Social Capital and Public Policy: How social capital can inform public sector interventions to improve health and reduce inequalities

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WHAT THE PROJECT IS ABOUT
The project examines the way in which social capital theory is being used in public policies and programs to improve health and wellbeing in South Australia. It is concerned with the ways in which networking and trust between people in communities (what we call ‘social capital’) are developed through local, community-based initiatives. Tim examines how public servants interpret the concept of social capital and put their interpretations into practice.

UNDERLYING PHILOSOPHY
We base our research on evidence suggesting that social ties and networks contribute to the well-being of individuals and healthier communities, and that building social capital can help to alleviate health inequalities and promote more equitable societies.

How do we find more about the ways in which government initiatives can create networks which benefit community members?

By investigating existing initiatives:
- how these interventions attempt to build social capital?
- what are their outcomes? (who benefits from these initiatives?)

CASE STUDIES
1. Kilburn Blair Athol Community Capacity Building Project (Dept. of Health)
2. The Parks Helix Project (Arts SA)
3. Yangara Project (Onkaparinga Council)
METHOD
Stage One (2005)
What is already out there? Policy and literature reviews and policy workshops.

Stage Two (2006)
Closer look at the Case Studies
   -how these interventions attempt to build social capital
   -the outcomes (who benefits from these initiatives)
Interviews:
Focus Groups/ Community Meetings
Think Tanks

Stage Three (2006-7)
Australian Social Capital Public Policy Guidelines

Stage Four (2007)
Trial of the Guidelines

Stage Five (2007-8)
Final Revision of the Guidelines and Dissemination

SUMMARY
The aim of our research is to investigate existing initiatives in order to demonstrate the importance of social capital for public policy and develop effective strategies for its creation.