

Trip to Melbourne

This humorous article is a personal reflection on the authors' experiences during their working trip to the National Workshop for Stronger Families Fund projects in Melbourne.



My first time in Melbourne. Well what a trip! One that I will not forget in hurry.

Day one

We were on the first direct plane flight from Broome to Melbourne, the Pigram Boys were at the airport to play us away with their music, the people coming off the plane were all wearing a string of pearls. I said to Shelly "I wonder what we will get when we get on the plane". She said "probably nothing". Well she was right, we got nothing. Then we got to Melbourne and caught a taxi. We asked him to take us to the hotel. Well, he just looked at us and said "what, the YWCA?". We both looked at each other and shook our heads: "No the Y Hotel". Off we went, he got us there all right, it was the YWCA!!! Shelly was amazed and I won't say what she said. We proceeded to book in and off-load our bags and then back down stairs to find out where to get a feed.

The lady said go five blocks to your right. Well we started out the wrong way, then we got some instructions from some tourists. Well I tell ya, one block is one kilometre, which meant

Ronda Clarke and the Derby Crew

that we had to go five kilometres to get a feed. On our way there Shelly decided that she would like Hungry Jacks. We found it, but it was closed. Disappointment started to settle in. We looked up the street and saw a KFC sign, so we decided to get KFC, but when we got there they had no chicken, Ha! Ha! We were told to wait ten minutes for the chicken to cook. While we were waiting a young man approached and asked us if we could give him 80 cents so that he could buy some food. Shelly just gave him the rest of her chips. We both just laughed.

Twenty minutes passed and still no sign of a feed. Shelly went back inside to inquire about the chicken, meanwhile the Manager was giving a customer back his money and told him that there was literally no chicken. Shelly started to laugh. What? KFC with no chicken? Ha! Ho! The waitress reassured Shelly that they had just enough for us – thank god for that we were starved. We started to eat our tea, then we were approached by a young girl who asked if we could give her some money because her car had

dribbled out all the fuel and she need to buy a gerry-can and some fuel to re-fuel the car. I just burst out laughing and replied, "Why would you want to buy more fuel to put in the car for it to dribble out again?" She walked away not very happy. There were some Chinese students sitting at the table next to us and they were laughing too. Shelly asked, "Is Melbourne always like this?" They replied, "Yes".

After tea we decided to take the long walk back to the Y Hotel (YWCA) Ha! Ha! But who should pass us but the young man that had asked us for 80 cents, his hands were full of coins. Shelly and myself just started laughing again. We arrived back at the Hotel. I got into bed while Shelly was in the bathroom, I yelled out to her, "The beds are quite comfortable, maybe Melbourne will look different in the daylight!"

The next morning we meet two ladies from Darwin who are also here for the Stronger Families Workshop. We swapped names and had a chat and a coffee then we proceeded to go down town to look at the shops. As we were



walking, Shelly decided she needed a toilet. We happened to be just outside the Movie Cinema. She proceeded to ask were the ladies room was. The young girl at the counter replied that to use the toilets she would have to buy a ticket, so we both decided to buy a ticket to use the toilet – this cost us \$13.60. This would have been the most expensive piddle that we had ever had. We looked at each other again and laughed.

The next day was the Workshop. The first workshop was about Action Research. Well, we ended up in a debate on Action Research, and this was a very interesting day.

That night we decided to go to the Crown to have tea, as we had been told that the waterfall at the front entrance was just excellent and so was the towers of fire, and it was a *must* to see the chandelier come down, at the Crown. Well we were disappointed again, after waiting with head bent for half an hour, it didn't come down. Then we were told that Melbourne was on water restrictions and so no waterfall, but one good thing – we did see the towers of fire.

Day two

On Day Two we went off to our workshops and then that night we all had Dinner at the Y Hotel. After dinner we were all watching an education video

in the next room and when we went back to our tables to get a drink and sit down, the tables had been cleared away. In other words dinner was over and they were kicking us out, so we all proceeded to go across the road to a hotel (pub) – there would have been about 30 of us. We were all drinking expensive drinks and having a great time. Shelly went to get herself a second drink only to be told that there was no more ice. Shelly said, "What, No Ice! You have to be joking." Shelly then decided that she couldn't drink a hot drink so she proceeded to go to the shop next door and buy a bag of ice. She brought the ice back to the Hotel and we all filled our glasses with ice, everyone was cheering her on, she walked up to the bar-tender and handed him the ice. Everyone was happy. Then at 10.30 the bar-tender decided he wanted to go home and he told us that we had to leave. We all couldn't believe what was happening. What – a pub with no ice, and now closing early! Ha! Ha!

Day three

By this time the "action research" from last night was only just starting to wear off and the reflection on the night before was about to unfold. We all met at the best coffee shop in Melbourne, Cafe Scaletti, right next to the Y Hotel (sorry, correction, YWCA). We all went inside to the last day of

the workshop. Only one thing I would like to have changed on that day was the talks, the reflection from last night had finally settled in and the evaluation was not looking good for some.

The workshop ended and we said our goodbyes to everyone. That night, there were still a few of us left so we decided to go out to tea. We walked five kilometres again to somewhere that was not what we all expected and we were all feeling tired, so we decided to take a taxi. Well it happened again. The taxi driver wouldn't take us because we were not going to make enough money. He told us to take the tram, off we walked to take a tram. Well the tram that we caught wouldn't take us because he wasn't taking passengers. Ha! Ha! Shelly and myself just broke out in laughter. Melbourne, what a place, I reckon you have to have a good sense of humour, good pair of legs, be able to communicate with different people, and make sure you don't want any hospitality at all, and that you're ready to shop for miles because everything is spread out through the suburbs. Other than that, the old buildings are lovely and the weather, it's great. My face didn't melt once. Just one big Thank You and that was for Cafe Scaletti. The coffee and hospitality is the best that you will ever get anywhere in the world – a really great crew. Also thanks

PROMOTING THE RIGHTS OF THE FAMILY

Key agencies unite to support parents who have learning difficulties

The forum, *Strengthening Every Family – Supporting parents who have learning difficulties* was hosted by the Office of the Public Advocate and Victorian Parenting Centre, on 9 July 2003. Eighty-five participants from the Department of Human Services and the community services sector working in parent support, intellectual disability, child protection and advocacy attended the forum.

The keynote speaker *Professor Gwynnyth Llewellyn* from the University of Sydney said there was a need for services to respond to parents with intellectual disability in the context of the broader social and economic factors which effect all parents. "Disability is not an individual problem. It is about the way we regard people and the support and services society provides – this is what enables them or dis-ables them," she said.

Dr David Sykes from the Office of the Public Advocate said: "The current adversarial nature of the legal and service system can place the rights of the child against those of the parent. We should really be promoting the rights of the family".

The forum discussions highlighted several key issues:

1. A lack of clarity around what constitutes "adequate" parenting. This provides an opportunity for assessments of parenting to be significantly influenced by judgements values and perceptions.
2. Peoples perceptions of disability can inhibit their ability to consider the importance of other socio economic factors such as poverty, poor education, housing, living in remote areas and ethnic

background, which can have a greater impact upon a persons capacity to parent.

3. Limited availability and access to appropriate parenting support programs.
4. Need to improve professional practice to better support these families.
5. Need for staff training and support.
6. Need for greater collaboration between and integration of services across education, health, disability family support and child protection.

Participants agreed that parents with a disability face multiple disadvantages in keeping their families together. To help meet the needs of the family, delegates agreed on the need for a more coordinated and collaborative services response, including the secondment of staff

Introducing

Two new members of the Training and Support Team of the Stronger Families Learning Exchange

to all the lovely people that we met in Melbourne and at the workshop. We did some really good networking and hope to keep in touch in the future.

But it didn't end there. We were sitting in the Airport waiting to go back to Broome and there was this lady with all these pearl necklaces. Shelly and I just started laughing. I said, "Can't be, I wonder if we are going to get our pearls after all." Well we did. We got back to Broome at about 11.30 that night and by the time we booked in and got to our rooms it was about 12.30 which is about 2.30 Melbourne time, we hit the bed without a whimper. The next morning we packed the car thinking only another 240 kilometres and we will be home, but to our disappointment the car would not start, we had a flat battery. Shelly rang to get some service to get the car going. Meanwhile the weather in Broome was *hot* and my face was melting. It could only happen to us.

What a trip! It's one that we won't forget and has been told over and over again. Everyone thinks it's really funny – lucky Shelly and I have a good sense of humour. HA! HA!

The End. From the Derby Crew.

Ronda Clarke is a Project Coordinator with the Derby Young Women's Centre.

between agencies and the development and evaluation of existing services to identify service gaps.

Warren Cann, Director of the Victorian Parenting Centre, said working with parents with a learning difficulty presented the opportunity for services to promote best practice for all parents. "If we can get it right for this group, we can get it right for everyone."

A key outcome of the forum was a commitment by more than 25 per cent of delegates to form a working group to draw together the key themes from the forum into a plan for action including lobbying key stakeholders like the Department of Human Services for change.

What do you most enjoy about working in the SFLEX project?

LIZ: My kids and I have returned to Melbourne after four and a half great years living and working in Alice Springs. Having just joined the team I am impressed by the welcoming and vibrant atmosphere of the SFLEX team and the diversity of approaches to facilitating action research and community development. I visited a project in Tasmania with Kelley during my first week and am looking forward to working with the broad range of projects and people involved in the Stronger Families Fund projects around Australia. I feel enthusiastic about catching up with the other projects I have been allocated soon.

What do you hope to learn from working in the team?

Reflecting on experience and sharing ideas with this dynamic team and network of community projects and exploring creative ways to record, document, reflect and enhance the things that communities find are useful and lasting for them in the important process of growing up kids. I also hope we will explore accessible ways



LIZ ORR

to share that knowledge with a broad audience and contribute to linking communities and projects up with each other.

What is your contribution to the team/project?

How we keep on keeping on and energise each other matters. Participation, participation, participation and participation! Communication, communication, communication! I have been working with community groups to reduce isolation, address violence, understand grief, loss, and life changes and learning ways to work together to develop approaches, services and networks that speak and act with the diversity that are communities, for about twenty years. People have amazing ways of growing connectedness and harmony. Listening, recording and reflecting on those stories contributes to long-term good health and wellbeing. Connecting in with the projects and other team members I hope to be part of resourcing, documenting, and developing learning tools that give voice and share skills and local knowledge in authentic ways that will build strength and resilience for the process of community development at both practical and theoretical levels.

What do you most enjoy about working in the SFLEX project?

I have always enjoyed working at a grassroots level, acknowledging the strengths and expertise that is often hidden within communities. I have the delightful advantage of arriving in the team at a time when the learnings from some of the projects are clearly demonstrating the benefits of local ownership and control of innovative ways to address issues.

What do you hope to learn from working in the team?

There is a wonderfully diverse and extensive body of wisdom and knowledge within the team. They also bring back an enormous wealth of experiences, expertise and ideas from the projects to share with others. I'm already finding new ways



MARGO NORTHEY

of looking at the world and I've only been here a week!

What is your contribution to the team/project?

I have many years of experience in the community and education sectors, working from a community development perspective. Supporting participation in, and ownership of, decision-making processes at a local level is exciting, challenging and never boring. I have been involved in a range of social and environmental issues in the Latrobe Valley in Victoria where we lived for twenty years. My most recent work has been with vulnerable women and children, attempting to increase community awareness and understanding of the devastating effects of domestic violence on the whole community and to support the development of a more responsive service system.