



## National Child Protection Week: Protecting children is everyone's business

Adam Blakester

In September 2004, thousands of Australians came together and made protecting children their business. Organised annually by the NAPCAN Foundation, National Child Protection Week is a key event on the community calendar. NAPCAN's focus during the week is to increase awareness of the problem of child abuse and neglect, inspire people that there are simple things we can all do to help prevent abuse and break down the misperception that this issue can be dealt with by the welfare sector alone.

In 2004, NAPCAN worked to reposition the prevention of child abuse and neglect as a whole-of-community responsibility reinforced through the week's theme: "Protecting children is everyone's business". Individuals were encouraged to engage with their community and get together by holding an event for kids.

There was a positive response to NAPCAN's prevention message with many Australian communities actively supporting parents and children during National Child Protection Week. An estimated 96,500 people directly participated in this event, compared to 49,000 in 2003, and the total number of events doubled from 337 to 737.

The range of events organised during the week were diverse and included numerous breakfasts, information sessions and displays, as well as creative and family fun days. Some fun and simple activities were taken directly from the suggestions on NAPCAN's website and in the National Child Protection Week organiser's booklet, such as the staff who raised valuable funds for NAPCAN through a baby photo guessing competition.

Other activities showed originality and initiative. The Hawkesbury Child Protection Interest Group in New South Wales organised the display of positive child protection messages on school noticeboards and placed banners on council sites at key traffic locations. In the Northern Territory, the Oenpelli Community which had come together to create parenting resources using traditional stories and paintings in their own Bininj language, used NAPCAN child protection grants to create a CD-ROM on their community.

One of the highlights of National Child Protection Week was the support of children's champions, particularly Cathy Freeman who attended a Police Citizen's Youth Clubs Family Fun Day in Queensland. Channel 7's weather presenter, Nuala Hafner showed her support, hosting the National Launch. It was held in regional Armidale with more than 350 people attending a day of youth entertainment and children's activities.

At the Queensland Breakfast Launch, former Australian Cricket Captain and the 1989 Australian of the Year, Allan Border, spoke about his commitment to NAPCAN's vision of communities taking actions to preventing child abuse and neglect. In Victoria, Courageous and Inspired Community Awards were presented to twelve such communities during the week.

In the Australian Capital Territory, a Community Forum was held in which members of the audience actively brainstormed ideas that individuals and community groups could use to better support children and their carers. This event arose out of direct recommendations from the Vardon Report, in which the abuse of children in care in the Australian Capital Territory was examined. Community engagement is essential to National Child Protection Week.

Now imagine if the same effort and enthusiasm that goes into planning and participating in events for this special week went into preventing child abuse everyday. National Child Protection Week should be like a single snapshot of Child Friendly Communities preventing abuse and neglect of children.

National Child Protection Week 2005 will build on last year's success and develop a new theme around the concept of Child Friendly Communities.

For further information go to [www.napcan.org.au](http://www.napcan.org.au)

Adam Blakester is Executive Officer of the NAPCAN Foundation.

