

# Stronger Families Fund projects

*re - visited*

In the last edition of the Bulletin, a number of Stronger Families Fund projects spoke about their work. Here is some news about what they have been doing since then. All the projects were asked to respond to the same questions.



## Families NOW Beenleigh

MARITA HOLT

Families NOW has established an information desk for families adjacent to the Family Assistance Office at Beenleigh Centrelink, south of Brisbane. Families NOW provides information such as tip sheets on parenting and family issues, support and referral for families, a playroom for children, and parenting and budgeting courses for parents.

### *What has the project been doing since the report in the last Bulletin?*

Families NOW has progressed significantly on several fronts. We have been involved with several promotional activities such as Family Day, held at the Showgrounds in Brisbane and sponsored by 96.5 FM radio station, Beenleigh Marketplace, where

we held a stall and displayed information about who we are and what we do. At our Under 8s Week we handed out Families NOW show bags to children. We have been instrumental in the formation of a local Community Centres and Family Support Network. We have held a "Your Opinion Matters" workshop that involved clients and service providers coming together to evaluate Families NOW.

We have also started a fortnightly *Parenting Perspectives* article in the local newspaper, a six-monthly newsletter, and a web page that is upgraded regularly at [www.families-now.net](http://www.families-now.net). We are busy planning for our next lot of fun activities at the end of the year.

### *Who is working on the project? What are your roles?*

Marita Holt is the Coordinator of Families NOW and Dianna Dawson is the Project Officer. In addition, staff consists of volunteers, who play an important role in service delivery, and who are a valuable asset to our project.

We are overseen by a governance management committee.

Marita Holt oversees the day-to-day running and planning of Families NOW. She recruits, interviews, trains and supports staff, and is heavily involved in building community capacity and collaboration through partnerships. Dianna Dawson organises projects and events and the action research. She is also developing a plan for sustainability.

Families NOW's Governance Management Committee comprises:

*Vince Vernick*

Program Manager for Lutheran Community Care Queensland

*Theresa Leslie*

Manager, Beenleigh Centrelink

*Dorothy Aldred*

Senior Social Worker, Beenleigh Centrelink

*Patrick Geary*

Team Leader, Family Assistance Office, Beenleigh Centrelink



Families Now project officer Dianna Dawson and coordinator Marita Holt.



Visiting the playroom at Families Now are Jenny and her daughter Lucy.

Jenny Bouras

Customer Services Officer, Family Assistance Office, Beenleigh Centrelink

**What's been learned in the last six months that may be of interest and value to other developing projects?**

Families NOW has developed a client reference group from people who have participated in our courses. The group meets every two months for a coffee and to discuss issues or concerns that have come up, and will be involved in the action research. As each course finishes, participants are invited onto the reference group, which gives them the opportunity to continue relationships formed in the courses both with Families NOW and each other.

The playroom has given staff the opportunity to approach parents about issues or concerns relating to their children, for example tantrums, toilet training, behaviour etc. We change the theme in the playroom every month and encourage children to add to the theme by colouring in

drawings for the walls. For example, this month's theme has been on spring so we have asked the children to colour in leaves to place on trees on the wall.

Families NOW offers child care facilities for participants who attend the courses. The primary school we went into partnership with earlier this year offered to provide childcare and supper facilities for the courses as they were held at the school. Families NOW have also provided child care facilities for courses run at Beenleigh Centrelink. We try and provide as much assistance as possible to every participant so that parents can attend the courses without any hassles.

The "Your Opinion Matters" workshop that was held in July gave us some insights about what works at Families NOW. There were four main learnings from the evaluation process:

- clients appreciate a safe and comfortable space with staff who empathise with them;
- clients appreciate staff being facilitators and providing options for

problem solving rather than telling them what to do in a given situation;

- parenting workshops work better if parents are consulted first, courses are tailored to needs identified at these consultations and facilitators are parents themselves;
- clients appreciate Families NOW being accessible with no delays or queues, and the outreach work done – for example, in schools and shopping centres.

**How has the community responded to the project so far?**

To date, the community has responded positively to the Families NOW. We are becoming more and more well known among services and clients alike, and we are receiving more recognition in the community – for example, we are finalists in the Local Business Achievement Awards, which will be presented later in October.

We have had interest from other Centrelink Offices in Queensland and New South Wales and are looking at replicating Families NOW in other branches of Centrelink.



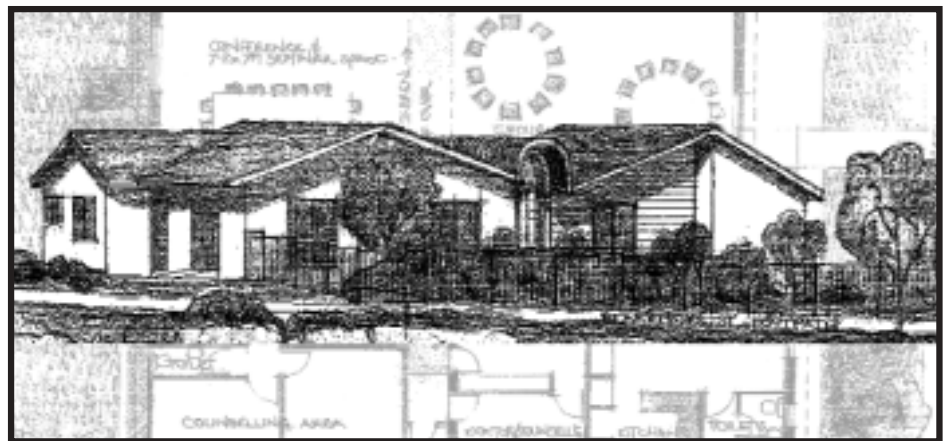
**Ashmont Community Resource Centre, Wagga Wagga**

ROB DONALD

In the last issue of the Bulletin, readers were introduced to the project at Ashmont Community Resource Centre, Wagga Wagga – a community-based family therapy centre to provide professional counselling and other services within the community of Ashmont with the aim of strengthening and supporting parents and families. The vision to be pro-active in addressing the family needs of the disadvantaged is slowly being realised. We take a holistic approach that assumes that all levels of family life will be benefited by our service.

**What has the project been doing since the report in the last Bulletin?**

We have worked hard to encourage Family Support Agencies from central



Ashmont Community Resource Centre

Wagga Wagga to offer their services from the Ashmont Community Resource Centre. We respond to crisis by enabling easier access to Family Support Agencies locally.

- Housing needs have been addressed by Tenancy Advocacy and Support Service (ACE Tenancy). It's amazing how many referrals to other Agencies grow out of this service.
- Fair Trading operates from the Centre one day a week to empower

locals to get appropriate professional services from the various sectors of the business-world.

- Relationships Australia now offers generalist counselling one day per fortnight.
- The Court Assistance Scheme offers assistance in Family Violence situations.
- More recently the Aboriginal Medical Centre has offered a doctor twice a week from our building.



- The Early Childhood Van is now located alongside our Centre two days per week.
- We are getting closer to other specialist services being offered from the Centre such as Women's Health, Drug and Alcohol workers, Financial Counsellors, and Gambling Counsellors. It has seemed slow going to get this many services involved but we have also learnt that we have to be careful not to advance too quickly. Family Support, Best Bets and Financial Counsellors joined us early in our program but we didn't immediately have a client-base for them so that their program has been delayed for a time.

#### *Educational seminars and workshops on family issues*

We are also pro-active in attempts to avoid family crisis by running education seminars and workshops on family issues, with a new program starting about every three weeks. Parenting programs have included: *1 2 3 Magic*, a four-week series on appropriate disciplining run by CentaCare; a two-week parenting series addressing the socialising needs of children run by the New South Wales Department of Education and Training; a six-week series, *How to Drug Proof your Children*, run by Focus on the Family educators; and a Foster Carers Parenting Workshop run by Anglicare. Centacare are also planning to run *Hey Dad for Dads*, *Parenting Teens*, and *Fathering after Separation*.

Other education programs have been arranged with TAFE: six sessions on *Introduction to Computing*; a literacy course focusing on Resume Writing; the Aboriginal Programs Unit Outreach Day; and a First-Aid Certificate Course (requested by locals).

Family Support Financial Counsellors ran a two-week course on Budgeting. Housing Needs have been addressed by two seminars from Shelter Housing. A two-day seminar on Sudden Infant death Syndrome was run particularly for 15 members of the Aboriginal Community, to address this health and child care issue. There is a fortnightly "Men's Group" addressing issues of separation and also a weekly sexual-assault support group – both initiated by the local community.

#### *Who is working on the project? What are your roles?*

Disadvantaged circumstances have left many of the residents of the Ashmont area feeling physically and socially isolated, and dis-empowered from seeking assistance from available Family Support Agencies. To redress this situation, the Ashmont Community Resource Centre has employed two part-time Liaison Officers, one of whom is Indigenous, to act as advocates for the community. They review the presenting issues and support clients to approach the appropriate agency or agencies.

The Project Manager is *Rob Donald*. For various reasons, staff turnover has been high. Nevertheless, the program has been much blessed by each staff member's unique contribution. Since June, *Therese Reid* has amply filled the role of Indigenous worker. The Aboriginal Community has benefited much from Therese's energy and vivacious manner, and members will long remember the NAIDOC Day celebrations she organised.

The non-Indigenous role is currently held by *Sandra Grentell*, who joined the project in late July. Sandra has considerable experience with the Women's Refuge which has inevitably brought her in contact with many of the families and Family Support Organisations that continue to be part of her life with us.

#### *What's been learned in the last six months that may be of interest and value to other developing projects?*

Eight months into our program, the number of Agencies available from the Centre is not as great as we had hoped. Below are listed the issues that affect the occupancy together with our responses to these to date.

##### *No provision in agency budgets for rental*

Response: Encourage them to pay less rent – sometimes nothing – or opt for less frequent attendance in order to start establishing a presence and slowly build a clientele in Ashmont.

##### *Inadequate agency staffing levels to accommodate the special needs of our local community*

Response: Use meetings and phone-calls to advocate for the community

and continue pressing for staffing positions to be created or filled.

##### *Inter-agency approach not part of tradition*

The same clients are often being helped by different agencies, but inter-agency client reviews can be difficult to plan, given that many staff are part-time, and that privacy issues have to be addressed.

Response: Accept that more planning is necessary to arrange inter-agency client review meetings, and that it takes time to get Boards and committees to approve arrangements. Inter-agency referral forms are important to get client permission to share information as defined by them. Sometimes one has to accept that, as long as the referral forms have been filled out, the liaison officers will go with clients to negotiate with the different agencies on the appropriate days. You need to allow for travel costs in your budget to cover this.

##### *Agencies' wish to centralise records and services*

Response: For these agencies (such as CentreLink) we have information available at the Centre so that the liaison officers can educate clients as to what is available to help them elsewhere, and make appointments or referrals as appropriate.

##### *Need to build trust*

Present agency client-lists have few Ashmont clients as local community members have, in the past, been reluctant to seek help from agencies in town.

Response: As the Centre builds trust, community members are presenting themselves and client-referral lists are growing. We have been quite creative in finding ways to build trust and simply attract people to the Centre, to familiarise themselves with it, and then have us make referrals for individual counselling as appropriate.

##### *Funding needed for emergency relief*

Response: Funds for emergency relief are being sought from the Department of Family and Community Services Emergency Relief Program. Strict guidelines for distribution, including the need for recipients to receive appropriate counselling, are recognised.

### *How to build up client involvement*

More educational programs have been introduced at an earlier stage than originally planned, with funding provided by the WWCC Neighbourhood scheme to support families unable to pay for workshops. A potential client contact list is thus being established.

Unfortunately, it is often the same core group who attend different programs, yet each time the list is being extended by an extra two to four. The number of clients from Ashmont attending any one program is smaller than hoped, but there are encouraging signs. For example, the parenting programs which in the past have been run in the schools by Department of Education and Training have had greater attendance at our venue. We are learning that small numbers do not reduce the quality of presentation nor the benefit to those who do attend. We have found that clients do open up more in smaller groups and educators have been able to adopt their material more to meet individual needs. For example, in one parenting program the educators just happened to be familiar with the children of parents who attended, and so were able to personalise their material and present it in a way that addressed particular situations. This would have been too invasive in a bigger group.

We are also working with the agencies before they start renting the counselling rooms to develop, or identify existing, educational programs, which will attract local folk. For example, Relationships Australia have been successful in offering anger-management workshops in Canberra and then offering family therapy to address family violence with all levels of the family. We are working towards these being offered in Ashmont.

It is also recognised that periodic repeating of seminars familiarises the community with the services offered and they then become the referral points for future like seminars. It is therefore intended to periodically repeat programs.

We have also run regular community BBQ days. Free monthly sausage sizzles have attracted about 40–60 people each time. On NAIDOC Day we

ran a big function including culturally appropriate games by the Department of Sports and Recreation, face-painting (using culturally-correct colours and symbols), kid's art, didgeridoo player and dancers, appropriately decorated big sponge cakes and Johnny cakes, as well as the BBQ. A big tent was erected and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags were mounted on flag poles hired for the occasion. Fortunately we were able to get funding from the Local Council and AIATSIS to cover costs. About 200 people enjoyed this cross-cultural experience.

The many cultural activities on NAIDOC Day have grown into workshops on Didgeridoo making, painting and playing for the boys of the community and other cultural strengthening programs like Aboriginal Art, Dance and Storytelling. TAFE have been very helpful in funding these.

The Community Health Early Childhood Van is now located next to the Centre so that Programs can be run by Community Health to compliment this activity and gradually build a cliental for more intensive family counselling services to be offered by them and others in the future.

The Aboriginal Medical and Dental Corporation now offers medical services from the Centre two days a week and this too is promoting other services to their clients.

### *How has the community responded to the project so far?*

The Aboriginal Elders now regularly attend the Resource Centre for meetings and just for a cuppa and a chat. People are starting to drop in and treat the place as home. For example, one person met us on a BBQ day and dropped in frequently after that. She later sought help to relocate after being assaulted by her neighbour. The inter-agency approach was able to identify sources of assistance and provide advocacy for new housing, travel, removal and the many establishment costs.

This is only one example of the crisis response. It will take time for the many education programs to have recognisable benefit in reducing crisis. This is our aim as more and more folk seek help just because we're there!



## Enfield Child Development and Family Centre

LEAH DE ZEN

Enfield Early Learning Service, Adelaide, is a coordinated and holistic approach to providing supports to families and children in one of the most disadvantaged communities in South Australia. The service will establish flexible and sustainable responses in the areas of health care and educational opportunities for families with children 0–12 years residing in the areas around the Enfield Primary School.

### *What has the project been doing since the report in the last Bulletin?*

At the time of the last report the project was still very much in the planning stage. The Steering group of the Enfield Early Learning Service and the senior management group (Enabling group) have met regularly to work through issues relating to the ongoing development of the formal partnerships between the Departments of Child and Youth Health and Education and Children's Services, as well as the day-to-day project business of employing a coordinator etc.

In July a coordinator was employed, and since then has been meeting project partners and getting a feel for the history and vision of the Project, making links with local service providers, mapping services, identifying gaps, and most importantly, consulting with the community and encouraging participation in the Project.

The Project has also been establishing its governance model. A community committee meets every three weeks and focuses on community participation and identification of community needs. A service providers' committee looks at collaboration and links between local services in response to community needs. A management body oversees the Project's direction. The management body has representatives from the



community and service providers group as well as from Project partners. It is intended that the management group will reflect the needs of all three stakeholder groups – community, service providers and partners.

Although the coordinator has been on board for only six weeks at the time of writing, the Project has made many links with local service providers and has already started to work on several activities such as a new arrivals playgroup and parent network groups.

*Who is working on the project? What are your roles?*

The project has a team of dedicated individuals who have driven the vision from the start. Leah De Zen, the newly appointed coordinator, has worked with disadvantaged families and communities for the past five years. We also have a part-time administrative officer, Cherida Hall, who helps with tasks such as taking the meeting minutes and developing communication strategies.

*What's been learned in the last six months that may be of interest and value to other developing projects?*

We've learned that:

- Managing several different committees and the related group dynamics takes quite a bit of energy.
- Establishing effective communication strategies in the early stages is important and increases the success of collaborative partnerships.
- Strong planning before the implementation stage is important to the long term success of the project.

*How has the community responded to the project so far?*

The community has responded with great enthusiasm and commitment with 17 local mums joining the Community Advisory Group. There has been a great response to the consultations that were held in an informal one-to-one environment. Some very innovative ideas have been suggested, like a Community Garden, Drop In Café for parents to network and a Dad's shed.



**Goldfields Men's Health Project**

**CLAIR READ**

The full title of the Project is *Strengthening men and their families in mining communities of the Eastern Goldfields, Kalgoorlie*. In partnership with State Public Health, this Project will implement a preventative, early intervention approach to the social, family, psychological and physical wellbeing of men and their families in the mining communities using strategies such as networking, collaboration, awareness raising, and production of resources.

*What has the project been doing since the report in the last Bulletin?*

A one day men's health forum, *Working Men's Health, It's Your Choice* was held in June. Targeted at Occupational Health and Safety personnel, men and their partners, employers and health and social service providers, the forum included a keynote presentation, five other presentations, focus groups and reports back from each focus group. Topics presented on included: fatherhood, shift work and fatigue, alcohol & other drugs, physical health and depression and stress. The forum aimed to raise awareness of men's health in the Goldfields, how different issues affected their families and how these issues that may impact on both their personal and family life could be prevented. An extensive evaluation indicated that overall the forum was a success.

A health promotion network group has been established consisting of occupational health and safety representatives (including mine site nurses) from six mines in the Kalgoorlie-Boulder area. This overall purpose of this group is to achieve a constructive, collaborative network for occupational health and safety personnel in the mining industry in the Goldfields.

This group will share ideas and resources, help identify needs that



Enfield Community Advisory Group at work.



Goldfields's Men's Health Inc Project Officer Clair Read outside the "Paddington Gold Mine" owned by AurionGold.

mine site employers/employees may have and provide health promotion services including information and education. This group will also help identify family-friendly strategies that have or could be undertaken on mine sites within the region. After only two meetings, I have received interest from another two mines wanting to participate in the group. The group meetings will also provide an opportunity for attendees to identify areas of professional development such as intervention training.

Men's Health week, from 26 August to 1 September, provided a great opportunity to again raise awareness of men's health issues and hold a Fathers' Day event on the 1st of September. Information stalls with information displays and pamphlets on relevant men's health and family issues were held during the week and then, on Sunday, a Fathers' Day picnic in the park was held.

Men's health checks were conducted; there were information displays; the Parenting Information Van was accessible to all those who attended the park; pamphlets were on display for people to browse; men's health information bags were distributed to all men who attended (although we did run out very quickly); games were held for both dads and children; and a free BBQ was held.

Many other activities for the project are ongoing with great support from local media.

**Who is working on the project?  
What are your roles?**

Clair Read is the Project Officer and coordinates all activities that the project undertakes. The project is managed by *Helen Brown*, Health Programs Manager at the Eastern Goldfields Medical Division of General Practice, and is overseen by Goldfields Men's Health Incorporated – a committee consisting of representatives from the Eastern Goldfields Medical Division of General Practice, Northern Goldfields Health Service, GPs, service providers (Centrecare and other psychologists), the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and the Chamber of Minerals and Energy. The project also has representation and direct participation by Federal and State politicians based in Kalgoorlie-Boulder.

**What's been learned in the last six months that may be of interest and value to other developing projects?**

Networking! This project would not have advanced as it has without networking with key stakeholders within the community that have had an impact on the project. The assistance from those with interest in the project, the mining industry and the Kalgoorlie-Boulder community has enabled the activities and events that have been undertaken to be successful.

Support from the local media has also been a great advantage when promoting events and also creating awareness of different issues. Create a good relationship with radio producers and journalists and they will help support your project in any way they can.

Asking for representatives from different organisations to assist in planning events ensures a collaborative approach.

**How has the community responded to the project so far?**

The Kalgoorlie-Boulder community has responded to the project move really well so far with ongoing support from all, including the mining industry. This is evident from the number of community organisations that sponsored and supported the men's health forum. We received \$2000 from the Chamber of Minerals and Energy Community Relations Committee, and thirteen local organisations sponsored the event.



Kristy Betteridge, Clair Read (Project Officer) and Debbie Broughton at Goldfield Men's Health Inc. Father's Day Picnic.





## Goodwood Connect

### DENNIS CRISPIN

Goodwood Connect in Goodwood, Tasmania, is a community capacity building project to build strong families through early identification of issues for children 0–5 years, and young people and families at risk.

#### *What has the project been doing since the report in the last Bulletin?*

The project has been continuing to build connections in the Goodwood community through existing community groups. A couple of new groups have been established and supported by the Connect process. The first is the “Goodwood Together” group which formed following a citizenship training course, offered to people who attended a community event organised by local Precinct Committee and the community centres.

Once people finished the training, they felt they wanted to continue to meet socially and at the same time develop relationships and build trust within the community at large. They are already planning a get-together for families in the local park and inviting all residents. The second group was set up after a public meeting to discuss the poor access across a major highway which separates the homes from the school. The group will lobby to improve access and has already designed a questionnaire to gather vital data. It has also spoken to other nearby schools with similar issues.

We have formed our three sub-groups looking at what we want to achieve from the project. One of the groups is considering the issue of consultation with the broader community to find out the issues and concerns facing the residents.

#### *Who is working on the project? What are your roles?*

So far we have only *Dennis Crispin*, the facilitator, but we are looking to employ a person to help with the administrative load and provide some links and assistance with the consultations with the community.

#### *What’s been learned in the last six months that may be of interest and value to other developing projects?*

We received some interesting responses from people who did not attend a community family picnic held in June. Most had heard about the event (so the publicity via community newsletters worked) but had chosen not to attend for a variety of reasons – some wanted activities not involving parents and others had problems with the use of the word “picnic” (it’s not really picnic weather in Tassie in June).

There are a number of issues around trust with the Connect process and the burden it may place on people already working hard in the community. It is important to recognise the good work which is already going on in the community.

#### *How has the community responded to the project so far?*

We think, fairly well, although it is still early days and our approach has been to build relationships with existing community groups. Hopefully by developing these relationships we will achieve greater acceptance.



**T**he Bernard van Leer Foundation has been involved in early childhood care and development through the provision of grants to projects around the world. Many of the ideas, methods and approaches have been developed through their “Effectiveness Initiative” which seeks to understand and share “what makes an effective program work”.

The Bernard van Leer Foundation is a private foundation, established in 1949, and based in The Netherlands. It operates internationally. Its income is derived from the bequest of Bernard van Leer, a Dutch industrialist and philanthropist, who lived from 1883–1958. Bernard van Leer was the founder of Royal Packaging Industries Van Leer.

The Foundation aims to enhance opportunities for children aged 0–8 years growing up in circumstances of social and economic disadvantage, with the objective of developing their potential to the greatest extent possible. The Foundation concentrates on children in this age group because research findings have demonstrated that interventions in the early years of childhood are most effective in yielding lasting benefits to children and society.

The Foundation accomplishes its objective through two interconnected strategies:

- a grant-making program in selected countries aimed at developing culturally and contextually appropriate approaches to early childhood care and development;
- the sharing of knowledge and know-how in the domain of early childhood development with the aim of informing and influencing policy and practice.

## IMPORTANT

### Have you contacted us yet to join our mailing list?

If you or your organisation would like to remain on the Stronger Families mailing list to receive future Bulletins, you will need to contact us at the Stronger Families Learning Exchange on (03) 9214 7828 or Freecall: 1800 352 275. You can also email [strongerfamilies@aifs.gov.au](mailto:strongerfamilies@aifs.gov.au) or send back the tear-off slip on the inside back cover.

Anyone who has already contacted us, or Stronger Families Fund projects, Early Intervention projects, or Department of Family and Community Services contacts, will already be on the mailing list.

