

# THE ACE SECTOR & RESULTS BASED ACCOUNTABILITY



An exploratory study



Adult  
Learning  
Australia

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# Executive summary

This national research project has been undertaken to explore the value and use of Results-Based Accountability (RBA) by Adult and Community Education (ACE) providers in relation to their non-formal learning programs.

## Rationale

In the post compulsory education sector in Australia where ACE is positioned, the main outcomes measured are numbers successfully completing a qualification and getting a job and/or going on to further study.

These measures are not suitable to demonstrate outcomes achieved by ACE through its non-formal learning programs. These programs provide a 'learning gateway' for people who want to engage in learning but who face barriers to participating in formal accredited education programs and/or who are not interested in formal programs.

For adult learners involved in non-formal learning programs, the main outcomes may be personal or social in nature (e.g. improved self-confidence and connections with others motivated to learn) rather than or in addition to being work related and economic in nature. The challenge faced by the ACE sector is how to measure these 'softer' outcomes achieved by participants.

While ACE providers themselves have a good idea of what they are achieving through their non-formal learning programs through anecdotal information or one off impact research, they currently have no systemic way of measuring their outcomes on an ongoing basis to evidence and improve their performance and report their performance to outsiders.

Outsiders include governments and other funders who increasingly are requiring the community not for profit sector to prove the social worth of their programs in order that they can assess the effectiveness of use of their funds and target their funds to maximise cost-effectiveness.

## RBA for outcomes reporting

Of the various methods for planning and measuring outcomes achieved, RBA is the option that has been picked up by the community services sector internationally and in Australia. The RBA method was developed by Mark Friedman about ten years ago to provide an easily understood and simple way for non-experts and people at every level in an organisation to keep the focus on the outcomes or results achieved in people's lives as a result of programs or services, and drive continuous improvement in results achieved

RBA uses a simple three-part categorisation scheme for performance measures. RBA uses a seven-step process to answer three questions:

1. How much did we do (e.g. numbers served)?
2. How well did we do it (e.g. % satisfied with key aspects of the service)?
3. Is anyone better off (e.g. % of participants served showing improvements of various kinds in their lives)?

This process allows staff and services to gain an idea of where they were, where they are now and therefore, make evidence-informed decisions about client outcomes and how to improve them and take action on these decisions.

Whilst comparatively simple to understand, RBA does involve technical know-how. It involves appropriate outcomes determination and finding/creating appropriate data collection tools, staff able to collect the data and enter it into systems to store the data, data analysis and report preparation.

## Findings

To explore the merits of RBA in relation to ACE non-formal learning programs three case studies were conducted of how RBA has been implemented into the everyday processes of ACE providers and with what results and lessons learnt.

The three organisations that agreed to be the subject of a case study were:

- Milang Old School House Community Centre – South Australia
- Wandana Community Centre – South Australia
- ConnectGroups – Western Australia.

The key themes that emerged from the case studies are:

- RBA is being used within the Neighbourhood Houses and Community Centres subsector of ACE in particular and for community services programs mainly, and for which RBA is becoming a requirement for continuing funding of these programs by some state governments.
- The use of RBA in the delivery of non-formal adult learning programs is less well progressed and is not a funding requirement, but some community centres are voluntarily implementing it because they have seen the value of RBA in their other programs and can see it will also work well in relation to non-formal adult learning programs to tell the story of the breadth of the achievements of their students.
- RBA implementation is best undertaken using an action learning approach. It is through the doing of RBA that the process starts to gel for staff. It is only when participating in RBA that they come to fully understand the methodology.
- The RBA process is purported to be simple but in all three case studies their RBA implementation has been aided by a RBA support program involving training in the core concepts, assistance to develop the best outcomes measures and data collection and analysis and reporting tools, and for troubleshooting issues arising in individual organisations. It appears that without this assistance RBA was not likely to have been successfully introduced into programs of the three case study organisations.
- Having a champion of RBA within the organisation also appears useful to keep the momentum going and overcome any resistance.



- RBA implementation takes time. All three case studies had been involved in RBA for several years and RBA is still not embedded in all programs in two of the three case studies.
- All three case study ACE organisations see RBA as a robust way of moving from anecdotal evidence to real hard evidence of the qualitative outcomes from their programs that is useful internally to reflect on and improve their work and to justify their service provision to external stakeholders, including their funders.

## Conclusions

Based on this exploratory study, RBA appears to have merit in relation to ACE's non-formal learning programs as a means of producing robust evidence of the differences that these programs make to the adults involved and for use for both continuous improvement purposes and to show the effectiveness of their programs to their funders and justify their funding. A useful next step might be to consult ACE providers and the funders to come up a set of outcomes measures that would be suitable for their non-formal learning programs so that each ACE provider does not have to 're-invent the wheel in this regard and to achieve at least a consistent set of core outcomes for planning and reporting on through RBA.

To introduce an RBA support consultancy to develop the tools for data collection analysis and reporting on the outcomes measures and to train ACE providers in RBA in general and in the use of the developed tools. Governments need to have a consistent approach to the implementation and use of RBA. Without an RBA support consultancy it is unlikely that ACE providers could or would proceed on their own with RBA.

# Introduction

The Adult and Community Education (ACE) sector aims to make a difference to adults' lives and the communities in which they reside through the provision of learning programs. These often are non-formal learning programs, designed with specific intended outcomes that do not include achievement of a formal qualification or award.

## Measuring outcomes

While ACE providers themselves have a good idea of what they are achieving through their non-formal learning programs through anecdotal information or one-off impact research, they currently have no systemic way of measuring their outcomes on an ongoing basis to reflect on and improve their performance and/or to report their performance to outsiders (ALA, 2016).

Results based accountability (RBA) is a method for gauging differences or outcomes achieved for those involved in services or programs, which has begun to be used in the community services not for profit field to evidence performance and inform decision-making to improve performance. Adult Learning Australia with funding from the Department of Employment and Training has undertaken a small national research project to explore the value and use of RBA by ACE providers in relation to their non-formal learning programs.

## Project objectives

The objectives of the project were to:

- explore how RBA is used by ACE providers as a tool to measure the achievement of planned/desired outcomes for participants in non-formal learning programs
- explore how RBA practices are implemented into the everyday processes of ACE providers
- explore how well in practice RBA achieves the aims of providing evidence to justify service provision and improving non-formal learning programs
- advise on the merits of RBA in relation to ACE's non-formal learning programs.

## Project method

The project methodology involved three components; a focussed literature review, interviews with community sector members involved in RBA, and the development of case studies. The purpose of the literature review was to:

- identify relevant information from research and projects on RBA
- identify RBA use in the community sector and specifically in relation to non-formal education programs
- inform the development of the questions to ask ACE providers using RBA in interviews.

The purpose of the interviews was to:

- gain a better understanding of how RBA is being used, from an organisational through to a government perspective
- identify ACE organisations using RBA in non-formal learning programs that could be approached to provide case studies.

Altogether, eight interviews were conducted, mostly by telephone with one face to face.

The interview questions are contained in Appendix 1 of this report, and also those questions asked of individual organisations to generate case studies.

The purpose of the case studies was to demonstrate how RBA is being implemented in ACE providers and with what impacts and lessons learnt. Case studies are useful in providing answers to 'how' questions (Rowley, 2002), which form the basis of this project's objectives.

## Case studies

Three case studies were developed:

- two involving ACE community centres in South Australia
- one a peak community organisation in Western Australia.

The case studies were shared with the relevant interviewees for comment and validation.

## Report structure

In the next section the rationale for focusing on client outcomes in relation to ACE non-formal learning programs is explained and the benefits and challenges of so doing.

Methods for planning and measuring outcomes suitable for use in the community sector are also overviewed in the following section that includes RBA.

What RBA is and involves are outlined in the fourth section.

The case studies on RBA use by ACE organisations are presented in the fifth section.

The key themes that have emerged from the case studies are discussed in the sixth and final section and some conclusions drawn on the value and use of RBA by ACE providers in non-formal education programs.



# Why an outcomes focus for Adult and Community Education?

In this section the challenge for ACE in reporting the differences it makes to the lives of adults through the provision of non-formal education programs is explained, and the benefits of so focussing and also the challenges.

## The context

ACE is an important part of the overall Australian education landscape. ACE is the community based owned and managed, not for profit sector of education that provides accessible learning opportunities for adults in local communities that meet their needs and support place-based community development.

The learning programs ACE offers mostly are non-formal in nature that is, not focussed on the achievement of formal qualifications. The non-formal education programs provide a 'learning gateway' for people who want to engage in learning but who face barriers to participating in formal learning programs and/or who are not interested in formal learning programs. The terms 'pre-accredited' or 'non-accredited' learning are also sometimes used to describe non-formal learning programs.

ACE offers non-formal learning programs in hobby, recreation and other personal interest areas for personal development purposes. ACE also offers non-formal adult basic education learning programs, such as literacy and numeracy programs and programs focused on self-presentation and management skills and communications, teamwork and problem solving, that aid effective functioning in all facets of modern life. These non-formal learning programs can act as a foundation for further learning, including formal learning for qualifications for entry to work or improving one's position in the workforce. Some ACE providers also offer learning programs inside the formal vocational education and training sector. However, the majority of ACE providers remain focussed on non-formal learning programs; particularly for the disadvantaged in education to provide them with self-improvement opportunities and as stepping stones or

pathways to further learning if they so desire, including to formal learning for work purposes (ALA, 2016).

The national Ministerial Declaration on ACE includes the following statement that conveys the position held by ACE within the education sector:

'ACE offers highly supportive pathways into learning, further education and training, and work and, as a result, is well-placed to engage those with low levels of educational attainment. Participation in non-accredited education and training for example, can serve to build the self-esteem, motivation and confidence many struggling to engage require to move into further education and training or employment. The non-threatening adult environment also makes ACE an attractive option to those marginalised from the more formal education system, and provides opportunities for the development of the foundation skills that are critical for effective educational, labour market, and social participation. This capacity of ACE to support the re-engagement of Australians from disadvantaged backgrounds in learning and work is the key to its crucial role in supporting the Australian Government's Social Inclusion agenda' (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 6).

## The challenge

ACE uses non-formal learning programs as a means of achieving an array of outcomes in many domains. Its learning programs can serve personal, civic and social purposes as well as economic ones. Clemens, Hartley and Macrae (2003) have classified the outcomes gained from ACE into three domains: private, public and work (set out in Table 1). The challenge faced by the ACE sector is how to convey the outcomes it achieves for participants from non-formal learning programs.

**Table 1: Outcomes individuals gain from adult and community education**

In the private domain of family, friends and personal interests	In the public domain of citizenship, community participation and debate	In work domain of both paid and unpaid
• Emotional wellbeing	• Social connections	• Skills towards and for employability
• Physical wellbeing	• Cross-cultural knowledge and sensitivity	• Self-sufficiency
• Spiritual peace and maturity and achieving a sense of belonging	• Contributions to organisational capacity	• Expanded pathways to work
• Cognitive development	• Individual involvement in the community	• Income generation
• Communication skills	• Knowledge of community and government services	• Professional development
• Enhanced personal relationships		
• Home sustainability		
• Creative abilities		
• Literacy and language		
• Expanded personal choices and pathways		
• Mastery of recreational skills		

(Source: Clemens, Hartley & Macrae, 2003)

In the post-compulsory education sector in Australia where ACE is positioned, the main outcomes performance measures used are numbers successfully completing a qualification and getting a job and/or going on to further study. These measures are not adequate to demonstrate the outcomes ACE achieves through its non-formal learning programs.

For adult learners with low level initial skills there is a need to recognise and acknowledge small transitions made through non-formal learning as important milestones. For those who experience disadvantage in education, the main outcomes may be personal or social in nature in the early non-formal learning programs they undertake rather than work related and economic in nature. The distance travelled by the learner in each learning experience requires recognition (NVEAC, 2010).

From a starting point of not engaged in learning, there is a continuum of outcomes that adults might achieve from participating in a non-formal learning program as evidenced by Bowman (2007):

- The first critical milestone outcome is to be engaged in a learning program.
- The second critical milestone outcome is improved confidence, self-esteem and motivation to learn. This might be gained through improved literacies and other generic skills.
- Improved friendships with classmates and wider community connections may also result.
- Doing more study may also be a significant outcome to progress further towards improving job and life prospects.

These positive outcomes for individuals can also cascade into positive impacts for the community and economy as a whole. For example:

- Civic engagement and social cohesion for the community
- Decreasing calls on welfare services and significant cost savings in these services

- Income gains for the individual and tax revenues to government and community
- Lifting of the overall workforce participation rate and productivity

The overall purpose of Bowman's paper was to prompt discussion on the outcomes ACE's adult learning programs may achieve for its participants and that an outcomes performance measurement framework could and should capture.

## Benefits of outcomes based reporting

A focus on client outcomes and building capacity of ACE organisations to measure them in a meaningful way can have the following benefits as researched by Planigale (2011).

### Evaluative benefits

- **At the individual level:** information on individual client outcomes can provide useful data for reflection by individual staff members and clients on individual progress and the effectiveness of the services being provided to that individual.
- **At the organisational level:** outcomes measurement assists staff to understand whether what they are doing is working, to what extent, and for which clients. It helps the service or team to answer the question of whether it is being successful in its mission, and can therefore play a role in guiding decision making.
- **At the system level:** outcomes measurement assists funders to assess the effectiveness of use of their funds and to consider how it may be targeted to maximise cost-effectiveness.

### Quality improvement benefits

Outcomes measurement can drive quality improvement, both by identifying what works, and by identifying interventions or approaches that are less successful and are in need of review

### Motivational benefits

Outcomes measurement can help both staff and clients to recognise progress and celebrate achievements. This can be a significant shift for organisations whose staff are constantly attending to the hard work of service delivery and never recognising that a goal has been achieved.

## Advocacy benefits

Outcomes measurement can assist in demonstrating the successful results of a program or intervention, as well as potentially demonstrating levels of client need. This information may help in the task of generating support (partnerships, public perception, funding).

## Knowledge building benefits

Outcomes measurement can contribute to research and evaluation, by helping to generate hypotheses and questions for further research, and assisting the development of evidence based service delivery.

## Challenges in implementing outcomes based reporting

Implementing outcomes based reporting is challenging. The challenges include:

### Expensive and time-consuming process

Resources are required for researching and developing outcome statements, measures and tools; training; developing or modifying data systems; collecting and entering data; supporting staff and trouble-shooting; analysing and reporting on data; and reviewing the outcomes system itself and sustaining the measurement systems over time and ensuring they function well.

These technical aspects require due consideration. If the wrong measures of outcomes have been used or the tool used to measure the outcomes is not the best tool then the information produced may be of poor quality (Planigale, 2011).

### Staff impacts

It is possible that some service delivery staff may feel threatened by outcomes measurement systems. Staff can feel they are being scrutinised. Where services are delivered to clients with complex needs in resource-poor environments, there is a risk that managers or frontline staff will feel they are being held accountable for things that are outside of their control.

It is essential that both those collecting and those interpreting the data understand the range of factors and constraints that affect outcomes, including the fundamental observation that outcomes are largely controlled by the client (Planigale, 2011).

# Methods for outcomes based planning and reporting

In this section methods for planning and measuring outcomes suitable for use in the community sector are overviewed, that include RBA, the method starting to be applied particularly by Australian Neighbourhood and Community Houses that make up a large part of the ACE sector (ALA, 2015). Drivers of RBA outcomes based reporting in the community sector are also overviewed.

## Suitable methods

Methods for planning and measuring outcomes suitable for use in the community sector include:

- Program Logics
- Social return on investment (SROI)
- Social accounting and audit (SAA)
- Results based accountability (RBA)

## Program logics

Program logics help illustrate the place of outcomes in the overall design of services and the relationship between the resources used to deliver services, the activities provided by community services and the outcomes created by services. The development of program logics requires working through the program's 'theory of change'.

This means identifying the links between the resources available within the program, the activities undertaken, its outputs, and the short-term impacts and long-term outcomes –hierarchically arranged.

Program logics recognise the interconnectedness of different levels of a program and so accommodate the complexity that characterises human services delivery. In developing program logics, it is stakeholders who decide the goals of the program and who also determine the performance goals (Funnell, 1997, 2000).

## Social return on investment (SROI)

SROI is a principles-based method for measuring extra-financial value, such as social value, not currently reflected in conventional financial accounts. Value created is measured relative to resources invested. It sets out a process for working with stakeholders to identifying outcomes, modelling the link between activities and outcomes and measuring value. The unique feature of SROI is the requirement to apply monetary proxies to social, economic and environmental value. This is seen as both one of the major strengths and the major challenge of this methodology (Flatau et al, 2015).

## Social accounting and audit (SAA)

SAA is based on similar principals to SROI and requires that organisations publish audited social accounts. Impact is demonstrated and reported but not necessarily measured and SAA does not require application of financial proxies to value social outcomes or calculation of a SROI ratio.

Other differences include: SAA reports outputs as well as outcomes, requires reporting on internal issues and only reports on what has happened (Flatau et al, 2015).

## Results based accountability (RBA)

RBA is a strategic method that looks to utilise defined indicators to assess an organisation's ongoing achievement of defined outcomes. The RBA has no set indicators; this flexibility allows organisations to use basic principles

to construct their individual method of demonstrating the impact they are having. Due to its flexibility, RBA can be used to monitor population, environmental and social impact as well as program level performance accountability. It is dynamic and is subject to revision. Predetermined outcomes as well as indicators can be changed as they become irrelevant down the track (Flatau et al, 2015).

All of the above methods for planning and measuring outcomes have in common three underpinning ideas:

1. Justifying service provision on the basis of outcomes
2. Demonstrating these outcomes by data-based evidence
3. Assuming that an outcomes focus and measuring progress will improve the social service system.

## Drivers of outcomes based reporting

An international study into current outcome measurement policy and practices in the community sector, covering the UK, Scotland, the US and Canada, found the push towards the development of outcomes measurement is being driven by two main factors. It has largely been driven by the requirements of funders (e.g. governments, social investors and philanthropists) that community sector organisations prove the social worth of their programs. There also is a growing awareness by organisations within the community sector that by utilising outcome measurement tools and frameworks they will better serve their clients (Flatau et al, 2015).

The same is occurring in Australia. There has been a push towards using outcomes-focussed ways of measuring performance in Australia's not for profit community sector by both the sector itself and its funders.

In 2009, the Australian Productivity Commission released an Issues Paper and Draft Report on Measuring the Contribution of the Not-for-Profit Sector. The Commission's report proposed an overarching framework for measuring the collective contribution of the not-for-profit sector. The Commission's framework focuses on four levels of measurement:

- Inputs – what was invested; any physical or intellectual resource used to achieve the objectives of an activity or intervention
- Outputs – what was produced; the product of an activity or intervention

- Outcomes – the effects of a program or service on a participant or group of participants during or after their involvement in an activity or intervention
- Impacts – the broader effects of an activity, taking into account all its benefits and costs to the community.

The Commission's proposed framework is a program logic approach.

Commenting on the Commission's framework the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (undated) noted its high-level focus for high-level measurement at the whole of sector level rather than for measurement of specific outcomes for individual community organisations.

The Alliance suggested that for individual community organisations a more specific approach is required and for the collection of specific information linked to practice at the organisational level.

## RBA in the community sector

This research project has identified outcomes based methodologies to be increasing in use in the community not for profit sector in Australia and the RBA method in particular.

RBA use by Neighbourhood and Community Houses was found to be particularly advanced in South Australia. In 2009, Community Centres SA (CCSA) ran an RBA model for planning, implementing and evaluation of the Centre's programs. CCSA was concerned about the lack of recognition and understanding of what they saw as valid and important outcomes of the work of their Community Centres. RBA was seen as a way CCSA could help Community Centres to document the outcomes they achieved and assist funders to understand the value of their work.

CCSA's pilot RBA project caught the interest of the SA Department of Community and Social Inclusion (DSCI). CCSA has since been engaged by the DSCI to support community centres to implement RBA and RBA has become a requirement for program funding through DSCI. CCSA provides RBA training and individual organisational support (<http://www.communitycentressa.asn.au/events>).

Western Australia is also actively looking into RBA as a way of measuring outcomes for the impact of its community sector, motivated by the desire to achieve positive change in the lives of Western Australians and by the recognition that to do this they need to know more about the difference that their social programs make to the lives of

the people they serve. WA's Delivering Community Services in Partnership (DCSP) Policy, focussing on the achievement of outcomes and improving services and support for vulnerable and disadvantaged Western Australians, was introduced in 2011. In 2013–14, Linkwest the peak body for Community, Neighbourhood and Learning Centres in WA was chosen by the Department of Local Government and Communities (DLGC) to trial for 18 months the suitability of RBA in Community, Neighbourhood and Learning Centres in WA (<https://www.linkwest.asn.au/about-us/measuring-social-outcomes>).

In New South Wales, RBA has been picked up by the Local Community Services Association as a way of measuring outcomes for its Neighbourhood and Community Centres (Smith, undated). This coincides with a move towards outcomes measurement framework for social impact investment by the NSW Government. The Government has recently released a Social Impact Investment Policy to deliver better services and results in NSW (New South Wales Government 2015) and has created an Office of Social Impact Investment – a joint initiative of the NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet and the NSW Treasury.

In Victoria, a large project has been undertaken on behalf of the Adult, Community and Further Education (ACFE) Board, to develop a framework for measuring outcomes of pre-accredited programs beyond 'employment' and 'further education'. The Outcomes Based Framework for Pre-

accredited Training was approved in July 2015 by the ACFE Board. It provides a clear and consistent understanding of the intent of pre-accredited training by explaining the what, who and how of pre-accredited training. RBA could apply in the implementation phase of this project.

There also is a strong push in Tasmania for Neighbourhood and Community Houses to measure outcomes to make sure that programs, services and activities delivered for people and communities hit the mark, or 'make a difference' (NCHNT, 2015). RBA is the method being used to implement the Neighbourhood Houses Tasmania Outcomes Framework (<http://nht.org.au/reporting-on-outcomes/>).

In Queensland the Queensland Council of Social Services ran RBA workshops in 2014 in response to the Queensland Government's then draft Social Services Investment Framework that indicated that it will 'place customers first by designing outcomes-focused services around the needs of individuals, families and communities' (<http://cotaql.org.au/2014/06/the-queensland-government-social-services-investment-framework/>).

The ACT Council of Social Services is also active in facilitating outcomes based reporting (Meko, 2013).

The above is indicative only of the use of RBA in the community sector in Australia. It was beyond the scope of this project to investigate the full extent of RBA usage.



# RBA method to outcomes reporting

Of the various methods for planning and measuring outcomes achieved, RBA is an option that has been picked up by the community services sector in Australia, perhaps as RBA is purported to be simple. Here what RBA is, involves and its uses are outlined as context to the case studies undertaken on RBA use in ACE providers.

## What RBA is

The RBA method was developed by Mark Friedman (2005) to provide an easily understood and simple way for non-experts and people at every level in an organisation to keep the focus on the outcomes or results achieved in people's lives as a result of programs or services and drive continuous improvement in results achieved. RBA is being used throughout the United States, and in countries around the world, to produce measurable change in people's lives (Fiscal Policy Studies Institute, 2016).

## Basic ideas of RBA

RBA contains a number of basic ideas:

- It starts with ends and works backward, step by step, to means.

- It provides step by step processes in plain language to enable partners to get from talk to action quickly.
- It uses common sense methods that everyone can understand.
- It's an inclusive process; everyone in the service can contribute.
- It places importance on the collection, base lining and understanding of data to indicate if things are getting better or worse.
- There is a strong emphasis throughout on understanding the impact of what is being done, analysing and reflecting to improve what is being done and providing evidence that shows how the program, service and organisation is making a difference (Friedman, 2005).

RBA involves 7 steps as in Table 2 (Friedman 2009).

**Table 2: The seven steps of the RBA process and what to do to answer them**

Step	What to do
<b>Plan</b> Step 1: Who are our customers?	Define the program/service purpose Identify the participants
Step 2: How can we measure if our customers are better off? Step 3: How can we measure if we're delivering services well?	Define performance measures and methods and tools for collecting data on performance measures to determine How much did we do? How well did we do it? And Is anyone better off?
<b>Do</b> Deliver the service and collect the data on the defined outcomes measures	
<b>Review</b> Step 4: How are we doing on the most important measures (baselines and causes)?	Select the key or headline measures. Review the data on these measures. Identify performance levels on the measures. Identify the story behind the performance level.
Step 5: Who are the partners that have a role to play in doing better?	Identify the partners internal and external: current and potential.
Step 6: What works to do better, including no-cost and low-cost ideas?	Brainstorm ideas to improve the program or service.
Step 7: What do we propose to do	Create an action plan from the ideas.

## What RBA involves

### **The first step in the RBA method is to identify the 'results' wanted.**

'Results' refer to what an organisation wants its clients to exit with after accessing the services/programs. Staff are asked to consider two preliminary points:

- Who are your clients – e.g. children, parents, bereaved clients, adolescents?
- What results do you want for your clients?

Staff are asked for the most important results to be identified that they want their clients to achieve as a result of accessing the program or service. A focus on the most important results keeps the RBA process manageable and focussed. The results can be changed if, from RBA review meetings, it is decided that another client outcome is more important. In the case of externally funded services, funders may have already stated client outcomes to be reported against. However, RBA can be used as an advocacy tool as well in this case, to measure 'unexpected' outcomes, which the funders have not taken into account.

### **The second step is to identify measures or indicators for each 'result' selected and the method and tool(s) that will be used to collect the data on the selected measures.**

The measures should allow determination of answers to three questions:

1. How much service was done?
2. How well the service was done?
3. Is anyone better off?

These three questions are central to the overall RBA method. The measures are referred to as the 'headline' measures.

The 'how much did we do' question relates to numbers.

Ways to know how much staff did include 'head counts; for example, number of clients served; number of clients referred to another service; number of sessions offered. Most services collect this data for funders already, so it is easy for staff to collate this information. This information is referred to as the baseline.

The 'how well did we do' question relates to how well the service was delivered.

Depending on the client group and/or service provided, the 'how well' question can be answered using client feedback in the form of a short survey or in the form of verbal feedback. Examples of 'How well did we do?' questions include whether the participant would recommend the service to others in a similar situation, had their needs met, were supported by staff and so on.

The 'Is anyone better off?' question relates to the client and asks if and how the service/program is benefiting the client; that is, what are the results being achieved?

This is the most important question in RBA.

A number of tools can be used to answer this question including (but not limited to) verbal feedback, surveys, interviews, services provider observation, and the significant change method.

### **Then comes the doing, the delivery of the service and the collection of information on the defined outcome measures using the tools developed.**

### **The fourth step is to assess the information collected, making sense of the data and drawing conclusions about outcomes.**

Graphs are used at this point that show the baseline (pre-service data), a prediction and the curve to turn/desired direction of the client outcome and the actual direction achieved as measured.

The 'curve to turn' is an RBA term. The 'curve to turn' arrow shows the service where they need to go to get closer to the desired client outcome. This arrow does not set a target to meet, but shows the direction the service desires the outcomes to go in the future. For example, if the desired result was increased confidence for clients after using the service, the curve to turn arrow will point upwards to show the service that they need to get more clients to indicate that they have more confidence post-service so that the service can claim that they are getting closer to achieving this aim.

Once staff have seen the graphs, they are asked to explain very briefly why the graph looks the way it does. This phase of RBA is known as providing a 'story behind the baseline'. This story is used to explain both why a service thinks clients who did get the desired outcome did so as well as to diagnose what it was about the service or the clients that did not receive the desired benefit.

**The fifth step is to consider what to do, to do better.**

Based on the stories behind the data, staff are then asked to list a few strategies which can help the service get closer to their desired client result or ‘turn the curve’.

‘Strategies’ are coherent sets of actions that have a reasoned chance of sending the trend line in the right direction. The strategies may be new things the service can do or improvements that can be made to what is already done. Simply continuing in the same way is not a strategy unless the service is already achieving maximally.

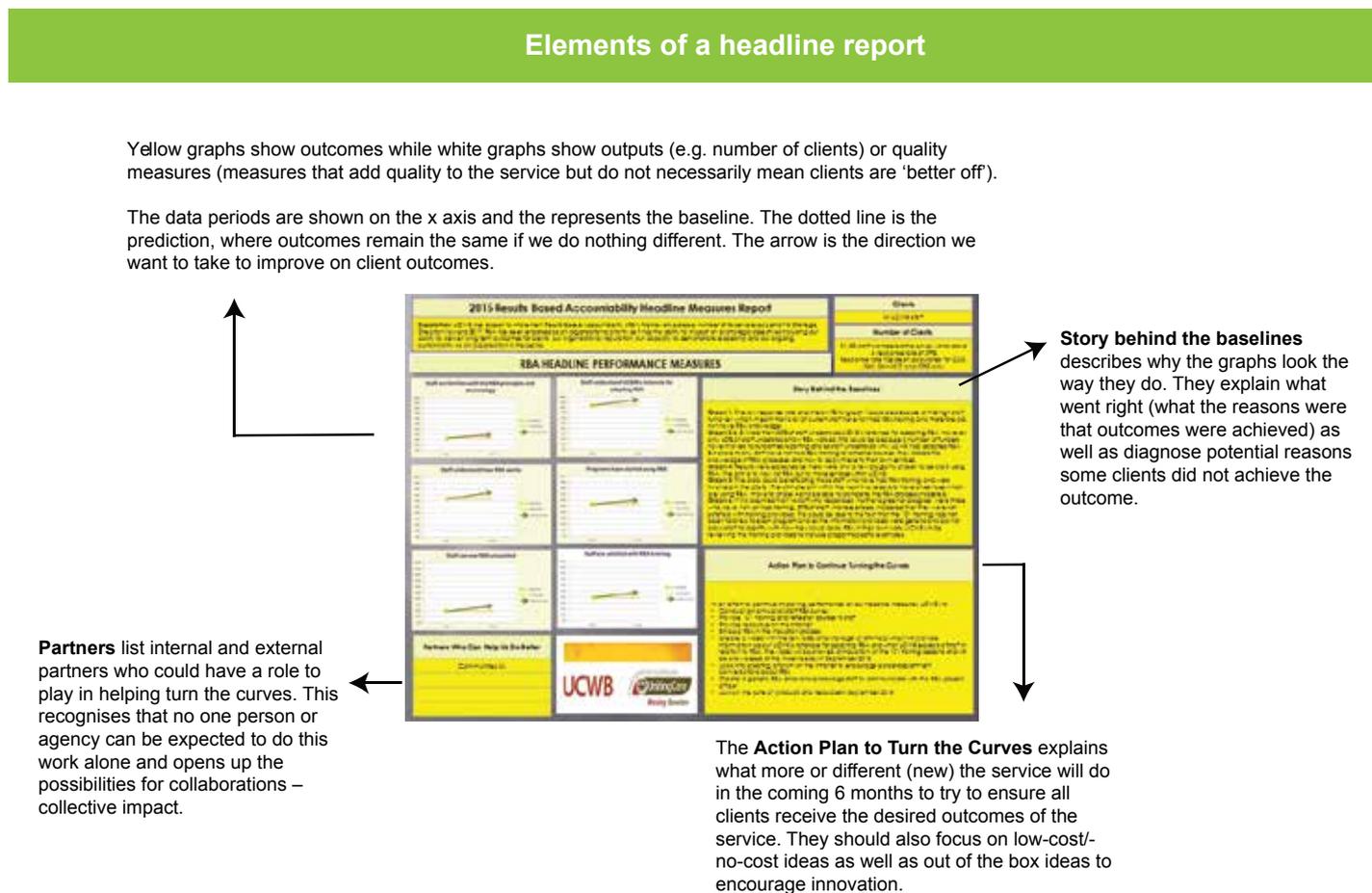
**The sixth step is the listing of few partners (both internal and external) who can help to ‘get closer to achieving the client results.** For example, the clients’ family, the school, the church, other services.

**The seventh step is to learn from the findings and use them to develop an action plan for improving the service.** This may also involve the setting of targets.

**A key feature sure of RBA is the RBA headline report.**

The result of the RBA process is a one to two page report – or report card – that provides quantitative as well as qualitative evidence of how a service or programme performs and, most importantly, if the service has had an impact on the conditions of life for its clients. RBA reporting is designed for services and staff to be able to see from a glimpse where they are now, where they would like to go in terms of client results and what actions need to be taken to get them there. A RBA headline report with explanations of the elements is shown in Figure 1 below. There are RBA copyright software tools that can help to generate the RBA headline report.

**Figure 1: RBA headline report elements explanations**



## RBA in summary

Overall, the RBA process is built around a common sense progression from ends to means. It uses a simple three-part categorisation scheme for performance measures:

1. How much did we do (e.g. numbers and who is served)?
2. How well did we do it (e.g. % satisfied with key aspects of the service)?
3. Is anyone better off? (e.g. % of participants served showing improvements of various kinds in their lives).

It allows staff and services to gain an idea of where they were, where they are now and therefore, make evidence-informed decisions about client outcomes and how to improve them and take action on these decisions. RBA is a deeply reflective process, which stresses the importance of including a number of stakeholders that have a role to play in the delivery of the service/program. RBA has the potential to turn up weaknesses in the way things are done, as well as giving a reality check about what programmes are actually achieving.

## How RBA can be used

RBA can be developed and used at different levels: state, community, agency, or program. RBA use at the program level is referred as Performance Accountability (measuring program level outcomes for clients and participants; the responsibility of a program manager).

RBA use at the community or wider population level is referred to as Population Accountability (measuring community level outcomes for whole populations; the responsibility of a group of partners).

In this instance the partners are determining their collective impacts on a particular whole population. Collective Impact (CI) is another term that is used for Population Accountability uses of RBA to evaluate performance or outcomes across multiple organisations in relation to a particular whole population

RBA use for Performance Accountability fits within RBA use for Population Accountability as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: RBA – Population accountability and performance accountability



# ACE RBA case studies

In this section, the case studies are presented that were undertaken to learn how RBA is being used and implemented in ACE organisations and with what impacts and lessons learnt. The three organisations that agreed to be the subject of a case study were:

- Milang Old School House Community Centre – South Australia
- Wandana Community Centre – South Australia
- ConnectGroups – Western Australia.

Each case study was developed by interviewing a key contact in the organisation guided by the interview questions developed (and included in Appendix 1 of this report) on the basis of the literature review and interviews with community sector members involved in RBA. Drafts of the case studies were shared with the relevant interviewee for comment and validation.

## Milang Old School House Community Centre – South Australia

### Description of the organisation

Milang Old School House Community Centre (MOSHCC) is a community based not for profit provider of adult education, community services and community support programs located in Milang, a small town with a population of just over 500 people, 75 km from Adelaide on Lake Alexandrina, South Australia.

MOSHCC was initiated by the Milang and District Community Association Inc. 'to promote well-being by integrating community development and health promotion with mutual support, adult learning and a focus on families'. Its mission statement includes a commitment to adult and community education (ACE) provision as a tool to enhance the economic, educational and social well-being of the community (MOSHCC, 2016).

Like most ACE organisations, MOSHCC works with vulnerable and disadvantaged people. It relies on multiple government funding sources (national, state and local) to run its

programs and also its volunteers to keep fees charged to participants to a minimum. It has an annual turnover of around \$1.4M, employs around 30 part time and casual staff, and has around 120 volunteers registered with them.

### Use of RBA

MOSHCC first became familiar with RBA in 2011 through its peak organisation Community Centres South Australia (CCSA) that began rolling out a RBA implementation support project.

MOSHCC has used RBA in its Lakes Hub project, which is part of the South Australian Government's Murray Futures program, funded by the Australian Government's Water for the Future initiative with some State government funding as well. The Lake Hub was established to help the community cope with the effects of the ongoing drought. MOSHCC was not specifically required to use RBA, but suggested it to the funder as a useful tool for measuring program effectiveness.

In the Lakes Hub project, RBA is being used to measure community resilience – the sustained ability of a community to utilise available resources to respond to, withstand, and recover from adverse situations.

For people to build resilience it is important that they have access to the accurate, timely and relevant information about environmental issues that are impacting them. As a trusted local source of information MOSHCC provides information on environmental issues of local concern and facilitates active involvement of community in decision making and government-funded recovery projects. MOSHCC records the number of people accessing information through the Lakes Hub project and surveys the people asking if they feel more knowledgeable as a result, have acted on this knowledge and become more involved in government-funded recovery projects, including in decision-making on these projects, and if they have used the information and skills learnt in their daily lives or work. The data collected is recorded using RBA Results Scorecard software that MOSHCC was able to purchase with Lake Hub project provided funding. The RBA Results Scorecard software tool takes data and presents it in a graphically simple form. MOSHCC reported that

*'The scorecard makes excellent use of the data being collected. We have five access portals to the scorecard including our funder as one access point so that both we and our funder can make use of the data collected for our various purposes. We also are using the score card in other of our projects.'*

MOSHCC is also using RBA in its foundation skills learning programs run with funding support from the South Australian Department of State Development (DSD). Currently there is no requirement from DSD to use RBA in these programs. MOSHCC is voluntarily using RBA because the current system of reporting in no way tells the story of the breadth of the achievements of their students. The current system of reporting is through a web-based reporting database called STELAR that meets formal vocational education and training requirements and has a focus on jobs and employment outcomes as a result of completion of training. MOSHCC knows from experience that its students are unlikely to get job outcomes directly as a result of participating in a foundation skills program. Their claim is that those kinds of measurable results can be years away, but that there are other, extremely relevant and important data elements that can be captured that show a more holistic approach to student progress and achievement.

*'We have so many great stories about people who've dropped out of school early and re-engaged with education through small programs.'*

Through RBA, MOSHCC is hoping to present an argument

to government (DSD) on the importance of funding the 'softer' outcomes, not captured at present. MOSHCC adds to the DSD reporting requirements additional measures to determine the ways in which the learner may be better off as a result of participation in foundation skills learning programs. It uses RBA to include measures on whether participants have learnt new things and used their learning in their every-day lives and or at work and with what impacts. MOSHCC has instituted processes for ensuring community input at all stages to the RBA process to learn what makes a difference to them and ensure their programs deliver these outcomes.

MOSHCC has also trialled RBA with CCSA as a method for recording health benefits gained from its hobby and recreation courses including Tai Chi and drumming.

*'For people with mental health issues the positive differences they have reported to us from their participation in Tai Chi have been amazing to us. We have asked participants questions along the way as to how they are feeling about the program and if their involvement has led to any changes for them in what is going on outside of the program. It has been a good reflective thinking exercise for both the participants and the staff involve.'*

### **How RBA has been implemented**

MOSHCC has had help to implement RBA through the RBA support project managed by CCSA that has since received funding support from the SA Department of Community and Social Inclusion (DCSI). At this time, most staff in key positions in MOSHCC have completed RBA training, including some advanced workshops provided by CCSA. This staff training is supported by ongoing use of the CCSA RBA Facebook page and webinars. Staff also know that if they get stuck they can contact CCSA to assist. MOSHCC also attends the annual CCSA conferences, where RBA is regularly on the agenda.

MOSHCC have found challenges in implementing RBA across the organisation.

*'Getting many part time staff together is not easy and getting them on board with RBA can also be challenging due to the resource commitment. They see it as simply more paperwork.'*

However, MOSHCC has found that understanding of the RBA methodology is significantly better understood once projects are up and running.

*'Once you're doing it and talking about it together, it starts to gel.'*

MOSCC notes though that:

*'Implementing RBA in small organisations is harder than in large ones because it is resource intensive and expensive to collect and enter data in the way that provides accuracy and rigour for the headline reports.'*

Notwithstanding, MOSHCC has recognised the significance of fully embedding RBA. RBA is not integrated into all MOSHCC programs. It is anticipated that this will take another year and a half to happen.

MOSHCC also reported that RBA use at the program level is easier to get one's mind around than is RBA use at the community or wider population level. It is only now turning attention to its collective impact at the community or wider population level.

*'We have a broad range of programs, we do quite well with evaluating a specific program, however when it comes to assessing if we're making a difference to the community as an organisation, it's much more difficult.'*

The use of RBA at the program level has aided MOSHCC to start to consider its collective impact. MOSHCC is working towards identifying a set of results measures that it can use across all its programs as a common set for reporting on how the community is better off as a result of all its programs and services.

### Impacts of RBA

The implementation of RBA into organisational practice has provided MOSHCC an internal measure of its work and its value to the community.

*'We're a stronger organisation because we're implementing RBA, it's helped us to be clearer about the work we're doing and how we're responsive to the community. RBA has made it much easier for staff to see the impact of their work, and this is empowering for them.'*

MOSHCC also sees the value of the evidence generated by RBA to its relations with governments. The evidence is used in funding applications, and could be used very effectively in lobbying for support.

*'Having RBA makes me feel more confident when I'm applying for funding.'*

RBA also provides governments with a greater depth of evidence that will help to show if a policy is effective or not.

*'RBA gives government the stories that they don't necessarily get through numbers, and they get this through the "is anyone better off" question. Sometimes this is seen as the hardest question.'*

MOSCHH believes that the work they have done in RBA will make their position stronger in the new more competitive government funding models environment.

### Summary

RBA is seen by MOSHCC as a positive tool for their organisation. It has been rolled out by MOSHCC voluntarily in several of its government funded programs.

Through the use of RBA at the program level, MOSHCC staff can better identify and articulate the value of their work, and the impact their work has on individuals and the community, especially over the longer term.

MOSCC has had the benefit of government funded support to implement RBA and would like this support to continue, including to enable it to continue to afford and use the RBA score card software that it otherwise may not be able to.

## ConnectGroups – Western Australia

### Description of organisation

ConnectGroups is the peak body in WA for Self Help and Support Groups. Its mission is to support, nurture, advocate for and build capacity in self help and support groups in Western Australia.

ConnectGroups provides assistance to support groups and families and individuals involved through referrals, training, advocacy and networking. It has approximately 700 members who are all support groups for a wide range of conditions. These groups vary greatly in size, from organisations like the Cancer Council (and the groups that fall within it) to small locally based support groups.

ConnectGroups currently receives funding from three government agencies, including the WA Department of Local Government and Communities (DLGC), the WA Department of Health and the WA Mental Health Commission. The organisation has eight staff and an annual operating budget of about \$500,000.

## Use of RBA

ConnectGroups is in its third year of applying RBA. It applies RBA across its two service areas: referrals and capacity building that, in turn, enable its Self Help and Support Group members to deliver effective services to families and individuals. ConnectGroups is also applying RBA in small grant Aboriginal mental health program.

With regard to referrals, RBA is being used to monitor the extent of the surrounding work that goes into and supports each of the phone calls received. Through the implementation of RBA, ConnectGroups has been able to demonstrate in one study that seven phone calls amplified into fifty-nine different actions as a result, including emails and follow up calls. This enables ConnectGroups to demonstrate the full extent of the reach of its referrals service, and consequently the full benefit of its referrals service.

With regard to its capacity building activities, ConnectGroups provides these through forums, seminars, workshops and accredited training. All training provision, both accredited and non-accredited, is for support group facilitators and is provided free to them in the community setting that ConnectGroups provides. Initially the accredited training was in the Certificate IV Training and Assessment (TAE) but this was determined to have very little relevance to running a support group. The Certificate IV TAE has since been replaced with six units from the Certificate IV in Community Services – Self Help and Support Group Facilitation that a trainer from the North Metro TAFE delivers and is supplemented by non-accredited training delivered by ConnectGroups. This change was supported by a Consultancy Group established as part of ConnectGroup's consumer engagement strategy.

Through RBA, ConnectGroups is tracking capacity changes occurring for support group facilitators as they undertake training as well as the final outcome that TAFE focusses on and is generally defined by the assessment tasks and on what has been learnt (and is formally assessed). ConnectGroups is assessing student's level of confidence before and after a training event, their personal empowerment, and their ability to apply their learning effectively and practically back to their group as measures of capacity built.

ConnectGroups knows that their capacity building programs have been well received by members. This is captured in annual perception surveys, which go out to the entire membership base via the Department of Local

Government and Communities. ConnectGroups generally receive about eighty to a hundred responses and a regular 98% satisfaction rate across the services and 97% across training and capacity building programs. The surveys also indicate a 98% completion rate of the Cert IV six units of attainment.

*'This is a very low attrition rate, and students often go on to complete the full Cert IV independently of ConnectGroups. This training is viewed by ConnectGroups as a valuable tool for re-engaging people in education who have been disengaged for some years.'*

ConnectGroups is also using RBA in an Aboriginal Mental Health program:

*'We're into a year of delivery. We're trying to measure mental health outcomes based on our service agreement expectations as listed as our KPIs [key performance indicators] and based on the state government's 2025 mental health plan.'*

## Implementing RBA

ConnectGroups' use of RBA began when they were invited by Linkwest, the Peak Body for Community, Neighbourhood, Family, Resource and Learning Centres in WA, to participate in a program Linkwest was rolling out on RBA implementation with funding support from the state Department of Local Government and Communities. This coincided with the commencement of a services procurement reform by the WA Government, and conversations from government to the not for profit sector around focussing on measurable outcomes rather than outputs.

ConnectGroups saw the Linkwest invitation as an opportunity to better ascertain the outcomes it was achieving for its support group members and at no cost to itself initially.

ConnectGroups regard themselves as fortunate that their initial involvement with RBA was through the program at Linkwest:

*'This meant that our hand was held in the rollout.'*

The biggest challenge ConnectGroups found with using RBA, and the most expensive, is the time required to collect and enter data into spreadsheets and to create graphs for the one-page RBA headline reports.

*'The [RBA] excel spreadsheets are complex documents,*

*and without support, very difficult to develop. This behind the scenes technical work requires staff time that in smaller organisations is hard to find.'*

The cost of the formal RBA tool for data collection and presentation was one aspect of RBA that Linkwest could not afford to purchase. Linkwest has developed its own and made it available to its members, including ConnectGroups.

ConnectGroups strongly believes that small community services organisations would find it very difficult to apply RBA and meet compliance on their own, without the kind of support Linkwest provided them.

*'If organisations could access this kind of support they might consider initiating RBA, but it is very difficult without it. To develop the technical tools required would take staff time away from services delivery.'*

ConnectGroups also suggested that whoever adopts RBA has to come from a holistic, cultural change perspective:

*'Unless an organisation sees RBA as having a wide spectrum, rather than as more red tape imposed on them, then they won't have the rich experiences RBA can offer. Implementing RBA requires a new way of thinking [from results backwards to means to achieve them] and requires a new organisational culture and approach. All staff need to know and understand the value, and it's easier in a small organisation for everyone to understand the "whys". It's harder in a larger organisation, where staff roles are more disconnected.'*

Whilst there have been some limited resources for RBA provided through the Linkwest project, ConnectGroups now finances RBA implementation itself because of the benefits realised. It pays a fee to Linkwest for its RBA support service.

### Impacts of RBA

ConnectGroups are confident that RBA is now embedded in their organisational culture and practice, and is providing an environment of invaluable, ongoing continuous improvement in their services.

*'Being small we did RBA gradually one program at a time and now I think there isn't anything else we can measure.'*

ConnectGroups is in no doubt that RBA has added insight and depth to their service delivery. However, they would not say that the introduction of RBA has affected one way or the other their support group members.

*'I wouldn't say that our support group members know that we're implementing RBA, they just know that they have to do an evaluation form. We talk about it all the time, and it features in our newsletters but in itself it doesn't resonate or is important to them. At the end of the day they are getting what they need.'*

ConnectGroups through RBA believes it is now better placed to demonstrate to government and other funding bodies the worth of their small organisation.

For ConnectGroups though the jury is out as to whether government insight into the differences they make has improved. The experience of ConnectGroups is that understanding of measurable outcomes within government is still limited, and inconsistent. Their experience is that the value of RBA remains personality-based through the departmental champions, and not widespread.

### Summary

ConnectGroups took up RBA with a positive mindset to better demonstrate its worth. It has found RBA valuable in demonstrating the full impacts of its referral services and that their training programs have built the capacity of those involved to apply their learning to their particular self-help or support group. RBA is also enabling achievement of ongoing continuous improvement in ConnectGroups services. They admit though that implementing RBA would have been hard if they had not had the RBA training and support tools provided by LinkWest.

## Wandana Community Centre – South Australia

### Description of organisation

Wandana Community Centre (WCC) is located at Gilles Plains in north Adelaide. Gilles Plains has a population of around 3,400.

WCC exists for the primary purpose of community development and lifelong learning. It aims to build a strong community in Gilles Plains and surrounding suburbs by providing a meeting place 'where people come and gather, share information and care for each other'. It is run 'for and by the community'. It is a small centre with a staff base of 11 part time and casual staff, who work the equivalent of 3 full time staff members, and about 30 volunteers that work the equivalent of 3 full time staff members. Its annual budget is about \$250,000.

WCC is part of Centacare Catholic Family Services, the official community service agency of the Catholic Archdiocese of Adelaide. The mission of Centacare is to provide 'relevant, authentic and effective services that will enhance the quality of life of our clients and will enable them to participate fully in the community' (Centacare, 2016). Centacare offers a range of services, including Playgroup, Drug and Alcohol, Homelessness, and Training and Education. WCC delivers some of these services.

### Use of RBA

The programs that WCC applies RBA to include; its supported playgroup, multicultural women's group and individual family support programs (support and counselling services). These are all funded by the SA Department of Community and Social Inclusion (DSCI). It has become a requirement of DSCI funded projects that RBA is used.

At this stage WCC is not using RBA in its adult basic education programs funded by the SA Department of State Development (DSD) as there is no requirement for this. However, WCC believes RBA would be useful and better measure the outcomes of their adult basic education programs should DSD taken an interest in RBA and support agencies to do so.

### How RBA has been implemented

WCC first became involved in RBA implementation through a pilot program run by its peak organisation, Community Centres SA (CCSA), in 2011, and has received ongoing RBA training and support from CCSA. The CCSA RBA pilot project attracted the interest of the SA Department of Community and Social Inclusion (DSCI) and from 2012 DSCI has funded CCSA to support community centres throughout the state to become 'RBA competent' and as part of DSCI's requirement for its funded programs/services. CCSA runs training workshops and also provides templates for RBA data collection and reporting for its members and offers troubleshooting services.

WCC took an 'action learning' approach to RBA wherein people are learning as they implement RBA. Participants and other stakeholders have input into the development of program goals and RBA performance measures mainly through discussions and feedback.

*'Participant involvement is important. This happens mostly in an informal way. As a community centre, we know the area well. If we're doing our job properly we're doing a lot of talking to other people and organisations. A lot of it is about building relationships and talking to*

*people, otherwise you're running programs that have no basis in the community.'*

WCC found that while the concepts of RBA are considered to be quite simple and don't require a high level of education or experience for people to understand, RBA can be made over-complicated, which leads to measures becoming irrelevant or difficult to implement.

*'The development of measures can take time to get right, and appears to be not a perfect science. We come up with measures, which are sometimes based on a best guess. It can turn out that it's not measuring what needs to be measured, so we have to rejig.'*

WCC explained that there was an extensive consultation process between DSCI and CCSA members to determine what outcomes measures would be suitable for DSCI programs. There now is an agreed set of outcomes measures for DSCI programs that are similar across similar programs from which a funded organisation chooses those most relevant to their particular program. There also are templates for reporting that were developed by DSCI and CCSA to aid RBA implementation.

WCC suggested that having a key person in the organisation who is the 'champion' for RBA and has the major responsibility for implementation is important to keep the momentum going, overcome resistance, and increase people's understanding of RBA. For example, WCC had one staff member who was worried that RBA would be used as a 'performance management tool', to criticise and judge their performance which created resistance to it.

*'WCC had to be really clear that RBA is not used to monitor staff performance. Rather RBA is a way of identifying issues that are impacting on program outcomes, and putting in ways of rectifying this.'*

WCC has found that RBA provides evidence that supports their service provision, and can justify funding. The RBA reports it provides DSCI help government measure the progress of policy implementation, which strengthens the argument for continuing to support programs, or even to increase resources. DSCI can pull data together from across the many agencies it funds and take a look at impacts at the population level. WCC explained the connection between its use of RBA at the program level and DSCI's population level focus as follows:

*'Our programs may not impact on the high level population statistics but still are effective. For*

*example, an organisation may have a homelessness program where the number of homeless people has not been reduced (not necessarily affected the population statistic), but their level of social connectedness clearly has increased. From our perspective that makes it a successful program.'*

WCC recognises that RBA allows government to measure progress of policy implementation, which happens through the outcomes of individual programs. Over time, they can see there will be greater opportunities to work at the population level, and to influence change at this higher level. This will mean bringing different people and organisations with different perspectives on an issue to work toward a common goal, or end results for their community members, and open up opportunities for more effective collaboration.

### Impacts of RBA

WCC has found that the use of RBA has aided clarification of the purpose of its programs. An example of this is in relation to the multicultural women's group it runs and that was the first program to which WCC applied RBA. This program involves a number of staff, educators and volunteers. Over time, the purpose of the women's group was becoming blurred with different perspectives on what it was there for, and this was impacting on the outcomes of the program. Some people felt that the group was in place to teach language skills; others felt it was about skills development. With the use of RBA, they were able to work collaboratively to drill down to what the multicultural women's group was fundamentally about, and that was building 'community connectedness':

*'We were able to reach agreement about what this group is all about. It helped us be very clear about the group's purpose, and therefore what will be delivered.'*

This realisation impacted on the program design and content, and measures have now been developed that will quantify the outcomes. These measures include:

- % of participants with increased social connections in the broader community
- % with improved knowledge of local services available to them
- % who feel more confident about their future.

In terms of the use of RBA within its adult basic education WCC feels that it would work really well. The example was given of a person who is enrolled into a non-accredited program:

*'When they first come into the centre they are unable to meet anyone's eye, they don't say anything and they sit in the classroom and pretend they're invisible. Over time, you can see them change – they start to say hello to the receptionist, they will smile and meet the eye of people they pass in the hall. They start to participate in class discussion.'*

*'The current way of reporting would not capture any of this change. We can put measures in place with RBA that will allow us to report this impact, as well as whether or not they attended the class. It is important to get the measures right so that all areas of impact within the program are captured.'*

Funding bodies can want 'instant' results, which is not possible with the kinds of people that WCC is working with. Incremental changes, such as those described above, can be measured more effectively with RBA, as well as how programs are changed and improved as a result of RBA data.

The current measures are felt to be a 'blunt instrument' – enrolment numbers have increased/decreased, people are attending/not attending, literacy levels are showing an increase/decrease – and the ability to tell the story about what is really happening does not lie therein. However, being a small organisation WCC has many competing priorities and unless there was support from the funding body it would be too resource intensive for it to implement RBA in its adult education programs on its own.

### Summary

The introduction of RBA is seen by WCC as a positive for their organisation and programs, and therefore their clients. WCC sees RBA as providing a solid background of evaluation and quality improvement. It is a way of quantifying some of the more qualitative data that is currently lost and providing baselines from which it is much easier to measure progress and outcomes from a participant and program perspective, as well as organisationally. At this stage, RBA is being used only in the programs where it is a requirement of the funding.

There is a strong recognition though that RBA would work very well in its adult education programs because it will capture the many outcomes that are currently overlooked. However, WCC will not use RBA its adult education programs unless it becomes a funding requirement. It has other priorities to contend with within its limited resources.



# Findings and conclusion

This project has explored the merits of Adult and Community Education (ACE) providers using Results-Based Accountability (RBA) as a tool to measure outcomes achieved for participants in their non-formal learning programs.

## Context findings

This section summarises the findings and draws some conclusions. The rationale for the study is that ACE providers currently have no systematic way of measuring the outcomes for participants from their non-formal learning programs (ALA, 2016). There are benefits to having a systemic way of documenting the outcomes they achieve for participants in their non-formal learning programs; to have a robust evidence base on which to reflect and improve their performance and to report their performance to outsiders and particularly their funders to help them better understand the value of their work and continue to fund their work.

ACE providers non-formal education programs can yield a range of significant changes for participants in attitudes and behaviours as well as in knowledge and skills but documenting and reporting these changes currently is not part of the education and training reporting regime. The focus of education and training reporting is on job outcomes.

For ACE students in non-formal education programs achieving job outcomes is not a likely result but there are other, extremely relevant and important qualitative outcomes, such as improved self-esteem, motivation and confidence and the development of the foundation skills and social participation, that the ACE Ministerial Declaration on ACE acknowledges are critical results for ACE

students in non-formal education programs to achieve as part of a pathway to further education and labour market outcomes.

Driven by both their own desire and that of their funders to better understand and improve the positive differences they make to adults lives, the community not for profit sector, of which ACE providers are a part, has begun to use the RBA method of outcomes reporting which at its core is about determining 'is anyone better off', the common goal of the community not for profit sector.

The RBA method was developed by Mark Friedman about ten years ago to provide an easily understood and simple way for non-experts and people at every level in an organisation to keep the focus on the outcomes or results achieved in people's lives as a result of programs or services and drive continuous improvement in results achieved.

## Case study findings

To explore the merits of the RBA approach to outcomes reporting, three case studies were undertaken of ACE providers who are using of RBA and to learn how RBA has been implemented into their everyday processes and with what impacts and lessons learnt. Key themes that have come through from the case studies are:

- RBA is being used within the Neighbourhood Houses and Community Centres subsector of ACE in particular and for community services programs mainly, and for which RBA is becoming a requirement for continuing funding of these programs by some state governments.
- The use of RBA in the delivery of non-formal adult learning programs is less well progressed and is not a funding requirement, but some community centres are

voluntarily implementing it because they have seen the value of RBA in other of their programs and can see it will also work well in relation to non-formal adult learning programs to tell the story of the breadth of the achievements of their students.

- RBA implementation is best undertaken using an action learning approach. It is through the doing of RBA that the process starts to gel for staff. It is only when participating in RBA that they come to fully understand the methodology.
- The RBA process is purported to be simple but in all three case studies their RBA implementation has been aided by a RBA support program involving training in the core concepts, assistance to develop the best outcomes measures and data collection and analysis and reporting tools, and for troubleshooting issues arising in individual organisations. It appears that without this assistance, RBA was not likely to have been successfully introduced into programs of the three case study organisations.
- Having a champion of RBA within the organisation also appears useful to keep the momentum going and overcome any resistance.
- RBA implementation takes time. All three case studies had been involved in RBA for several years and RBA is still not embedded in all programs in two of the three case studies.
- All three case study ACE organisations see RBA as a robust way of moving from anecdotal evidence to real hard evidence of the qualitative outcomes from their programs that is useful internally to reflect on and improve their work and to justify their service provision to external stakeholders, including their funders.

## Conclusions

Based on this small exploratory study, RBA appears to have merit in relation to ACE's non-formal learning programs as a means of producing robust evidence of the differences that these programs make to the adults involved and for use for both continuous improvement purposes and to show the effectiveness of their programs to their funders and justify their funding.

A useful next step might be to consult ACE providers and the funders to come up a set of outcomes measures that would be suitable for their non-formal learning programs so that each ACE provider does not have to 're-invent the wheel' in this regard and to achieve at least a consistent set of core outcomes for planning and reporting on through RBA.

To introduce an RBA support consultancy to develop the tools for data collection analysis and reporting on the outcomes measures and to train ACE providers in RBA in general and in the use of the developed tools. Governments need to have a consistent approach to the implementation and use of RBA. Without an RBA support consultancy it is unlikely that ACE providers could or would proceed on their own with RBA.

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# Appendix 1 – Interview questions

## Questions for government/peaks

### About your organisation

- What services do you deliver/fund?

### Policy frameworks

- What is the degree to which RBA is rolled out in the state/policy area you are operating in?
- How do you see RBA as adding value to the government's policy agenda?
- Has the use of RBA in organisations provided government with greater insight into the development of programs for vulnerable and disengaged people?

### Internal/Department work

- How is RBA being used currently in your area/department?
- What system of accountability was used prior to RBA? How did your department measure outcomes?
- What barriers have you experienced in implementing RBA in your state/department/area of influence? What have you done to overcome these?
- Has any kind of review or evaluation been undertaken to measure the effectiveness of RBA? If so, what were the results?
- What intentions are there to roll RBA out more broadly amongst funded programs in SA/WA/NSW e.g. community education?
- Is RBA being used as a tool in your state/area to measure the achievement of desired outcomes for participants in non-accredited learning programs?
- What are the key lessons learnt on your experience of implementing RBA? What are the key messages you would give to a government department or agency considering implementing RBA?

## Working with service providers

- Have you/would you/do you provide support/resources for organisations to transition to RBA?
- What are they? Have they helped?
- What changes have you observed in terms of successful outcomes in relation to the service being funded?
- What changes have you observed more broadly as a result of the use of RBA e.g. at a community level, organisationally?
- Are providers comfortable with the use of RBA?
- Has the rollout of RBA improved your relationship with providers? If so, how?

## Use of RBA in measuring education outcomes

- How well do you think RBA would translate into non-accredited program delivery e.g. engagement with learners; strengthening learner pathways; improving attendance?

## Questions for service providers

### About your organisation

- What sort of organisation are you e.g. NFP, Incorporated Association?
- What services do you deliver/fund?

### Your use of RBA

- What programs/services does RBA apply to?

### Why is RBA being used?

- What services do you deliver?
- What department/s are you accountable to?
- Is RBA a requirement of your contract?

## How is RBA being used?

- How do your program goals tie in with government policy?
- How do you involve participants (and/or agencies) in setting goals (for programs/services; contract delivery)?
- How important is participant input into this process?
- How are RBA practices being implemented across your organisation?
- Has implementing RBA provided opportunities that didn't exist before?
- What approach to RBA training do you use? An evaluation of RBA undertaken in Wales in 2011 noted that it was only when people were participating in RBA did they fully understand the methodology – how does this compare to your experience?
- Do you have ongoing professional development and support in the use of RBA?
- What are the key 'lessons learnt' on your experience of implementing RBA?
- What are the key messages you would give to another community organisation considering implementing RBA?
- What happened to the data you collected before moving to RBA? How is it used now?
- [if changed] How has this impacted on your staff e.g. motivation, performance?
- How were you measuring performance/outcomes before introducing RBA?
- What have the biggest challenges been in implementing RBA in your organisation?
- Has the use of RBA allowed you to engage more effectively with vulnerable and disengaged people? How?

## How RBA contributes to continuous improvement within organisations

- How do you report back to the 'community'?
- Who is your community? Or stakeholders?
- Results-based accountability systems monitor program progress, and evaluations identify why programs are succeeding or failing and what changes might be necessary.
- How do you incorporate evaluation into your RBA framework?
- How do you determine where the improvement needs to be, or what needs to change to reach goals/targets?
- What improvements have you measured/noticed in your organisation? Program? Staff? Participants? since using the RBA framework?
- What impact has the implementation of RBA had on your organisational culture?
- What is the impact on the relationship between staff and participants and participants' level of engagement?
- How does it demonstrate value for money?
- How do you feel your program demonstrates value for money through the RBA framework?

## Use of RBA in measuring education outcomes

- How well do you think RBA would translate into non-accredited program delivery? E.g. engagement with learners; strengthening learner pathways; improving attendance



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