

Evaluating a community initiative with a focus on Indigenous health

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Porirua Healthlinks Trust, a community organization in the Greater Wellington area, has been mounting an annual 'Creek Fest' since 2004. This is a one-day event that focuses on health and culture. It has become increasingly successful particularly in attracting large numbers of Pacific and Maori peoples who live in the immediate locality as well as those from further away. The fest held in March 2006 was evaluated to determine whether it was meeting its stated objectives and what else the organization might do to achieve its health-related goals with regard to this initiative. Of the 500 questionnaires handed out on the day, nearly 400 were completed for analysis. This article draws on both the results of the survey and the process used to report on the evaluation of the fest. The self-administered questionnaire with interviewer-assisted delivery was seen to be the key to obtaining such a high response rate. Implications for undertaking evaluations in ethnically diverse communities are discussed.

Introduction

Porirua is a city of approximately 50 600 situated to the north of Wellington City (the capital of New Zealand) and is part of the greater Wellington region. While the European/Pakeha community is in the majority (63.9 per cent in Porirua compared with 80 per cent in the New Zealand population as a whole), Pacific people make up the next largest group with 26.7 per cent of the population (compared to 6.5 per cent of the New Zealand population as a whole). Maori (the Indigenous people of New Zealand) are the third-largest ethnic group with 20.5 per cent of the Porirua population (compared to 14.7 per cent of the New Zealand population as a whole). The population of Porirua is younger (0–14 years 28 per cent and 65+ 6.8 per cent) when compared with the New Zealand population as a whole (0–14 years 23 per cent and 65+ 12 per cent). This is also an area of lower socioeconomic status with a lesser rate of home ownership and a large concentration (49 per cent) of rental housing provided by the government. As such, health is a major concern. Studies such as the *Porirua City Health and Disability Report and Plan* (Porirua Health Project 2000) indicate that Maori, Pacific and people on low incomes experience poorer health and are less likely to receive the health services they need.

Porirua Healthlinks Trust (PHLT) was established in 2001 following the Health Needs Assessment project and submissions from the Kapiti and Porirua local authorities on behalf of their communities. The Ministry of Health provided funding to PHLT to implement and progress initiatives identified in the *Porirua City Health and Disability Report and Plan* to improve health and disability outcomes and reduce health inequalities for Maori, Pacific and people on low incomes (Porirua Healthlinks Trust 2005).

Porirua Healthlinks Trust's role is to provide community leadership and a sustainable voice for the peoples of Porirua to ensure that all communities are involved in all aspects of health development. It works actively alongside the diverse communities of Porirua to understand their needs, to ensure the relevance and acceptability of health services and to achieve better health and wellbeing for everyone in Porirua (Porirua Healthlinks Trust 2005).

Although its vision is to support community leadership and provide a sustainable voice for the priorities of the peoples of Porirua, PHLT also acknowledges that issues such as employment, housing, income and education have a major influence on people's health and wellbeing (Porirua Healthlinks Trust 2005).

Creek Fest

With the above mandate and concerns, in 2004 and 2005, PHLT organized and coordinated Creek Fest, a one-day community event, which was held at Cannons Creek, Porirua. The main goals for Creek Fest are to 'promote healthy lifestyle messages, good eating, exercise, smoking cessation and to celebrate our cultural diversity through food, music, performance, sport and craft'.

Porirua Healthlinks emphasizes the need for people to be more aware of improved health services and thus considered that a combination of music, food and healthy messages in a festive atmosphere would be a good way to make a range of information available. Therefore, Creek Fest was deemed to be an appropriate event to communicate messages on 'health and culture' to the community at large.

The estimated number of people who attended the previous Creek Fests exceeded 10 000, which suggested that it was a successful occasion. However, PHLT thought it important that feedback was provided to ensure that its relationship with the community was maintained at a high level.

Purpose of evaluation

PHLT has good relationships with the Porirua community, particularly through its partnerships with other community organizations and both local and central government. The Auditor-General (2007) uses PHLT as an organizational example of the way in which local bodies can develop consultative decision-making frameworks. Thus,

PHLT is in a position to receive ongoing feedback about its activities. To understand the views and opinions of the wider community and to assist them in decision-making about changes and improvements for Creek Fest, PHLT decided to carry out an evaluation of the Creek Fest event in 2006.

PHLT wanted to find out:

- how successful the Creek Fest event was
- how often Creek Fest should be held
- what activities should be included at Creek Fest
- what changes/improvements the community recommended
- how much health information the community received from Creek Fest.

Method

PHLT has three full-time employees, two managers and an administrator, who act as the conduit between the Trust and the Porirua community. As with any small organization, these employees spend all their time on delivery and facilitation of services, liaison and fundraising including grant applications. The possibility of carrying out an evaluation only arose because of the initiative taken by Aliitasi Tavila, then an MA (Applied) in Social Science Research student at Victoria University of Wellington, who was required to undertake a 200-hour practical research placement as part of her masters degree.

The evaluation was planned in conjunction with the two managers at PHLT. It was decided that a brief survey would be administered to those attending Creek Fest in March 2006. This method was chosen as a way of minimizing the amount of time involved and maximizing participation rates of the wider community. It was also felt that the results from a survey would give baseline data and an indication of what might need to be followed up in future consultations with the Trust and its member organizations. The use of quantitative methods for programme evaluation has been emphasized in New Zealand, particularly in the public sector (State Services Commission 2003), because of ease of application and ability to produce an outcome in a relatively short space of time. The ability to reach a large population, as in this case, is also a major consideration, which leads to the adoption of survey questionnaires as an appropriate tool to use. This evaluation was also framed within Hall and Hall's (2004) definition of a small-scale evaluation as one that has limited resources allocated to it and a short time frame; Creek Fest is a one-day event and there was a 200-hour time allocation for the entire project.

Self-complete surveys are not considered the ideal method of data collection for Pacific peoples, which was an issue raised by the managers of PHLT. However, as Newport (2003, p. 154) points out:

People might think that because we come from an oral tradition, where collective responsibility is a key part of who we are, focus groups—for

example—are the best way to gather credible information from Pacific communities.

She goes on to discuss that, as with any research or evaluation, the method chosen must be connected to the question being addressed and thus other ways of collecting the information must be considered. As Tiatia (2004, p. 59) indicates in research she carried out, the ‘drop off’ method where she and a team of interviewers dropped off self-complete questionnaires to a large sample and then collected them at a designated time was invaluable in terms of attaining high response rates. The variation of this method adopted for the Creek Fest survey demonstrates the advantage of adapting conventional techniques to take into account the characteristics of the population under study.

One of the issues raised around research and evaluation is that of who is doing the research and who benefits as a result of it being done. Maori and Pacific communities have a long history of being seen as the ‘other’ where they are researched ‘on’ and their experience interpreted by outsiders through a different lens (e.g. Smith 1999). Sanga and Pasikale (2002) articulate five principles that need to be taken into consideration for any research (or evaluation) activity involving Pacific participants. These are the acknowledgement and maintenance of ‘*mana*’ (dignity); enduring *relationships* rather than episodic encounters; *reciprocity* to enhance the research process and outcomes; *empowerment*; and *communication*. While they discuss these principles mainly in relation to narrative methods, these principles do apply in a broader research and evaluation context.

The evaluation of Creek Fest was carried out by people from the local community, on a programme initiated by the local community, for the benefit of the local community and, as such, fulfilled the criteria for ethical research and evaluation by being responsive to the needs and aspirations of the Pacific community (Lima 2002).

The evaluation

The participants of the evaluation were members of the Porirua community who attended Creek Fest in March 2006. A short and simple questionnaire was administered on the day to evaluate the festival (see Appendix 1).

It was evident that Creek Fest had expanded its size and capacity since it was first introduced. The Creek Fest of 2005 attracted approximately 18 000 people and Creek Fest 2006 had an estimated attendance of 22 000 people.

Five hundred questionnaires were given out and 396 were completed and received back. The researcher had recruited four university students from Porirua City plus the receptionist from PHLT to distribute the survey and assist people to answer the questionnaire. Each surveyor was given a bundle of approximately 50 questionnaires to be handed out. The evaluation was not targeted to

any particular population group, such as Maori or Pasifika, because the festival was aimed at the general Porirua community. Prior to being asked to complete the questionnaire, participants were assured that the survey was anonymous. Participants were assisted to complete the questionnaire by being asked the questions and then writing down their answers on the survey form, which took about a minute. As an incentive to take part in the survey, there was a prize draw for a Creek Fest T-shirt. Entry was optional and those wanting to be in the prize draw had to write their name and contact phone number on the perforated part at the end of the questionnaire. Anonymity was not compromised as all these name slips were immediately detached and put straight into a plastic bag for the draw and once the draw was made they were destroyed.

Fieldwork

Creek Fest opened at 7 am and closed at 6 pm. Based on the prior experience of busiest times by PHLT managers, the fieldwork took place at two set times during the day, 12 – 1.30 pm and 4 – 5.30 pm. Groups of people, rather than an individual, were approached to participate by one of the six interviewers. People go to Creek Fest as part of a group of family and/or friends, so the decision to include all members of a group who were willing to take part reflected the reality of the situation. At the same as the interviewer assisted one person to complete the questionnaire by going through the questions with them, others in the group would fill out their copy of the questionnaire thus enabling them to also record their opinion of the Creek Fest experience. The high completion rate reflects the success of this method. People were more willing to participate because they were not negatively impacting on the enjoyment of the remainder of their group by having them ‘hang round’—albeit for a very short period of time—and wait for one member to fill out an evaluation form.

Results and findings

Of those who completed the survey, 78 per cent were from Porirua. The majority of these people had also attended the fest in 2005. This suggests that Creek Fest is catering for the people of the area.

The major theme of Creek Fest ’06 was health. Figure 1 indicates how respondents felt about the health information they received on the day. Approximately half were satisfied with what they received while around a third were not interested in this aspect of Creek Fest. This suggests that further work needs to be done in relation to relaying health information to the Porirua community.

As shown in Figure 2, the main expectations people had about the festival were that there would be sports competitions, and that they would attend Creek Fest in a safe, relaxed and comfortable environment.

Activities, in comparison to static displays, are considered an important aspect by the organizers

FIGURE 1: AMOUNT OF HEALTH INFORMATION RECEIVED

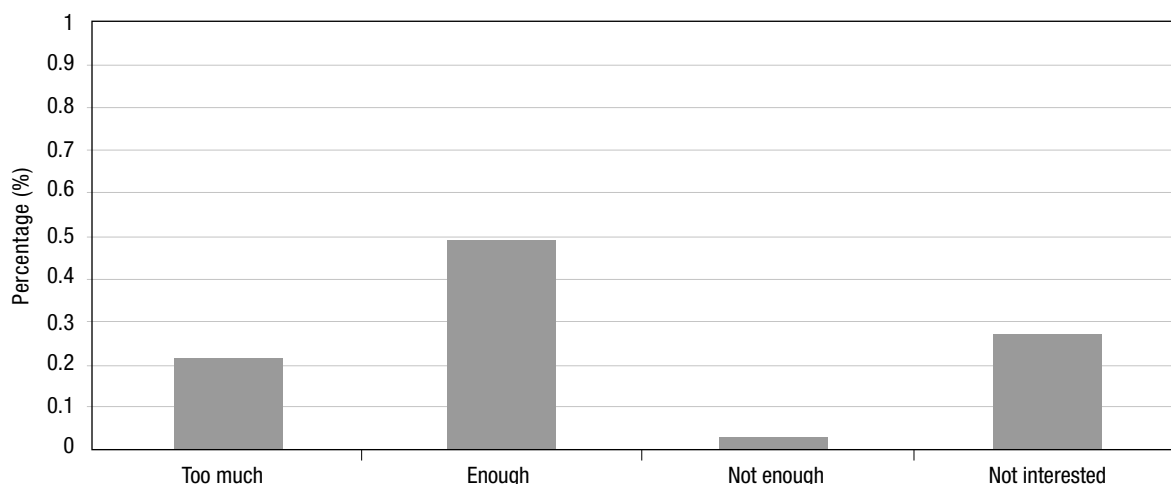
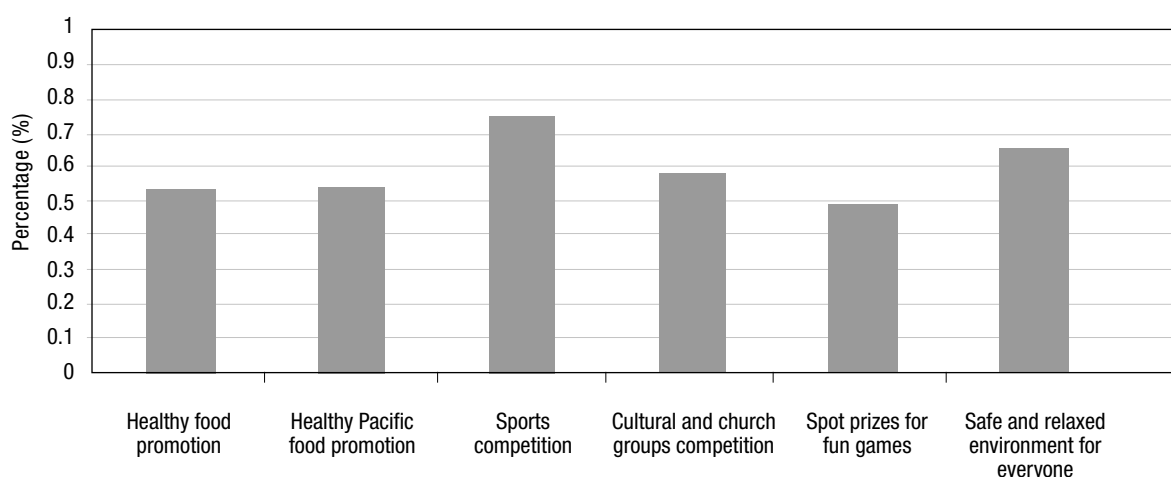


FIGURE 2: PEOPLE'S EXPECTATIONS OF CREEK FEST



because they attract people to attend the fest (see Figure 2). Activities provided included sports, music and performances. Nearly 90 per cent of those surveyed indicated that they found the activities excellent or very good.

Another key issue is the safety of people and the overall environment where the fest is held. Porirua City can be perceived as an unsafe place because of a gang presence around the area. Therefore, it was important to ascertain people's perspectives on how safe they felt. It was interesting to see that 60 per cent of those surveyed had always felt safe with less than 10 per cent who only felt safe sometimes or not at all.

In terms of suggested changes and improvements, most of those surveyed wanted to have a New Zealand celebrity involved in some way—people such as Tana Umaga (an All Black of Samoan descent from the Wellington region) or

Michael Campbell (a top golfer of Maori descent from the Porirua area). Introduction of a healthy menu, which would reinforce the health promotion aspect of Creek Fest, and the promotion of the event through the media were seen to be the least favoured options for change (see Figure 3).

People were asked about their means of transport to Creek Fest and around 70 per cent either took their own cars or were a passenger in a car driven by a friend or family member. Given this high usage of private cars, it is not surprising that respondents commented that more car parking facilities were required.

Finally, people had the opportunity to comment about the festival overall. As Figure 4 demonstrates over 70 per cent of those surveyed indicated that Creek Fest should continue to be held annually because 'it is a job well done'.

FIGURE 3: SUGGESTED CHANGES AND IMPROVEMENTS

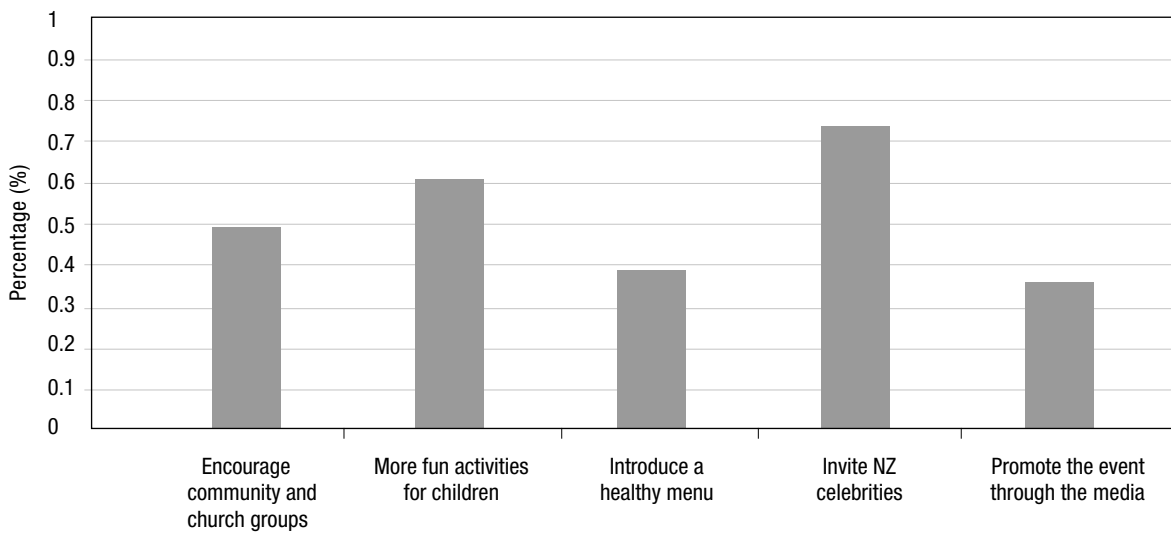
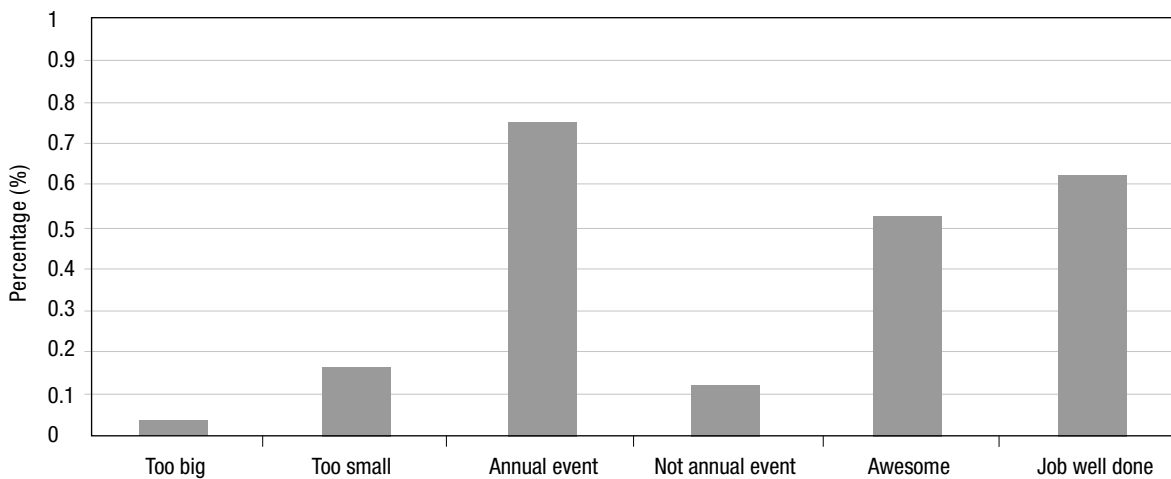


FIGURE 4: OVERALL PERCEPTIONS OF CREEK FEST



Conclusions

In answering the evaluation questions posed by PHLT, four out of five indicated a very positive outcome in terms of the running of Creek Fest. However, given PHLT’s overall emphasis on health and health messages for the Porirua community with the aim of improving health outcomes, Creek Fest could be deemed less than successful. The evaluation indicates that health as a focus for Creek Fest is not considered to be a salient issue for the community. The majority of those interviewed came to the festival to eat, and generally have a good time. They favoured sports competition over healthy food promotion though it could be argued that sports competitions contribute to health and wellbeing. However, there are those who for various reasons are unable to participate in such physical events and thus are excluded from health-promoting

activity in this instance. A high percentage of respondents preferred to have a celebrity attend the festival rather than having a focus on healthy living. Further, the survey results indicated that the introduction of a healthy menu throughout the day was not a favoured option.

This then highlights three key concerns:

- 1 Is the Maori and Pacific community aware that their health is the most at risk when compared to the rest of the New Zealand population?
- 2 Who should be responsible for raising awareness among the community in relation to the health issues?
- 3 If the community does not consider health as a priority, who is going to address it?

PHLT, as the commissioner of the evaluation and programme provider, will need to take these



Photos (left to right): Creek Fest is a one-day event that focuses on health and culture; Creative activities for children at the 2006 Creek Fest.

concerns into account when planning subsequent Creek Fests. They will need to decide whether Creek Fest can be presented in such a way that the health messages are key or whether some other mechanism should be used to address these key health messages. The analysis of the 2007 experience may help with further decision-making.

In evaluating Creek Fest 2006, apart from the value of finding out that the medium was working but the message was not being delivered, the aspect that is of real importance to evaluators is the use of a survey as the primary means of data collection with a predominantly Pacific population.

As discussed earlier, surveys are not seen as the most suitable medium for collecting data from Pacific and Maori peoples. Understanding the assumptions that underlie Pacific methods of questioning and grounding research in Pacific world views is crucial. Given the diversity of nations that are subsumed under the label 'Pacific', advocating for a Pacific methodology/world view is in itself problematic. However, while there may be differences between groupings of Pacific peoples, the term can be seen as 'a unifying political and social tool of action' (Newport 2003, p. 153). Kirkman (2001) suggests that the position of insider when undertaking research and evaluation is advantageous because the researcher is attuned to the cultural nuances that the outsider can miss. However, as Tavila (2006) pointed out, while she knew the Samoan community well, in this situation she was working with a much more diverse cross-section of the Porirua community and in a completely different role. Assumptions around the insider perspective which suggest the individual has the requisite skills and knowledge to deal with all Pacific questions may not assist the progress of the research/evaluation (Newport 2003).

A key issue was knowing the correct approach to take when soliciting groups to take part in the survey. Language and demeanour are crucial, particularly with older Maori and Pacific people. A

respectful approach and the use of the right degree of formality in addressing individuals ensured people did listen positively to the request to participate. This 'knowing' came from an insider perspective and was instrumental in achieving the high response rate. The interviewers were part of the community they were working in and therefore accepted as 'legitimate enquirers' rather than being viewed with suspicion or being seen as irrelevant. Therefore, in reviewing Sanga and Pasikale's (2002) five principles for positive engagement with Pacific participants, the process ensured the acknowledgement and maintenance of '*mana*' (dignity). The commissioners and evaluators in carrying out the Creek Fest evaluation were committed to enduring *relationships* rather than episodic encounters with the Porirua community, and believed strongly in *reciprocity* to enhance the research process and outcomes, and *empowerment* and *communication*. The evaluation results were presented to the community at a public meeting held at Pataka, Porirua's museum and art gallery (see Appendix 2). The local media and other service providers picked up on the results and thus facilitated an even broader dialogue, ensuring that a diverse range of perspectives could be included in the planning for future Creek Fests. In this way the five principles were upheld.

In conclusion, the use of face-to-face delivery of a self-complete survey questionnaire to groups of people by Pacific interviewers worked extremely well. It achieved a high response rate and combined economies of scale with the personal contact. Respect for the cultural mores and process ensured that the aims of the evaluation were achieved and initial concerns about the acceptability of questionnaires were not realized. Variations of this approach have been used successfully by other Pacific researchers and should be considered when looking at possible approaches to evaluation of programmes, particularly those being undertaken in Pacific communities.



Photos (left to right): Winner of Best Pacific Health Provider Display at Creek Fest 2006; Youth games at Creek Fest 2006.

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Appendix 1: Survey questionnaire

Creek Fest 2006 is the third event Porirua Healthlinks Trust has run. We are interested in finding out what you think about it and any ideas for changes. Please tick (✓) your answer to the following questions.

- 1 Do you live in Porirua city?
 Yes
 No
- 2 Did you attend Creek Fest last year?
 Yes
 No
- 3 How did you find out about Creek Fest? (Please tick all that apply.)
 Friends
 Newspaper
 Word of mouth
 Church
 School
- 4 Creek Fest is a health and cultural festival, what do you expect at the festival? (Please tick all that apply.)
 Healthy food promotion
 Healthy Pacific food promotion
 Lots of sports competitions
 Cultural and church groups competitions
 Spot prizes for fun games
 Safe and relaxed environment for everybody
 Other (please specify) _____
- 5 Some people have made the following comments about the Creek Fest event. (Please tick those you agree with.)
 Agree
 Too big for a small community
 Too small for a big community
 It should be an annual event
 It should not be an annual event
 It was awesome
 It was a job well done
 Other (please specify) _____
- 6 How much health information did you receive from Creek Fest '06?
 Too much information
 Enough information
 Not enough information
 Not interested
- 7 How would you rate the activities at the Creek Fest event?
 Excellent
 Very good
 Good
 Average
 Poor
- 8 What is your means of transport to Creek Fest?
 Private car
 Public transport
 Push bike
 By foot
 Other (please specify) _____
- 9 How safe do you feel when you attend Creek Fest?
 Always feel safe
 Often feel safe
 Sometimes feel safe
 Seldom feel safe
 Other (please specify) _____
- 10 What changes could Porirua Health Links Trust make to improve Creek Fest? (Please tick all that apply.)
 Encourage community and church groups' participation
 More fun activities for the children of all ages
 Introduce a healthy menu throughout the day
 Invite NZ celebrities to be involved (e.g. Tana Umaga or Michael Campbell)
 Promote the event through the media
 Other (please specify) _____
- 11 Please add any other comments about the Creek Fest '06 event.

Thank you for your time. Your name will be in the draw to win a 'Creek Fest '06 T-shirt.

Appendix 2: Recommendations

The following recommendations based on the findings of the survey were presented to Porirua Healthlinks Trust and the Porirua community at a public forum held at Pataka.

- It is important that Porirua Healthlinks Trust consults with all the health providers and practitioners around Porirua area to discuss a better method of relaying health information to the community, rather than waiting for the 'Creek Fest' event to happen. In this case, most of the community will hopefully recognise Creek Fest as an annual health promotion.

- Identify the best method of relaying health information to the community. Would it be through the:
 - hospitals
 - schools
 - doctors' surgeries
 - churches
 - shopping centresOR
 - a community event such as Creek Fest.

- Encourage health education programmes of all sorts to raise awareness within the community. This may include a programme for the senior citizens, such as bowling, exercising, weaving or storytelling.

- The issue of safety should be considered paramount at the festival. [The researcher's] observation of the day confirms that there are times when people feel intimidated by gang members. This was not a very pleasant feeling for the community, especially the families with young children. Failure to provide sufficient safety measures may ruin the reputation of the festival.

- Implement lots of sports activities to encourage people to participate. It would also be a good idea to include a dance extravaganza as a therapeutic programme for all. The dance activity would involve both the elderly and the young.