

## **EXPLORING ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES OF SOUTH ASIAN AGENCIES PROVIDING DIRECT SERVICES**

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The purpose of this exploratory study was to learn about the current organizational structures, their strengths and challenges as well as to explore possible ways to increase the effectiveness of the organizational structures and processes of South Asian agencies providing direct services.

The diversity within the South Asian communities combined with diminishing funding poses serious challenges for agencies providing direct services to a rapidly growing community. The impetus for the project comes from two clear and recognisable areas, one, the increasing and changing needs of the South Asian communities and the recognition within the South Asian community at large that agencies providing direct services to its members need strong and effective leadership; and two, from pressure exerted by funding bodies to administer programs and services more efficiently and effectively with increasingly limited funds.

A total of 163 face-to-face interviews were conducted with board members, staff, clients and members of six South Asian agencies providing direct services. Agencies were selected on the basis of similar mandates and programs. Demographic information regarding the agencies catchment areas, funding sources, program, clients and staff were collected.

The strengths, issues and challenges revealed by this exploratory study are categorized according to the various broad functions of the agencies. These categories are: (1) decision-making process; (2) financial; (3) staff/personnel; and (4) client satisfaction.

This study reveals that if decision-making is to be successful and effective, agencies need to be clear about their own vision and mandate, moreover, these should be clearly articulated and there must be a broad based ownership across the stakeholders. In addition, the various role functions and responsibilities of board, staff, and members should be made transparent and there must be delineated lines of communication between all parties of the agency.

With regards to financial issues, several themes come through the interviews: (a) accountability of financial statements are given importance in this time of funding cutbacks; (b) agencies are physically cutting back on wages and services, but are still trying to maintain those same services, which may not necessarily help the clients in the long run; (c) reliance on volunteers has increased; and (d) the need to look at alternative modes of survival is imperative, i.e. building alliances and seeking other avenues of funding.

In agencies where good relations existed between board and staff, there was evidence of strong volunteer and member participation. Strong and open communications between

and among all parties fostered a trust and enthusiasm to participate in making the agency meet the needs of the clients. In turn, this correlated with client satisfaction. On the other hand, in agencies where communications were not open and encouraged, staff working in these agencies tended to have a negative assessment and view of how effective the agency was in carrying out its mandate. An overall lack of communications not only resulted in the isolation of individuals but also affected staff morale and self-esteem.

Overall, recruitment strategies and policies varied from agency to agency. Agencies with a strong sense of their overall mandate tended to be generally more effective in delivering their services usually because their client group was specific and the lines of communication between and among the various levels of participants were clear and open. The study revealed that not only do the staff selection procedures and processes need to be strengthened, but that in addition to these improvements there must be on-going training available to staff and board to make the agency more relevant to community needs as well as more effective at all levels. While cuts in funding severely restrict the type and amount of education and training that can be undertaken internally or externally, there was recognition among the participants of this study that including education and training as part of its mandate usually allows for some training to take place.

Generally, the clients participating in this study seemed to be satisfied with the services that their respective agencies provided. The variables of agency responsiveness and timeliness as well as staff communications, understanding and overall competencies were rated high. According to the clients surveyed, improvements were required in two areas. The clients surveyed indicated that the job search services were not comprehensive and that with some agencies the physical surroundings were very cramped and in need of a "facelift".