



Health Outcomes International Pty Ltd  
HEALTH, COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT CONSULTANTS

## DRUG FREE AUSTRALIA LTD

### PROGRESS REPORT 4

### EVALUATION REPORT 2

JANUARY 2009

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# BACKGROUND

## 1.1 THE DFA COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS INITIATIVE

The Drug Free Australia Limited (DFA) Community Partnerships Initiative is a project which seeks to deliver an anti-drug message to key stakeholders and the Australian community.

The project's main focus is on issues related to illicit drugs and how they relate to young people. While the project concentrates on the prevention and elimination of illicit drugs in Australia, it also addresses issues related to legal drugs when they impact either directly or indirectly within the project's scope.

The primary target group for the project is young people, but also includes other individuals and groups in the community who interact with young people in their social environments.

The project's implementation strategy operates within the framework of a 10-point Implementation Plan. This Plan forms the basis of the preliminary and subsequent progress reports provided by DFA to the Department of Health and Ageing (DoHA) under the conditions of their funding contract.

## 1.2 THE EVALUATION

As part of the funding agreement with the Department of Health and Ageing (DoHA), DFA has engaged Health Outcomes International (HOI) to undertake an independent evaluation of its activities against its Implementation Plan. The evaluation is a process evaluation, and examines and comments on the processes and activities undertaken by DFA over each reporting period relative to the Implementation Plan, having regard to the stage of development and maturity of DFA as an entity and its program. It should be noted that the evaluation does not extend to an evaluation of the content of the program per se and its relative merits, but rather examines whether or not DFA has done what it said it would do, and the relative effectiveness of its activities in pursuing its aims and objectives.

## 1.3 SOURCE DOCUMENTATION

This report presents the evaluator's comments on the activities of DFA as presented in its Progress Report 4 to DoHA, dated August 2008, its associated Attachments and Addendum materials. It should be noted that there has been no external review or validation of the contents of these documents, and their contents have been accepted as being factual.

This is the second evaluation report, the previous report being submitted in January 2008 and based on materials provided in Progress Report 2 by DFA. This report does not replicate the information previously presented and commented on, but focuses on DFA's activities over the past 12 months. Where relevant, however, reference is made to previous comments and observations.

## FINDINGS

The following comments are offered in regard to each of the 10 points that comprise DFA's Implementation Plan.

### **2.1 POINT 1: ESTABLISH A NATIONAL DATABASE OF ORGANISATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS COMMITTED TO THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT'S ANTI-DRUG POLICY.**

The report indicates that DFA has continued to be active in extending its organisational infrastructure and network of affiliates (both at the individual and corporate levels) within Australia and overseas. Examples of their activities in this area in the current period (which build on those activities previously reported) include:

- Further appointments to the DFA Board;
- Preparation and presentation of Annual Financial Reports to DoHA;
- Appointment of further Fellows in Australia and overseas, with 15 Australian Fellows and 9 International Fellows as at 30 June 2008;
- Expansion of affiliates in Australia and overseas, with 73 organisations having established reciprocal website links as at 30 June 2008;
- An invitation from two international groups (the International Task Force on Strategic Drug Policy and the World Forum Against Drugs) to become part of their Harm Prevention organisations; and
- Expansion of the Harm Prevention Supporter Group, now comprising 12,952 individuals and organisations. The 76 organisations included in this membership represent some 212,000 people. On this basis, DFA claims to have direct links with families and individuals representing nearly 220,000 people.

The report indicates that DFA has been effective in extending its organisational and networking capacity to reach a wide audience. Of particular note is the expansion of its contacts and affiliates at the international level with whom formal and informal relationships have been established.

### **2.2 POINT 2: TO COMMUNICATE WITH THESE ORGANISATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS ON A REGULAR BASIS THROUGH ONLINE AND PRINTED PUBLICATIONS; TO MOBILISE THEM WHEN THERE IS MEDIA DEBATE REGARDING DRUGS ISSUES.**

As previously reported, the communication strategy implemented by DFA comprises a number of elements, such as:

- A weekly communiqué to Board members;
- Website development (see [www.drugfree.org.au](http://www.drugfree.org.au));
- Media releases;
- The appointment of Media Monitors to monitor broadcast and media releases;

- Quarterly newsletters, with distribution increasing from 4,000 recipients in 2007 to 8,000 in 2008, with further access available via the DFA website;
- Correspondence to potential supporter groups and individuals;
- Presentations to community groups, schools and sporting groups;
- Sharing of information and media releases with international affiliates;
- Meetings with international consortia to share common policy and strategy; and
- Submissions to various reviews and enquiries.

A number of examples of these activities are presented in the attachments to the report. The various communication approaches are both proactive (e.g. the quarterly newsletters and media placements) and reactive (e.g. presentations to various groups) in nature. Processes within the communication strategy have been developed to ensure that DFA is able to provide a timely response to issues as they emerge, and media coverage of the DFA perspective on issues has increased. The combination of approaches provides opportunities for DFA to communicate its message to a wide audience at a range of levels.

### **2.3 POINT 3: TO ESTABLISH AND MAINTAIN A DYNAMIC WEBSITE.**

DFA has established a website ([www.drugfree.org.au](http://www.drugfree.org.au)) that is both appealing and informative in its design and content. The website hosts newsletters and information sheets, as well as linkages to other sites with which DFA has established reciprocal rights. The report indicates that to date almost 300 sites have been reviewed for their compatibility with DFA's philosophy and objectives, with 73 having established formal reciprocal linkages. In the past six months, a research library has been added to the site, which may be accessed via password by DFA members. The library includes references to a range of research articles that are reflective of the DFA philosophy.

A separate report was provided (Attachment 4 to the report) which reports access to the DFA website between 1 March and 30 June 2008. This report indicates that during this period:

- There were 5,379 visits by 4,571 visitors;
- There were 11,650 page views, an average of 2.16 pages per visit;
- The average time spent on the site was 1.29 minutes;
- 85% of visits came from search engines, 8% were direct searches, and 7% came from referring sites; and
- 80% of visits were from Australia, 9% from the USA and 11% from other countries (especially the UK, New Zealand and Canada).

The average monthly visits to the site in this reporting period was 71% higher than in the three month period following the establishment of the website in 2007 (see previous report for details). Overseas visits to the DFA site have increased, perhaps reflective of the increased number of visits that came from referring sites, which as noted above, has increased in the past 12 months. The average number of pages viewed and the time spent on the site suggests that visitors to the site continue to be more than casual browsers, and have an interest in its contents.

The data indicates that the website has contributed to DFA's strategy to raise its profile, and to attract the attention of its target audience.

### **2.4 POINT 4: TO CONDUCT AND COORDINATE RESEARCH ACTIVITIES REGARDING DRUG ISSUES; PRODUCE APPROPRIATE PAPERS AND PUBLICATIONS REGARDING SAME.**

DFA's Research Coordinator works directly with DFA's 24 Research Fellows. Priority areas for research are identified through discussions between the Coordinator and the Fellows, with publication processes determined by the Board.

The previous report identified five publications developed during the last period, including three submissions to various inquiries and research activities. In the current report, the following report and publications are identified:

- *Progressive Report into the Impacts of Federal and Northern Territory Government Interventions on Indigenous Communities in the NT*. The report was based on information gathered via a literature search, on-site interviews, meetings/surveys of politicians and NT community service agencies. The first progressive report was completed in October 2007, and the second in June 2008.
- Two papers published in the *Journal of Global Drug Policy and Practice*:
  - *When harm minimisation is not harm minimisation – Australia as a case study* (Dr Stuart Reece); and
  - *Putting ethics in its place – right at the heart of drug policy debates* (Dr Gregory Price PhD).

In 2008, the Board of DFA decided to prioritise Cannabis as its major research project.

## **2.5 POINT 5: TO COORDINATE VISITS OF OVERSEAS DRUG EXPERTS FOR THE PURPOSE OF FACILITATING SEMINARS; INVOLVE LOCAL/NATIONAL EXPERTS IN REGULAR SEMINARS; ARRANGE ASSOCIATED MEDIA ACTIVITIES.**

As reported previously, the main activity in this area over the past two years was the first DFA International Conference held in Adelaide in April 2007.

In February 2008, Trevor Grice (NZ author of *The Great Brain Robbery*) presented to two community forums in Sydney and also attracted media interest.

With DFA's involvement in the International Task Force on Strategic Drug Policy, there is an expectation that there will be greater opportunities to network with international specialists at regular intervals. Examples of such opportunities in the current period include participation by DFA representatives at conferences in Ecuador in June 2008, in Vienna in July 2008 and in Sweden in September 2008.

The DFA Executive Officer commenced liaison with a number of community organisations, including Rotary and the RSL. RSL State offices in NSW, Tasmania, SA/NT, Victoria and WA agreed to allow DFA to address their State congresses. A number of school communities have also indicated interest in DFA's Youth Leadership program which aims to train teachers to use the resources in their classrooms.

The media news "ticker" on the DFA website provides an indication of the relevance of media items generated by DFA. Radio has been a particularly effective medium for DFA to present its message.

DFA reports that it is now in a position to arrange forums through sponsored support from a range of community-based organisations, and cites a number of examples where such forums have been held or are planned. In the main, these forums are managed by the DFA Directors in their respective State or Territory.

## **2.6 POINT 6: TO COORDINATE A NATIONAL MEDIA RESPONSE TO PRO-DRUG ACTIVISTS WHEN THEY ARE ACTIVE IN THE MEDIA.**

The Executive Officer of DFA also has the role of Media Coordinator, with DFA spokespersons nominated according to their area of expertise. QA processes have also been established and the services of an external media/PR company have been engaged to assist in this activity. In 2008, this media assistance has been sought on an "as needed" basis, as the media is now contacting DFA directly for its comments and views on drug issues

DFA's patron (Dr Margaret Court) has produced 15 community service announcements that have been distributed in CD in all states and territories by their respective DFA Board members.

## **2.7 POINT 7: TO FACILITATE REGULAR MEDIA RELEASES TO ALL SUBURBAN AND METROPOLITAN MEDIA REGARDING LOCAL ANTI-DRUG ISSUES; KEEP LOCAL MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT FULLY INFORMED.**

Monitoring of key trends in the drug debate is undertaken by the Executive Officer using Update and the ANCD emailed summaries. A "bank" of media releases has been established to facilitate rapid responses to local issues, with a consistent message and philosophy consistent with DFA's underlying ethos. All DFA releases are placed on the website.

In 2008, DFA has sought to be more active in the international media, linking with overseas affiliates. A number of topics are identified in the report that illustrate specific areas of interest.

Board members are responsible for establishing links with their local members of parliament. In 2007, a delegation of Board members presented evidence to the House of Representatives Inquiry to the Impact of Illicit Drugs on Families, and was cited in the report from the Inquiry. A response to the report was compiled by DFA, which received a high level of endorsement from its members. A letter was subsequently sent to the Prime Minister.

A delegation of DFA Board members met with NT politicians, indigenous elders and families representing a wide range of stakeholders affected by the NT Intervention legislation. The reports from this study have been previously referred to in Section 2.4 above.

Several other activities are identified in the report that illustrate DFA's proactive role in engaging with politicians at both a local and national level to promote DFA's philosophy and perspective on key issues

Each of these activities indicates that DFA has been effective in expanding its public profile, and in attracting both media and political attention to its activities and views.

## **2.8 POINT 8: AS REQUIRED, LIAISE WITH AND ASSIST GOVERNMENT AND OTHER GOVERNMENT AGENCIES REGARDING THE GOVERNMENT ANTI-DRUG MESSAGE AND OTHER ANTI-DRUG INITIATIVES.**

DFA has established links with other relevant agencies and officials, largely using its Board members' networks of contacts and those of its Fellows. Access to various reports and media releases are also used as a mechanism of information distribution.

Board members are provided with resources to disseminate to government agencies when meeting with their representatives. Letters have been sent to Federal politicians, particularly new Ministers, and a number of meetings have been held with them and their advisors, with more planned.

Plans are underway for conducting a range of business seminars, with the aim of assisting workplaces with their drug policy development.

The activities cited illustrate that DFA has been proactive in engaging with politicians, government agencies and other key stakeholder groups to transmit its message and engage in the drug debate.

## **2.9 POINT 9: PREPARE DOCUMENTATION AND SUBMISSIONS TO PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRIES.**

As previously noted, DFA has prepared a number of submissions to parliamentary inquiries, including a 2007 presentation to a House of Representative Inquiry.

A submission was also prepared to NIDRI's research into Amphetamine-type Stimulants Strategy, with a face-to-face meeting attended by DFA in Adelaide. A number of other submissions and activities at the national and international levels are cited in the report that illustrate DFA's activities in this area.

## **2.10 POINT 10: INFORM AND RESOURCE LOCAL MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT AS APPROPRIATE.**

The Board of DFA and its fellows have considerable links and networks that they use to access local members of parliament, and have developed resources they can use to inform their discussions.

As previously noted, a number of communications and meetings have been held with local politicians in several States and Territories in which DFA informed politicians of its perspectives and views, and contributed to the debate on drug policy.

A database of politicians' meeting and their outcomes is being developed by DFA.

## **2.11 SUMMARY.**

Progress Report 4 from DFA indicates that the organisation has continued to expand its profile in the community in the debate on drug use in Australia. Further progress has been reported against all ten elements of its Implementation Plan. This has been achieved through its corporate infrastructure and processes, and the development of a range of resources and media that facilitate the dissemination of its views and ideals.

The networks and linkages established with a range of individuals and organisations have capitalised on the profile of its Board members and the establishment of Fellows in Australia and overseas. Of particular note in the current period has been the notable expansion of its overseas network, and the establishment of both formal and informal links with a number of international entities sharing a common philosophy with DFA. DFA has also been proactive in contacting members of parliament at State and national levels.

DFA has also commenced providing information and conducting forums at a local level, as evidenced by a number of community-based forums conducted and planned, and initial meetings in schools using its Youth Advisory Team.

The need to be able to respond rapidly to emerging issues in related fields has been recognised, and processes have been established to facilitate this activity. Monitoring of use of its website indicates that there has been a 71% increase in the number of visits compared to last year, including an increased level of overseas interest.

All indicators provide evidence to support the conclusion that DFA has followed its 10 point Implementation Plan, and has been effective in establishing a profile at both local and national levels, enabling it to participate in and contribute to the drug policy debate.