.

- Yes we have learned a great deal in the way of developing and expanding our horizons and how to plan and train our committee members also how to interact between the members. I could say this was a wholesome learning.

Relationships

- One notable outcome is that I have established a partnership with an organisation who is able to provide transport for people to attend [...], at a minimal cost. For me to go out and secure this partnership is a great outcome for me personally because it demonstrates how far I have come as a result of participating in Mercury Rising. For our [...] members, most of whom are financially disadvantaged and receive a disability support pension, the benefits of being able to attend our self-help group meetings without the worry of how to get there and home again is a real blessing.

- I believe when we had to share ideas and talk about the new ideas and the different ways each group had used, was a really great way to learn also the little practicable games we had to play in group was very eye opener.

Grants

- In regard to the small grants, they were very well received as we have no source of income. Hence promotional material such as our [...] postcard, as well as new chairs, fans, and a fridge are much appreciated in our hot region ... Being eligible for funding also reinforced the knowledge that we do make a valuable contribution to our community.

- The group has long (7 years) been seeking funding to assist with everyday expenses, member training, one off outings, guest speakers (to cover fares, petrol, coffee break). The members see in financial support a recognition that their "self help" efforts are valued and not some "hole in the corner" exercise that can't be acknowledged too publicly...The first small grant secured the group's future for 18 months. The grants came at a most fortuitous time as the long term convener had retired and there had to be a change of venue. Although

our new hosts are an open and generous organisation [I'm] sure they appreciated the fact that we were not going to be a drag on their resources...With the funds from our large grant we are planning to stage a series of largish workshops...

<u>Comments on personnel</u>

- Many thanks to Diana for the skills and knowledge she was able to impart to us, and the informative and entertaining way in which she did so, while always encouraging each person to be fully involved.

<u>General comments</u>

- Over the last 7 months our average attendances at meetings have been 10-11 with about 35 different people attending at least once. These attendances have been slightly higher than previously due to the moral boost the grants, care and attention and networking gave members.

<u>For the future</u>

- I would like my group to get bigger and stronger to achieve our goals of helping more people. Also I would like to improve our meeting and give it better structure.

- We should have more of the similar projects, so we can continue to learn and help other achieve their goals and have a happy life, as dividual makes families and families makes society if we have happy individual we will have a happy family and it will reflect on having a happy healthy society and a happy Australia.

<u>Comments from project personnel</u>

- Regional networks have been moving towards developing a quality framework based on agreed principles of good practice for mental health self help support groups. Twenty-one draft principles have been discussed and adopted thus far by both the Gold Coast and Townsville networks. One of the advantages of having a set of agreed principles is seen to be that it both adds to the professionalism and to the overall structure of groups.

- Some groups are looking at providing a service that is wider than a mere support group whilst others are developing multiple groups. They are increasingly seeing support being operationalised through a range of support services (including information, telephone support, advocacy, community education), not just through support groups per se. This

reflects a significant shift towards a more professionalised support function and some of these groups are developing organisational arrangements which are becoming more and more structured and formalised (including incorporation) whilst endeavouring to remain firmly committed to the self help philosophy/ethos. 'Mercury Rising' is providing the basis to assist groups to further develop such organisational frameworks that will not only allow continued delivery of well-researched, authoritative information and support but will also continue to raise the community and professional profiles of the groups involved.

- ...the draft evaluation report does not mention any of the attempts to include CALD groups in the ccb activities. The project is currently working with 74 groups in various parts of the state with 21 groups **(**28% of total**)** being for people from CALD communities.

- I suggest there are some critical overgeneralisations in the evaluation report. The report places the grants component of the project as the focus of the project with other components such as the training and networking portrayed as secondary. Greater coverage was given in the report to an examination of the grants component, its allocation, funds usage and impact on capacity building. Other aspects of the project such as training and networking were dealt with in less depth, with the report stating "the grants programme has come to epitomise the participatory nature of the project with extensive discussion and consultation over funds distribution and "best use"'. Although I have only attended 2 meetings, this assertion seems to be misplaced and actually devalues the training and various networking components of the project. Furthermore, it does not give due regard to the process of capacity building involved in the training and networking components. These may be less measurable than the grants components but are no less important to the development of more sustainable self help groups and networks.

- Another concern of mine related to the statement 'that the existence of money may have distracted from other key elements'. Embedded is this statement is the assumption that there is something morally suspect / inconsistent about self help groups accessing grants whereas it is the norm for other NGOs in our market economy. A more balanced examination would have shown how the grants program reinforced the other capacity building initiatives rather than the current perspective which suggests the grants program dwarfed them.

- Another concern about the report includes the overly academic terminology of the report which I feel serves to disengage the participants rather than provide a basis for critical input and reflection.