

## The Impact of Community Work: How to Gather Evidence

by Karen Mcardle, Sue Briggs, Kirsty Forrester, Ed Garrett & Catherine Makay, Policy Press, 2020, 228 pp., \$69.16 (paperback) ISBN 978-1447343943

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social workers to resist the temptation to wield power over others. This book reminds social workers to share our power with others and to only use power to promote social justice.

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Finding ways to measure effectiveness and evaluate the impact of the work that community workers do is essential. In the context of disaster recovery, which is particularly relevant in Australia currently, the survival of whole communities could depend on this (Lonne et al., 2017). Despite this, such a topic is often only addressed in the final chapters of text books, which downgrades its importance. *The Impact of Community Work: How to Gather Evidence* breaks this tradition and starts at the point where many texts end. The chapters provide insight into different methodological perspectives and the book provides a comprehensive and useful overview of the tools available for gathering evidence and evaluating it in the context of group programs or community work.

Although not aimed towards the social work profession specifically, the book would be a useful addition to a list of key texts for social work students or practitioners. What would be appealing for those new to the practice of research and evaluation is that it provides the much-needed stepping stones to cross the discursive divide between research and practice (Denvall & Skillmark, 2020), a divide that can be bewildering for many students. It does this through the use of case studies and accessible language, which together make for clarity surrounding the subject of evaluation.

Part I incorporates a discussion about the values that inform community work. In line with social work ethics (Australian Association of Social Workers [AASW], 2020), the authors call for approaches that amplify the voice of those who actually use services or participate in programs. In order to ensure these voices are heard by decision makers within funding hierarchies, workers will need to possess expertise and sound judgement. In Chapter 4, for example, Catherine McKay and Karen McArdle talk about the art of actually presenting findings to a specified audience. Evaluations must be rigorous, yet also true to the core principles of empowerment and self-determination and be presented within the spirit of social transformation.

Part II focuses on exploring methods, from gathering statistical data via surveys to using in-depth interviews and focus groups to capture qualitative nuance. Differing approaches are also discussed, including social impact studies, longitudinal studies, participatory action strategies, and narrative inquiry. Of particular note in Part II is the way the authors advocate for cultural change within organisations. This is communicated in Chapter 13, where Sue Briggs, Kirsty Forrester, and Karen McArdle remind us of the usefulness of the data contained within Management Information Systems (MIS) for mapping service user needs and measuring change. This usually dry topic makes most of us baulk as we contemplate the time this takes away from our relational endeavours, but here it is brought to life through common sense, enthusiasm, and passion for change. Using secondary data is also discussed in Chapter 14 by Kirsty Forrester and Karen McArdle, who advocate for dismantling a siloed approach to community work and replacing this with collaborative approaches across organisations so that the main focus is understanding and responding to the needs of the community.

This book addresses a complex topic in an accessible way. By doing this, it makes a significant contribution to the conversation about positive change within communities and the community services. It is a testament to the idea that change begins by engaging with the existing mechanisms within funding and organisational structures and appealing to those who hold power within them. Doing this requires a sound knowledge of research and evaluation methods as well as creative thinking to ensure that evidence and evaluation is meaningful, not just for managers and funders, but for service users also. The values and skills needed for this are not unique to community workers but to all those who have an ethical responsibility to influence positive change at system, community, and individual levels (AASW, 2020).

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