

Stronger Families Fund projects

update

The following projects were introduced in the previous issue of the Bulletin (Spring/Summer 2002). Here's an update on their progress. A number of questions were asked of each project.



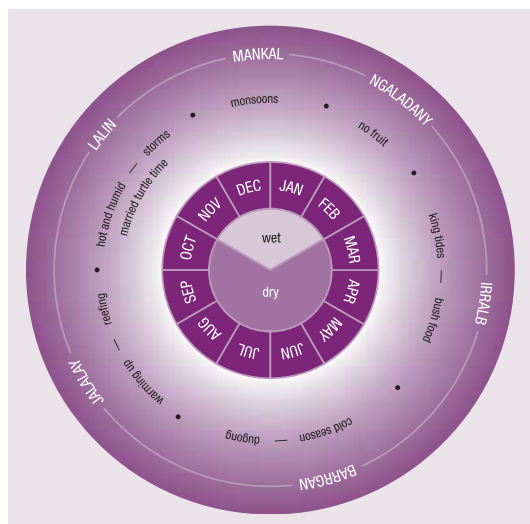
Building strong and healthy families in Derby

Jalaris Aboriginal Corporation

The Jalaris Aboriginal Corporation has taken a coordinated and holistic approach to addressing major issues affecting family strength and health in Derby with a particular focus on meeting the fundamental needs (such as adequate nutrition) of Indigenous parents and young children.

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

Since the last report we closed the Jalaris Drop-In Centre for Mankal, because the heat and humidity were extreme, and have thought long and hard about what happened during the last year. In this part of the Kimberley we don't have the four seasons of spring, summer, fall, winter; we have six seasons as below.



The numbers using our service were almost overwhelming: 389 clients (8% of Derby's population) for a total of 2251 visits, mostly kids dropped off for the morning by their parents. We had children from outlying communities and other Kimberley towns, and at one stage had to turn some away because they were using up too many of the resources meant for the Derby children.

The popularity of the Drop-In Centre was fun for the kids and convenient for the parents, but was too much for the Jalaris people. We were concerned that too many of the parents were just using us to dump the kids on to someone else, whereas the aim of our project is to strengthen the families, make them healthier, with better physical and emotional caring.

So in the spirit of action research we have redesigned our project to focus specifically on family health – to concentrate on bringing parenting and health education to the foreground of our service, with child care/nutrition as one of our tools, rather than our only tool. This has involved a lot of work in remodelling the layout of our buildings and providing a room for the mothers to learn the skills they have told us they want (such as sewing, cooking, computing, art).

Argyle Diamonds and Western Metals Corporation have sponsored us to purchase and equip a caravan as a Health Education Unit which, in association with the Derby Aboriginal Health Service, we will use to bring health awareness right to the homes of people in Derby and to the outlying communities and stations. With the medical equipment and educational information in the caravan, we will be able to introduce people to the basic health checks like blood pressure, weight, blood glucose level,

and heart rate. This will not involve doing the checks themselves, but just making people familiar with them so they will feel more comfortable about going to the clinic.

Two other projects associated with the Drop-In Centre will depend on funding for a bus coming through. Once that happens we will start our Elder Support program, whereby we hope to assist the old people not eligible for HACC services to do their shopping and attend social and cultural activities. We also hope to use the bus to take families from town to the outlying communities, to visit their traditional elders and country.

Who is working on the project? What are their roles?

The Chairperson of Jalaris is Mrs Bidy Morris. Bidy was born in Derby in 1944 but was raised on nearby Sunday Island and the Wotjalum Mission by her traditional Aboriginal grandmother until she returned to Derby in the late 1950s. Since then she has lived in Derby. Bidy began volunteer work in the early 1980s supplying low cost clothing and goods from one of the first Aboriginal stores to open in the town. The store was run in conjunction with the government department now known as the Department for Community Development, and operated for 10 years until handed over to Ngunga Women's Group. Bidy and her husband then created the Jalaris Store based in the Town Reserve community, where they continued to supply low-cost clothing and goods and also began selling groceries.

The CEO of Jalaris is Bidy Morris' husband Brett. Brett came from South Australia and married Bidy in 1985. He spent some years working as a caretaker on local stations before becoming,

in 1990, the bookkeeper for Burrinunga Aboriginal Corporation, set up in conjunction with the Department for Community Development and responsible for the community's housing. He held this position until 1999.

In 1994 Jalaris became incorporated and he opened the Jalaris Store. Brett managed the store until 1996 when Jalaris sold it to finance the building of the Jalaris compound. He then coordinated Rural Access Program funding to develop the infrastructure for the Jalaris kitchen and nutrition program. At the same time he supervised the Mungarri Nutrition Program for the Derby Alcohol Action Group. Brett has been the supervisor for the Jalaris Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) workforce since 1994, responsible for the training of the young men and women who built the facilities in the Jalaris compound. He is also a supervisor for the Department of Justice's community service program for offenders.

It should be noted that Bidy and Brett worked on all these projects as unpaid volunteers.

James Pillsbury is an American-born resident who has lived in Derby since 1987. He possesses a BA in Sociology and

has been involved with the Aboriginal community since arriving in Derby. He initiated a harm minimisation program called the Mungarri Nutrition Project in 1994, under the auspices of the Derby Alcohol Action Group, funded by the West Australian Drug Abuse Strategy Office. James was the Contract Manager for the project and worked closely with Jalaris to set it up and run it. He subsequently worked for Jalaris as a voluntary consultant helping to plan and develop its programs.

James was the Treasurer of Derby Meals on Wheels from 1994 to 1999 and was responsible for its day-to-day operations. He is a past Chairman and continuing member of the Derby Local Drug Action Group, and was Secretary of the Derby Aged Persons Homes Trust until it was taken over by the Shire. He worked at the Derby Frail Aged Hostel, largely occupied by Aboriginal residents, as an Assistant Supervisor from 1994 until 2002, when he became the full-time Project Coordinator for the Jalaris Drop-In Centre.

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

That is a hard question. We believe deeply in the local solutions to

local issues philosophy that forms the basis of the Stronger Families Fund approach. Everything about the way we work at Jalaris is based on personal relationships, trust built up over years and even lifetimes, and a compassionate response to the troubles of others. Our methods depend on these local and personal relationships, so it is difficult to translate our experience into other projects. We think the SFLEX researchers are in a good position to do that, and we have found our researcher, Maya Havilland, to be a very supportive and useful visitor.

How has the community responded so far?

The community response to the Drop-In Centre has been overwhelmingly supportive, both in terms of the clients who have come to us and the help we have received from other community organisations and businesses. We have been sponsored for everything from toys and playground equipment to computers and caravans; from voluntary teachers to gifts of food and clothing. Once again, all of this support has come from carefully developed relationships built up over time in our local community.



Connecting Families Project Wagga Wagga

Leah Anderson

Targeting small rural towns and communities identified as having limited access to services, this project aims to strengthen families by addressing the needs of vulnerable families and children who are at risk developmentally or have behavioural concerns, by linking with existing childcare and family support services.

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

The Connecting Families project conducted consultations with community members, which resulted in

the development of a mapping document that provides an overall view of the seven communities involved in the project. The document lists the gaps identified by community members and possible individualised models that would be suitable to implement. The project then identified the most appropriate model for each community, and has since been working on these models with both community members and service providers to begin their implementation.

To enhance and increase community participation in the project, community activities have been held. In the January school holidays, activity days for Humula and Mangoplah communities were convened. Run in partnership with the NSW Department of Sport and Recreation, the day began with sports activities for children of all ages, commencing at 9.30 a.m. and

finishing at 3.30 p.m. Preschool children were accompanied by a parent and activities for this group were held until midday.

The events continued in the evening with a community barbecue provided by the school committee, followed by a family film night at 6.00 p.m. Both communities had 90% participation and the feedback received indicated community gratitude for being important enough to have activities brought to them, and for stimulating social interaction. These communities have since begun to plan ways of holding similar events as a regular part of their interaction with each other and outreaching services.

The Wagga Wagga City Council holds a *Summer in the Park* series where family activities and entertainment are provided for the community once a month in a local park. March saw the *Summer in the Park* series ▶





held in Forest Hill, with the Connecting Families project participating. This day was a great success with many families from the area spending the afternoon walking around and enjoying the atmosphere. One hundred information packages were distributed to families, which included information on local playgroups, dates for the early childhood van visiting their area, activities to do with children at home, a copy of a simple play dough recipe, and a copy of the Wagga Wagga Childhood Directory, which lists services for families and children.

The project is currently working with the Tarcutta community to hold an activity day on 17 April. This will be held in collaboration with the Playgroup and will include a jumping castle, face painting, balloon entertainment, sports activities and a sausage sizzle. The community is working together to make the day a success and is excited about the upcoming event. Planning has also begun for an event to be held in September.

Who is working on the project? What are their roles?

No changes have occurred since the last Bulletin report. Leah Anderson remains the Connecting Families Project Worker, whose role is to coordinate the project, research models (with a lot of help from Carole Jean at the Strengthening Families Clearinghouse), liaise with communities and service providers and

encourage the communities to participate in events.

Janice Saw, the Social Development Manager, and Jenny Grantley, the Social Planner at Wagga Wagga City Council, remain the project management body and provide a supportive network in which the project worker operates.

How has the Community responded to the project so far?

All seven communities have responded in a positive way towards the project, with some communities expressing more enthusiasm than others. For those communities where an activity has been held, residents have shown their support by attending the activities in large numbers, with some families postponing holidays to attend. Feedback from community members in relation to the project has been positive, with residents and community groups identifying positive outcomes for their community through participation in the project.

Service providers have also given positive feedback in relation to the project, with many beginning to identify new and extended ways of working with the project to meet their communities' needs.

What has been learned in the past six months that may be of interest and value to other developing projects?

One learning stems from preparation undertaken for the project presentation to the 8th Australian Institute of

Family Studies Conference held on the 12–14 February, and has to do with Action Research. In having to show how the project has used action research, our team looked at the cycles that had been undertaken. These were:

- the overall cycles of the project as a whole;
- the cycles for each individual objective;
- cycles within the objectives for the activities undertaken.

This enabled us to assess and look at the project on different levels.

We were able to see clearly how the assumptions we had made in the development of the project related to the reality of the environment. The Action Research model has allowed us to observe, question and redefine, helping our practice to better match and meet community expectations and needs. For example, our original assumption that we would be able to develop a single model of service delivery has been modified, as there are significant differences within the seven communities. Thus the project now sees seven very individual approaches to meeting community needs.

The Action Research approach has allowed the project the freedom to change and develop with the communities, instead of trying to make the communities fit a given model.



Redland Community Centre Inc Strengthening Families Project

Jill Tilson

The project includes an eight-week parenting course called 'Toddler Tactics'. Evaluation and celebration takes place in the eighth week. On completion of the course, parents have the option of forming a parent support group or of receiving at-home support, which may be provided by parent support workers and/or a network of volunteers.

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

The Redland Community Centre has conducted eleven parenting courses involving 110 parents. Each course has evolved into a support group with about half that number attending the follow-up groups. Twenty parents have received in-home support.

Two more training courses for new volunteers have been completed. Two 'top-up' workshops, one for current volunteers, and one for workers have also been conducted. We currently have thirteen volunteers actively involved. Six volunteers have left the project to attend TAFE or University courses, and two have left to gain employment.

The overwhelming demand for the project was such that an extra trainer/facilitator was needed to conduct some of the courses and groups. The number of adjunct child carers was increased from two to five, all of whom work on a casual basis.

To help connect parent groups, a newsletter was initiated and is distributed monthly. In December 2002 a Christmas party was held on the Bayside Foreshore. Representatives from most courses and groups attended, with a total of 30 parents, 40 children, six volunteers and six workers. The success of the Christmas party resulted in requests for further events, which led to planning for an Easter Picnic in April where the children painted a mural on calico.



First group of parents arrive for the project's 2002 christmas party.

It was mounted onto a wooden frame and now hangs in the community centre. At the time of writing, planning for a Teddy Bears Picnic was underway.

What has been learned that may be of interest and value to other projects?

The majority (83%) of total respondents to the exit evaluation indicated an increase in confidence in their parenting. This was attributed, in part, to the level of trust and sharing that took place in the various forums. One of the factors that facilitated this, they indicated, was the process of creating group rules and the feeling they had of acceptance and self-worth.

The demand for in-home support has been less than anticipated, with feedback received indicating that there was a stigma attached to it. We have since changed the name and focus to 'individual support', with the venue a place of parents' choosing, e.g. a

park, coffee shop, or at home. This has resulted in a slight increase in interest in this program so far. Parents also remarked that the support received from each other in the networks they formed has negated the need for individual support from project workers and volunteers.

Lack of transport was an issue for parents at times, and we were able to use the Community Centre van to provide transport to enable them to attend the courses and groups. These journeys, in fact, became informal individual support, as problems were often discussed on the journey and a coffee was had at the end! Also, some parents from Macleay Island were able to attend the Easter picnic, as we were able to collect them from the ferry.

When the first three courses and groups had finished, parents indicated that, although they had made



Parents and carers gathering for morning tea at the christmas party.



their own networks and were continuing to meet informally, they wanted to maintain regular contact with the project. So we began 'The Drop In' to enable this to happen. These are facilitated by the Project Manager and conducted fortnightly. The parents choose topics and guest speakers are invited where necessary. Initially we could not supply child minding and the parents indicated that there was no point without it. So with the support of the Community Centre we are able to provide adjunct child-care.



More fun at the christmas party.

Indeed, the provision of adjunct child care has been one of the most important factors in the success of the project. Some parents who had never previously used child care experienced separation anxiety.

We asked parents how we could help them to overcome more easily any anxiety they had about leaving their children. A suggestion was made that meeting with the child carers and seeing the venue beforehand would be helpful. Initially, due to time constraints, we invited parents to 'drop in' to meet the child carers on a set day between 10 a.m. and 12 noon in the week prior to the commencement of the next set of courses. Because it was so beneficial, we decided for the future, that it would be better still if we could encourage every parent to do this. We therefore arranged individual appointments with the course facilitators and child carers a week before the commencement of the course. This was done for the last set of courses. We believe it was successful in eliminating some anxiety and reducing the rush on the first session. Parents knew what to expect, what to bring and already had a familiar face to relate to.

How has the project incorporated action research into its work, and how is the project recording its processes and learnings?

Incorporated into the project are pre and post-project questionnaires, written evaluations and reflective listening circles based on the work of Michael White. (For example, see Chapter Four from White, M. (2000) *Reflections on Narrative Practice: Essays and Interviews*, Adelaide, Dulwich Centre Publications or go to <http://www.dulwichcentre.com.au/reflectingarticle2.html>.) Professor Bob Dick contributed to this process by vetting the proposed key questions.

The evaluations are completed at the end of each session of the parenting courses, the entire course, and each group and individual parent support session. With the permission of participants, contributions to the listening circles are recorded and typed up later. Photos have also been taken again with permission.

Volunteers and workers are included in these evaluations and both the Child Care Leader and Facilitator give written and verbal reports to the Project Manager. Stories and any other evidence is stored in a separate locked cupboard and a reflective diary is kept by the Manager.

DO YOU KNOW ABOUT

The Good Practice Projects Database?

What is the database?

The Good Practice Projects Database is a database of Australian projects which adopt a primary prevention or early intervention approach in their work with families or communities. It aims to keep service providers in touch with what others across the country are doing to help strengthen families or communities. Particular emphasis is given to projects working with families with young children that use action research methodology.

Primary prevention activities aim to prevent the development of problems or risk factors. Early intervention activities target individuals or groups who may be at risk of developing problems or who are exposed to potentially harmful environments.

Action research involves a repeated cycle of planning, implementation of change, evaluation and further planning.

Contributions are invited

If your work has a primary prevention or early intervention approach to helping families and/or communities, and if it includes evaluation as part of its methodology, you are invited to submit details to the Stronger Families Learning Exchange (SFLEX). Such work might include home visiting, parent education, counselling, family support, training, community education, advocacy, research, or community development.

For a description of the Good Practice Projects Database please see <http://www.aifs.gov.au/sf/database.html>. If you would like to contribute information about your project, an application for inclusion in the database can be downloaded in PDF format from <http://www.aifs.gov.au/sf/database-form.pdf> and faxed to the SFLEX on 03 9214 7839. Alternatively, contact Ellen Fish on 03 9214 7828 (or email: strongerfamilies@aifs.gov.au) for further information.