

PRESENTATION TITLE:

CORE OF LIFE – PREPARING INDIGENOUS YOUTH FOR A POSITIVE PARENTING FUTURE

ORGANISATION: CORE OF LIFE – PENINSULA HEALTH

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What is Core Life?

Core of Life identifies Birth as being central to cultures and families.

Core of Life is a unique, 'hands on', life education program designed in 1999 by 2 midwives from Peninsula Health in Victoria. It presents male and female adolescents with real and factual information on what is involved in becoming pregnant, giving birth and parenting a newborn.

COL utilises relevant evidence to support its content, recognising the impact of the antenatal period and early childhood on development of health and well being of an individual. It is not religiously, politically or morally affiliated with any organisation. Program managers clearly believe that by increasing the public's awareness of the importance of the pregnancy and early parenting period in shaping the child's development for the future, we are more likely to lay sound foundations and less likely to have to deal with poor outcomes at a later time.

In 2005 Core of Life gained significant support from the Australian Government - Stronger Families *Early Childhood* initiative to assist them in expanding the program nationally and meeting the needs of young and future families Australia wide.

Where it began.....

Core of Life was developed in response to the rising number of teenagers presenting to give birth at our local maternity unit.

There was a recognised need within the local community to be able to:

- Access information prior to pregnancy and to encourage early access to community resources amongst the teenage and general population
- To address the increased levels of teenage births in the community
- To respond to local secondary schools alarming number of requests for a more comprehensive reality based source of information for their students

This program has been designed to assist in responding to local communities needs for information sharing with their young people to help improve outcomes for our young and future families and promote connectedness within each community.

Essentially Core of Life aims to:

- Introduce teenagers to the realities of pregnancy, birth and parenting
- Encourage personal responsibility for their own health and wellbeing by allowing them to make informed choices.
- Improve breast feeding rates and hence child development
- Assist in reducing teenage pregnancy rates
- Increase social capital and community resources by informing youth about community support services who may in turn assist others, improving community cohesion and enlarging social connection.
- Reduce the fear and anxiety surrounding one of life's major milestones.
- Familiarise adolescents with the role of midwives in providing holistic healthcare to families.
- Raise awareness of the importance of parenting and hence improving the physical and mental health of the next generation.
- Reduce isolation and alienation of young mothers and encourage them to stay in / return to school after a teenage birth.

How does it work?

Core of Life is designed to be incorporated into

- 1) local high schools' health education curriculum and
- 2) within community settings offering programs for youth **not** actively engaged within a school setting or whom may be at risk.

COL utilises multimedia technology and realistic role play to engage young males and females (14-17yrs) in a 'hands on' approach to learning, seeking to give practical information, promote positive attitudes and indicate where in the local community assistance is available.

Sessions aim to;

- Foster increased levels of responsibility and confidence in youth
- Facilitate positive community and early childhood development
- Assist in reducing teenage pregnancy rates.
- Enhance the relationship between the SCHOOL – HEALTH SYSTEM – WIDER COMMUNITY



Through sessions Core of Life aims to highlight the physical, emotional, and social consequences of pregnancy and parenthood, as well as focussing on the needs of the new baby to allow for optimal development and opportunity in life. It outlines key issues involved in having a baby, and local supports and resources available.

Sessions provide an opportunity for young people to develop skills and knowledge in parenting, child development, community resources, sexual health and life skills to increase self esteem and positive decision making. Information supports the health and developmental benefits of initiating and continuing to breastfeed a baby. It also demonstrates the risk for mother, child and family upon exposure to harmful substances, focussing on an outcome of improving health status and building resilience, along with fewer social and emotional problems.

Last year FACSIA recognised this program as being worthy of inclusion for funding support its expansion to high need communities across Australia through a training pathway. Attendees will be offered information on how to access the training and program for their community.

Core of Life has now reached a point where the program has trained **1350** professionals (**95%** of all Victorian DHS secondary school nurses) nationally, is implemented in over **240** secondary schools (140 in Victoria) and approximately **32,000** youth have attended a Core of Life session in a metropolitan, rural or remote setting throughout Australia. All evidence to-date, suggests that COL is proving to be a solid example of how integrated health promotion and early intervention can have a positive effect on individual and community capacity building strength.

Core of Life Indigenous program

It is clear that Core of Life's content and program delivery strategy contextually fits with the overall recommendations outlined in the Indigenous Parenting Project Report (SNAICC 2004) where it was recommended that:

“parenting information for Indigenous communities should combine local content with more broadly applicable information drawn from the evidence base on child and adolescent development”

also

“Parenting information needs to target parents prior to their child's birth”

and

“A priority for parenting information resources should be the production of highly visual materials designed for use in facilitated group settings. This should include materials using plain English and where possible local language. Resources should be available in a variety of formats.....”

Core of Life consults and collaborates with indigenous organisations to provide individualised, specifically designed education resources. Due to the programs capacity to be adapted to a variety of settings/groups all information will be culturally sensitive, relevant and respectful.



What Core of Life would like to achieve.

Recently, the National Symposium Report from Promoting Healthy Pregnancy in Indigenous Communities noted a key action to assist in improving outcomes for Indigenous women and children is to promote school aged education about this part of life – not just those adolescents attending high school, but also those not engaged in school. This report also stressed the importance of educating boys and girls wherever culturally appropriate.

Program Managers aim to build on existing programming for each location by increasing the capacity of the community to provide education to local youth (including young mothers/fathers to be), about pregnancy, birth, infant feeding and early parenting. This will challenge any current misconceptions and provide young people with knowledge and contacts to enable them to make informed, positive choices about one of the biggest journeys in their lives.

- **Core Of Life consults and collaborates with Indigenous organisations** and communities to provide individualised, specifically designed education resources. Due to the programs capacity to be redeveloped to suit a variety of settings/groups, all information will be culturally sensitive, relevant and respectful.
- **Core of life encourages groups to share traditional and cultural elements of pregnancy and parenting with their youth.** These elements can combine in a package to provide a source of local history and strength for future parents.
- **Core of Life managers upon request, presents the program to local youth** and invite their feedback on the necessary modifications/improvements
- **Core of Life also encourages community ownership** and will therefore provide training for staff that are trusted and respected by the community who will then either team up with each others or work alongside other service providers working within their community.
- Using engaging visual materials and effective 'role play' the trained presenters within the community will increase their capacity as valuable role models and share important wholistically driven information about being pregnant, birthing a baby and the issues of early parenting with youth within the region.
- Education about diet in pregnancy, smoking and drug taking - looking at short and long term impacts, especially alcohol consumption and FAS are a vital part of the education sessions as well as the financial and emotional responsibilities and challenges of parenting.

This information sharing is **critical** in empowering indigenous youth, in particular those at risk groups of youth within any given community, to make informed, responsible decisions regarding becoming a parent either now or in the future.

Examples of Core of Life Indigenous activities

Nhulunbuy – Yirrkala Community.

Upon request, Core of Life managers worked with local ‘Strong women’ through the Women’s Centre at Yirrkala located in East Arnhem Land. The aim was to explore the local needs for parenting education, and how young women in their community may be supported with information to improve outcomes for themselves and their children whilst also improving access to community and mainstream services.

Managers were involved in filming traditional practices and will collect pictures from local families. This powerful imagery may be shared as part of the education package delivered by locally trained facilitators for the young women of Yirrkala community to assist in creating positive outcomes well into the future.



ABOVE: Traditional Smoking Ceremony outside Gove

Core of Life was also presented at the local community high school to a group of girls 12-18yrs with Indigenous elders translating important material into ‘Yolgnu’ language. This experience proved to be extremely worthwhile in bringing the older women and new, younger generation of future parents together to explore this fundamental and important part of life and share stories. Evaluations from students were very supportive of further education of this nature and identified that the girls learnt a ‘lot of new information’ including gaining an improved understanding of the harmful effects of drugs and alcohol taken during pregnancy.

The ‘Strong Women’, Yirrkala School and Core of Life found the experience extremely nurturing and rewarding and look forward to the next steps.



ABOVE: Core of Life sessions at Yirrkala School



Core of Life returned to the area in April 2007, bringing with them images and footage of local families pregnant and parenting and local language embedded within the program. Local health/youth and education have now trained in Core of Life. Program managers will then return yet again in August 2007 to work further with the elders at the Women's Centre.



ABOVE: Nhulunbuy Training day

Royal Flying Doctor Service

In October 2005 Program managers were contacted by Cairns RFDS Office to discuss the possibility of developing a Core of Life program for Indigenous communities on Cape York Peninsula. RFDS appointed 2 staff to attend the one day training who then compiled an evaluation report to decide on the program's appropriateness for the particular communities in mind. Core of Life was proposed as a special Health Promotion Project at Health Promotion Planning meeting for 2006. As a result Core of Life was put forward, approved and community consultation with key stakeholders commenced.

Community meetings were held at Pompuraaw and Coen involving community members and associated personnel to develop a project plan and decide on when and where the pilot sessions would be held, and which elements of the program and resources were to be modified to ensure they met the cultural and educational needs within the particular sites. Local images of pregnant and parenting women and their families were collected by clinic staff to be built into the visual aspect of Core of Life and the language/written text modified to suit local needs.

In August 2006 the first Core of Life session was run in Pompuraaw at the clinic with good attendance. Feedback from the session was very positive and a second session was planned soon after. Youth in Pompuraaw will continue to be involved in Core of Life sessions well into the future and more staff will be trained to sustain the program.

RFDS project staff have now secured funding to introduce Core of Life into other Cape communities and RFDS have now trained further staff to assist in the planned roll out.

Core of Life is currently working collaboratively with many other Indigenous sites to develop further educational resources. Encouraging local communities to contribute

images, artwork and language will help to allow young people to identify with their community and its culture around positive pregnancy, childbirth and parenting practices. This sense of ownership will help to ensure the program maintains its strong cultural respectability and sustain its relevancy to their young people and families.

Cape York - FNQ

Core of Life visited Western Cape York and held a forum which included all local key stakeholders from Weipa, Napranum and Aurukun communities. The key outcome from this forum was an identified need to offer evidence based, user friendly info, on pregnancy and parenting to their local youth. This was a plan to assist with the surmounting issues they were facing locally with teen pregnancy, poor antenatal education attendance, smoking mothers, domestic violence and child neglect.

Core of Life program visited Aurukun community and ran sessions for their teen boys and girls (separately) which was very successful and a great start for the staff in Aurukun that started training that day in Core of Life.

A further training was held in Weipa with a wide range of school, health and community based staff attending. These staff are now trained and have the education tools to implement Core of Life in any given opportunity be it in school, clinics, community groups etc.



ABOVE: Students in a Core of Life session at Aurukun Community

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