



Promising Practice Profiles

Project title	Port Augusta: A Child-Friendly Community—Parent Advisory Group Extraordinaire
Project practice	Supporting parent group activism
Project undertaken by	Communities for Children with UnitingCare Wesley Port Pirie as the Facilitating Partner Organisation
Start date	2006
Focal areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting families and parents • Creating Child-friendly communities • Families and children’s services working effectively together
Program	Communities for Children
Issue	<p>Port Augusta is a rural town in South Australia with high levels of transience, a significant indigenous population, limited economic opportunities and diverse migrant and refugee populations. A conservative <i>whitfella</i> culture has prevailed resulting in newcomers to the town (especially those from CALD backgrounds) experiencing heightened levels of social isolation, and general discrimination. Young families were particularly vulnerable and the existence of spaces for building social networks, encountering support and participating in their local community were extremely limited. Pre-existing spaces were exclusive and not welcoming. As a result, young families did not know how to find or create a sense of belonging in their local community. The initial Communities for Children consultation process with all local service providers, institutions and key stakeholders identified that the community needed spaces for social support and network-building that also empowered parents towards a more active citizenship. The aim of the project was not to change existing spaces; rather, it has created an innovative model of pathways for active community involvement with the aim of creating a more child- and family-friendly community.</p> <p>The Port Augusta CfC site undertook a substantive consultative process over a period of five months during which it attempted to engage with the whole of the Port Augusta community. There was particular emphasis on engagement with parents and care givers of young children, and the early childhood sector. The consultation involved visiting and meeting with staff from 54 local services and programmes. Key issues which emerged from the consultation and shaped the development of PAGE included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a lack of mechanisms for parents to influence service providers; • many services were insular (unaware of what other services provide, and unable to refer parents effectively); • a lack of available or user-friendly information for parents; • many shops and community facilities being unfriendly to children and/or inaccessible to parents; • some local restaurants not welcoming children; • a lack of inclusive spaces for parent social support and networking; • the need for pathways for parents to become more involved in their local community; • many families not aware of existing early childhood and parent support services; and • social isolation being experienced by many parents, especially those new to the community, and/or from CALD or Indigenous backgrounds.

Program context

Parent Advisory Group Extraordinaire (PAGE) is an activity of Communities for Children, which operates across the City of Port Augusta. PAGE links with the Port Augusta Early Years Parenting Centre. The activity is delivered through the Facilitating Partner UnitingCare Wesley Port Pirie, who has provided a Project Officer for 8 hours per week. The role of the project officer was to implement and facilitate the PAGE project. As the group evolved towards greater self-direction, the role of the project officer was to provide ongoing resource support.

PAGE is an inclusive, volunteer group of parents of young children who are concerned with creating a more family friendly city. They are unique in that their activity extends well beyond parent support and networking and involves advocacy, research, consultancy to local programmes, and project planning and implementation. PAGE welcomes and invites participation from all local parents and continually seeks to expand its reach and strengthen its community capacity building focus.

Port Augusta is a community which has a transient population, is culturally diverse with high level of Indigenous communities (27 different clans) and has tended to be very conservative. Currently 27% of the population are Indigenous (this does not include the APY Lands or seasonal flows from Adelaide and Alice Springs).

Port Augusta has been identified as having a large proportion of disadvantaged families. SEIFA Index of Disadvantage rankings show that Port Augusta is located in the lowest 10–25% of areas in Australia. AEDI results showed that Port Augusta has the highest scores for disadvantage across all five domains for the North and Far Western Region of South Australia. The AEDI showed 43.1 % of children were vulnerable in one domain, and 22.9 % of children vulnerable in two or more domains.

Port Augusta is a meeting place and a trading place but has lacked structures and projects that were supportive of this. As a result of poverty, racial discrimination, isolation and limited opportunities, personal aspirations are low in Port Augusta. For new families and for young parents there have been very few supports and the groups that have existed have not been welcoming or inclusive and few people were willing to be more welcoming. Additionally there was no information for young families to know what is available in the community. Social isolation has been a big issue of young families and especially for newcomers to the community.

The Social Vision Unit, Port Augusta Regional Council and the Northern Regional Development Board share common goals for striving to encourage both economic development and to strengthen social outcomes for Port Augusta. However, there is not a strong culture of the business and community sector working collaboratively, and service providers have tended to work in isolation. There is scope, and enthusiasm for change, with the Port Augusta Communities for Children Project a timely opportunity to demonstrate effectiveness and improved outcomes for families through developing integrated, collaborative family support systems and provision of services.

PAGE has become a key resource group for community-oriented programs, local council and service providers to consult with when they require input from a wide cross-section of the community. As a result of PAGE, there has been a demonstrated increase in inclusion, active parent engagement in the local community, and family friendliness in the City of Port Augusta. PAGE parents now have a vision of taking their “model” of supporting families in building family-friendly communities to neighbouring remote and rural areas.

This PPP describes the practice of facilitating parent activism and building community capacity in a remote rural community with the objectives of:

- developing local parents’ ideas on what constitutes a child-friendly regional city;
- advocating for improved community facilities catering for families with young children, particularly with Local Government, businesses and service providers;
- working in partnership with the Early Years Parenting Centre (EYPC) community;
- supporting and encourage parents to use the EYPC;

- developing pathways for young families and families new to the city to actively engage with the local community;
- instigating Child-friendly Business Awards to promote facilities such as baby-change areas, family-friendly areas in restaurants, and age-appropriate playgrounds;
- supporting the establishment of more family-friendly workplaces and strategies to support organisations to adopt family-friendly strategies;
- improving collaboration between services, businesses and the community; and
- increasing access to information available for families, the wider community and services.

PAGE was formed during the CfC consultation period and involved representation from Aboriginal, Filipino, Zimbabwean, Salvadoran, and non-Aboriginal families. It was set up as a critical reflection group that would work closely with the CfC Management Committee in identifying the CfC activities for the Port Augusta site. Public forums which were held during the day and evening were advertised to attract parents. An essential strategy in the formation of PAGE was that these forums were held in locations that were “family friendly” with particular effort made to engage Aboriginal families through Pika Wiya Health Service. Other recruitment strategies included: word-of-mouth, people introducing PAGE to each other, service providers (including the CfC management committee) being challenged to bring along 1–2 parents to the reference group meetings; local community using flyers, and visiting kinder gyms (especially at morning tea time) to talk with the mums.

Extensive advertisement of the group was done through the Members seek out newcomers to Port Augusta and attempt to engage them. Additionally, PAGE also had a visible presence at the launch of the EYPC and took advantage of extensive publicity surrounding that event in order to attract more people to EYPC and get involved with PAGE.

Practice description

The ingredients critical to the effective operation of the Parent Action group extraordinaire (PAGE) were considered to be:

- presenting a clear vision for parent activism;
- access to resources;
- flexible facilitation (enabling a self-directing group);
- weekly meetings;
- empowering and building capacity (a strengths-based approach); and
- promoting parents as “action researchers”.

Presenting a clear vision for parent activism

The concept of PAGE arose from the initial Communities for Children consultation process which identified a need to empower local parents to:

- become more active participants in creating a child friendly community;
- act as a local resource for the roll out of Communities for Children activities especially the Early Years Parenting Centre; and
- develop social capital that would become a resource for local government and key service provision agencies.

An important feature of the practice of facilitating parent activism in a rural community is presenting a clear vision of what this activism could look like while ensuring ownership of the vision by PAGE participants. Forums were an effective way of providing parents with the opportunity to reflect and share with each other and from such discussions parents and workers began to identify with the concept of parent activism in relation to the development of a community one-stop early childhood centre; working with businesses to create more family friendly environment; and appreciating parents’ capacity to become researchers and a community resource.

Access to resources

An important aspect of the success of PAGE in becoming more than a parent support group has been the ability to access a range of resources. This is a direct result of PAGE being a Communities for Children activity. Key resources have been:

- the 8 hour per week facilitator/resource person;
- being able to contract crèche workers;
- access to communications equipment such as phones, faxes, email, printers, and photocopiers; and
- the existence of a small budget for promotion of PAGE, and PAGE-related activities.

The Early Years Parenting Centre (which owes much of its shape to the vision of PAGE) provided an ideal space for group meetings, a crèche, and PAGE early childhood based activities such as playgroups, music and movement groups, parent's mornings, and craft groups.

Flexible facilitation, enabling a self-directing group

A flexible approach to community development facilitation by the PAGE workers has enabled the group to make the transition from a facilitator-controlled agenda to participant-led facilitation. Facilitators were not only flexible about the degree of facilitation needed at any given time but also around issues of time, space and other community/family commitments. CfC management provided ongoing support to the PAGE facilitators and encouraged them to keep the self-determination of the PAGE group a central to their approach.

Self-direction in the PAGE group was initially supported through processes involving consultation, relationship building, and devoting time to fostering critical thinking and reflection skills. As members gained a sense of their own value and potential roles as individuals and as a group, the seeds for self-direction were planted.

Skilful enablement/establishment of PAGE in the early days resulted in a group with a sense of vision and resource that were of immediate benefit to the local community. Not rushing the formation process is important. PAGE emerged with an identity very different to regular parent support groups in that self-direction is required in varying degrees from inception.

Weekly meetings

It has been noted that the frequency with which people interact with each other has some bearing on the quality of those interactions (Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000). The frequency of early PAGE meetings was initiated by participants and was identified as a key ingredient of the group's successful cohesion and the sense of community that emerged. Weekly meetings provide a sense of continuity and consistency for participants and since forming in 2005–06 up to 20 parents have participated in PAGE at any given time. Flexibility with meeting times and dates is important to fit in with individual's different family and community commitments and to allow time for other activities.

Empowering and building capacity (a strengths-based approach)

CfC/PAGE facilitators employed a strengths based perspective in order to develop a "can do" approach within the PAGE group and forge strong links between PAGE and the broader community. This strengths-based approach developed participants' confidence along with their expertise. Emerging group identity leading to greater self-direction was accompanied by a continual emphasis on the resources, strengths and abilities that local parents already possessed.

Building coherence in a disparate group

In the early days, PAGE quickly became a very active and supportive group for parent members as well as for the CfC initiative. However, with new people joining, the dynamics of the initial group were changed and there was a less inclusive atmosphere. This resulted in one meeting where some parents indicated that they were considering not continuing their involvement with the group. The CfC/PAGE coordinator addressed this issue at the following meeting, by introducing a tool that would help the group to appreciate that in addressing community issues, they needed to *become* a community. Each person was invited to share their own story by producing a poster about themselves, their family, and their hopes for PAGE and then sharing it with the

group. A photo was placed in the centre of each person's story. The results of this were quite dramatic. Some shared intimate stories that gave an appreciation for who they were and the journey they have experienced—with the rest of the group feeling honoured that those stories were shared with them. Emerging from this activity was an understanding and celebration that as each participant come with their own story, the group was also creating its own story. As a community they were then able to participate in advocating to the wider community, their commitment to young families and a child and family friendly city. As a result of this initial activity, each new parent who joins the PAGE group is now invited to add their own story and become part of the PAGE community.

An important learning for the group was not to assume that bringing people together with common purpose, necessarily translates into shared vision about *how* a group is run or outcomes are achieved. There was also the learning that it is critical to address issues such as racism and personality differences that might have an adverse affect on a group, as quickly as possible.

Working with cultural difference

At the same time that the PAGE group was experiencing upheaval through differing personalities and agendas, there were also issues related to cultural difference and conflict within the group. The idea of getting everyone in the group to share their stories of who they are, their cultural background and journeys, and their vision for the community was also a way of addressing tacit racism that had emerged with the expansion of the group. This was then expressed in a variety of ways which included:

- sharing experiences or examples of racially motivated discrimination in the local community;
- promoting appreciation and understanding of each other's cultures and traditions through intercultural evenings; and
- seeking out families from CALD backgrounds who were new to the town and at risk of isolation.

All of these efforts contributed to a distinct turning point within the PAGE group, which was identified by all members.

Developing individual and group capacity

Developing individual and group capacity also occurred through taking on responsibility and developing organisational skills; the development and management of the PAGE Family Friendly Business Awards; through sitting on management committees and reference groups; becoming parent "action researchers"; and active involvement in the planning and rolling out of CfC activities, in particular the Early Years Parenting centre (EYPC). PAGE involvement in the EYPC was extensive and CfC management supported PAGE through this process.

Continually opening up and inviting in

A key feature of PAGE is its desire to continually open up and invite the participation and involvement of more local parents. This is done through a number of practices such as creating a warm open and hospitable environment; welcoming and greeting all individuals; and making conscious efforts to engage newcomers in conversation.

Providing pathways to community involvement and engagement

PAGE has provided its members with graduated pathways towards greater community involvement, engagement and activism. Local parents were supported to undertake action research in the local community, develop skills and confidence in engaging with key stakeholders (such as local service providers, local government, and the media), and become more involved in the programming of the EYPC. Support was also provided for individuals to develop new local business ventures, gain employment, undertake tertiary study, facilitate groups and develop and run early childhood activities.

Research base

Literature and past research supporting the effectiveness of the Parent Advisory Group Extraordinaire parent activism practice is considered here in

six areas: empowering parents; community activism; a strengths-based/“can do” approach; building community capacity; inclusive communities; and parent activism.

Empowering parents

PAGE empowers parents through providing alternative and less formal routes for community engagement and learning: supporting the development of what could be called “a participation career” (Robinson, Reeve, & Casey, 2008).

Part of the success of PAGE has been the ability of CfC staff and other professionals to share power and let parents take on roles of decision making, planning, and research. Early childhood interventions are more effective when professionals are prepared to let go and invest power in parents (Carpenter, 1997). Some of the strategies CfC management and PAGE workers use to facilitate parent involvement and empowerment include:

- providing contexts and resources for learning and development and then using these as a basis for leadership and activism (Swick et al., 2001);
- recognising that parents bring high levels of skills, but sometimes need formal support to develop the specific skills, knowledge and understanding required for community action and change (JRF, 2008);
- fostering informal learning relationships and helping parents to see how they are mentors to other parents—especially those experiencing the first time parent crisis (Swick et al., 2001);
- recognising that personal social and support networks are a critical component of a more ecological understanding of the local community environment (Carpenter, 1997, p. 393); and
- encouraging storytelling as an avenue for giving voice to thoughts and feelings and strengthening an avenue for reflection (Swick et al., 2001, p. 68).

A strengths-based/“can do” approach

Working from a strengths-based perspective was integral to the establishment of PAGE and underpins current relationships between CfC management/workers and PAGE as well as between PAGE members. Recent literature has shown that parent learning is most evident where the structure and type of support needs are driven by the parents (Turner & Bredhauer, 2005). Fostering a “can do” approach has been important to the Port Augusta context where due to limited opportunities and widespread disadvantage, personal aspirations are low.

Building social capital

The social capital of communities, which consists of the cultural resources and interpersonal relationships, is also eroded by inequality and social exclusion. Children’s welfare and family functioning are crucially dependent on the social support available within local communities. Building social capital is claimed to be a more effective way of promoting children’s welfare than is the present emphasis on formal child protection and family support services. (Jack & Jordan, 1999)

PAGE builds social capital through supporting local parents (who are experiencing isolation and exclusion) to develop resources support them in their individual, family and community lives. These resources are in the form of knowledge resources and identity resources (Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000). Knowledge resources include knowledge of the local environment, community based services and supports, of informal networks, and the roles and value of others in the community. Identity resources include greater understanding of personal and collective identities (especially in relation to race and ethnicity), building a sense of belonging in the group, encouraging participation, and providing a space where people can share and reflect upon their views of self and others (Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000).

Building community capacity

Community capacity is the interaction of human, organisational, and social capital existing within a given community that can be leveraged to solve collective problems and improve or maintain the wellbeing of a given community. It may operate through informal social processes and/or organised efforts by individuals, organisations, and the networks of association among them and between them and the broader systems of which the community is a part. (Chaskin, 1999, p. 4)

The building of community capacity within the PAGE group can be discussed within the context of Chaskin's (1999, pp. 5–7) four characteristics of a community with capacity:

1. A sense of community

A degree of connectedness between PAGE members arises through recognising mutual experiences and circumstances as well as taking risks in sharing personal histories and journeys.

2. A level of commitment

PAGE is underpinned by a vision for parent activism and community change. It provides numerous pathways for participants to get more involved in their local community. As individuals invest their time and energy in PAGE this appears to lead to an increased concern for how to make their local community more family friendly.

3. Mechanisms for problem-solving

Through skilled support in addressing issues of conflict and exclusion in the early days of PAGE members have developed strategies for solving problems and identifying priorities—within the group and in relation to the group's activities. Frequent group meetings ensure ongoing communication between members and documentation of these meetings (via minutes) helps track decision making and courses of action.

4. Access to resources

While PAGE has benefited by access to economic, human and physical resources it is also facilitating access to greater resources for individuals and the community. PAGE members gain employment, establish small and micro-businesses, gain access to media and local government, and change and reclaim community spaces.

Falk and Kilpatrick (2000) note that the increased willingness to act for the benefit of the community is a result of the formation of identities different to those which previous self perception allowed. It appears that PAGE processes, and activities geared towards building a sense of community and belonging in the group may have supported the formation of different identities. Some of these new identities are evident in the discussion of outcomes below.

Community capital “cannot be generated by individuals acting by themselves”. (Leonard and Onyx, 2004, p. 3).

An emphasis on relationship building through formal and informal communication has led to open and effective communication and the building of trust within the PAGE group (Guenther & Millar 2007). PAGE is unique in that it supports members (local parents) to take risks within the social context of the group *and* within the broader community—via parent activism. Individuals are able to act with a sense of confidence that others will respond and act in “mutually supportive ways” (Leonard and Onyx, 2004, p. 4).

Parents as researchers

PAGE is unique as a parent action group in that local parents have been supported to become action researchers within their community. If we accept

Turner and Bredhauer's (2005) assertion that greater parent involvement leads to more effective early childhood interventions and that parent learning is most effective when structured and driven by parents, then involving parents in research and reflection as well as planning appears to follow suite.

Parents have been involved in planning, observation, data gathering, reflecting and project planning (Carpenter, 1997). The action research cycles reinforce and develop parents' identity as a valuable community resource.

Social inclusion: Greeting

Participants in communicative democracy should listen to all modes of expression that aim to cooperate and reach a solution to collective problems. (Young, 1999, p. 80)

Recent research into social exclusion identified that personal relationships, participation in community life and the ability to access local services are all essential for life in Australia today (Brotherhood of St. Laurence, 2007). Many community development and empowerment strategies address issues related to external exclusion (being left out) yet miss what Chambers (2007) calls "internal exclusion". Internal inclusion is about being visible, being heard, and being recognised within a community: It is more than just a sense of self-identity; it is about self location within the community (Chambers, 2007; Jaeger, 2001).

Greeting is one of the many things we can do to make people feel acknowledged and listened to (Chambers, 2007). PAGE creates an innovative space where inclusive political communication can take place. All parents are welcomed regardless of class, ethnicity, formal education, or English language proficiency. Each person in the group is "greeted" and acknowledged. Culturally specific ways of communication and expression that might result in exclusion within some social and political spaces are not viewed as a barrier to participation or parent activism (this includes more public activities such as presentation of awards and working with local government). PAGE facilitates/embraces both external and internal inclusion so that previously isolated parents come to have a greater sense of place and belonging in their local community. (Jaeger, 2001, p. 81).

Building child-friendly communities

With the ratification of the UN Convention on the rights of the Child by Australia, it is expected that every child, regardless of age, gender or ethnicity, will be an equal citizen, have their voice heard, their needs met and be able to participate fully in family, community and social life. (Summary of 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child Articles 12, 13, 14, 15, & 31; see www.unicef.org)

Extensive evidence that shows that families under stress are isolated from support agencies and other social support networks. Lack of access to the resources that community links provide can result in vulnerability of adult family members and their children. Isolation can also have a negative impact on family functioning and disadvantage or impair children's development (Wise, 1999). Building child friendly communities is not only about preventing adverse outcomes for children but also about supporting and building up the resiliency and capacity of parents and carers through the creation of positive relationships, interactions and networks in their community.

To build a child friendly community therefore, means not only supporting and welcoming children, but supporting and welcoming parents and carers as well. (Halsey & Curtis, 2005)

PAGE contributes to a more child friendly community through welcoming families, providing a supportive social environment and by promoting democratic inclusion. It brings ...

differently positioned strangers into one another's presence ... [and helps] make concrete the fact that people of differing tastes, interests, needs, and life circumstances dwell together in a city or region. (Young, 2000: 214)

Outcomes

The Parent Advisory Group Extraordinaire's desired outcomes have been presented in an outcomes hierarchy. The ultimate goal of PAGE is to facilitate parent activism with the purpose of creating a more family-friendly community.

The outcomes ensuing from the practice of enabling parent activism are:

1. providing research and consultancy;
2. parent activism/engagement in the local community;
3. building social capital;
4. increased confidence;
5. more child friendly communities—a sense of belonging;
6. community and businesses working together;
7. provision of early childhood activities; and
8. a parent advocacy/advisory/activist group model.

Evidence of outcomes

The Parent Action Group Extraordinaire has been operating for two and a half years and during this time has worked closely with Dr Jo Baulderstone, the Local CfC Evaluator, to develop context-appropriate ways of collecting data and measuring satisfaction and to build evaluating capacity among PAGE members and workers.

These have included:

- a baseline measuring tool to assess levels of "Child Friendliness" in Port Augusta and the quality and availability of parent friendly service information;
- a self-evaluation survey;
- an interactive parent survey used at celebrating families events;
- participant-observer data gathering; and
- documentation of all meetings, and gatherings.

The following outcomes evidence has drawn on PAGE participant satisfaction surveys, meeting minutes; feedback sheets from PAGE sponsored groups and events, PAGE publicity and promotional material, and two focus groups with PAGE members. Ongoing discussion and collaboration with the PAGE group as well as current and previous workers have taken place via telephone and at gatherings with a local evaluation assistant.

Outcome 1. Providing research and consultancy

From its inception PAGE has continued to develop its capacity as a critical reflection resource for the local community. More recently this resource has been recognised by local service providers and the group has participated in consultation and planning for local community based initiatives. Examples of research and consultancy expertise provided by PAGE include:

- being on interview panels for EYPC staff;
- undertaking a detailed external audit of all of Port Augusta's playground;
- an internal audit of all businesses and agencies;
- presenting proposals to local government (most recent is the Waterplay Park);
- representation on the DECS Children's Centre Steering Committee;
- consistent representation on the CfC Steering Committee;
- liaising with local services and organisations with an early childhood agenda; and
- consultation to the Port Augusta Hospital about the content of in-house televisions.

Outcome 2. Parent activism/engagement in the local community:

PAGE members have also been supported to develop strategies that assist them to gain increased influence over valued community resources (Carpenter, 1997). Some of these strategies are the development of the Family Friendly Business Awards, early childhood programs (such as playgroup and musical playgroups at the EYPC), and lobbying and planning for the Port Augusta Waterplay Park.

The PAGE group has been unique in being more than a parent support group or social networking space. These initiatives have included the:

Local playground audit

One of the research activities of PAGE was to undertake an external audit of all local playgrounds. Members developed a set of criteria by which they measured child friendliness and noted improvements needs. This audit was then presented to the local council and it was well received. As a result a checklist was developed for use by the Port Augusta Council in developing new and maintaining existing playgrounds.

Child-Friendly Business Awards

Following on from an internal audit of all services, agencies and businesses conducted by PAGE members, the group developed the Monthly Family Friendly Business Awards. The purpose of these awards is to highlight Family Friendly Businesses, Groups and Individuals in the local community by giving a monthly award to those who are actively involved in providing and promoting Port Augusta as a Family Friendly City. Family friendliness includes facilities available to families (e.g., easy access to shopping facilities, baby change/feeding Rooms), a friendly attitude toward children in general, proper care and maintenance of play grounds in the community and also better and safer recreational areas for families with children 0–5 years and providing family friendly facilities in restaurants, clubs, and other shopping centres.

Awardees received a certificate which is presented to them by one of the PAGE parents as well as media publicity.

Working with the local media

A key ingredient of the Family Friendly Business Awards is media promotion of the award and the business involved. The local newspaper takes a photo and writes a small article on the business involved. The focus is on awardees but PAGE members are aware that these monthly features are also a good way of promoting the group and its activities within the local community. PAGE parents have also worked closely with local radio and television media in promoting their activities.

Working with the local council

Since presenting the Playground audit to the Local Council in 2006, the PAGE group has continued a close relationship with local government. During the past year PAGE has been working with Council on the idea of a Waterplay Park. PAGE members approached Council to try and get a commitment to being involved.

The feasibility study will be conducted by a consultancy firm who have been chosen by the CfC manager in consultation with PAGE. PAGE members have formed an organising committee especially for the Waterplay park and will have representation on the steering committee.

Establishing a child-friendly business

One PAGE parent has expressed her commitment to a family friendly business community through opening her own children's wear shop. The "Bush Babies" shop is a welcoming place for local families and their children. It has a play area for children, and once a month a coffee morning is held at the back of the shop. It is also a frequent meeting place for local parents.

Outcome 3. Building social capital

Most PAGE members had experienced social isolation, exclusion and discrimination.

The development of trust, friendships, networks and supports as a result of involvement with PAGE was reported by all members consulted with. One parent gives her version of how the group has worked with issues of conflict and division.

PAGE has been very multicultural. In the first few weeks of our meeting it was very multicultural. Then there were issues with one person. It was about race-based discrimination. This then caused conflict within the group. Then we decided to do an activity. Each person made a photo-board about themselves. We all had had a few minutes to share with the group. This was a real turning point in the group. Afterwards people were more accepting of one another. We tried to give everyone a chance to tell their story and since then there has been tolerance within the group. Without that activity we could not stand here today. Now, with new members we do this activity regularly.

PAGE participants reported that they had gained knowledge about each other and their local community as well as a sense of belonging. Members also spoke about how important it is to create a welcome and hospitable space that supports local parents and gets them thinking about how they could contribute to the community.

Outcome 4. Increased confidence

PAGE participants report increased confidence as a result of being involved with the group and becoming more active in making changes in their local community.

PAGE members and CfC workers highlighted many outcomes that were directly linked to increased confidence. These included: gaining full-time employment for the first time; gaining employment in other early childhood related programs; volunteering; public speaking; starting up a small business and micro-enterprises; commencing tertiary study; working alongside of professionals on steering committees; working with the media; assuming leadership roles; and running programs at the EYPC.

Outcome 5. More family friendly communities: “A sense of belonging”

Port Augusta receives many migrants and many PAGE members are migrants. Members have used their own experiences of exclusion and discrimination as the basis for strategies that have contributed to a more family friendly community.

In addition to the external and internal auditing mentioned above, PAGE has more recently worked with seven different surgeries in Port Augusta to ensure that these spaces were more child friendly (some did not have any toys, books or magazines for families). They have also been working with all of the banks in town as well as local hairdressing salons.

Promotional material about PAGE and its activities has been distributed regularly and to all spaces in the town that families are likely to frequent. The CfC and EYPC managers report an observable increase in the level of media support for a child friendly community.

Many individuals (especially those from CALD backgrounds) reported that what they had gained from being involved with PAGE was a sense of belonging in their local community.

Outcome 6. Community and businesses working together

In addition to the monthly Family Friendly Business Awards which are announced in the local newspaper, PAGE has also worked closely with the two local hotels to offer more family friendly facilities and services.

Outcome 7. Provision of early childhood activities

Involvement in the EYPC centre by PAGE parents and been consistent and continually expanding. PAGE currently facilitates five weekly EYPC based activities which are separate to PAGE meetings. These activities are:

- Play and Stay—a regular playgroup;
- Kids Playtime;
- Easy Arts and Crafts;

- A scrap booking class; and
- A mums support group.

PAGE initiated and facilitated a musical playgroup which was attracting up to 70 participants. Because this number of participants was unworkable for the EYPC it has split into two musical playgroups. One of these is for Family Day Care carers and children and now has its own paid facilitator.

As well as expanding the range of activities that the EYPC offers, there has been an increase in the number of families with young children using the centre. Those families have reported greater satisfaction regarding the accessibility of information on early childhood services and programs. One unexpected outcome of the PAGE facilitated playgroup at EYPC is that it has been a good entry point into PAGE and further involvement in the community.

Outcome 8. A parent advocacy/advisory/activist group model

The final outcome of the PAGE practice of facilitating parent activism is emerging development of model for parent empowerment and community capacity building in rural communities. While this model has not yet taken any concrete form, discussion about it reflects a high degree of parent empowerment and community capacity. The vision for PAGE was sown by CfC management. The vision for outreach into other rural towns is the vision of PAGE.

<p>Policy analysis</p>	<p>This is an excellent example of a promising practice that supports Indigenous and CALD families who have been isolated and in some instances remote from supports. PAGE is particularly impressive in that parents as a group have been enabled to advocate for their own communities with apparent success, thereby increasing community strengthening and skill development.</p> <p>The practice is sustainable, as evidenced by the length of continuity thus far, and would appear to be replicable in other communities.</p>
<p>Project evaluations</p>	<p>The program has been running for two and a half years and has been subject to local external evaluation.</p>
<p>Project related publications</p>	<p>See material in the section on research</p>
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More information	More information on Port Augusta: A Child Friendly Community, Parent Advisory Group Extraordinaire (PAGE) Project and <i>Promising Practice Profiles</i> can be found on the PPP pages of the Communities and Families Clearinghouse Australia website at http://www.aifs.gov.au/cafca/ppp/ppp.html



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