

Evaluating a Community Initiative with a Focus on Indigenous Health

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Abstract

Porirua Healthlinks Trust, a community organization in the Greater Wellington area, has been mounting Creekfest for the past few years. This is an annual one day event that focuses on health and culture. It has become increasingly successful particularly in attracting large numbers of Pacific and Maori peoples who live in the immediate locality as well as those from further away. The most recent Fest, held in March 2006, was evaluated to determine whether it was meeting its stated objectives and what else the organization might do to achieve its health related goals with regard to this initiative. Of the 500 questionnaires handed out on the day, 400 were completed for analysis. This paper draws on both the results of the survey and the process used to report on the evaluation of the fest. The self administered questionnaire with interviewer assisted delivery was seen to be the key to obtaining such a high response rate. Implications for undertaking evaluations in ethnically diverse communities are discussed.

Introduction

Porirua is a city of approximately 50,600 situated to the north of Wellington City but being part of the greater Wellington region. While the European/Pakeha community is in the majority (63.9% compared with 80% in the New Zealand population as a whole), Pacific people make up the next largest group with 26.7% of the population (compared to 6.5% of the New Zealand population as a whole). Maori (the indigenous people of New Zealand) are the third largest ethnic group with 20.5% of the Porirua population (compared to 14.7% of the New Zealand population as a whole). The population of Porirua is younger (0-14 years 28% and 65+ 6.8%) when compared with the New Zealand population as a whole (0-14 years 23% and 65+ 12%). This is also an area of lower socio-economic status with a lesser rate of home ownership and a large concentration (49%) of rental housing provided by the government. As such health is a major concern. Studies such as the Porirua Health and Disability Plan and Report 2000 indicate that Maori, Pacific and people on low incomes experience poorer health and are less likely to receive the health services they need.

Porirua Healthlinks Trust (PHLT) was established in 2001 following the Health Needs Assessment project and submissions from the Kapiti and Porirua local authorities on behalf of their communities. The Ministry of Health provided

funding to PHLT to implement and progress initiatives identified in the Porirua Health and Disability Plan and Report to improve health and disability outcomes and reduce health inequalities for Maori, Pacific peoples and people on low incomes (Porirua Healthlinks Trust Annual Plan 2005-2006).

Porirua Healthlinks Trust's role is to provide community leadership and a sustainable voice for the peoples of Porirua to ensure that all communities are involved in all aspects of health development. It works actively alongside the diverse communities of Porirua to understand their needs, to ensure the relevance and acceptability of health services and to achieve better health and well-being for everyone in Porirua. (Porirua Healthlinks Trust Annual Plan 2005-2006).

Although its vision is to support community leadership and provide a sustainable voice for the priorities for the peoples of Porirua, PHLT also acknowledges that issues such as employment, housing, income and education have a major influence on people's health and well being (Porirua Healthlinks Trust Annual Plan 2005-2006).

Creekefest

With the above mandate and concerns, in 2004 and 2005, PHLT organised and co-ordinated Creekefest, a one day community event, which was held at Cannons Creek, Porirua. The main goals for Creekefest are to 'promote healthy lifestyle messages, good eating, exercise, smoking cessation and to celebrate our cultural diversity through food, music, performance, sport and craft'.

Porirua Healthlinks emphasizes the need for people to be more aware of improved health services and thus considered that a combination of music, food, and healthy messages in a festival atmosphere would be a good way to make a range of information available. Therefore Creekefest was considered to be an event that is used to communicate the messages on 'health and culture' to the community at large.

The estimated number of people who attended the previous Creekefests exceeded 10,000 which suggested that it was successful. However, PHLT considered it important that feedback was provided to ensure that its relationship with the community was maintained at a high level.

Purpose of Evaluation

To understand the views and opinions of the community and to assist them in decision making about changes and improvements for Creekefest, PHLT decided to carry out an evaluation of the Creekefest event in 2006.

PHLT wanted to find out:

- How successful the Creekefest event was
- How often Creekefest should be held

- What activities should be included at Creekfest
- What changes/improvements the community recommended
- How much health information the community received from Creekfest

Method

The evaluation was designed by Aliitasi Tavila, an MA (Applied) in Social Science Research student at Victoria University of Wellington, in conjunction with the managers at PHLT. It was decided that a brief survey would be administered to those attending Creekfest in March 2006. This method was chosen as a way of minimizing the amount of time involved and maximizing participation rates. The use of quantitative methods for programme evaluation has been emphasized in the public sector in New Zealand in particular (SSC 2003) because of their ease of application and ability to produce an outcome in relatively short space of time. The ability to reach a large population, as in this case, is also a major consideration which leads to the adoption of survey questionnaires as an appropriate tool to use. This was also framed with Hall and Hall's (2004) definition of a small scale evaluation which has limited resources allocated to it and a short timeframe.

Self-complete surveys are not considered the ideal method of data collection for Pacific peoples and this was an issue raised by the managers of PHLT. However, as Newport (2003:154) points out

People might think that because we come from an oral tradition where collective responsibility is a key part of who we are focus groups - for example – are the best way to gather credible information from Pacific communities

She goes on to discuss that as with any research the method chosen must be connected to the research question and thus other ways of collecting the information must be considered. When looking at the collection of information, Sanga and Pasikale (2002) articulate five principles that need to be taken into consideration for any research activity involving Pacific participants. These are the acknowledgement and maintenance of '*mana*' (dignity); enduring *relationships* rather than episodic encounters; *reciprocity* to enhance the research process and outcomes; *empowerment*; and *communication*. While they discuss these principles mainly in relation to narrative methods they do apply in a broader context.

One of the issues raised is that of who is doing the research and who benefits as a result of it being done. Maori and Pacific communities have a long history of being seen as the 'other' where they are researched 'on' and their experience interpreted by outsiders through a different lens (eg Smith 1999) This evaluation was carried out by people from the local community, on a programme initiated by the local community, for the benefit of the local community and as such fulfilled the criteria for ethical research and evaluation

being responsive to the needs and aspirations of the Pacific community(Lima 2002).

The Evaluation

The participants of the evaluation were members of the Porirua community who attended the Creekfest in March 2006. A short and simple questionnaire was administered on the day to evaluate the festival (see Appendix 1).

It was evident that Creekfest had expanded its size and capacity since it was first introduced. The Creekfest of 2005 attracted approximately 18,000 people and Creekfest 2006 had an estimated attendance of 22,000 people.

There were 500 questionnaires given out and 396 were received back. The researcher had recruited four university students from Porirua City plus a receptionist at Porirua Healthlinks to distribute the survey and assist people to answer the questionnaire. Each surveyor was given a bundle of approximately 50 questionnaires to be handed out to those attending the fest. The evaluation was not targeted to any particular population group because the festival was aimed at the Porirua community at large. The questionnaire took about a minute to complete, and the surveyor assisted the participant to complete the questionnaire by asking the questions and writing down the answers. Prior to the completion of the questionnaire, the surveyor personally assured the participant that the survey was anonymous. Nevertheless, as an incentive to take part in the survey, there was a draw for all participants to win a Creekfest tee-shirt. Therefore, to take part in the draw participants had to complete the perforated part of the questionnaire and write their name and contact phone number. This was an optional part of the questionnaire. It did not identify any participant or compromise anonymity as all these name slips were immediately detached and put straight into a plastic bag for the draw and once the draw was made they were destroyed.

Issues around surveys.

Understanding the assumptions that underlie Pacific methods of questioning and grounding research in Pacific world views is crucial. Given the diversity of nations that are subsumed under the label 'Pacific' advocating for a Pacific methodology/worldview is in itself problematic. However, while there may be differences between groupings of Pacific peoples, the term can be seen as "a unifying political and social tool of action"(Newport 2003:153). Kirkman (2001) suggests that the position of insider when undertaking research and evaluation is advantageous because the researcher is attuned to the cultural nuances that the outsider can miss. However, as Tavila (2006) pointed out, while she knew the Samoan community well, in this situation she was working with a much more diverse cross-section of the Porirua community and in a completely different role. Assumptions around the insider perspective which suggest the individual has all the requisite skills and knowledge to deal with all Pacific questions may not assist the progress of the research/evaluation (Newport 2003).

Fieldwork

Creekefest opened at 7am and closed at 6pm. Based on the prior experience of PHLT managers of peak flow times, the fieldwork took place at two set times during the day, - 12-1.30pm and 4-5.30pm. Groups of people, rather than an individual, were approached by one of the six interviewers to participate. People go to Creekefest as part of a group of family and/or friends so the decision to include all members of a group who were willing to take part reflected the reality of the situation. While the interviewer assisted one person to complete the questionnaire by going through the questions with them, others in the group would fill out their copy of the questionnaire thus enabling them to record their opinion of the Creekefest experience. The high completion rate reflects the success of this method. People were more willing to participate because they were not negatively impacting on the enjoyment of the remainder of their group by having them 'hang round' and wait for one member to fill out an evaluation form – albeit for a very short period of time.

As Tiatia (2004:59) indicates in research she carried out, the 'drop off' method where she and a team of interviewers dropped off self-complete questionnaires to a large sample and then collected them at a designated time was invaluable in terms of attaining high response rates. The variation of this method adopted for the Creekefest survey demonstrates the advantage of adapting conventional techniques to take into account the characteristics of the population under study.

Results and Findings

Of those surveyed, 78% were from Porirua. The majority of these people had also attended the fest in 2005.

The major theme of Creekefest 06 was health. Figure 1 indicates how respondents felt about the health information they received on the day. Approximately half were satisfied with what they received while around a third were not interested in this aspect of Creekefest. This suggests that further work needs to be done in relation to relaying health information to the Porirua community.

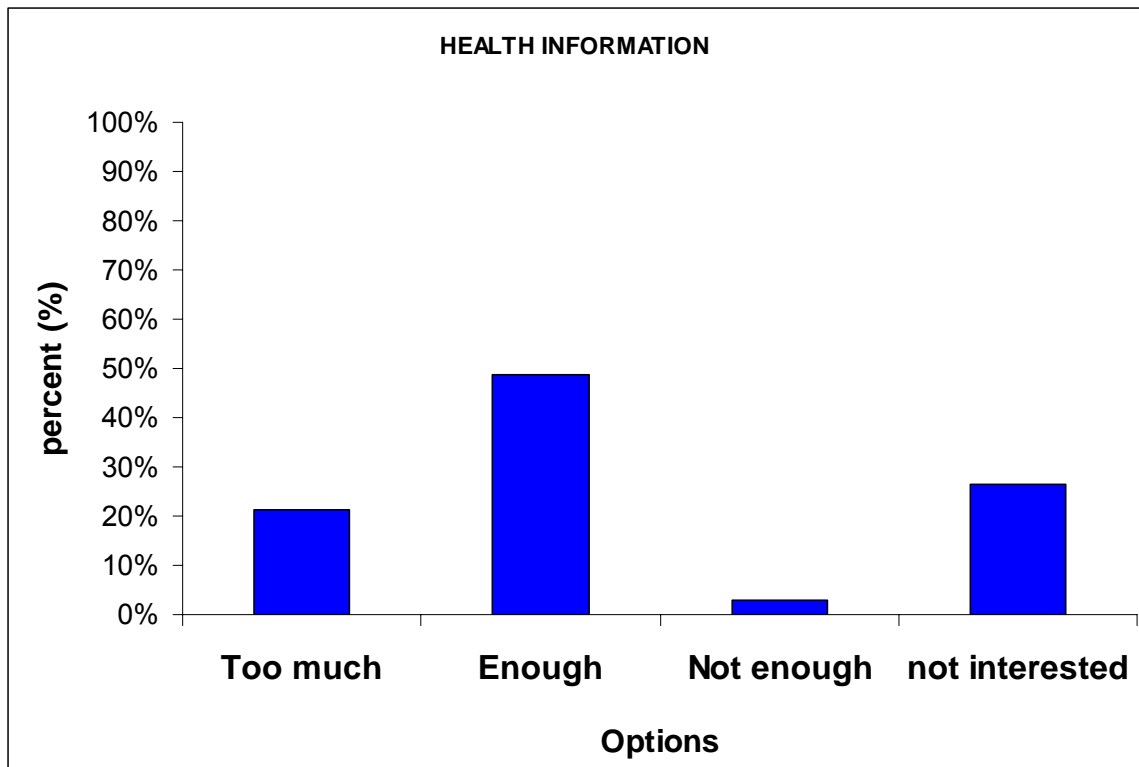


Fig. 1. Amount of Health Information Received

As shown in Figure 2 below the main expectation people had for the festival was for there to be sports competitions, and that they expected to attend Creekfest in a safe, relaxed and comfortable environment.

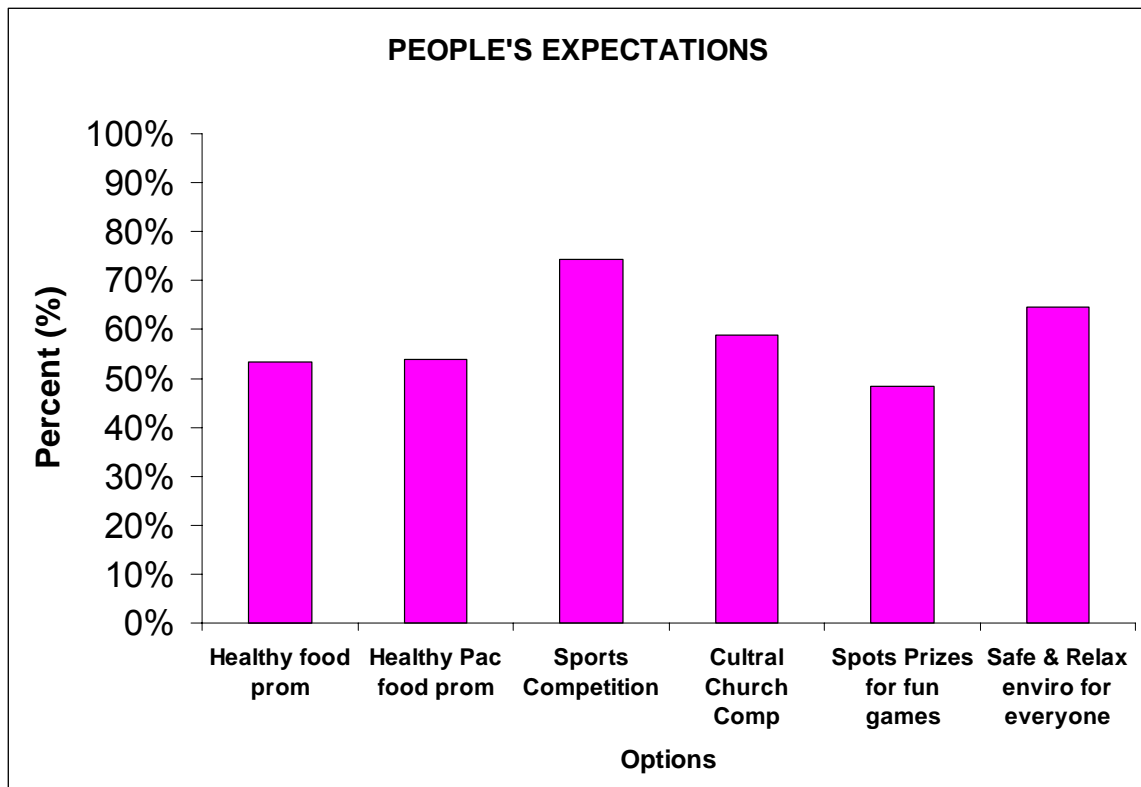


Fig. 2. People's expectations of the festival

Activities are considered important because they attract people to attend the festival. These included sports, music, and performances. Nearly 90% of those surveyed indicated that they found the activities excellent or very good.

Another important issue is the safety of people and the environment where the festival is held. Porirua City can be perceived as an unsafe place because of a gang presence around the area. Therefore, it was important to ascertain peoples' perspective on how safe they felt whilst attending the festival. It was interesting to see that 60% of those surveyed people had always felt safe with under 10% who only felt safe sometimes or not at all.

In terms of suggested changes and improvements, most of those surveyed wanted to have a New Zealand celebrity involved in some way – people like Tana Umaga (an All Black of Samoan descent from the Wellington region) or Michael Campbell (a top golfer of Maori descent from the Porirua area.). Introduction of a healthy menu, which would reinforce the health promotion aspect, and the promotion of the event through the media were seen to be the least favoured options for change (see Figure 3 below).

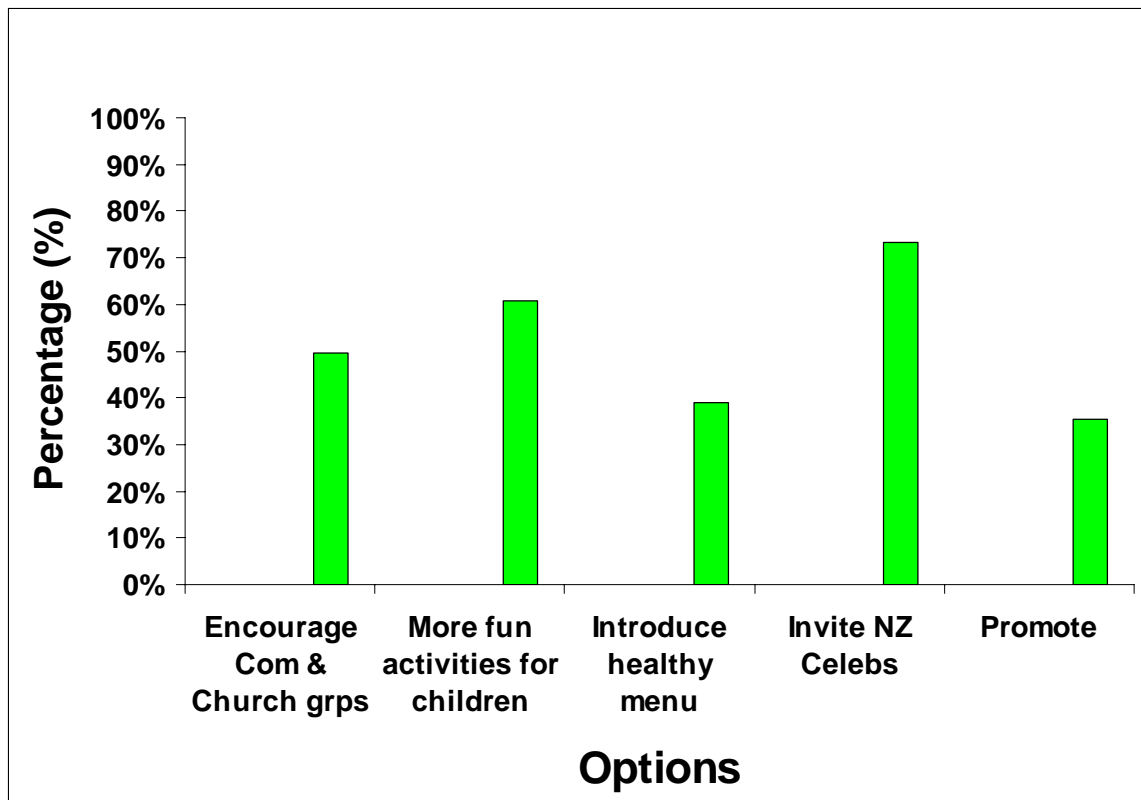


Fig. 3 Changes and Improvements

People were asked about their means of transport to Creekfest and around 70% either took their own cars or were a passenger in a car driven by a friend or family member. Given this high usage of private cars, it is not surprising that respondents commented that more car parking facilities were required.

Finally, people had the opportunity to comment about the festival overall. As Figure 4 indicates over 70% of those surveyed indicated that Creekfest should continue to be held annually because “it is a job well done.”

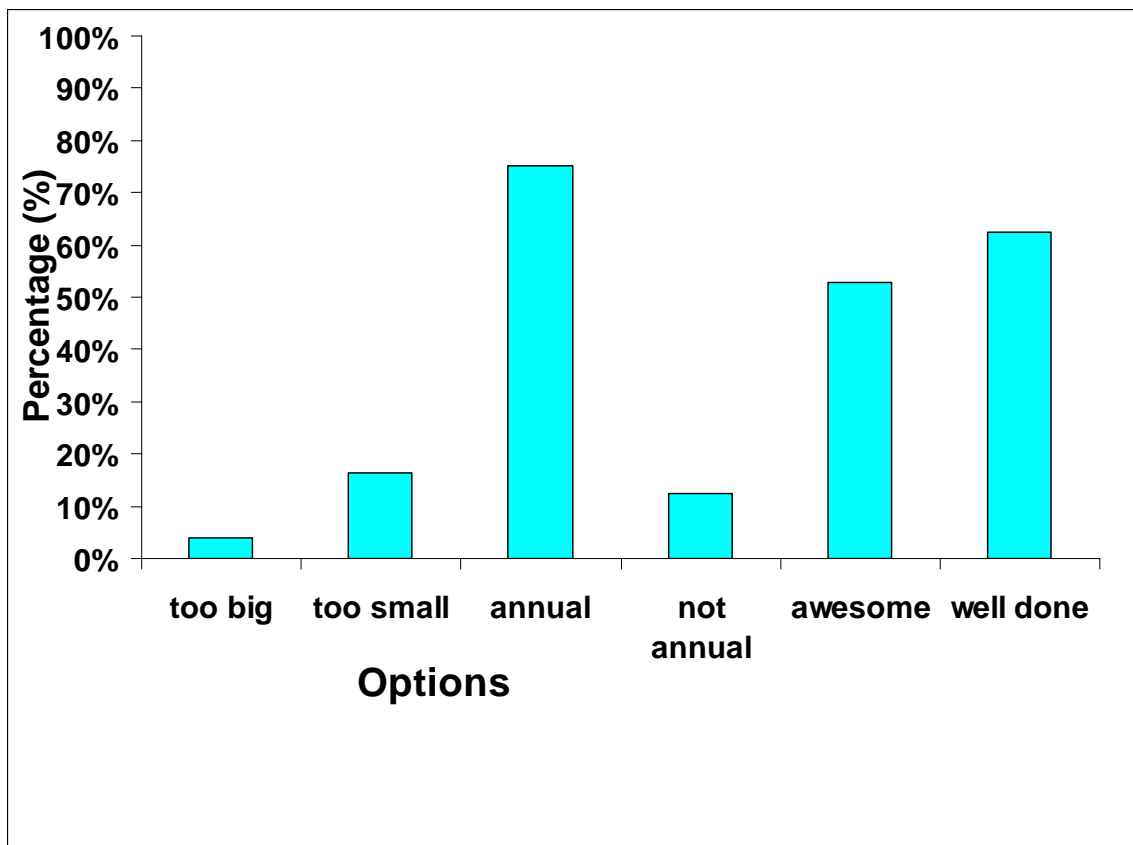


Fig. 4 Overall perceptions of Creekfest

Conclusions

The evaluation indicates that the main aspects of health are not considered to be an issue for the community. The majority of those interviewed came to the festival to eat, and generally have a good time. They favoured sports competition over healthy food promotion though it could be argued that sports competitions contribute to the health and well-being. However, there are those who for various reasons are unable to participate and thus are excluded from health activity in this instance. A high percentage preferred to have a celebrity attend the festival rather than having a focus on healthy living. The survey results indicated that the introduction of a healthy menu throughout the day was not a favoured option.

This then highlights three key concerns:

- (a) is the Maori and Pacific community aware that their health is the most at risk when compared to the rest of the New Zealand population?
- (b) who should be responsible for raising awareness amongst the community in relation to the health issues? and
- (c) if the community does not consider health as a priority who is going to address it?

In terms of carrying out the evaluation the use of face-to-face delivery of a self complete survey questionnaire to groups of people by Pacific interviewers

worked extremely well. It achieved a high response rate and combined economies of scale with the personal contact. Respect for the cultural mores and process ensured that the aims of the evaluation were achieved and initial concerns about the acceptability of questionnaires were not realized. Variations of this approach have been used successfully by other Pacific researchers and should be considered when looking at possible approaches to evaluation of programmes particularly those being undertaken in Pacific communities.

Appendix 1 Survey Questionnaire

Creek Fest 2006 is the 3rd event Porirua Healthlinks Trust has run. We are interested in finding out what you think about it and any ideas for changes.

Please tick (√) the right answer to the following questions.

1. Do you live in Porirua city?

- Yes
- No

2. Did you attend Creek Fest last year?

- Yes
- No

3. How did you find out about Creek Fest? (Please tell all that apply)

- Friends
- Newspaper
- Word of mouth
- Church
- School

4. Creek Fest is a health and cultural festival, what do you expect at the festival? (Please tick all that apply).

- Healthy food promotion
- Healthy Pacific food promotion
- Lots of sports competitions
- Cultural and church groups competitions
- Spot prizes for fun games
- Safe and relaxed environment for everybody
- Other (please specify).....

5. Some people have made the following comments about Creek Fest event. (Please tick those you agree with).

Agree

- Too big for a small community
- Too small for a big community
- It should be an annual event
- It should not be an annual event
- It was awesome
- It was a job well done
- Other (please specify).....

6. How much health information did you receive from Creekfest '06?

- Too much information
- Enough information
- Not enough information
- Not interested

7. How would you rate the activities at the Creek Fest?

- Excellent
- Very Good
- Good
- Average
- Poor

8. What is your mean of transport to the Creek Fest?

- Private car
- Public transport
- Push bike
- By foot
- Other (please specify).....

9. How safe do you feel when you attend the Creek Fest?

- Always feel safe
- Often feel safe
- Sometimes feel safe
- Seldom feel safe
- Other (please specify).....

10. What changes could Porirua Health Links Trust make to improve Creek Fest? (Please tick all that apply)

- Encourage community and church groups participation
- More fun activities for the children of all ages
- Introduce healthy menu throughout the day
- Invite NZ celebrities to be involved e.g. (T Umaga / M Campbell)
- Promote the event through the media
- Other (please specify).....

11. Please add any other comments about the Creek Fest 06 event.

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Thank you for your time, your name will be in the draw to win a 'Creek Fest '06 T-shirt.

Appendix 2 Recommendations

The following recommendations based on the findings of the survey were presented to Healthlinks Trust and the Porirua Community at a public forum..

- It is important that Porirua Healthlinks consult with all the health providers and practitioners around Porirua area to discuss a better method of relaying health information to the community, rather than waiting for the 'Creekfest' to happen. In this case most of the community will hopefully recognise the 'Creekfest' as an annual health promotion.
- Identify the best method of relaying health information to the community. Would it be the : Hospitals
Schools
Doctors' surgeries
Churches
Shopping Centres
Or is it a community event such as the Creekfest.
- Encourage health education programmes of all sorts to raise awareness amongst the community. This may include a programme for the senior citizens such as bowling, exercising, weaving or storytelling.
- The issue of safety should be considered paramount at the festival. My observation of the day confirms that there are times when people feel intimidated by gang members. This was not a very pleasant feeling for the community especially the families with young children. Failure to provide sufficient safety measurements may ruin the reputation of the festival.
- That lots of sports activities to encourage them to participate are implemented. It would also a good idea to include dance extravaganza as a therapeutic programme for all. The dance activity would involve both the elderly and the young.

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