

The Gazebo Café Skills Training Program — A Multi-perspective Evaluation

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Interwork Limited is an open employment service that aims to maximise participation of individuals in the open labour market. As part of its services Interwork offers a Gazebo Café Program. The aim of this research project was to evaluate the impact of the participation in the Gazebo Café Program (a work preparation and skills training centre), from the perspective of key stakeholders. The rationale for this evaluation was to provide the management team of Interwork with information to inform decision-making for future directions of the Café. The project was undertaken as partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Applied Science in Occupational Therapy with Honours. In-depth interviews were conducted with three consumers, as well as two focus groups with four employment coordinators, and two referring agency staff members respectively. Analysis of the data revealed seven themes. The results suggested that participation in the Gazebo Café Program was a positive experience. Consumers felt they developed functional skills. Employment coordinators and referring agency staff emphasised the impact of the development of social and interpersonal skills. Opportunities to experience meaningful occupation while performing the work role, all within a natural and supportive community environment were valued impacts. Issues were raised relating to finding the right composition of consumers with and without disabilities, the affordability of the services for external users, and the current unavailability of accredited training. While the findings expand upon existing literature, they describe impacts of participation in a transition program for consumers that appear to not have been described elsewhere. Information is provided to other service providers in regards to the value and impact of such a program. Implications for open employment services are discussed.

Since the early 20th Century, western societies have considered the opportunity to work a fundamental right. This right has included people with a disability “who have suffered considerable and sustained disadvantage in obtaining work” (Buys & Rennie, 2001, p. 96). Following the introduction of the Australian Commonwealth Disability Services Act in 1986, rapid growth has occurred within open employment services for people with a disability (Farris & Stancliffe, 2001, p. 143). Open employment services aim to maximise participation of individuals in the open labour market. Interwork Limited, established in South Australia in 1991, is an open

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employment service that aims to maximise participation of individuals in the open labour market. It is funded by the Department of Family and Community Services and provides job preparation, job searching and job maintenance support services. Services are provided to people with disabilities, including physical, sensory, psychiatric and intellectual disabilities. Interwork has, over the past couple of years, extended its service to include people without a disability who are disadvantaged in the open labour market, including Indigenous youth and job seekers who are in pre-preparatory phases.

Interwork is quite distinct from other supported open employment services in South Australia. It provides ongoing support as is required by a large proportion of its consumers and a brokerage model in the employment of support workers (Rees, 1996). Another distinctive feature of Interwork is its Gazebo Café Program. The Gazebo Café Program allows the assessment of work capacity for individuals, and offers real work experience and skill development in a food service facility. The Gazebo Café is located within the grounds of a community centre and is a fully functional Café. It was established in 1996 in recognition of the absence of a transition program for people with a disability, who have not had the opportunity to experience and develop workplace expectations and skills. Over the past 7 years the Gazebo Café Program has extended its service to include people without disability who are disadvantaged in the open labour market.

Transition programs aim to create opportunities for individuals to adjust to the workplace experience and develop a vocational personality. Strauser and Waldrop (1999) infer that more fundamental services are needed to develop the work personality in vulnerable consumers, thus assisting them to adjust to work, perform tasks, and achieve work satisfaction. A study of types of vocational rehabilitation services and the employment outcomes of consumers with serious mental illness, found that transition programs are underutilised (Finch & Wheaton, 1999). A discussion on employment rehabilitation program policy strategies proposes that creative new ways be devised to respond to the increasing disadvantage individuals with disability are experiencing in the open labour market (Fabian, 1999). The Gazebo Café Program attempts to fill a gap in open employment service delivery by "providing an opportunity for skill development at an interim level between the point of starting to consider work as an option and actually handling the demands of a real workplace" (Forsyth, 2001, p. 4).

Interwork consumers each have an employment coordinator whose role it is to plan and implement individualised strategies which will assist them in preparing for and finding employment. For some consumers, participation in the Gazebo Café Program forms part of their pathway to finding a job. Duration of participation in the program varies from consumer to consumer and depends on the aims of the placement and the progress made by the consumer. Most consumers participate for at least a week, some for a fortnight and others may attend for up to 6 months. Some consumers attend daily, while others attend between 1 to 4 days per week. Consumers may participate in customer service duties and/or food preparation duties.

Currently the management of Interwork has a number of decisions to make in regard to future directions of the Gazebo Café Program. Financial viability is a consideration, and presently Interwork supplements the income generated by the Café, in order to run the Gazebo Café Program. Over the years it has become

apparent to the management of Interwork that the Gazebo Café Program's main benefits are the value of skill assessment, training and work experience offered to consumers. While facilities and support services of the Gazebo Café Program are used mostly by Interwork consumers, they are also available to external organisations on a fee for service basis. The management of Interwork is considering expanding fee for service opportunities by providing accredited training through the Gazebo Café Program to consumers who want to pursue opportunities in the hospitality sector. As first step in the decision-making process, Interwork's management wanted to explore the value of the current Gazebo Café Program. An evaluation of the perspective of users of the program was felt to be beneficial to inform decision-making. Users included consumers and referring parties, both from within and outside of Interwork.

Historically, research has been limited in regard to the views of consumers in the area of vocational rehabilitation, but it is crucial to the effectiveness of service delivery (McCarthy & Leirer, 2001). Petrovski and Gleeson (1997) state that it is essential that service providers move away from reliance on secondary information, and ask the consumer directly about their experiences. As Whitney-Thomas, Timmons, Gilmore, and Thomas state, "consumers of vocational rehabilitation services must have a voice" (1999, p. 39). The role transition programs play in open employment services, from the perspective of consumers, therefore needs to be a focus of future research. Evaluation research was chosen as the most appropriate form of program assessment for this study, as it enables the incorporation of the perspective of consumers and other service users of the Gazebo Café Program. Evaluation research can also increase understanding of individuals' experiences, the value of these experiences, and how they can occur in the future (Wadsworth, 1997).

This research project asked the question: what is the impact of participation in the Gazebo Café Program for individuals who experience disadvantage in the labour market? The project was undertaken to obtain users' perspectives on the impact of the Gazebo Café Program.

Method

Research Design

This research used a qualitative evaluation design of both an inductive and formative nature. Inductive evaluation involves exploration that is not limited to stated, predetermined goals (Patton, 1987). Formative evaluation involves the description of holistic effects on participants in order to inform program improvement (Patton, 1987). Such a design was selected to describe naturally unfolding program impacts, and to explore the experiences of participants in depth and detail. This approach was chosen for its usefulness in revealing areas in which the Gazebo Café Program could be improved, as well as highlighting strengths that should be preserved (Patton, 1987).

Participants

Three stakeholder groups were identified in collaboration with Interwork's management — consumers, employment coordinators and referring agency staff. It was felt that these key stakeholders were the main users of the Gazebo Café Program on a daily basis and were best suited to provide their perspective on its impact. The following groups participated in the research: three consumers who had participated

in the Gazebo Café Program; four employment coordinators employed by Interwork Limited and who work with the consumers who access the Gazebo Café Program; and four referring agency staff members who work with consumers who access the Gazebo Café Program.

Consumers approached for this research had attended the Gazebo Café Program for no less than 7 days within the past 12 months. Employment coordinators and referring agency staff who participated in this research had worked with the Gazebo Café Program for at least a 6-month period. The researcher selected participants purposively. Purposive selection was chosen due to the limited available pool of potential participants. Purposive selection aims to “select information rich cases for in-depth study” (Rice & Ezzy, 1999, p. 43), which was appropriate for this in-depth qualitative evaluation research.

Once potential employment coordinator and referring agency staff participants were identified, the researcher telephoned them to explain the research, and invited them to take part. Those who expressed interest were sent an information sheet, and when volunteers contacted the researcher, focus group interviews were arranged. Two referring agency staff members responded from a pool of five and all employment coordinators contacted agreed to participate.

Once potential consumer participants were identified, the researcher contacted the consumer's employment coordinator. The employment coordinator in turn contacted the consumer to explain the research and invite them to be interviewed by the researcher at the Gazebo Café. Those who expressed interest were sent an information sheet.

Data Gathering

Three semi-structured single interviews were conducted with consumers, using open-ended questions (Appendix A). This type of interview is consistent with the objective of obtaining meaningful data of a depth and descriptive detail that reflects the understanding of the various perspectives of the participants (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Rice & Ezzy, 1999).

Two semi-structured focus group interviews were conducted with employment coordinators and referring agency staff respectively. The focus groups' structure centered on open-ended questions (Appendix B). Focus group interviews allowed for the exploration and stimulation of ideas that were produced through group dynamics (Holloway, 1997; Morgan, 1998), and were thus consistent with the objective of gathering rich narrative data.

The semi-structured nature of both individual and group interviews attempted to gain rich data, reduce the rate of data that was meaningless (Holloway, 1997), and produce more efficient group comparison analysis (DePoy & Gitlin, 1998). Interviews were recorded on audiotape and then transcribed verbatim.

Data Analysis

All transcripts were read until the researcher was familiar with them (Koch, 2001). Their content was then analysed question by question in order to “identify coherent and important examples, themes and patterns in the data” (Patton, 1987, p. 149). Categories were then grouped together to form themes salient to the experience of consumers and the impact of participation in the Gazebo Café Program.

Research Integrity

To heighten the accuracy and rigour of data interpretation, several strategies were applied. The method of triangulation was used; first by examining the impact of participation in the Gazebo Café Program from the perspective of consumers, employment coordinators, and referring agency staff members; second by gathering data using single interviews and focus group interviews. Predetermined, open-ended questions written in complete conversational sentences allowed information to be collected consistently (Krueger, 1998) through interviews. Sections of data were categorised and organised into themes by both the researcher and the research supervisor, independent of each other, to check that the allocation of themes and categories to data was consistent and reliable. The researcher also established an audit trail of the research process, documenting clearly the methods used to gather and analyse data (DePoy & Gitlin, 1998).

Ethical Considerations

Consumers of the Gazebo Café Program experience a wide variety of disability, including intellectual, mental, acquired brain injury and physical. Consumers were encouraged to both share the information sheet with their advocate/carer, and invite them to attend the interview. Written consent forms were used to obtain consent from all participants and from consumers' advocate/carer if appropriate. Ethical approval was obtained from the University of South Australia.

Results

Seven primary themes reflecting the perspective of the participants in relation to the impact of participation in the Gazebo Café Program were identified from the data. Four important issues relating to the program but not directly linked to the research question emerged from the data (Table 1).

TABLE 1

What is the Impact of Participation in the Gazebo Café Program for Individuals who Experience Disadvantage in the Labour Market?

Perspective obtained from:	Positive Impact	Negative Impact
Consumer, employment coordinator & referring agency staff	Skill acquisition, Community interaction, Building a sense of self	
Consumer & employment coordinator	Work	
Consumer & referring agency staff	Staff attitude	
Employment coordinator & referring agency staff	Stepping stone to open employment	Disability Accreditation Program to work pathways
Employment coordinator		Only one program, only one location
Referring agency staff		Cost

Skill Acquisition

Participants reported that the program allows for a variety of functional skills to be developed, specifically in relation to the food and hospitality industry. Many of these skills are transferable to a variety of settings and tasks such as health and safety and customer service. Consumers acknowledged they had learnt a range of hospitality skills, with a specific focus on basic kitchen hand skills. One consumer commented:

Well in a way I'm learning a lot more than what I actually know ... Like teaching me all the basics of being a chef.

Consumers also developed interpersonal skills. They developed social skills such as the ability to work in a team and to take direction. They also developed living skills, including nutritional and cooking skills. The program uses an approach to skill development that uses consumer-centred goals. Goals are graded over time to allow for changes in the consumer's level of ability and interest. As one employment coordinator commented:

... just as ... time progressed he became more and more aware and more active and more able to do things and more willing to take on advice and stuff.

The referring agency staff particularly valued that the program provides a wide range of opportunities for the development of skills. As one staff member stated:

I don't think there is really anywhere else that they can go and get that range of experiences that they do there.

Community Interaction

The Gazebo Café is set within the Glandore Community Centre; thus the Centre plays an important role in the impact of the program. Participants identified several factors that influence this role. First, a variety of services are situated within the Centre, creating a sense of affiliation and community. One employment coordinator described:

There's a sense of affiliation 'cause there are so many other things out there at Glandore. There's radio stations, kindys ... there's a lot of sense of community about the place.

Second, the patrons of the Centre, in particular older people, use the Café, which creates the opportunity for consumers to meet new people and to participate in mainstream community. For example, one consumer stated:

And you learn new people, and people very happy, so some people I help as much as I can, you know, like I open the door for them, like that. That makes me feel happy.

Third, the park in which the Centre is situated provides a beautiful surrounding for consumers as they participate in the program. As one referring agency staff member commented:

For the students to be able to be given the opportunity to actually be in a simulated situation like that in a nice environment, I mean being down in that park, and with that setting, and having elderly people that come in from the community. I thought that that was fantastic.

Building a Sense of Self

Participation in the program allows consumers the opportunity to experience a new environment, move out of their comfort zones and develop confidence. One consumer commented that:

I never like done this, like go out and do this before. Like that. I might do a little bit helping my mum like that. And like you know, very comfortable you now set table or plate. Before Café, nup, but now, yeah.

Consumers experience a sense of pride and achievement while involved with the program. Along with this their motivation and self-esteem increase. Employment coordinators valued this impact highly, with one stating:

Some people that have worked there have gone from one hour sessions to basically being there full day every day, and just the amazing change in them, and their sense of accomplishment ...

Stepping Stone to Open Employment

The support and flexibility of the program were highly valued as important impacts. They enable consumers to be exposed to new experiences and challenges in a safe and appropriate manner. Consumers also viewed the real work demands of the Café as having a significant impact. These elements allow the program to act as a transition between training and open employment. Employment coordinators discussed this issue:

... it still has that (realistic) element because it does service the community as well.

Gazebo probably gives them self confidence and that, you know, support, before out into open employment.

Work

The program provides consumers with the opportunity to engage in meaningful occupation. As one consumer stated:

Like time got passed, something to do, and you meet other people too, and you help as much as you can.

Engagement in meaningful occupation, specifically work, enables consumers to experience the work role. Within the framework of the work role, consumers develop a work ethic and earn a wage. One employment coordinator noted:

... (it) allows them to develop a work ethic and know what's expected and build confidence and social skills ..., before they hit the big wide world.

Staff Attitude

The staff members of the program, including the chef, support workers and employment coordinators, are consistent, caring, positive and firm in their interactions with consumers, and provide great support. A consumer stated:

They're just delightful!

Disability

Employment coordinators expressed concern that consumers with a disability are pooled together in the program and thus creating a high proportion of people with disabilities on the work site, with one commenting that:

It's still pooling people together with disability as well.

One referring agency member considered the issue of integration of consumers with disabilities and those without disabilities on the work site:

I took some kids down there, and they never really said much about it, but I think some of them actually felt a little bit threatened with the people down there who had disabilities.

Accreditation

Referring agency staff stated that accreditation of skills acquired by their students or consumers while participating in the program was crucial in gaining funding from government. Both referring agency staff and employment coordinators perceived that the opportunity to gain accreditation was highly valued by consumers. An employment coordinator explained:

And the young person who I'd been working with went there with the assumption that it would lead to a [certificate] one [certificate] two in hospitality and/or food making, and it hasn't eventuated, which really put him off. That's what I thought. I felt disappointed. He felt really disappointed.

Program to Work Pathways

Participants discussed pathways from the Gazebo Café Program to employment as fee for service arrangements do not include assistance with further pathways. Developing these pathways was perceived as the role of Interwork. One participant noted:

But I do believe that ... it would be good if Interwork did pick them up for that next step too.

Only One Program, Only One Location

Employment coordinators expressed the need for programs that could offer a variety of training and skill development in different locations. One participant stated:

And I often wish we had more Gazebo's, but in different industries, like a manufacturing type place and a clerical type place, and a gardening type place. Just for vocational training, and skills acquisition, and you get to see how consumers take direction, work in teams, how they learn ... functional assessment ... It's brilliant for that.

Cost

Referring agency staff expressed difficulty in affording the fee required for their students or consumers to participate in the Gazebo Café Program.

... that would be an inhibitor for us now ... we would probably have to find some funding ...

Discussion

The findings of this research suggest that the impact of participation in the Gazebo Café Program is overwhelmingly positive. Negative issues raised included finding the right balance between consumers who experience disability and those who do not, accredited training currently not being available, and the affordability of the program for external users. Consumers developed a variety of skills for increasing opportunities to gain open employment, including functional, social and interpersonal skills. The program enables consumers to build confidence and experience meaningful occupation while performing the work role within a natural and supportive community environment. While the findings expand upon existing literature, they describe

impacts of participation in a transition program for consumers that appear not to have been described elsewhere.

While employment coordinators, referring agency staff and consumers referred to the development of functional skills as an important impact of the Gazebo Café Program, employment coordinators and referring agency staff placed greater emphasis on the impact of developing social and interpersonal skills. Petrovski and Gleeson (1997), in their qualitative study on the influences of job satisfaction for people who experience an intellectual disability, referred to the heavily documented need for social skills and social integration for workers with intellectual disability. They suggested that open-employment service providers needed to place greater emphasis on social integration, and provide training for both task-related skills and social skills.

Participants in the research identified that developing the role of worker was an important impact of the program. The worker role involves attending work on time, participating as a team member and following direction. Lougheed (1999) reports that research into employability and job retention indicates the main reason people cannot attain or keep work is not due to lack of functional skills, but rather due to lack of work behaviour. In their discussion of the work personality model, Strauser and Waldrop (1999) propose that work role behaviour is the "foundation for good work adjustment" (p. 295). They suggest vocational rehabilitation services need to develop interventions that strengthen the work personality. In addressing issues that affect open employment for people with serious mental disorders, Fabian (1999) emphasises the need for exposure to opportunities for the development or redevelopment of the work personality. For an individual to acquire the sorts of skills and behaviours demanded by the worker role, intervention must be carefully constructed and based on factors that contribute to vocational performance (Fabian, 1999). This evaluation research of the Gazebo Café Program can further assist in clarifying understanding of how transitional programs contribute to vocational performance.

Another impact valued highly by research participants was the interaction that the consumers have with the wider community. The Gazebo Café is set within the Glandore Community Centre, which creates both a sense of affiliation with other services and the opportunity for consumers to meet new people and to participate in mainstream community. The results of Wehmeyer and Bolding's (2001) study of self-determination, autonomy and life choices for people who experience intellectual disability, before and after moving to a less restrictive work or living environment, found that "more normalized, community-based environments support and enhance self-determination" (p. 371).

Participants reported that the important impacts of the Gazebo Café Program were the opportunities for consumers to experience a real work environment, move out of their comfort zones, and develop confidence and self-esteem. The supportive and flexible, yet challenging nature of the program, enabled consumers' experiences to be safe and appropriate. Facilitating learning, development and change through increasingly demanding activities that occur in a natural environment, is stated to be the most effective way to facilitate learning (Lougheed, 1999). Work experience programs that provide both an "appropriately supportive environment" (Fabian et al., 1999, p. 6) and opportunities for success for individuals who experience severe and chronic mental illness, represent some of the most effective ways of increasing an individual's belief in their ability to engage in work.

The consumers' disabilities was an issue for referring agency staff and employment coordinators, but in different ways. Employment coordinators described having only consumers who experience disability working together in the program as a negative impact. Interestingly, a study of self-esteem among young adults with intellectual disability, (Svios, 1993, cited in Petrovski & Gleeson, 1997) found that for people who experience intellectual disability, interactions with peers who do not experience disability are hindered. Poor sense of self, due to the knowledge of belonging to a stigmatised group, was found to be the underlying reason. Referring agency members expressed concern that consumers who do not experience disability felt threatened by those who do. While this appeared to be an issue for very few non-disabled consumers, and was not an issue for those who had regularly attended the program, it does indicate that the consumer mix at the Café must be carefully considered.

A variety of issues emerged from the research data that were not directly related to the experience of consumers, but were pertinent to the service provided by the Gazebo Café Program. First, the issue of cost was raised and was linked directly to the ability of the program to function as a registered training organisation. Due to lack of financial resources, referring agency staff found it increasingly difficult to justify the funds required for their student or consumer to use the program, unless accreditation for Vocational Education Training modules could be attained. It was reported that if skills acquired by consumers during the program were accredited, then referring organisations would receive funding from the government. Second, it was suggested that the Gazebo Café Program is limited to one industry and one location. An expansion of the service would increase the opportunities for consumers to access a range of experiences, and thus improve the ability of Interwork to meet the individual needs of their consumers. Third, it was also suggested that Interwork take more responsibility for linking paying consumers directly to job opportunities.

This research had a number of limitations. First, the research was confined to a small sample size and one service provider. Information gained, however, was in line with the intended exploratory nature of the project. In addition, the sample size was appropriate for the requirements of this honours degree course and timeframes. Low response rates due to a limited pool of referring agency staff, as well as limited responses received from consumers, further contributed to the small sample size. Low response rates from consumers may be attributed to the challenges in providing the intensive level of communication required to ensure that consumers make informed decisions. The consumers who participated do not represent the broad range of consumer experiences, including Indigenous youth, who have participated in the Gazebo Café Program.

The study provided valuable information to Interwork's management on specific issues which may influence future decision-making in regards to the Café. In addition, findings can be generalised to the wider disability employment services industry since it contains exploratory information on the impact of such a program. In addition, this project serves as an example of client involvement in program evaluation.

Conclusion

This study found that the Gazebo Café Program has many positive impacts of participation for individuals who experience disadvantage in the labour market. Opportunities for consumers to build confidence and to experience meaningful occupation while performing the work role, all within a natural and supportive

community environment were regarded as important impacts. The supportive, flexible and challenging nature of the program, the development of functional skills, as well as social and interpersonal skills, and the wide range of opportunities, were also perceived as important impacts of the program. The balance in the composition of consumers who access the program, the cost of the service, and the formal accreditation of training, influenced the use of the program by external organisations.

This study's findings provide information that is useful to the management of Interwork as well as other service providers in understanding the role that the Gazebo Cafe Program plays in the provision of supported open employment services and the impact of such a program. Continued evaluation from multiple perspectives, which involves process and outcome variables of the Gazebo Café Program, is recommended.

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APPENDIX A

Single Interview Questions

1. What sort of things do you do at the Gazebo Café Program?
2. How has it been helpful for you?
3. How has it not been helpful for you?
4. What is good about the program?
5. What is bad about the program?
6. Can you tell me how it could be better?
7. Can you tell me what is best about the program?

APPENDIX B

Focus Group Questions

1. Think about your experience with the Gazebo Café Program. What comes to mind?
2. Think of a consumer who has used the program. Think of their name, age, and what their disadvantage may be. Draw a picture of this consumer standing at the door of the Gazebo Café after having spent the day there. This person is holding something and saying something. Draw something in their hand, and write what the person is saying. (Krueger, 1998, p. 74).
3. Based on your experiences, what do you see are the positive impacts of the Gazebo Café Program on consumers?
4. What do you see as the negative impacts of the program on consumers?
5. Is it important that the program continue? Please explain further?
6. Of all the effects we have discussed today, which do you think are the most important?