



**Evaluating a Recovery Orientated Mental Health Program in  
the Changing World of Community Based Mental Health  
Practice**

**Dr. Angela Carr and Cherie Nay**

**AES August 2012**

**Australia's first charity**



# The presentation

- Background to The Benevolent Society (TBS)
- The Personal Helpers and Mentors (PHaMs) mental health program
- Background and aims of the evaluation
- Evaluation plan
- Evaluation lessons
- Implications for future evaluation practice

# The Benevolent Society (TBS)

- We are Australia's first charity
- We are an independent, non-religious organisation established in 1813
- We have been a catalyst for social change for 200 years, tackling some of Australia's most difficult issues
- Our goal is to help people overcome the barriers preventing them from participating fully in society



## PHaMs: The Personal Helpers and Mentors Program

- PHaMs is an innovative community based mental health program funded by FaHCSIA
- Voluntary program based on a recovery orientated approach
- TBS is funded to deliver six PHaMs programs (in Logan, Armidale, Inverell, Mudgee, Wingecarribee/Macarthur and Liverpool)
- PHaMs is the first mental health program that TBS has delivered

# Recovery approach to mental health services

- Recovery is a new approach in Australia
  - *“Recovery is a deeply personal, unique process of changing one’s attitudes, values, feeling, goals and skills and/or roles. It is a way of living a satisfying, hopeful and contributing life even with the limitations caused by illness. Recovery included the development of new meaning and purpose in one’s life as one grows beyond the catastrophic effects of mental illness.”*
- Challenges many traditional and clinical approaches
- Challenges consumers previous experiences
- Requires organisational, practice and social change

## Background to the Evaluation

- TBS is committed to evaluating as many of its programs as possible
- Internal Social Policy and Research (SPAR) team responsible for program evaluation
- PHaMs was identified as a priority program for evaluation in 2009

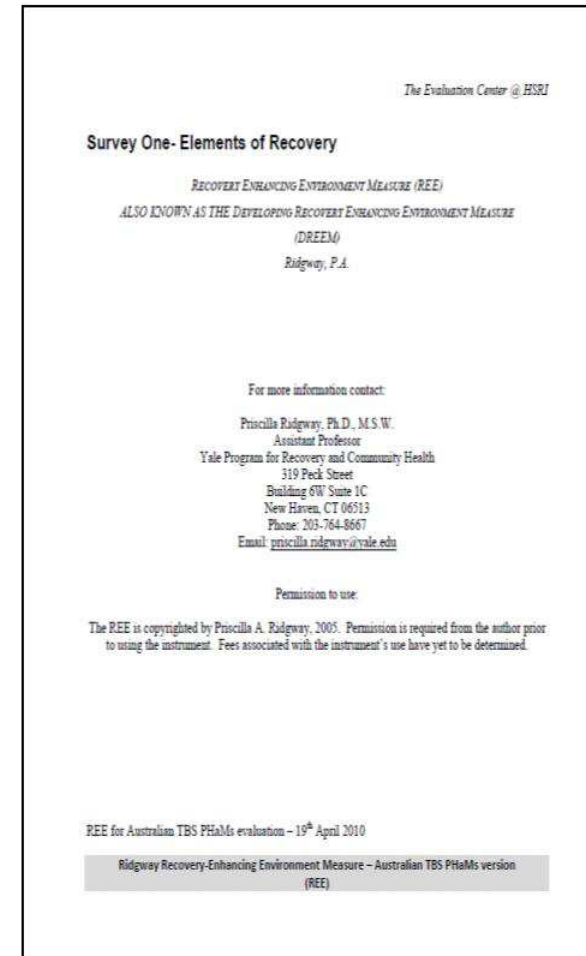
## Aims of the Evaluation

- To explore the effectiveness of the PHaMs program in supporting the recovery of participants
- To understand how PHaMs practices contribute to participant recovery
- To identify areas for program improvement and development



# What we knew

- An Evaluation Steering Group had been established
- The Recovery Enhancing Environment (REE) survey had been identified
- Pilot of the REE had been conducted by SPAR
- TBS had contracted an external consultant





# Evaluation Plan

1. Split the REE into two surveys and roll out across all PHaMs sites
  - PHaMs workers administered one survey
  - Baseline data collected from May 2011
  - Addition of the Personal Wellbeing Index
2. Development of a program logic (July 2011)
3. Development of a common data set (MDS)
4. A limited process evaluation- interviews with workers/participants

# Evaluation Lessons



## What we did not realise

The external consultant's approach to recovery oriented practice varied from the approach that existed at many of the PHaMs services

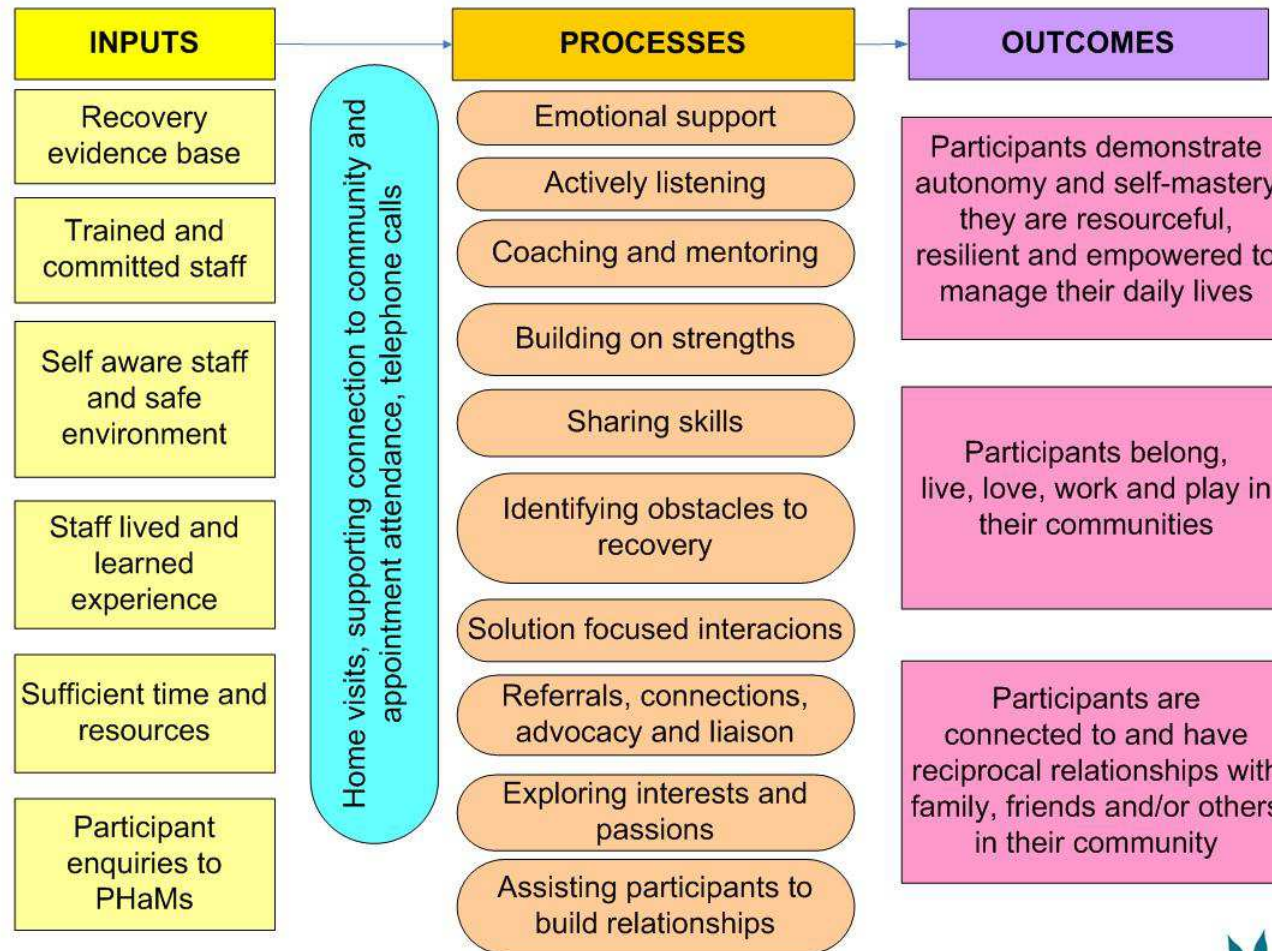


For most staff implementation of the new approach to recovery oriented practice was only beginning

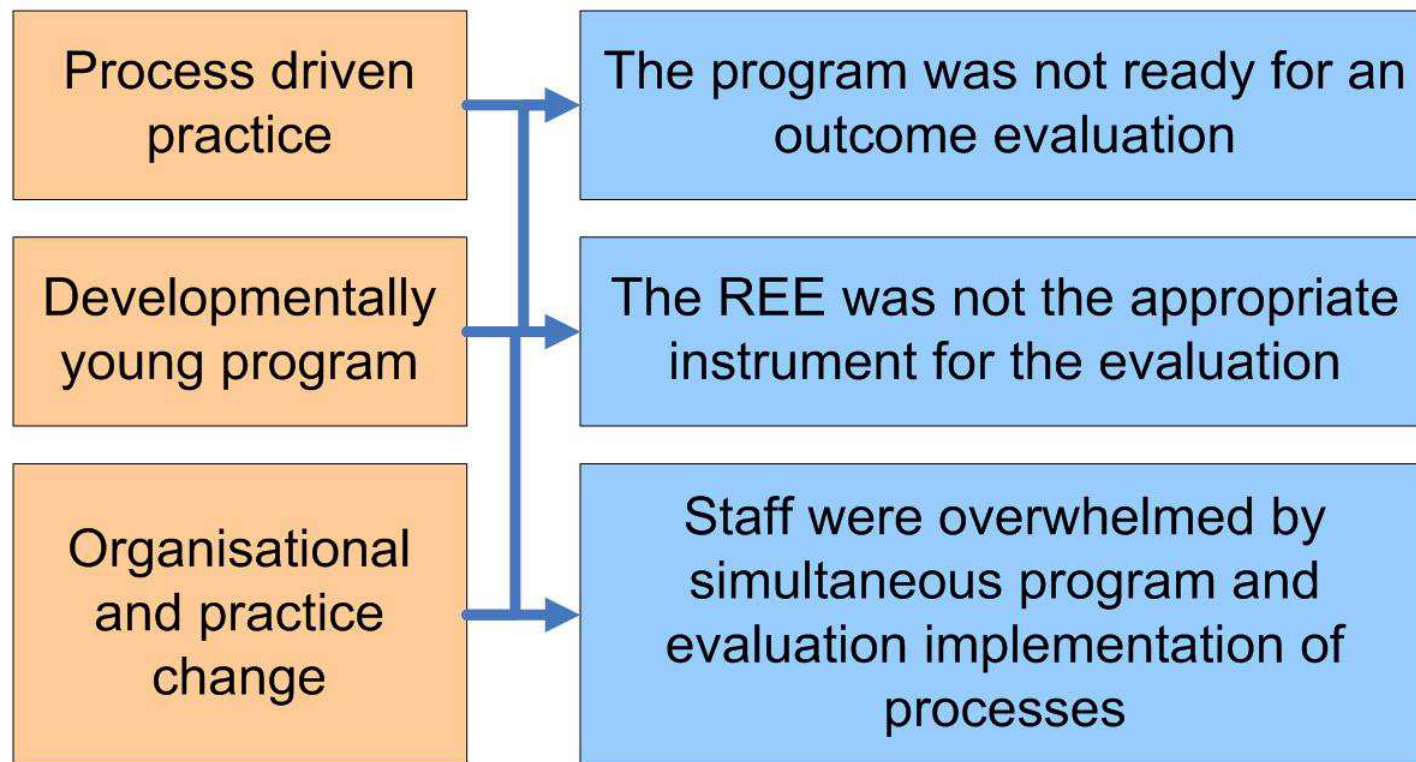


PHaMs staff were facing significant organisational and practice change

# A process driven approach



# Implications for the evaluation



## What we learned about evaluation planning

- The importance of gathering detailed information about the program and its stage of implementation - Prior to planning the evaluation or developing the methodology
- To work with program staff (and, if possible, participants) to develop a program logic, identify evaluation purpose, and identify and commit the resources needed to achieve that purpose
- To use the information above (eg. context, stage, PL, purpose, resources) to inform methodological development (including choice of instruments)

## What we learned about implementation

- To ensure that the evaluation pilot directly reflects the evaluation methodology
- The importance of identifying key program staff to ‘own’ and monitor the evaluation and of engaging staff to ensure early identification and resolution of evaluation issues
- The need for evaluation plans to be flexible and responsive to program development processes and changes

## How we responded

- Re-developed evaluation questions and analysis framework to reflect the contents of the program logic and relevant contextual information.
- Refocussed the evaluation to include greater emphasis on program processes (including increased in-depth interviews)
- Identified and addressed REE data collection issues - leading to increase in survey numbers



## What do we have now

- A responsive evaluation that reflects the way staff and participants see the program, highlights program achievements, and identifies areas for program improvement
- Increased internal understanding of the range of purposes evaluation can serve
- Program commitment to longer term tracking of outputs and outcomes identified in the Program Logic

# Implications for future evaluation practice

Evaluation providers and clients need:

- to share a clear understanding of the developmental stage of each program identified for evaluation
- to share an understanding of the different ways evaluation can add value at different developmental stages of a program
- processes for early identification and clarification of evaluation expectations (including the purpose of the evaluation, way it will be used, and impact on program staff)

## Question time

**Dr. Angela Carr (Senior Research & Evaluation Officer)**

[AngelaC@bensoc.org.au](mailto:AngelaC@bensoc.org.au)

**Cherie Nay (Research & Evaluation Officer)**

[CherieN@bensoc.org.au](mailto:CherieN@bensoc.org.au)

The Benevolent Society's work is only possible because of the compassion, determination and passion of our people, the financial support of our donors and the generosity of our volunteers.

