Research to practice seminar

One of the initiatives to come out of the partnership between Anglicare and Flinders University is a series of Research to Practice Seminars. The first of these seminars was on the topic of ‘Promoting employment opportunities for people in marginalised groups’. It was held in the Council Room, Registry Building at Flinders University on Wednesday 30 September.

The event featured descriptions of Anglicare’s employment assistance programs and a presentation of research findings from two studies undertaken within the National Institute of Labour Studies at Flinders University. The first of these studies explored successful approaches to supporting people from marginalised groups to gain and maintain employment, and the second research project identified regions of South Australia that offer employment opportunities for people with low skill levels.

Throughout the seminar, the 26 participants from Anglicare, Flinders University and ETSA shared their own experiences and understanding of the issues of engaging marginalised groups in the workforce.

The group also began exploring areas where Anglicare and Flinders University may be able to work together in the future to investigate how to support people from marginalised groups to gain employment.

A second research-to-practice seminar is being planned for November on the theme of applying outcomes hierarchies to organisations’ planning and education.
During the recent Anglicare–Flinders University Steering Committee meeting, a focus discussion was held on Aboriginal people working at both organisations. A number of enterprising projects are taking place.

Professor Lester-Irabinna Rigney, Director Yunggorendi, First Nations Centre for Higher Education and Research of Flinders University spoke of the focus on teaching, research and support to Aboriginal students. The centre has 12 Aboriginal members of staff.

Flinders University has 180 Aboriginal students in all degree programs, and students are recruited from across Australia, especially from South Australia and the Northern Territory. The centre is 20 years old next year; staff are connected to 40 Aboriginal organisations and research connects Flinders University to 12 other indigenous organisations.

A large part of the research work conducted by the centre is consultancy based, and staff also play a brokering and liaison role in connecting people and groups.

Flinders University has an Aboriginal Employment Strategy, and is aiming to be the preferred university for Aboriginal students. The university is drawing on the expertise of these students to collaborate with the Australian Science and Maths School to fund a summer school for Aboriginal high school students in maths and science from around the country.

There is also a Flinders University Indigenous Engagement Strategy integrated into all aspects of the university.

In the meantime, Aboriginal Consultant Ian James was engaged by Anglicare 18 months ago to boost recruitment of Aboriginal staff and work on strategies to retain them. Since then the number of Aboriginal staff at Anglicare has increased from six to 21. These positions are mainstream and based throughout the organisation, rather than related to Aboriginal-specific programs. Anglicare aims to have 30 Aboriginal staff working by 2011.

Ian is also commissioned with the task of developing strong links with Anglicare and other Aboriginal agencies and organisations.

Currently Ian is working on a range of projects, including:
- Developing a Reconciliation Statement for the organisation
- The Reconciliation Day Committee, hosting key events at The Platform in Elizabeth.

Contributions made by both Professor Rigney and Ian James at this meeting will encourage the development of specific Anglicare/Flinders University Indigenous activities which are currently being considered.
One of the goals of the Flinders University–Anglicare Steering Committee has been to identify non-traditional opportunities for student placement. While many social work students from Flinders University continue to be placed in programs such as the Parenting Orders Program, Living Beyond Suicide, and at the Loss and Grief Centre, there have been some exciting developments over the past three months that have seen education, arts and humanities students also beginning or making plans to undertake placements within Anglicare. It is anticipated that opportunities for students from areas such as business and IT will also be explored over the coming months.

Currently, there are three formal agreements between Flinders University and Anglicare SA to provide placement opportunities for students.

The longest standing of these is the agreement with the Loss and Grief Centre, which accepts up to 10 students a year. Students accepted into the Loss and Grief Centre are studying Bachelor of Social Work or Masters in Social Work and have an interest in counselling. The students are supervised and supported by a student unit, headed by Trish Hensley from Flinders University, who offers practical support as well as professional supervision to the students.

Another agreement between Anglicare SA, Autism SA and Flinders University has been established to support the Early Childcare Centre at Daphne Street, which has recently expanded to provide a specific service to children with Autism. Daphne Street is seeing the first three students this semester who are studying Bachelor of Disability and Rehabilitation Work. It is anticipated that three students per semester will be accepted into Daphne Street for placement.

The final formal agreement with Flinders University involves the placement of international students within Anglicare. The details of how this will look and work are yet to be defined. Currently, international students are involved in placements at Anglicare, but not as part of this agreement.

Additional to these formal agreements is a less formal agreement between Anglicare’s Tenants’ Information and Advocacy Service (TIAS) and Flinders University to place four law students a year in a community legal information role. These students work with TIAS workers to support clients with legal information relating to their tenancy.

We have also investigated elective placement opportunities with humanities and education disciplines. The placement of students from humanities enables Anglicare to broaden the opportunities available to students. As a result, three students who are studying a Bachelor of Behavioural Science are involved in a research project with Communities for Families program to investigate how to deal with the early onset of sexualised behaviours in children. From this, they will make recommendations for a program that could be run in the community to address the issue.

The education based elective placements give opportunity for students of primary and early childhood studies experience in the child care centres and parenting and play through community development. Students of middle or secondary school education can try placements in alternative education settings and working with young people ‘at risk’. While there has been some interest from these students, a placement is yet to commence.

Other disciplines that have been discussed for Flinders University students to become involved in a placement have included environmental and horticultural backgrounds, where students can conduct energy audits of the organisation. Students could also work with the community garden (north) workers, volunteers and clients to develop a sustainable and water neutral garden. This is still in the discussion phase with details to be determined as negotiations to bring information and technology students into Anglicare to work on the redesign of the intranet (matrix) in 2010.

Over to you

The Anglicare-Flinders University steering group welcomes your responses — and ideas, questions and opinions as we work together to make our partnership unique, progressive and purposeful.

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