



ACTION RESEARCH

USING WOMEN'S LIVED EXPERIENCES TO PROMOTE WOMEN'S HEALTH

This resource talks about how action research can help women and service providers work together to empower women to improve their health opportunities, services and resources.

What is Action Research?

Action research sees women as experts in their own health.

Women are encouraged to reflect on their life experiences and then identify, implement and evaluate actions to promote their health.

Why do Action Research?

Action research provides a powerful opportunity for women to voice their experiences and opinions about their own health and to make decisions about what actions they would like to take to improve their health.

Implementing and evaluating actions provides an opportunity for women to learn new skills in research, planning, administration and community advocacy.

Some ideas on how to do action research

1. Promote the research idea to service providers and community women and establish a project reference group to guide the project
2. Provide a safe space and sufficient time for

women to explore the issue of interest (eg via a series of workshops)

3. Provide spaces for service providers to discuss the issues and identify opportunities for action, potential challenges and resources
4. Support women to make decisions about possible actions
5. Resource women and involve service providers in the implementation of actions
6. Evaluate actions and explore future action
7. Resource women to undertake on-going community advocacy and identify other ways to sustain health promoting actions

Where to start

A great user-friendly book on action research methods is 'Do it Yourself Social Research' by Yoland Wadsworth. You can borrow this book from Women's Health West. Contact Joy Free, researcher on 9689 9588 or via email on joy@whwest.org.au.

An example of action research

The Young Mum's Rock project used action research to promote the mental health of young mothers living in Melton. An existing support group of young mothers carried out a number of workshops to explore factors that impact on young mother's mental health and then identify and implement actions to promote mental health. The young mothers identified two key factors - social isolation and lack of knowledge about local services. They decided to produce a brochure aimed at young isolated mothers talking about what it is really like to be a young mother living in Melton and how to get the support young mothers require.

The young mothers also planned and hosted an event at the local indoor playground to provide an opportunity for young mothers to meet with each other in a fun and informal environment and learn about local services available to them. Since the event, the young mothers have been involved with a range of local and national media talking about the needs of young mothers. One mother has started a second young mother's support group.

The project continues to support and resource young mothers to become community advocates. The evaluation demonstrated that the young mothers were very proud of their achievements in this project. They thought that they had done something worthwhile, helping other women in the community. Service providers identified that the action research process empowered women to take ownership of the project and contributed to the broader community.

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Produced as part of the Young Mums Rock! project by Joy Free, Researcher, Women's Health West, March 2006

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