

**REPORT TO:**



**RE: BRAIN GYM COURSE  
FOR GROUP COMMUNITY LEADERS  
WITH ASSESSMENT OUTCOMES**



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**FUNDED BY:**



**WITH GRATITUDE FOR THE EFFORTS, FUNDING AND  
INTEREST OF THE FOLLOWING PEOPLE:**

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Left to Right: Toby Dawson, IRT Foundation Manager, Reuben Sakey, Acting Area Manager, Sydney, Anita Robertson, Lenette Francis both of Learning Enhancement Services, Karin Vasquez CEO MDSI

## THE BRIEF

After discussions the following brief was negotiated:

### **Project Aim**

The aim is to maintain independence and connectedness for clients within the confines of the Macarthur Diversity Services Initiative (MDSI) activities.

### **Project**

This project is innovative as it incorporates Brain Gym activities to improve physical and mental health thereby improving self esteem and confidence to reduce social isolation. This program will improve consumers wellbeing and enablement as it focuses on participation in community activities.

The Project provides a focus on both the mental (Brain Gym) and the physical through healthy lifestyle and heart health initiatives and will increase understanding of the factors affecting health as we age.

The project also uses community leaders who will receive and utilise brain gym skills, and their connection to the group both culturally and linguistically to continue the project beyond the funding period. As the group also engages with others in the community, it will encourage new people to participate. The project will be evaluated to add to the knowledge base supported through IRT Foundation by providing a report based on the evaluation of the program to describe the benefits to participants e.g. Balance, coordination; how this has improved the lives of older people and improved their participation and reduced social isolation, to encourage other organisations.

We also want to evaluate pre and post program

- improved participation in leisure, social, cultural and spiritual activities
- maintained or improved mental fitness, memory
- developed or enhanced cognitive skills and
- improved physical abilities that influence confidence and self esteem
- overall improved quality of life and increasing active social outcomes
- participation and community inclusion

MDSI therefore can embed this program into our extensive CALD programs. MDSI believes that Brain Gym will provide exercises that are fun and effective that can be contextualised to individual needs and that have a greater acceptance as participants see physical outcomes.

Sue Gordon was the Submission Writer.

It was further decided that there would be 12 leaders chosen from a variety of groups to be trained for this project.

## THE BRAIN GYM COURSE

The four day course was completed on the 29th September, 2016. The course was completed to Government standards as part of a Certificate IV according to TAE40110. The participants were registered with Brain Gym Australia which gave them news items and updates for one year.

This business is qualified with Brain Gym Australia and its International body to deliver government level courses to Certificate IV level or as part of a vocational course for youth within High Schools. We saw much excitement when this was realised by the participants. This course offers personal extension of the participants.

The group of 12 embraced this course enthusiastically. There was much conversation about the use of it at home, in the workplace and happily even on the station platform awaiting trains to attend the course.

The 12 participants of the course spoke 9 different languages in their homes and the intention was that they would present brain gym activities to their respective groups in their own language. Multiculturalism and inclusivity is as diverse a combination as one can imagine here. The MDSI can be congratulated on this. Consequently teaching this group was very exciting for the trainers. The use of visual aids, demonstrations, practice and discussions prevailed. The Brain Gym philosophy is that if the participant is not having fun they will not learn and consequently will not be able to pass on their skills from their own language base. It was expected that the group leader's clients would also assist others in their groups with the movements and exercises.

It was wonderful to hear the training expounded to groups in Spanish and Vietnamese when we had the pleasure of visiting them.



Brain Gym fun! Above.

Testing a dimension of the brain Left



## THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS

Due to the diverse languages the participants found the assessment questionnaire (in English) laborious and time consuming. The questionnaire was taught to the Brain Gym participants with the view that they would each choose up to three clients only in their group to assess approximately once a month over a three month period. It would then become obvious whether there were changes in the group. Due to these difficulties we considered it suitable to proceed with a simple evaluation sheet related to the group. However, 22 client assessments had already been made and the results are shown on pages 6 and 7.

The assessment forms were designed as a noticing tool only for the leaders of the group with feedback from their clients. No effort was made to produce science based outcomes. Group leaders made honest, open and caring judgments of their clients. Those clients were also encouraged to give feedback on how they felt from time to time.

To facilitate the group leaders who had difficulty with the assessment forms a qualified Brain Gym Instructor (who was trained by this business) was employed by MDSI for an average of 1.5 hours per week.

The exercises and activities were not compulsory. It was noted on three forms that pain inhibited the participation of clients on some occasions. Also that known persons of a more stubborn nature did participate after a few sessions when they had seen what was involved.

When one looks through the results of the assessments on pages 6, 7 and 8 it is obvious how much this simple program has benefited the clients of the MDSI. There have been life changing improvements which will no doubt serve to support them in their crafts, reading, social interaction and general well being. These benefits will only remain if the project continues until it becomes easy and applicable to both leaders and clients. It is hard to equate from these assessments what the true outcomes may be, but for a person to register that they are not as dizzy as usual would undoubtedly contribute to their ability to remain safe. This statement is made from our experience of the program we initiated in the Bowral Hospital for 'The Falls Prevention' group.

The outcomes of this study have been recorded overleaf.

**THE FOLLOWING TABLE SHOWS THE IMPROVEMENTS NOTED BY LEADERS OF  
THE BRAIN GYM GROUPS OVER AN EIGHT MONTH PERIOD**

Number of persons out of 22 who indicated improvement	Area of Improvement
18	Poor balance
12	Easily disoriented
18	Difficulty remaining still
22	Eye tracking (movement of eyes)
15	Directional awareness (which way do I go)
12	Difficulty with space perception (misjudging distance)
12	Dizziness
17	Short attention span
16	Easily distracted
12	Misinterpretation of questions
14	Confusion of similar sounding words
16	Frequent need to have a word repeated
12	Inability to follow sequential instructions
11	Confusion or reversal of letters
11	Poor reading comprehension
11	Inability to remember what is read
13	Easily fatigues
11	Poor breathing
11	Provokes fights or arguments
10	Dislikes change, poor adaptability
11	Mood swings
9	Easily angered
2	Insecure, anxious
2	Poor manual dexterity

<b>Number of persons out of 22 who indicated improvement</b>	<b>Area of Improvement</b>
3	Poor sense of time
2	Does up the wrong buttons
1	Puts the shoes on the wrong feet
3	Cannot tie shoe laces
4	Forgets to bring things
4	Can not follow directions
2	Late to outings
4	No interest in hobbies
3	Never involved in outings
3	Looses conversation before the subject is complete
1	Totally self centred
2	Vague when holding a conversation
4	No attempt to read
2	Does not notice missing people e.g. At the dining table
2	Hears the conversation but does not comprehend

Further events following the Brain Gym course are recorded over on page 6.

We need to keep in mind that some of the improvements on pages 6 and 7 may well be that clients had learned more English during the 8 months of the assessment period e.g. misinterpretation of questions and confusion of similar sounding words. However the clients feedback is recorded that they believed the improvements were because of the activities.

It needs to be mentioned also that although the leader of the Dementia Group was very caring and presented her program with a clear presentation including visual aids there was little improvement for that group other than a happier attitude. This however, is of great social benefit.

A private matter occurred from one of the Brain Gym participants. She reported that her father had a stroke a couple of months after the course whilst on a cruise. He lost his whole right side and some brain functions. He was unable to perform front to back or left to right movements. He was told that he would need 8 weeks rehabilitation. She told him to do Brain Gym even if it seemed 'silly'. He co-operated and found that he enjoyed the process and after daily activities he was out of rehabilitation in 4 weeks. This person loved the Brain Gym course and could see the practical benefits implemented in her father's real life situation. She has become a massive believer and is most grateful for this knowledge. This is a story, the likes of which, we have heard many times. People gain hope and have tools to appropriate into the grief of their illness which will naturally support their general well being. Brain Gym is a simple but effective modality.

There has been another very significant report of a person who was diagnosed and on medication who felt unhappy, depressed and spoke of suicide. With her doctor's advice this person is now off her medication and has returned to daily activities. This client puts a great deal of emphasis on the commitment to Brain Gym being an ongoing contributory factor to her continued ability to function normally.

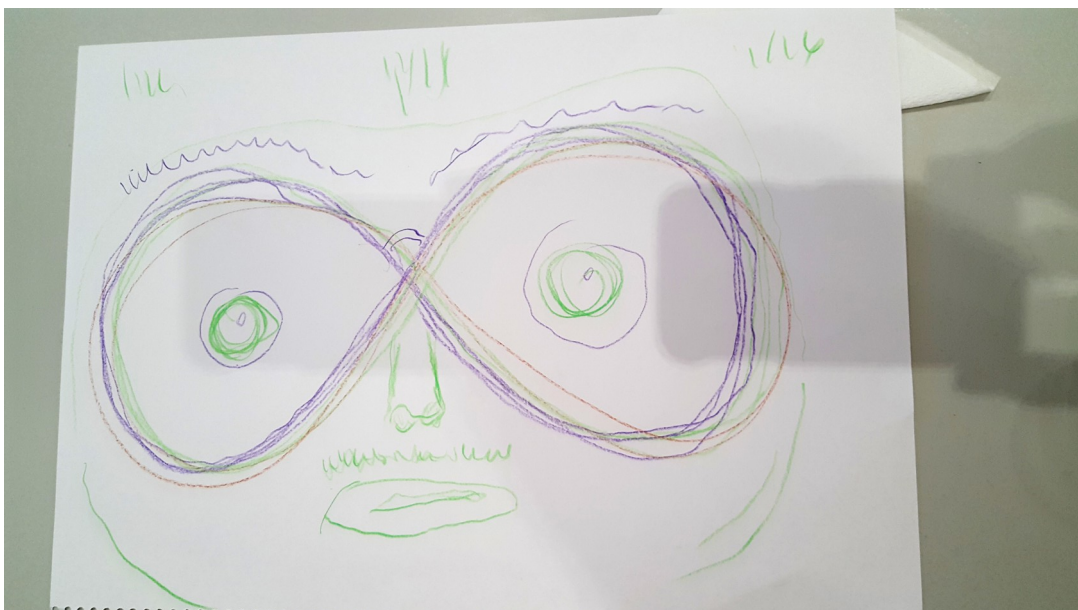






The group leaders were encouraged to make visual aids and games to encourage participation. Above is one such effort that the Dementia Group enjoyed. The 'Fireman's jump' or 'Toss the cubes'. Clients hold a sheet with the blocks on it. Everyone is involved in jumping the blocks up and down on the sheet. This can get quite vigorous at times! When a block falls from the sheet the picture on it indicates the activity they do together.

Below is another activity. The Lazy 8. In this case the Dementia Group found that adding it a comical face was fun. The Lazy 8 enhances visual integration and bi-lateral brain activity.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

We have noted with pleasure the benefits the leaders have found within their groups. Our (Learning Enhancement Services' and MDSI.s') joint expectations in relation to this project has achieved that which we outlined in the original brief sited on page 3 of this report.

We would however, point out that the leaders' experience and knowledge at this time is quite limited and that the outcomes of this pilot study has achieved about as much as can be expected without further training. We know also from many years of teaching Brain Gym that without further training and ongoing assistance in this field the skills that have been achieved in the groups will not be permanent.

Having now experienced the results of the Brain Gym Project in your establishment we respectfully recommend the following:

1. That a further 2 day course be implemented for Group Leaders, 'Utilizing Brain Gym, Noticing It's Effectiveness and Accountable Assessment',
2. Continued employment of a Qualified Brain Gym Instructor for the purpose of assisting group leaders in the delivery of Brain Gym. This outcome will no doubt encourage clients to share these skills with other clients and their families as has already been recorded in this report.

The inclusion of Brain Gym into your establishment will give you a wonderful marketing tool and you will continue to be known as a leader in the care and development for the community.

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ANITA ROBERTSON  
Dip. Ed.. UK. PG (UTS Sydney)

JENNIFER ROUNDS (Mentored Brain Gym Instructor)

This page illustrates one of the twenty-six Brain Gym Activities all of which enhance brain integration.

