



Promising Practice Profiles

Project title	SuperGrands
Project practice	Family mentoring program
Project undertaken by	Communities@Work—ACT
Start date	May 2006
Focal areas	Supporting families and parents
Program	Local Answers
Issue	<p>SuperGrands addresses particular vulnerabilities and unmet needs of parents who do not have the skills to cope with the financial and time pressures associated with parenting and child rearing. The program was developed to address gaps that exist in skills development of young parents and families in home economics. Many of the program participants are separated or unable to receive support from extended family for a variety of reasons, thus transference of knowledge from one generation to another can also be unavailable or difficult to access.</p>
Program context	<p>The program was developed to meet the needs of young parents and families primarily in Tuggeranong and Weston Creek, in the Australian Capital Territory. Clients are referred from a range of community support services and agencies as well as self-referrals from groups (e.g., Brindabella Women's Group, Cooking groups and the Welcome to Tuggeranong Mums group). Volunteers on the other hand, are recruited through word of mouth generated through seniors groups, clubs and other volunteer programs as well as responding to targeted advertising (media, festivals, expos, and presentations to clubs and church groups). The program's clientele has included a wide range of young parents and families. There are a growing number of refugee and migrant families participating in group sessions.</p> <p>The program provides the opportunity for mature volunteers with a lifetime's experience to share their knowledge and skills with a younger generation in a practical yet caring environment, under the guidance and supervision of trained social practitioners. Volunteers are trained to harness their knowledge in the areas of home management, including budgeting, menu preparation, shopping to a budget, cooking healthy easy meals, tips and ideas for housekeeping and organising the home. They are also guided in how to mentor and encourage young families and parents to set goals and work towards them.</p> <p>Objectives for the program are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• improve planning, organisation, communication skills of young parents and families;• enable young parents and families to learn household management skills and develop confidence and self-esteem;• improve budgeting and financial literacy skills;• improve skills in menu planning, shopping within a limited budget, cooking nutritional meals and snacks;• improve household maintenance skills; and• increase intergenerational contacts and build relationships.

Practice description

SuperGrands is a family mentoring program which aims to develop and strengthen household and family management skills of young parents.

The practice of harnessing the knowledge and life skills of mature volunteers and training them to work and mentor young parents and families provides a mentoring relationship that many young people would not otherwise have. Supported by an experienced and trained coordinator they use a strengths-based practice of helping young parents and families to set goals and to reach them. This practice enables seniors to be proactive as mentors and encouragers in their community and draws on their strengths, knowledge and experience. Their contribution is valued and fulfilling and helps to reduce isolation among young families without extended family supports.

The one-on-one home coaching by experienced mature volunteers is individually tailored to the specific needs of families but typically covers basic cooking, menu planning, good eating habits, supermarket shopping, housekeeping techniques, budgeting, tax returns, gardening, home maintenance and assistance with communicating with government agencies.

Training & supporting volunteers as family mentors

Key activities—how and why does it work

The critical ingredients for establishing a promising practice of equipping mature volunteers to mentor young parents/families rests in:

- harnessing the life experience of mature volunteers through exploration of what they already know and how they can share that knowledge;
- developing information and training appropriate to the program and to provide a professional framework for practice by volunteers building on the strengths of their life experience;
- conducting regular training and information sessions including cultural awareness;
- providing ongoing support and information; and
- using supervision with volunteers as a tool for professional and personal development (sense of worth within the community).

Harnessing the life experience of mature volunteers

Harnessing each volunteer's life experience and the skills that they have provides a rich sharing of tips and practical ideas with young parents. Lessons learnt at different times and in different situations in their lives have been found to be invaluable. At the start of the volunteer training session, there is an interactive discussion which allows people to discuss views, values and ideas. The purpose is to draw on strengths and bring volunteers into a framework of professional practice.

Prior to training, there are discussions about how to develop a relationship, respect for individual differences and values, coaching, mentoring and boundaries. A high priority is for volunteers to work with their client to identify strengths that can be built upon and new skills developed. This involves recognising that their clients may have "different" values to themselves and agreeing to work within a framework that respects that difference and is non-judgmental. Volunteers are taken through a process of discussion about the importance of working towards the client's goal rather than their own. They learn about the process of putting their own values to one side in order to support the needs of the family. For example a client's goal may be budgeting, but the volunteer may think the house needs tidying as the first priority.

For some senior volunteers this aspect can be challenging and they recognise from the start that they would not be able to keep within the boundaries required and so do not progress. The majority however do continue. As part of ongoing training and debriefing there are regular get togethers which enable volunteers to gain peer support, sharing their experiences with each other whilst maintaining client confidentiality.

Networking time is always factored into these meetings to enable relationship building between volunteers and with the SuperGrands Coordinator.

Developing information and training appropriate to the program for a professional practice framework

As the project is modelled on the New Zealand “SuperGrans” a collaborative relationship has been established with them. Information has been shared between the two agencies on such issues policies and procedures and training tips. Relevant information has been adapted and a full training package developed for use in Australia.

The following were the key training areas identified during the information exchange with the New Zealand coordinator of SuperGrans as well as feedback and experience shared by co-ordinators at the 2006 national conference in New Zealand as the most relevant topics to equip volunteers to mentor young parents and families in improving home and family management. These topics have been taken up and are part of the program of activities that are discussed between mentor and mentee family:

- Budgeting
- Safe food handling
- Nutrition
- Child Safety
- Personal safety
- Budget shopping

The program also taps into peer support from other programs within the agency such as the Family Support Program to provide their expertise and participate in the training sessions to talk about issues such as “how to develop relationships”, “how to encourage clients” and “how to set boundaries and goal setting”.

Another integral component of this practice framework is the collaborative partnerships that are formed with other agencies and organisations to help deliver important aspects of the program. These include Care Financial Counselling Service (budgeting); Nutrition Australia (great meals costing less); Food Safety Council (safe food handling); ACT Department of Disability Housing and Community Service (keeping children and young people safe); NAPCAN (child safety); and Australian Federal Police (personal safety).

Conducting regular training and information sessions

Volunteers are recruited on an ongoing basis. The target is to maintain 20 SuperGrand volunteers with access to SuperGrand consultants for one-off tasks (e.g., change tap washers). Training includes an orientation into the organisation, policies and procedures and code of conduct. This process enrolls SuperGrands into the broader Volunteers Program so that they are part of a large network of volunteers.

The next session covers the key training areas (as listed previously). Once matched and working with their family, volunteers are supervised and supported with one-on-one contact and guidance by the SuperGrands Coordinator. Peer support and information sessions are held regularly for volunteers to talk about issues and share strategies. Group rules and boundaries of confidentiality are observed for these sessions.

Information talks are held as required with professionals from the supporting agencies invited. These can include a Financial Counselling provider, a Family Support provider, a Nutritionist, a Psychologist, a Red Cross representative. This allows the volunteers to ask questions that have arisen for them during their work and provides an opportunity for discussion about appropriate strategies for dealing with an issue—for example taking time out just to talk about everyday things with the families is important in order to build trust and develop a relationship. This relates to reinforcing the importance for volunteers to stay client-focused and look at their client's individual needs. They are trained in how to develop a support plan with their client that sets out the tasks in order to reach the chosen goal and how

to evaluate progress along the way. They are also trained in strengths-based practice and how to exit once the goals are complete.

Providing ongoing support and information

The SuperGrands Coordinator assesses each referral and matches the client with a volunteer. Regular supervision of the volunteer is provided through phone contact, emails and get togethers as well as ongoing information and peer support sessions. Information is also provided to the volunteers through the organisation's Volunteers Newsletter. To ensure SuperGrands receive extra information on a regular basis, a SuperGrands newsletter has been developed.

The SuperGrands Coordinator monitors client progress towards goals and uses client evaluation sheets as a tool to mentor the volunteers, providing strategies and options as needed. This provides a debriefing process and allows the co-ordinator to pick up on areas of support as needed.

Volunteers are provided with an information kit that contains information on other services and activities that are available for young parents and families. If there is a question that they are asked and unable to answer, they forward it on to the Co-ordinator who provides the necessary information. Peer support and information is also available from the team of trained caseworkers within the agency who are invited to volunteer get togethers and attend information sessions where possible.

Using supervision with volunteers as a tool for professional and personal development (developing a sense of worth within the community)

The SuperGrands Coordinator attends appropriate training including a recent mentoring workshop to strengthen skills to mentor and encourage the volunteers. Supervision with the SuperGrands Coordinator enables volunteers to raise issues and identify information gaps where assistance is needed. Volunteers are encouraged to view supervision as building a relationship with their co-ordinator (mentor) and to discuss and name challenges that they face as they work with families. Issues such as differing values and boundaries are the most common themes for discussion. These sessions are valuable for discussions about adapting to different situations and what it means to finish or exit a client. Being mature aged volunteers, they often bring with them a range of experiences and the co-ordinator is able to use these experiences to validate the work that the volunteers do to benefit the families with whom they work.

Peer-support sessions are held and these are invaluable tools for professional development amongst volunteers. Many learn new skills and are able to use the sessions as the venue for sharing concerns or worries. These are often raised, discussed and normalised at the peer-support sessions, providing encouragement that they are doing well. Lessons learnt can be discussed and strategies that have worked are shared with the volunteers.

Research base

Literature and research supports mentoring as a highly effective strategy to develop confidence and skills as well as personal and professional development:

Mentoring is widely recognised as a valuable personal and professional development strategy ... Key benefits for the mentee: increases self confidence; develops skills and knowledge. (University of New South Wales)

Young parents and families as mentees are able to safely develop their confidence and skills whilst mature volunteers develop a growing sense of worth and reward through sharing their knowledge and wisdom:

Volunteering is one important way in which younger and older people can come together to learn more about each others lives ... in short a chance to get to know one another and a chance to encourage co-operation, trust and respect between generations. Intergenerational work of this kind also has the potential to

deliver real outcomes changing individuals' circumstances and improving their life chances. (The Scottish Government).

As an intervention strategy, mentoring is based on a well-established research base, which has been applied in a range of child and family welfare and child development programs. Through these applications, it has been established that when young people have supportive relationships with adults, they generally have an enhanced ability to develop resilience, meaning in life and to deal with life's challenges. These relationships act to protect young people, including those who grow up in high stress family or community environments (Garbarino et al., 1992; Werner, 1984; Rutter, 1999). More recently, these relationships have been understood as a form of "social capital". Social capital has been defined as "the processes between people in which to establish networks, norms, social trust and facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit" (Cox, 1996). The concept of social capital has been applied to mentoring relationships, as it relates to building up the needs of young people whom they are working with. In this program, SuperGrands applies the mentoring principles with young adults and mentoring principles through supervision and ongoing training to the SuperGrand volunteers.

A facilitated mentor relationship such as SuperGrands provides the structure and training processes to support mature volunteers in their intergenerational work, providing a great deal of learning and personal development, at a time of life that for some has become less fulfilled than during their younger years. For example, the ACT Volunteering shows research that:

Volunteering may lower the risk of physical ill health, and reduce heart disease rates. Volunteering results in a heightened sense of well being and may hasten surgery recovery time and increases the opportunity for close interpersonal relationships and develops social networks, which act as a buffer against stress and illness. (ACT Volunteering)

SuperGrands was chosen as an effective intervention to support young families based on the practice-based evidence from the New Zealand experience, which is provided in their full evaluation report produced in June 2007. Below is a quote from the Evaluation Report about positive parental outcomes from the program:

SuperGrands work within the family to build certain characteristics which are known to impact positively on parental involvement. These are: a belief by parents in their own effectiveness; parental perceptions of their child, for example confidence in the child's academic abilities, perceptions of her or his openness to help; family ethnic, religious and/or cultural identities and the extent to which this identity is supported and respected within the community.

The New Zealand Program (SuperGrands), funded through SAGES (the Older People As Mentors program), responds to Goal 10 of the New Zealand Positive Ageing Strategy "by increasing opportunities for personal growth and community participation, through encouraging the utilisation of the experience and skills of older people". The program was succinctly described by the Hon Lianne Dalziel, New Zealand Minister for Women's Affairs, at the 2007 National Supergrands Conference:

The need that SAGES recognises is that many individuals and families struggle to manage the day-to-day operation of their home and family lives, and would benefit from personal support and guidance on how to cope better. Through SAGES, these people are able to receive one-on-one life and home skills mentoring, in areas such as home management, cooking, budgeting and parenting. The focus is on helping them to help themselves by giving them the skills and confidence they need. The opportunity that SAGES recognises is that there are many older people in the community with a wealth of experience and knowledge in these areas. Through SAGES, people can use and

pass on these skills, to the great benefit of the wider community. It's a program that supports the government's aim that all families, young and old, enjoy more opportunity and security and share in the progress New Zealand is making.

Outcomes

SuperGrand volunteers assess the progress of their young parent or family towards the goal that they have set for themselves. Diary notes are kept and volunteer observations of families made. Feedback from volunteers about their clients' progress is assessed on a scale of "no progress" to "goal completed". Each client is different and, in some cases, time needs to be spent further developing trust and building a relationship before work can start.

Key themes that are coming through in the evaluations to this point are:

Parental outcomes

- Increasing parents' confidence.
- Improved home management skills.
- Acquiring new skills such as gardening.
- Enhancing parenting skills.

Volunteer outcomes

- Increasing self worth through respect for the value of the skills that seniors can give to young parents and families.
- Steady sense of fulfilment and reward.
- Demonstrated ability to face challenges with support.
- Growing personal and professional development.
- Enjoyment of peer support.

Community outcomes

- The program builds and fosters genuine relationships and networks amongst migrant and refugee families.
- Participating agencies work with the program to help integrate communities.
- The program has demonstrated skill in working with isolated families.
- New partnerships or working relationships have been established.
- Increase in the number of partnerships formed with other community groups including schools.

Evidence of outcomes

The positive outcomes achieved have been based on data and information that have been collected in various ways:

- Data are collected through weekly evaluation reports kept as confidential diary notes by the volunteers. The evaluation form lists up to three goals for each client. These each have a scale rating for progress. The SuperGrand volunteer talks through the assessment with their family or young parent and together they decide how they are progressing. This provides extra opportunities for validation and affirming the work and achievements made to date as well as encouraging further progress to reach their goal.
- Surveys are also conducted at training, information sessions and client exit interviews.
- Feedback is also obtained through peer-support sessions and get-togethers.

Capturing the life experience of mature volunteers and harnessing the skills and knowledge in a way that can be transferred to younger people through one-on-one mentoring in the home delivers real outcomes for both the volunteers and families.

Outcomes for clients:

Ongoing monitoring and evaluation conducted with clients reveal that the program has helped to increase the confidence of clients in day-to-day household management such as budgeting and cooking as well as relationship building and parenting skills.

An independent evaluation of the program indicated an increase in parent confidence. Some of the feedback received which reflect what has generally been indicated by participants include:

“I am much more in control.”

“Flexibility of it, if I didn’t feel like cooking, we would sit and chat.”

“Helps me clarify goals and gives me guidance but I decided how to put things together.”

Some of the issues highlighted are that families now have more control of money owing to organisations, dealing with mental health issues and handling family feuds.

Below are some of the emerging themes based on feedback received from clients:

Increasing parents’ confidence

“I now have the ability to prepare and stick to a menu plan.”

“Saving a huge amount of money each week is making a difference.”

Improved home management skills

“A male SuperGrand taught my husband and older children how to hang our doors inside on their hinges, and the outside gate, now swings. He taught them to use a drill and what type of screwdriver to use for what job. Together they went for a trip to the hardware store to price the most useful items needed.”

“I now I have the confidence to cook, as before I had always put it in the ‘too hard’ basket.”

Enhanced parenting skills

“After cooking I played cards with my son.”

“My SuperGrand has supported me to get organised and my days now have some routine. I make time each day to sit with the children while doing their homework. The children know what is happening and are able to help with making lunches and packing their own school bags at night.”

Outcomes for volunteers:

The program found an overall enjoyment by volunteers in their “grandparent” role as well as an increase in personal and professional development. Information collected through volunteer debriefings and surveys, reveal that volunteers felt:

Increased self-worth

“As a SuperGrand I feel a personal gain every time I meet a new family.”

“Its great to help young people who just need a little support and help.”

Rewarding community work (participation)

“SuperGrands offers me the joy to be involved in the community at a very intimate and personal way - I feel like I’m making a difference.”

Other anecdotal evidence collected from SuperGrand volunteers indicates:

- Participants’ greatest satisfaction is having a grandparent role with families.
- As retirees, mentor participants feel they can still make a valuable contribution to the community.
- Participants enjoy learning about services they did not know were

available and passing information on to young parents and families.

- Participants enjoy seeing a young person meet a goal.
- Participants are being made aware of the diversity of other cultures, different values and different ways of living.
- Participants who have faced life's challenges with low income and young children to feed in their younger years, gain satisfaction from having something of value to pass on to another generation.

Community outcomes:

The program has been successful in engaging young families of diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds including 6 CALD women aged between 24 and 31, 18 Asian mothers and a grandmother, 5 Aboriginal mothers aged 19 to 21, 11 young Aboriginal boys aged 8 to 12 and 2 Aboriginal girls aged 12 years who were carers.

The program has been successful in working with three families who are refugees and survivors of torture and trauma.

New partnerships or working relationships have been formed with:

- a youth program offering a variety of support services to young Indigenous people in the ACT region;
- a leading national youth facility; and
- an agency assisting rehabilitation and resettlement of refugee survivors of torture and trauma.

A further positive outcome has been the extension of the program through the development of a pilot program for six young carers identified by a local primary school as the main carers in the families. Two SuperGrand volunteers are working with the students at the school to coach them in food preparation, food safety, cooking and freezing.

<p>Policy analysis</p>	<p>The practice has significant policy implications in terms of tapping into human resources and social capital that exist within the community to support vulnerable families fulfil their parental obligations and responsibilities. The process of recruiting and training mature volunteers to be SuperGrands engages people in their community and could be readily replicated in other communities. It promotes volunteering as a rewarding activity that helps to build sustainable communities through the transference of knowledge and wisdom from one generation to another. It values life skills of all generations, drawing on individual strengths and enables relationships, skills and confidence to grow in a nurturing environment.</p>
<p>Project evaluations</p>	<p>The program has not yet been formally evaluated</p>
<p>Project related publications</p>	
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More information

More information on Supergrands Project and *Promising Practice Profiles* can be found on the PPP pages of the Communities and Families Clearinghouse of Australia website at <http://www.aifs.gov.au/cafca/ppp/ppp.html>.

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