

YOUNG FAMILIES SUPPORT SERVICE, QLD

What has the project been doing since the report in the previous bulletin?

The Young Families Support Service (YFSS) has continued to provide a high level of one on one individual support for pregnant and parenting young people in Townsville. Our existing groups, the Preparation for Parenthood Program and the Young Parents Group have continued to be very successful and are becoming very widely known within the community. As a result of Action Research we have developed two new groups to fulfill a need that has been identified. A Parenting Skills for Toddlers group was run as well as an Anxiety/Stress Management group. These groups are specifically aimed at young parents. The Young Families Support Service has submitted our six monthly report to Australian Government Department of Family and Community Services and has conducted a second Reference Group Meeting.

The project has full time Social Workers (Brooke and Deborah) whose roles include individual casework, provision of emotional and practical support, group facilitation and coordination and action research.

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

There have been many learnings over the last six months. Some of them include:

- Feedback about the service can come from clients at any time, usually when you least expect it. It is therefore important to have mechanisms in place to record informal feedback as soon as possible after it is received. Each worker now carries an exercise book which is to be used for clients who give verbal feedback. They are asked if they would like to record their feedback in the book, otherwise the workers records the feedback on their behalf.
- The increase in profile of the project, through better promotion of

the service and attending more community meetings has served to increase the referrals from non-government / community agencies. The development and maintenance of strong networks is a very important aspect of the services' work and has greatly contributed to its success. It is therefore important that the time is taken to do this is factored into the project planning and funding agreements.

- A playgroup that had been running successfully with the assistance of one of the project Social Workers and a representative from Playgroup Association of Queensland dissolved when the workers moved away to allow the playgroup to become independent. Feedback from two of the original group members on why the group collapsed included reference to the fact that the group needed that coordinator who was not one of the group members. They needed "one person who could do all the organising and make all the decisions". Also it was identified that transport needs to be available to assist young families to access playgroups.
- The project workers have continued to see the importance of transport for young families in the community. The home visiting aspect of the service is extremely important as public transport in Townsville is limited and very expensive.

How has the community responded to the project so far?

The community has always responded positively to the project. We meet a need that is not otherwise met. Community agencies and other government agencies are large referral sources and are willingly involved in partnerships with Young Families Support Service. We accept self referrals and have found word of mouth between young people and past participants has helped us access young people who we may not otherwise have reached. Feedback from our reference group, which consists of government and community agencies and participants of the project, has been very positive.

THE PLATFORMS STRATEGY CITY OF MOONEE VALLEY, VICTORIA

What has the project been doing since the last report?

The latter half of 2003 has been an exciting time in the life of the project with the City of Moonee Valley and the Centre for Community Child Health continuing to work in partnership to implement the Platforms Project. Examples of some of the activities that have been occurring are detailed below:

Many early childhood professionals across Moonee Valley have been trained in the use of the Parent's Evaluation of Developmental Status (PEDS) tool. The training covered issues associated with children's development, the importance and credibility of parental concerns, the development and validation of PEDS and how it is administered, scored and interpreted in real life settings.

With the assistance of project staff, maternal and child health nurses, childcare and family day care staff have been trialing PEDS in the course of the normal practice since November 2003 as a tool for eliciting parental concerns. Many preschools and two local primary schools (Avondale Heights and Debney Meadows) commenced trailing the tool in February this year. Initial feedback indicates that, in general, trained professionals are finding the tool to be user friendly and valuable in providing opportunities for parents to raise concerns in a focused way, with professionals' confidence in the tool increasing as they become more familiar with it.

Project staff have attended a number of meetings and forums where they have presented an overview of the Platforms project and the implementation of the PEDS tool in the local community. These forums have included parent information nights, annual general meetings and local government seminar presentations. Each has provided an opportunity to increase the community's awareness

of the project and to promote the importance of working professionals and parents working partnership.

Recent Advisory Group meetings have included presentations by professional involved in the health and wellbeing of children, providing members with a broader understanding of what is happening in Children's Services. Guests have included the Child Nutrition Officer who spoke about the "H2O for Kids" project where children are encouraged to drink tap water as a drink of choice, while the Playgroup Project Officer highlighted her role in mapping playgroups across the municipality to assist with future planning of and access to these services.

A Tip Sheet Resource Box has also been developed and distributed to each early childhood service in Moonee Valley to assist professionals to provide up to date, consistent information to parents when engaged in discussing children's development. The information contained in the Tip Sheet resource Box draws on recent, available material, providing information on topics that parents commonly raise with Early Childhood Professionals.

Moonee Valley City Council has continued to work with the Melbourne PCP to map Children's Services and include them on the "connecting care" website (www.connecting-care.com). This website has been in operation for some time offering a

time efficient, seamless referral service for Aged and Disability. With the addition of local children and family services, Moonee Valley Children's Services will benefit greatly from being included in this Statewide resource.

Advisory Group members have provided inspiration for the development of concepts for community messages. A concept designer and graphic artist have been engaged to bring these community messages to life. A series of posters are currently being developed to promote messages around the importance of parents and professionals sharing concerns and knowledge of children's development. It is anticipated that these posters will encourage the sustainability of the platforms messages once formal project activities come to a close.

What has been learned since the last report that may be of interest and value to other developing projects?

A great deal has been learned in implementation phase of the project that will be of value to those who wish to implement elements of the platforms philosophy in their own area.

For example, we have learnt that it is vital that open communications channels and regular meetings are held between key players to ensure that learning are shared, barriers can be worked through effectively and everyone understands their roles and

responsibilities for the successful implementation of various project activities.

We have learnt that time is precious in the local community and therefore there is a need to think about what is practical and how activities can be implemented cleverly. We have also learnt it is important to provide clear direction and continual support to local services who are asked to be involved in project activities. For example, the provision of a manual of material (including relevant forms, translations, handy hints, community messages, workshopping ideas and brainstorming messages) was helpful for those asked to implement PEDS in their service. This, together with ongoing project staff support via telephone and face to face visits to service has been beneficial.

Finally, due to staff changes at various levels, we have learnt that the role of the Risk Management Strategy is crucial as a means of keeping momentum going and ensuring that project staff share a common knowledge base.

How has the community responded to the project so far?

We are currently embarking on the evaluation phase of the project and are confident that this phase will provide a clearer picture of the community's responses to the project and provide valuable direction for the future application of platforms philosophy across other municipalities.

CREATING CAPABLE COMMUNITIES (CCC), SOUTHERN FAMILY LIFE, MELBOURNE, VIC

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

The project has continued to build on and consolidate some of its previous activities and initiatives. This allows for us to try some new things, take up the opportunity to look at previous challenges and try different ways to address them. It also allows for continuity and a sense of safety and familiarity for families who are participating.

An example of this is through our long-standing and consistent weekly Homework Club. We now have a core group of parents attending this who feel comfortable to take on particular roles, both practical and supportive. One of the Dads of the participating families has agreed to maintain a presence at the weekly sessions as a result of adolescent boys turning up unannounced and causing disruption. This has been supportive of all parents and children in creating a sense of safety for the group. Although the consistent turn-up of a core group of parents is positive, the next challenge for us is to consider how we may

attract families beyond this core group. We are hoping that setting up a regular time separate to the Homework Club for parents to talk and raise issues or ideas will be a springboard for this.

What has been learned since the last report that may be of interest and value to other developing projects?

These issues have brought home strongly the critical factor in working effectively with families and communities. Our first base is in being able to critique our own work practice and delivery and how this becomes a demonstration model for the ideals