



Gunghalin Young Parents Peer Support and Education group (GYPSE) spokespeople talk about the needs of young parents during a Volunteer training session.

and offer the coordinators honest and constructive feedback on the planning, reporting or promotion of the program.

The coordinators network and liaise with community groups, agencies and families within the Canberra

region to identify the needs of families and look for ways to make agencies more accessible and effective for families.

Southside *Good Beginnings* celebrates the graduation of its first group of Community Parents.

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BARRWAYAMBANG GIRRAWA GROWING COMMUNITY PROJECT BOWRAVILLE, NSW

The project setting

Bowraville is a small rural community in northern New South Wales approximately 70 km south west and inland from Coffs Harbour, in beautiful Gumbaynggirr Country. Twenty per cent of the population of 2000 is Indigenous, and Bowraville was ranked the seventh most disadvantaged community in the state in Tony Vinson's 1999 report "Unequal in Life". Further to this alarming statistic, Bowraville is adversely reported in crime, unemployment, education and other social indicators. Social welfare practitioners widely comment on the continuing problems and difficulty of resolving what is commonly known as the "Bowraville problem". The situation is multi layered and complex, reflecting the issues that many Aboriginal Peoples in Gumbaynggirr Country face on a daily basis.

Why is the project needed?

Unfortunately, powerless people are often trapped on a merry-go-round, and don't make the first step toward changing dysfunctional ways of living until something critical happens. Until that time there is often an experience of acceptance – "frog in hot water syndrome". This "acceptance" – of inadequate health care and diet, poor living conditions, alcohol and other drug addictions, extreme violence and family dysfunction, children not attending school – often exists because people don't know any different. And so the

situation can remain until at least one person makes a move and breaks out of the cycle. When individuals do manage to make a change, the community is confronted with, and can be further fractured by, the "tall poppy syndrome". It is only when a connected group grow the same ground together that the change is validated and significant enough to bring about better relationships and widespread community development. The project is needed to facilitate this community growth and to establish a shared community vision.

What are you trying to do in the project?

The main aim of the project is to promote family resilience and community capacity through direct engagement of individuals and families in formal and informal learning opportunities. The program will improve access to services by Indigenous residents through service networking, promote active reconciliation and healing, foster better family relationships through parenting training and develop community leaders. Other elements of the project include establishing mutually supportive relationships among community organisations, developing a united community vision, and promoting economic and social participation through direct employment development and placement.

How are you going about it?

The project is supporting learning opportunities and activities that will lead to the development of a strategic group of community leaders, working within and enhancing community cohesion and growth. These include:

- Training for MiiMi Mother's Aboriginal Corporation Inc. Board about: roles and responsibilities; MiiMi's constitution and identifying the need to update; understanding community issues (what the project is about); and understanding the importance of good oral communication.
- Responding to the community's identified needs – for example, through development of an Indigenous Fashion Design Course, or a collaborative project to address family violence, or a kitchen garden project to support better nutrition.
- Including specific skills of new Aboriginal peoples to the area.
- Self-esteem activities through workshops and one to one support, especially through use of story and images.
- Enhancing the communication between community members.
- Being positive role models and leading the community by using examples of how we as a team relate to each other through training processes, through strategic processes, and through conflict resolution processes.
- Maintaining a project line of thought (not losing focus).
- Learning new skills and acting on necessary decisions for the good of the organisation, the community and for ourselves.

The usual pattern for change happens through the social action research method, and it is the shift back and forth between action and reflection that supports a process of community cohesion and growth.