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DEVELOPING COMMUNITY NETWORKS AND PARTNERSHIPS IN PROMOTING POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH IN RURAL SOUTH AUSTRALIA - Abraham Francis



This paper is based on field practice. It presents community work experiences and reflections about how rural communities can be engaged in the process of addressing issues of mental health and specially in challenging the myths of stigma attached to mental health. The paper describes the methods used in developing community net works and partnerships in rural South Australia and analyses how these methods have supported in creating positive environment in the local communities to promote mental health. It also outlines some of the challenges and issues faced in the field.

The paper examines the strengths of rural communities by exploring the nature of existing safety net groups, and analyses the partnerships and net works that were formed during the tenure of author's employment. This is highlighted with case examples to illustrate how strength based partnership models enhance creating supportive environment in communities, under the initiative of developing Mental Health Support Groups and Mental Health Action Groups in rural South Australia. Additionally the paper examines the strengths of the evolving role of communities in promoting mental health and suggests intervention strategies and raises questions for further research in social work practice with communities.

Boidata: *Abraham Francis is a social activist and an academic employed with the James Cook University. Prior to migrating to Australia he worked as a social worker and as a Lecturer in India. This paper relates to his work in South Australia.*

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