

BUILDING STRONGER FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES IN THE DALY/COX-FINNISS REGION, NT

The project setting

The region of Northern Territory served by the program covers approximately 4000 square kilometres and has within it seven substantial Indigenous communities: Belyuen, Bulgul, Nauiyu Nambiyu (Daly River), Palumpa, Peppimenarti, Wadeye (Port Keats), Woolanang, and many more outstations. The largest community is Wadeye with a population of 2200. Three other communities have populations in excess of 300 people.

Woolanang Homeland Christian College has recently been established as a regional residential college for Indigenous secondary students on the edge of Litchfield National Park, a popular tourist area. The college has been planned and is being managed by a council representing local families and communities. The College has developed within a context of holistic community development taking account of health provision, family support, training opportunities, and employment creation.

This project targets primary school children and their families in four of the seven communities and, through partnership with Woolanang College, expects to achieve enhanced educational outcomes for the children.

Why is the project needed?

From the earliest planning stage of the College, community leaders in the region identified lack of effective parenting as a key impediment to participation and success in schooling. The Collins' Report "Learning Lessons" has also stated that, particularly in



Children from the Families and Schools Together (FAST) program, Daly/Cox-Finiss region.

remote communities, "poor attendance at school, for whatever reason, remains the most significant cause of poor learning". It further based the causes of poor attendance and poor attention directly in family health and parenting practices, and also in parental experiences of school, school-community relationships and the history of these.

Successful secondary schooling, regular school attendance, focused attention in class, and parental involvement in schools need to be developed at the primary schools from which the students come. So the project leaders from the Northern Territory Christian Schools Association sought an early intervention program in the region's primary schools that developed family functioning and strengthened the partnerships between schools, parents and the community.

What are you trying to do in this project?

The FAST (Families And Schools Together) program is an innovative, early intervention program for children who are at risk for a variety of reasons. It involves families in an

eight-week, school-based multi-family group experience. The program aims to build resiliency and protective factors in children by developing a support network for the family, and empowering the parents to be the primary prevention agent for their own children. It is conducted by a collaborative team, from the school, a local support group, and local parents, and it encourages the families to meet, following the program, as an ongoing support group.

It was developed by Dr Lynn McDonald from Wisconsin in the United States and was initially piloted in Australia through Kildonan Child and Family Services in Melbourne. FAST was chosen as it has demonstrated significant success in many disadvantaged communities in Australia and the United States, including those with Indigenous families. It has also included well-developed evaluation procedures showing measurable changes in child behaviour. The program is designed to build on family strengths and relationships within the community. Its internal training component develops leadership for team members.



How are you going about it?

A Stronger Families and Communities Coordinator has been appointed to work alongside schools, community councils and other support services to develop, adapt and implement the FAST program throughout the region. Daly River was chosen as the first community in which to trial the program, as it had strong connections with the new College and a well functioning primary school of about 80 students, in which the FAST program could be trialed and repeated in a further cycle. It was also accessible in

most parts of the year including the wet season.

As part of the development of this program, local school and community members have been identified and trained as a team to conduct the initial program. Following this eight-week program, some of the team will organise monthly meetings of these families to maintain the support networks and provide programs to meet identified needs of these families.

Local ownership of the program is vital so that it can be adapted to

meet the culture and needs of the community. The training of local people in the FAST team will empower them for this role and provide some meaningful employment. The program is also funded to provide further traineeships in the field of family support. Some of this is happening in the appointment of an Indigenous Intern Coordinator. The establishment of reference groups in the community and region will assist in monitoring the program and identifying further training needs.

FAMILY INCOME MANAGEMENT, QLD

The project setting

The Family Income Management (FIM) study has been introduced in three project settings – Aurukun, Coen, and Mossman Gorge Community.

Aurukun

The town of Aurukun on the western coast of Cape York is a remote community with little economic infrastructure. Many services that other Australians take for granted simply do not exist in Aurukun.

Members of the Wik and Kugu sociolinguistic groupings inhabit Aurukun – capable and confident people who have negotiated tirelessly for recognition of title over their land, sea, and rivers, and just compensation from Comalco for mining of bauxite on land owned by people who live in Aurukun. The draft agreement between Comalco and Wik people, having been in development for almost ten years, identifies the development of employment and education options as having a high priority.

Aurukun Shire, with a population of more than 1000 people, administers a large CDEP program that the Council seeks to re-design so that adult education is a requirement of CDEP participation. The scheme provides employment for 400 plus residents.

Discussions concerning Aurukun's involvement in the FIM study first

commenced in August of 1999. Since that time, the broad concepts underpinning the study have been discussed with key community members. Aurukun Shire Council has indicated support for the project, as have a number of key family groups that make up the population of Aurukun Township.

The inclusion of Aurukun in the FIM trials is timely. Developments in Aurukun include:

- the introduction of Queensland Education's *New Basics* trial at the school;
- the development of a Land and Sea Management Strategy that will support the reoccupation of greater areas of Wik homelands;
- real potential for agreement with Comalco and Rio Tinto on outstanding issues related to mining; and
- the resolution of the Wik Native Title determination.

At its first meeting of newly elected Councillors, Aurukun Shire Council endorsed the implementation of the study in Aurukun.

Coen

Coen is a small settlement town located approximately 550 kilometres due north of Cairns. The town is located on the single major road transport route servicing Cape York – the Peninsula Development Road. Coen is located in the local government area of the Cook Shire.

Coen has had a mixed history of being a mining town and a major cattle

centre. In recent times (circa 1950), a significant Mission presence was established in the town. In the preceding ten years, various Aboriginal groups, linguistically, spiritually and physically connected to the country of the region, have been able to express a growing sense of independence. This is reflected in the development of two major satellite communities outside of Coen, being Port Stewart to the Southeast, and Merepah to the West.

Coen Regional Aboriginal Corporation, located in the town of Coen, is the local resource agency providing support for a range of services and initiatives required by the Aboriginal population of the area. The corporation runs a diverse and complex CDEP program, covering a 40,000 square kilometre area. At a specially convened meeting in May, the full Board of Directors of the corporation voted to support the implementation of the FIM study in Coen.

The development of the Family Income Management mechanism in Coen will provide a structure and methodology for the distribution and investment of royalties payable from the Chevron Gas Pipeline project.

Mossman Gorge Community

Mossman Gorge Community is located 65 kilometres north of Cairns on a no-through spur road from the township of Mossman to Mossman Gorge, a major domestic and international tourist destination attracting more than 500,000 visitors annually.