



Derby WA

STRONGER FAMILIES TEAM ON THE ROAD!

As reported in the last edition of *Family Matters*, the Stronger Families Learning Exchange was established earlier this year at the Australian Institute of Family Studies, with the objective of contributing to the evidence base about the effectiveness of early interventions for families and communities.

An initiative of the Commonwealth Government as part of its Stronger Families and Communities Strategy, the Learning Exchange has two components. Its *Clearing-house* provides the latest information on research and programs concerned with family wellbeing, primary prevention, and early intervention for families. Its *Training and Support Team* provides advice and assistance to community development projects on the use of action research to evaluate their work.

These community projects are funded by the Commonwealth's Stronger Families Fund. To date, 25 of an anticipated 80 projects, located in areas of high need across Australia, have

been funded. The focus of each project is to develop community support for strengthening the functioning of families, particularly those with children aged from birth to five years. The means by which this is done varies across projects, the view being that problems are best solved through local solutions developed through active community participation.

Making a reality of action research evaluation

The Stronger Families Training and Support Team at the Institute comprises Adam Tomison (Manager), Liz Branigan (Acting Team Leader), Tania Lienert, Sandra Billard, Colleen Turner, Richard Munt, Maya Haviland and, more recently, Anne Garrow. The team has worked hard to take the *idea* of using action research evaluation to support the work of projects in the field and turn it into a *reality*. The team has developed evaluation frameworks, project principles, key performance indicators, and varied methods of supporting interactions with the projects.

The diverse experience of team members has ensured these frameworks have emerged as both rigorous and flexible.

A key part of the project support has been for the team to establish relationships by visiting each of the projects. More than 15 visits have now been conducted to projects across Australia – from Hobart in Tasmania, to Cairns in Queensland, to Derby in northern Western Australia, and many places in between, such as Wagga Wagga in New South Wales, and Melbourne, the Team's home base.

The recent six-day visit by Maya Haviland and Adam Tomison to the Jalaris project in Derby is a good example of the types of projects with which the team is working (see story below).

For further information regarding the operations of the Stronger Families Training and Support Team, please contact Dr Liz Branigan (03) 9214 7800; lizb@aifs.gov.au, or Dr Adam Tomison (03) 9214 7821; adamt@aifs.gov.au.

JALARIS PROJECT



The "Blue House" Young Women's Centre



Some of the regulars at the Mungarri drop-in centre



The group meeting (from left): James Pillsbury (Jalaris), Jan Lewis (FaCS), Tony Giamboi (FaCS), Adam Tomison (AIFS), Brett Morris (Jalaris)



Lorna Hudson, OAM (senior Bardi woman, Jalaris team)

The Jalaris Aboriginal Corporation, established in 1994 in Derby in the far north west of Western Australia, is attempting to meet the fundamental needs of the Aboriginal community's children for education, nutritious food, clothing, safety and health care by providing a centrally sited drop-in facility five days a week. Over the years, local children have been frequent visitors to the Jalaris "Mungarri" centre, often with their aunts and uncles and their jabby (grandfather), and they have been fed as a matter of course if they are hungry.

On the basis of its kinship with the community, and the reputation it has developed over the years, Jalaris received funding from the Stronger Families Fund to expand and professionalise what has been an informal service.

Jalaris estimates that there are as many as 200 children in the immediate area, of whom 50 or more may drop in each day. The kitchen supplies low cost nutritious meals, and sells cheap but healthy snacks like fruit iceblocks; a small games arcade is also available. Having attracted the children, Jalaris identifies health, emotional and social problems, including truancy, and in association with relevant professionals provides assistance.

Funding has also been provided for the "Blue House", a drop-in centre for young women and their children. This centre is designed to help young women to deal with general health issues, substance misuse, domestic violence, isolation, boredom and lack of education. It provides opportunities for the women to learn parenting skills and other practical activities, such as computer literacy, cooking and sewing.