THE TONGAN MODEL

Adapting a community health development approach to the Tongan diaspora in urban New Zealand

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses a participatory action research project conducted with Tongans living in Mangere, a suburb of Auckland, New Zealand. The primary aim of the research was to adapt a well-proven New Zealand community development/health promotion model to use with Tongans living in urban areas, so as to enable them to address the health and well-being issues affecting them in a positive way. Information gathered in this study showed that Tongans in Mangere felt disorganised and disoriented in the face of the kinds of social, cultural, economic, health and environment issues arising in this “new” cultural and societal milieu. It was also clear that these factors directly affected their health and well-being.

This adaptation was to be called the “TONGAN Model”, with the letters TONGAN standing for; Talking, Organisation, Needs Assessment, Goal Setting, Action and Negotiated Evaluation. These designate steps in an operational systems approach to setting up and running empowerment-based community projects, where the community itself is in control. The possibility that this model might work with Tongans was especially interesting since its philosophy of empowerment and self-determination was different from the Tongan background from which many had come.

Overall, the research showed strong support for the TONGAN Model approach, and the final form of the Model presented here reflects fully the cultural and community requirements and views expressed by the participants. It is felt that this Model is not only applicable to Tongans in Mangere, but is also potentially useful for Tongans in other parts of New Zealand and perhaps also for other Pacific and migrant groups both in New Zealand and elsewhere.

Key Words: Tongan People, TONGAN Model, PEOPLE System, empowerment, capacity building