

# The proof is in the pudding



**EMMA WILLIAMS**

**LENA HUSSIEN**

**EILEEN CUMMINGS**

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# The authors



- Eileen Cummings – Rembarrgna elder, many years of work in policy and program devt, esp in remote communities, as well as occasional evaluation
- Lena Hussien – primary client, WA Aboriginal and European heritage, became an evaluator through preparing for this conference
- Emma Williams – no Australian Indigenous heritage, mix of policy and program development, evaluation work – for this conference, became an evaluatee

# Presentation theme



- **Examining value of evaluation with multiple stakeholders by auditing implementation, interviews after evaluation report submitted**
- **Not a new idea – see issues of EJA, but...**
- **Here focus on cultural aspects of evaluation; both evaluation methods and report designed to be culturally responsive**
- **Wanted to determine which evaluation and reporting elements effective with which stakeholders, in which contexts**

# The program



- **Remote Aboriginal and Family Community Workers/Program (RAFCW/RAFCP)**
- **A new child protection initiative in Northern Territory remote communities, funded through the NTER, aka ‘federal intervention’.**
- **RAFCP in 11 remote communities with tremendous cultural diversity (historically, linguistically, geographically), 2 urban offices in Top End, Centre**
- **Program new not only in age but in concept – a world first and just beginning to emerge, evolve**

# Cultural context of the evaluation



- NT has 1% of Australia's population, spread over one sixth of continent's surface
- 30% NT population Indigenous, greatest concentration of 'traditional' lifestyles in Australia, e.g. avoidance relationships, cultural authority, diversity of languages
- Diverse history, urban access, governance, land stability
- Evaluation focused on four remote communities; Anmatjere near Alice, Warlpiri more distant, Tiwi island (ferry, air to Darwin), Yolngu island off East Arnhem
- Also visited offices in Darwin (nearer Indonesia than other Australian cities) and Alice Springs (remote centre)

# Stakeholders – cultural dynamics



- Management commissioning evaluation – one Indigenous member, one non-Indigenous
- Program staff almost all Indigenous, most remote
- Senior mgt and funder appeared almost entirely non-Indigenous
- Evaluation team mix of Indigenous and non-Indigenous members
- Wanted both methods and reporting to meet needs of senior mgt and funders, but also remote community members with different literacy styles

# The evaluation



- Darwin - Logic model workshop in Dec 2008; 'theory of change' workshop in November 2009
- Evaluators visited Galiwin'ku, Ti Tree, Nguiu and Ntaria to interview RAFCWs, observe their work
- Interviewed Team Leaders, Managers and people working or who had worked with RAFCWs in CAT, child protection, out-of-home care, FaHCSIA; got input from RAFCWs in Oenpelli and Yuendumu
- Observed training in Darwin and Alice, reviewed forms and program documents, built pie diagrams, used 'fire tool' in 4 communities, etc.
- Shoestring – approx \$12,000 and in-kind support

# The 'fire tool'



- Way for community members to discuss, quantify RAFCW impact



# 'Fire tool' in action



- Administered in groups, usually with food



# Evaluation report



- Executive Summary
- Section on history of RAFCP
- Section on evaluation methodology, including comparison of early program theory model and the five streams of RAFCP that came out of workshop in Darwin
- Section with answers to original evaluation questions
- Section with ratings (stars) on different aspects of RAFCP
- ‘Voices’ section with many quotes from RAFCWs and others talking about RAFCP
- Section with recommendations

# Report Targets



- We thought the ‘stars’ section would appeal to 2 stakeholders in particular
- The ‘voices’ section was created to respect Indigenous contributions and with those stakeholders in mind
- The ‘history’ section was developed with a particular stakeholder in mind
- The section on methodology, including ‘theory of change’ developed with a particular scenario in mind
- Reality proved almost the reverse

# Reporting, implementation context



- Staff churn – 3 Program Managers, 2 Directors, 4 Executive Directors, 3 CEOs in period of months
- Policy churn and spotlight - eg Little Children are Sacred, Intervention, coronials, inquiry
- Political changes – NT govt hanging on with support of independent, federally same scenario (with more independents) likely to occur
- Contextual changes – amalgamation of local government into Shires; split between ‘growth towns’ and outstations/other communities
- Evaluation usage – sometimes disregarded, recommendations reversed

# Checking on the pudding



- **Audit of implemented recommendations – working with Program Manager and reviewing progress, barriers, every month or two**
- **Establishing chain of transmission and interviewing stakeholders**
- **Identifying some gaps in dissemination and formulating presentation packages prior to interviewing stakeholders**
- **Reflective practice and interviewing training for client, supporting her in obtaining and assessing feedback**

# Chain of transmission



- Evaluation report given to Program Manager
- Passed up to senior management within department
- Copy given to Darwin representative of funder (federal govt dept FaHCSIA), who then sent to Canberra office
- Evaluation NOT shared with most RAFCP staff until review began; versions for remote workers developed

# Participating in review



- Contacted Program Managers, remote workers, Team Leaders, Directors, three FaHCSIA staff, university colleagues
- Stakeholders in four States due to job changes
- Feedback (written or through semi-structured interview) from remote worker participating in 'theory of change' workshop and another who received site visit from evaluators, Team Leader, current and previous Program Manager, previous Director (now Senior Director), two FaHCSIA representatives (one currently and one previously overseeing program), two colleagues (one previously involved in this evaluation)

# Findings



- Some (stereotypical?) assumptions confounded – a stakeholder for whom the ‘star’ section was developed preferred the ‘voices’ section, and an Aboriginal worker preferred the ‘programmatic assumptions’ from the theory of change section
- However, clear distinctions between what different groups found interesting and important – eg ‘policy vs detail’ where a senior stakeholder appeared to find an over-emphasis on areas that proved of greatest interest and importance to workers

# Remote worker feedback



- Remote worker stakeholders found the evaluators and the processes used to be culturally respectful.
- They were most interested in hearing that they were valued, and in the findings (such as safety and office space) that impacted on their daily practice
- The feedback format they most valued was the personal presentation developed by the evaluators for them.
- They wanted all workers to have an interactive presentation on the evaluation findings, outcomes.

# Feedback from other stakeholders



- Program management found most of the evaluation of value, but most valuable aspect was the personal interaction with the evaluators, and their support in interpreting the recommendations and structuring the implementation
- Senior management wanted more on the policy implications – appreciated a special presentation developed during the review on the high level, long term implications of the evaluation and related research on remote workforce development
- FaHCSIA appreciated the ‘fire tool’ method and...

# Conclusions



- Cultural diversity real issue– but not quite the way we thought
- Estimate that 1/3 of the contract should have been for the period after report submission – with customised presentation packages for different stakeholder groups and an implementation support package
- Program logic, theory of change would benefit from wider variety of stakeholders; how to do this (in view of identified barriers) under discussion
- Implementation audit shows that those where evaluator able to build ‘buy-in’, understanding more likely to be achieved
- Exec Summary showed dangers of condensing recommendations – allow for those who read nothing else
- Review also revealed questions about role of evaluators – moral issues as well as setting limits, how reflect in contracts?
- THE END