

Updating Stronger Families and Communities Strategy PROJECTS

UPDATE

Community Connections – Chances For Children Project

The “Community Connections – Chances for Children” project developed in April 2000 out of the steering group that was established to consider possible projects to assist families and carers with young children aged 0-4 years. The original steering group was mostly made up of service providers such as the local Council, Education Department and Children Services. The priority issue identified through the partnership agreement was the number of very young children presenting at school with clear indicators of social, emotional and academic risk. Consultation with community and key stakeholders found wide support for the project. Funding for the project was secured and our first Community Development Worker was employed in 2001.

The community

Waverley is an outlying suburb of Launceston, in northern Tasmania with some 1600 residents. Some of the characteristics of Waverley are:

- a high percentage of families with children under the age of ten years (almost 17 per cent of the local population), including a large number of pre-school aged children;
- thirty per cent of local families are one-parent families;
- there are significant numbers of residents residing in public housing and rental accommodation (some 39 per cent of households);
- forty per cent of families are in receipt of an income of less than \$500 per week, with significant unemployment and a comparatively high percentage of persons who are not in the labour force; and
- a high percentage of households have no vehicle (14 per cent) or one vehicle only (over 45 per cent). (Source: ABS, 2001 Census)

Waverley is also a community with many assets. In particular, local residents value the semi-rural outlook of their suburb, the Waverley Lake and surrounding parklands, its strong primary school and substantial community hall.

About our project

Initially the project included the suburbs of Rocherlea, Ravenswood and Waverley. As the project progressed, it became apparent that the management of the project across three “high need” suburbs was not viable. The focus of the project since then, has been Waverley, with more informal links being maintained between the Ravenswood and Rocherlea communities. The project has endeavoured to:

- build connections within the community;
- identify the needs of the community but with a focus on families with children aged 0 to 5 years;
- recognise, document and build on community strengths;
- contribute to research that helps to build the evidence base for families with children aged 0 to 5 years; and
- address key health and wellbeing issues.

Previous editions of the Bulletin have provided regular updates of the Stronger Families and Community Strategy projects. In this section, projects report on their progress to date. For many of the projects this is the final update as the project is completed, or close to completion. Therefore, in addition to regular information, we have focused on the outcomes and lessons learnt from the projects.

There have been many initiatives and activities, some of which have continued, some which have come and gone, and many of which have been very successful. For examples some of the initiatives include:

- a Fire Expo – held in 2001 focusing on fire safety in the home;
- a Children’s Expo – involving over x service providers;
- Folk Art classes – a small group of women who come together for arts and crafts;
- playgroup – commenced in 2001 and operates two mornings a week at the Waverley Hall;
- community meetings – several meetings have been held to identify local issues and community building initiatives;
- Waverley Youth Photographic Display;
- Waverley Community Auskick – held over a six week period 2002 involving some 45 children;
- Eat Smart Cooking – monthly cooking classes facilitated by the National Heart Foundation;
- Early Start Programs – a local primary school initiative, supported by the Chances for Children project providing an opportunity to pre-school aged children and their families to attend and become familiar with their local school;
- Baby Buddies – also an initiative of the local primary school, where school classes “adopt” a new local baby;
- Carols by the Lake – organised and sponsored by a local church group with assistance from Chances, held in December 2002 and also



2004 with some 300 local people attending;

- Kindergym – commenced in May 2001 with a community physio-therapist hosting sessions;
- Pram Walking – a weekly walking group involving some six to eight mums and small children who walk between Waverley and the neighbouring suburb of Ravenswood;
- a Women's Information Room – established at the Waverley Hall with funding assistance from Women Tasmania;
- Waverley On-line – the school provides community access to school computing facilities; and
- Waverley Family Focus Project – this will be our main project this year involving local families in the planning, development and construction of a community meeting and play space.

Results, evaluation and sustainability

A major challenge for the Chances project over the past three years has been high staff turnover and lack of continuity. So far, over the life of Chances we have had four different workers for varying lengths of time. This has created many difficulties for us in terms of being able to sustain momentum and maintain the trust and involvement of the local community.

Several initiatives have lapsed. One of our hopes was to develop the Waverley Community Hall as a thriving community centre, but this has not been realised. Downtime between workers has also meant that it has been difficult for new workers to simply step in and pick up where the last worker left off.

Our latest worker commenced in August 2003, but tendered her resignation after only a few months. With only eight months of the project remaining the committee has had to seriously re-think how Chances should proceed.

In consultation with our funding bodies and the local community, we have decided that we need to focus on one key project, namely our Waverley Family Focus Project. This project will see the local community planning, developing and building their own local family meeting place. Already there has been lots of enthusiasm and participation by the local community. A project group made up largely of local parents has been established and work has commenced on researching possible designs and developing concept plans. Our hope is to leave the community with something that is lasting, tangible, has directly involved the community, and can form the basis for the development of a range of other family based initiatives.

It has become increasingly evident to us that initiatives that are closely linked with the local primary school have the best chance of being sustainable in the longer term. The school has a strong community network of parents and friends and is the only permanent and locally-based facility and service in the area. The committee has come to realise over time, the importance of building on the existing school networks and programs.

Again, we have great hopes that the Waverley Family Focus project will create ongoing and lasting benefits for the community. This project will

create a family space that can be utilised both during and after school hours.

Lessons learnt

We are learning many lessons which we believe will not only guide our own work in the future, but may also offer some useful insights for other communities. One of our key tasks in the coming months will be to carefully reflect on the learnings and document these. Some of the key issues and questions are about:

- high staff turnover and the consequences – there are many questions we need to examine for ourselves. Having, and keeping the right person in the job is critical to projects like ours. Are there things that we could have done, and systems we could have put into place, to ensure staffing continuity?
- community participation and involvement – we had hoped that during the life of the project a community-based committee made up of local people would evolve and take over the role of overseeing and managing the project. This did not occur. Why didn't this happen and was it in fact a reasonable expectation for the project?
- recognising and building on the strengths of local communities – we recognise that we were slow to recognise the strengths of the existing school community network and question whether greater energy should have been concentrated much earlier into developing this key community asset.

For further information and resources please contact Louise Dennis at Anglicare. Phone: (03) 6334 6060.

Creating Capable Communities: From foundations to sustainable solutions

The project works with local residents in highly disadvantaged public housing estates in the Bayside suburbs of Melbourne, including Highett, Moorabbin, Hampton, Sandringham, Elsternwick and Cheltenham. The public housing (for about 1200 families) sits within a local government area that includes the full range of population ages and socio-economic groups, including an industrial zone and some of the most exclusive suburbs in metropolitan Melbourne. Residents of the estates come from a range of diverse cultural backgrounds, and many have experienced a significant history of disadvantage, personal tragedies, family and community violence.

Where it began

The project evolved following a series of tragic events on the estate that led Southern Family Life to review the most effective use of their limited and shrinking family support resources. Conversations with children and parents highlighted the real dangers they felt in their neighbourhood. Residents felt unsafe and disconnected from their neighbours and the wider community. We heard expressions of abandonment and powerlessness from a community who was disadvantaged not only by their own individual histories but by a system which delivered to these communities a marginal "piece of the pie".

After ongoing consultation with the community and listening to their stories and their needs, Southern Family Life on behalf of residents, applied for funds from the first phase of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy. This funding from 2001-2004 helped us to establish with residents the core foundations for a community which provided safety, connectedness and a sense of belonging. Some of the core examples of this in the earlier stages were:

- residents gathering in a safe and welcoming space where they can share common stories and learn from one another;
- opportunities for residents to share their skills with others and to build on or learn new skills;
- children and parents linked to a wider network of support via other families and adults, and where needed professional support;
- the wider community engaging with and resourcing these neighbourhoods; and
- a growing sense of community ownership and pride evidence through more examples of initiative and beginning leadership roles.

It was acknowledged that these were promising indications of greater possibilities. Southern Family Life, key partners, the local community and the residents were adamantly in support of further funds to build on these foundations. We have been given this opportunity through receipt of further funding through the *Local Answers* initiative which will take us to June 2006.

Where do we take it from here?

The overall objectives of the project remain much the same:

- to strengthen the capacity of the wider local community to respond to the needs of these families as a way of improving family and community wellbeing;
- to improve both the parenting skills and relationship skills of the parents of these families;
- to skill and support residents to initiate and manage local community projects; and
- to increase family and social connectedness and reciprocity for the wellbeing of all

These objectives are being accomplished through a range of strategies and varied activities:

1. Building the network of collaborative partnerships

- A Homework Club has now been running for over three years and is well supported by a regular group of volunteers who take responsibility for areas such as a children's library, one-on-one homework support, outdoor games and sport and structured activities.
- In July 2004, the Breakfast Club commenced partnership with two other local agencies and the residents. After six months, Southern Family Life is providing more of a supportive role with residents running the program independently. The current challenge is to seek ongoing financial support from local business to ensure the future of this project.
- The project's reference group consists of a number of key local services, local police, Office of Housing and residents. We have sought participation of other specialist community resources, such as the local housing service and the Migrant Resource Centre.
- Cybec Foundation is a trust set up by a local business person in the community to support a range of community initiatives. This trust currently supports a local family's child who participates in the project with a scholarship to attend a local



From the right to left are: Jo Cavanagh (CEO, SFL), Marilyn Ellis (Neighbourhood outreach worker, CCC), Pat & Roger Riordan (scholarship funders) and Family who have participate in the CCC project.

private school. It also funds Southern Family Life's "Community Bubs". All clients from this program have linked into Keith Street community house programs and built positive social networks as a result.

2. Building effective parenting skills

A parenting skills program is conducted twice a year for eight weeks for parents of children 0-3 years of age. This course has had a range of benefits to parents including normalisation of their role, providing a network of support, both at the community facility and in their personal activities, decreasing isolation and social opportunities for their children. Over half the parents reported an improvement in their parenting skills and two-thirds of parents reported an improvement in their relationship with their child. All parents indicated that as a result they had made new friends. This feedback indicates that supporting and "growing" parents in their role, is more about their connections and resources than simply the acquisition of skills.

3. Building leadership capacity of residents

- A needs analysis is currently being conducted with a view to providing training for those residents who wish to expand their leadership role within the community. It is anticipated that the training will be in alliance with some of the key competencies of Community Development work and therefore will have an added benefit of supporting residents to pursue future study and employment. This will be a key initiative towards sustainable outcomes.
- Southern Family Life has a six-monthly training program for the recruitment of family and community volunteer workers. Residents who are already demonstrating their capacity as leaders in their community have shown interest in participating in the training to become volunteers for the agency. This further enhances future opportunities and contributes to change in the wider community.
- We are seeing more examples of

residents taking up leadership initiative in the project. We are seeing an increased contribution particularly in the project's reference group; the Breakfast Club is on occasions, run entirely by the residents; residents are representative on community reference groups; and within the "Parents Coffee n Chat" group at one of the estates, the parents are taking a lead role in discussing and addressing concerns of residents.

Of those parents who provided feedback about their contribution, 92 per cent reported an increase in self-confidence and more than half of those believed this has helped in pursuing family or employment goals; 57 per cent indicated they were also involved in wider community activities as a result.

4. Building effective relationship skills of residents

This is seen to be achieved through a range of formal and informal activities, with a focus on teaching and developing skills, which provide social opportunities for families in the community. For example, we have found some families and individuals do not attend the more structured program but do attend the Community Barbecues we hold at local parks. These informal and regular opportunities build trust, so that some residents have started to attend other more formal activities, whilst others have been referred back to the agency for relevant support. The more structured activities include: the Breakfast and Homework Clubs; the Parents Coffee n Chat group; cooking; and art and craft groups.

Parents and children's feedback indicates that the activities build positive relationships between family members and within the community. Parents indicate significant improvements in particular areas such as:

- seventy-two per cent of parents reported an improved relationship with their child(ren) whilst 61 per cent reported improvements in their general family relationships;
- seventy-one per cent reported an

improvement in their children's physical health and development and their child(ren)'s language and communication skills;

- seventy-seven per cent of parents said they had increased their informal supports through participating; and
- all parents indicated there was an improvement in their children's social and emotional development.

Bringing people and families together appears to have multiple benefits, which are clearly contributing to the overall benefit to families, and ultimately, the community's health and wellbeing.

Wider evaluation and findings

In addition, we have sought perspectives and feedback from a range of stakeholders to compliment and elaborate on the local resident's feedback. Interviews, questionnaires and discussions were conducted with key partners in the project and reference group members. Those who worked closely with residents such as the volunteers, also gave their feedback through observations they had made. Staff and students on placement also contributed to collecting the data, particularly from residents via focus groups, evaluation questionnaires, informal feedback, worker journals, observations and attendance records. The main findings were:

- increased resident ownership and pride of their community;
- increased number of resident's demonstrating leadership capacity;
- decrease in families and parents feeling isolated in their community;
- improved social networks for families and children;
- significant improvement of the health and wellbeing of residents, particularly children;
- increased numbers of partners contributing to the project and increased building of relationships with residents;
- acknowledgment of the value of partner relationships with all the stakeholders.



Sustainable change

The findings from our evaluation point towards the possibilities of building change within the communities which are long-lasting. Not that long ago, on numerous occasions, key workers and actively involved residents questioned whether what we were doing was worth all the effort and when would we see change that we thought may actually last? Enthusiasm and energy would wane at times, but time to think and

reflect has served us well. It is through this that we have had the opportunity to realise that change has been occurring all the time – slowly but progressively. What we are seeing now is the fruits of many incidences of small change that has been happening over time, giving many a sense of hope and optimism for their future. The project may look different in the future, the project may not even exist, but if families and communities are able to keep

hope and optimism in their lives, this will be the key to sustained change. The best job we can do is to know that we have had a belief and a presence in supporting change, we have acknowledged, shared and validated people's experience and we have celebrated their hard-won achievements.

For further information please contact Alison Normanton, Project Co-ordinator for Creating Capable Communities, Southern Family Life, Victoria.

Collaboration, partnership and networks aiming for "a whole community" response

The Families and Communities Enhancement Team (FACET) project has undertaken a specific focus on strengthening community networks. We hold that the most appropriate definition of social capital is that which is defined by the OECD (2001):

"networks, together with shared norms, values and understandings, which facilitate co-operation within or among groups".

This definition acts as the primary guide in the project's continuing commitment to the ongoing developmental process of the Inala Combined Interagency Network. One of the key principles for the local human services sector is that:

"co-operative interaction should occur between all levels of government, community organisations, the broader community, individuals and business in the planning and development of human services and community facilities/resources which are accessible, and respond effectively and efficiently to identified local needs".

The community

The South West Neighbouring Communities region, the FACET project's target area, is located approximately 10 to 15 kilometres south-west of Brisbane central business district and consist primarily of detached housing, although



pockets of industry are located in several of the target suburbs. Inala, Wacol and Acacia Ridge were identified as highly disadvantaged under the Socio-Economic Index for Areas, in 1996. The region has a large population of people from culturally and linguistically diverse and Indigenous backgrounds, with some areas having up to seven times Brisbane city's average population percentage for these groups.

The FACET project was initiated within a partnership agreement contained by a joint funding application across ten local community-based services who collectively identified there was a requirement for a greater level of co-ordination and collaboration in the development of innovative responses to identified needs. In order to ensure exclusivity and "a whole community" response, a focus on collaboration and service co-operation with individuals, families, community groups, community sector organisations (both government and non-government operating within or into the area), schools and businesses was a central tenet of the application.

In the South West Neighbouring Communities region, industrial estates, freeways and swamplands create

physical barriers between suburbs, while high levels of cultural and linguistic diversity and disadvantage, place demands on services with limited resources. The FACET project has sought to bring together community based and government agencies, and community members from across the region to address the barriers to services and to improve the community response to the needs of families with young children.

Initially, the Families and Communities Enhancement Team focused on four key areas: Carole Park (one of 12 suburbs covered by the project); families of children with a disability; Indigenous groups and young parents. We explored and developed a number of different ways to engage the community. The project has undertaken a plethora of individual collaborative projects, across a broad spectrum of the community, seeking to build upon the capacity of local services to respond to the needs of families, children and their community.

There are two main aspects of this work. The first involves staff from the FACET project developing alliance networks around specific targeted program areas in key priority areas, for example

Fathers/Male Carers Alliance Network, Vietnamese/Australian Alliance Network and the Early Years Development and Childcare Alliance Network. The second is to strengthen the existing Inala Combined Interagency and to deliver training to professionals in the local area through this network. In 2004 this involved facilitating three training workshops on topics such as strengthening community partnerships and early childhood intervention, and demographic and socio-economic statistical analysis of the region.

The project's support to the future direction's process undertaken by the Inala Combined Interagency has resulted in the establishment of an alliance of networks referred to as the South West Brisbane Inter-Network Alliance. The Alliance functions through existing and future networks, by working proactively to strengthen the capacity of community to work collaboratively.

In collaboration with a number of local and statewide organisations, a planning Steering Committee conducted an area wide conference from 27 June to 8 July 2005. The OurCommunity Festival provided an opportunity for FACET to display the outcomes achieved over the past three years, and to provide information on the outcomes of the interagency network developments and to develop an area wide identity to further enhance opportunities for collaboration, partnership and co-ordination in, and across, localised services, business and the broader community.

Action research has informed our project development throughout. It has meant involving the community in identifying the priorities and developing appropriate responses. It has

informed the development and the delivery of parenting programs such as "Yarning in Art". The flexible and responsive approach has meant that as we establish ourselves in the community we have been able to shift our focus so that we can now work to build and strengthen networks and alliances.

Results and evaluation

We have evaluated our activities in a range of ways whereby each process was evaluated on an individual basis, and as a whole integrated strategy. We have utilised both qualitative and quantitative data. Due to the broad-based consultative strategy conducted at the end of 2003, FACET has been able to achieve a high level of commitment and participation within the specific individual program networking activities and the broad commitment and ongoing participating of the redevelopment of the existing combined interagency network. It is important that people feel a level of ownership in the pursuits that they commit to, the feeling of ownership was gained by appropriately responding to the issues and programmatic priorities that they as individuals, and collectively, identified.

It is believed that these efforts will result in a more co-ordinated and collective community, which has a greater capacity to identify and respond to the ever changing, and emerging issues that confront a dynamic community. The process will enhance the communities' access and ability to act collaboratively and will mean they are more able to creatively respond with a higher level of innovative service delivery options.

The strategies adopted are not those which will result in quick outcomes.

There is a need to introduce change carefully in the commitment that all existing and potential stakeholders remain an integral component of the process. Over time sustainability of the strategies will be ensured through a culture of collaboration, co-ordination and participation.

Sustainability

The sustainability of the Combined Interagency, albeit in a new form, is assured; and the commitment from the local services and the local community to the process and its outcomes is high. By carefully implementing the process at the pace that is determined by the members, personal and collective ownership can be achieved. The network will determine the sustainability of new and emerging networks. Early indicators are that there is strong commitment to a number of the new networks and that they will integrate into the Combined Interagency structure easily.

Lessons learnt

One of the major lessons learnt is the need to ensure that any consultative, data collection strategies are broadly inclusive, and to ensure that all opinions/priorities are appropriately responded to in the setting of any program's aims and objectives. In addition, change needs to be introduced carefully and at a pace that allows for all members to become comfortable and to feel safe within the process.

A truly collaborative, co-ordinated and integrated community can be achieved, which in effect, builds the capacity of the community and networks into the future. In this way, it is truly a community development strengths-based approach.

Quality Relationships Alliance

Quality Relationships Alliance is a not-for-profit organisation, funded under the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy. It was established in 2002 with a vision to provide an innovative and vibrant service to enable individuals and families in the

Mandurah community to improve the quality of our relationships in the home, the workplace and the wider community.

The community

The Peel Region is one of the fastest growing regions in Australia. Mandurah, its major centre, is the fastest growing city in Australia. The

population is expected to more than double to 150,000 within the next 20 years (source: Peel Away the Mask, 2001). This means there needs to be a parallel increase in community services and infrastructure to support this phenomenal growth.

Quality Relationships Alliance (QRA) is premised on the belief that the ►

building blocks of a strong and connected community depend upon the quality of these relationships. Quality Relationships Alliance has implemented four interlocking strategies aimed at promoting the benefits of building and maintaining quality relationships. These strategies include: promoting quality relationships, enhancing community and professional networks, providing lifelong education training and development opportunities for human service providers and community members, and the recruitment and training of volunteers.

Results and evaluation

Given the enormity of time and resources that was required to establish such an organisation, we believe that Quality Relationships Alliance has achieved outcomes far beyond the organisation's original thinking and that these significant achievements and measurable outcomes can be identified and demonstrated across all of the combined strategies. This is also reflected by the large number of support letters and requests for more services, which we continue to receive. These accolades and requests for services have come from community members and a diverse range of large and small service providers, including: government, non-government, local politicians, community groups, church groups, private businesses and local media.

The Alliance model has proved highly successful in terms of capacity building, community strengthening, mobilising partners, and has been instrumental in facilitating a more co-ordinated approach across a range of services. Quality Relationships Alliance assists individuals, couples, families and the broader community through capacity building and skill development in terms of relationships, particularly in relation to parenting.

Quality Relationship Alliance in a short time has grown to be recognised locally as a peak body working to deliver and support the services and infrastructure required to ensure the Mandurah Region becomes a strong, connected and vibrant community. A Corporate Governance training model, developed

in partnership with the Department of Community Development and Volunteering Australia, was delivered to the Alliance Board in January 2005, with very positive outcomes, and it is anticipated that this model will be available to other non-profit community organisations in the future, further demonstrating QRA's commitment to fostering growth and development in community organisations.

In summary, Quality Relationships Alliance has proven to be highly successful, judged by the depth of participation and positive feedback received, in terms of engaging individuals and families to actively participate in a range of life long learning initiatives towards the building and strengthening of relationships.

Sustainability: Creating a thriving engaging and connected community

Quality Relationships Alliance's prevention and early intervention approach is underpinned by the principles of community development and a strengths-based framework. Our publicity campaign, education and training strategies offer participants the opportunity to enhance what is already positive, to build effective coping strategies and support networks and to find local solutions to local problems. In this way it seeks to complement the services that operate at crisis level by providing long-term benefits such as building and strengthening community capacity, resilience and self reliance. Our volunteer strategy also seeks to further empower individuals and families through opportunities for capacity building through training and development.

Through implementing a consultative, inclusive approach we have been instrumental in promoting and mobilising greater co-operation and collaboration between service providers. This has resulted in a drawing together of a wide range of services to address the needs of the community and a better integrated response to service delivery. This has also ensured sustainability through a combined collective approach. Furthermore, our professional development opportunities, while providing valuable learning expe-

riences have also enabled services and workers to link together. This has helped to reduce isolation and burn out and has meant that stronger networks and alliances have formed. Similarly, due to the nature of the services that QRA currently provide, we have sought to provide participants and families with relevant strategies and skills that will continue to provide long-term benefits. These include the reduction of relationship breakdown and isolation, the strengthening of community capacity and self reliance, and therefore, a reduction in the likelihood of future relationship problems.

Staff from the QRA project are confident that because of the success of the project we will be able to mobilise partners as alternative funding sources and/or supporters. We have already implemented clear direction in terms of future financial viability including strategic planning and action workshops. Quality Relationships Alliance currently have an application lodged with the Federal Government for further funding to enable us to continue and expand our services to the broader Peel Region. We are also lobbying the local State Government for assistance.

Lessons learnt

That Rome was not built in a day! That any attempt at positive social change takes small often adventurous, courageous steps. However, we have learnt that these steps do not have to be taken alone. That positive social change does not happen in a vacuum, rather it involves a "whole of community approach" that requires relationship building and strengthening across service providers as well as with the wider community. Moreover, it is through this inclusive, combined collective approach that miracles, however small can happen. It is these small miracles that often create the ripple in the water necessary to successfully engage and mobilise communities for the benefit of the whole community.

For further information and resources please contact: Marie Finch, Manager, Quality Relationships Alliance, Mandurah, Western Australia. See: www.qra.com.au for a list of useful website links.

**Mukulyanytjulu
Walkumunu Kanyinma:
Looking After Everyone
We Love Really Well**

The Project is located in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands in Central Australia. The Ngaanyatjarra Lands cover a vast remote area of Western Australia: 250,000 kilometres (or two or approximately three per cent of the Australian mainland), and are held as 99- and 50-year leases by the Ngaanyatjarra Council. The two major regional centres servicing the area, Alice Springs (1000 kilometres north east of Warburton) and Kalgoorlie (900 kilometres south west of Warburton), can be accessed via mostly unsealed road or by air using the regular mail service. The Indigenous population of 2,500 people live in 11 communities, ranging in size

from 50 to 500. Most community facilities include a shop, school, health clinic, women's centre, hall, football field, mechanical workshop and office.

Project story

Our Project works under the auspice of the Ngaanyatjarra Health Service with its main goal being:

“to work with families of pre-school children to develop ways to strengthen family functioning in response to agreed community needs”.

The Project is overseen by a steering committee of community and agency representatives. Steering committee members are consulted at bi-monthly meetings as well as “on the ground” to check that we are going in the right direction.

The evolution of the team is one of our important learning experiences. There were some sad losses as well as numerous and significant changes in the number, location, responsibilities and collaborative practice of the team members. Working through all this we established very good working relationships, keeping each other informed, sharing knowledge and looking after each other's wellbeing.

The project team now consists of two co-ordinators (we prefer to be called Project Helpers as the term co-ordinator implies control and “power over”): Cathy Farrington and Anna Szava, and two senior Indigenous Project Workers: Ruby Reid and Rhoda Watson. Anna, Ruby and Rhoda are based on the Lands, and Cathy in the Alice Springs office of the Health Service. Realising how an all female project team acted as a cultural barrier to men's engagement with our activities, we are now in the process of recruiting male team members.

As a result of an extensive community consultation process, Mukulyanytjulu Walkumunu Kanyinma consolidated its activities to four spheres of action:

- Growth Assessment and Action;
- Playgroups;
- Minymalu Witu-witulu Kanyinma: “Women Keeping Strong”; and
- Store Advocacy.

Ruby and Anna focus on Store Advocacy and Minymalu Witu-witulu Kanyinma while Rhoda and Cathy focus on Growth Assessment and Action and Playgroups.

Each of these four action areas respond to all of the issues the communities identified. The development of the strategic plan and these action spheres presented us with another opportunity of intense learning as we worked through cycles involving activities addressing the family issues.

Playgroup is one example. After several rounds of setting up meetings in communities to talk about the facilities, staffing, equipment, training and funding necessary to run activities we found little response. We first interpreted this as lack of interest, but at the Steering Committee's encouragement we



changed our approach. With a few boxes of toys and activity supplies we started to offer Playgroup activities on a tarp, under the veranda of the community clinic or store – with great success. There is not only a growing interest and attendance but also an increasing willingness among the participants to take on an active role in running the program.

Results and evaluation

Our project is halfway through its life. The evaluation framework we developed is based on the principles of participatory evaluation and it aims to establish communication regarding project outcomes between the team, the participants and the governing and funding bodies of the Project.

The growing understanding of the purpose of the Project and the increasing awareness of its presence proved to be invaluable in developing our activity framework. This was a slow process, involving building relationships and trust, but time spent well as we believe that the community drives the agenda.

One of our action spheres, Minymalu Witu-witulu Kanyinma, demonstrates how this worked. After a few months of observing our variably successful activities, senior women in Blackstone community with Ruby's leadership proposed a well rounded program of education and practice for better maternal and child health in a culturally appropriate and effective way. This strategy was piloted and accepted by the women who are now looking forward to introducing it on a larger scale.

We consider the growing community interest and involvement in our project as the most telling response. We feel that the project achieved a strong presence not only in Blackstone, the community where strategies are piloted, but in the whole of the Ngaanyatjarra Lands: as one of our workers said "other communities want to do it too and they are looking forward to working with us". Feedback to one of the steering committee members indicates "a strong level of community ownership and involvement" and that "young women seem to like the project though they can't pinpoint why".

Looking after our resources became a shared responsibility, reflecting the community's concern for our success. An example of how even old things gained a new momentum is the comeback of the "smoking" of newborn babies, a tradition of great significance for ensuring the good health and good behaviour of the child, but which has not been practiced for a while.

Partnerships have been developed with a number of organisations. We are receiving assistance from Northern Territory Health for the women's program, the Growth Assessment and Action program as well as for the store advocacy. The Best Start Program of the Department of Community Development Western Australia, Ngaanyatjarra College and Ngaanyatjarraku Shire support our Playgroup activities with funding and training.

Sustainability

Our motto is "working ourselves out of the project". We aim at establishing interest in, and enhancing the understanding of early childhood related early intervention and prevention principles and practice in the communities.

With our planned training programs for Growth Assessment and Action /nutrition, Child Care, Strong Women and store workers, and with trialled strategies in place, we hope to enhance the community's capacity to effectively respond to its needs.

We are working on turning certain aspects of the project from one-off to ongoing actions, which is supported by funding and organisational change. For example, where our partnerships with the West Australian Department of Community Development and the Shire resulted in the funding for the employment of a Best Start Playgroups co-ordinator and a support worker. We also brokered a partnership between the College and Yorganop Child Care Aboriginal Corporation for the ongoing delivery of a Child Care Certificate III training program.

Mukulyanytjulu Walykumunu Kanyinma finished on June 30 this year. We have obtained funding for a Child Health Co-ordinator to oversee

the Growth Assessment and Action program and are waiting to hear if we have been successful in funding applications for a Project Officer for Minymalu Witu Witulu Kanyinma and an Early intervention Coordinator to work in partnership with Best Start Coordinator to support Playgroup Development.

Lessons learnt

The main learnings from the project are:

- plans, actions, reflections are more valuable and successful after the discussions, advice and guidance given is taken;
- being kind and generous to people builds relationships and trust without which there is no Project;
- allowing time for the Project to develop in its natural time and for people to respond at their own pace leads to positive achievements;
- embracing error is an essential part of the inquisitive process of participatory action learning;
- our role involves genuine and emphatic facilitation and support;
- that no matter how difficult or frightening it seems in some moments without handing over control we will not achieve our objectives;
- having fun is as essential as hard work; and
- the people we work with are knowledgeable, capable and motivated.

Contributions by Cathy Farrington, Ruby Reid, Anna Szava, Rhoda Watson

Contacts

- NPY Women's Council
- Waltja Tjutangku Palyapai
- DCD "Best Start Program"
- Strong Women Strong Babies Strong Culture NT Health
- Growth Assessment & Action NT Health

Links

- <http://www.bernardvanleer.org/>
- http://www.geocities.com/dian_marie_hosking/ai1.html
- <http://appreciativeinquiry.cwru.edu/research/bibPapers.cfm>

Resources

- Waltja publications, particularly "Pipiri Palya"
- Batchelor College, "Growing Up With Culture Strong" and "Talking Early Childhood – A Resource Book".

Minto Under 12s Project, New South Wales

The Minto Under 12s Project is auspiced by UnitingCare Burnside and is located at the Minto Family Centre in Minto, a suburb north of Campbelltown in New South Wales. Campbelltown has a population of approximately 115,400 people – approximately 25 per cent of whom are aged 0-12 years [2001 Australian Bureau of Statistics Census Data]. On 29 May 2002, the redevelopment of the Minto Public Housing Estate was announced. The redevelopment means that 800 of the 1000 public housing homes will be demolished, affecting 3000 – 4000 residents. This process will take 10-15 years. The announcement of the re-development was done without any community consultation. Nearly thirty per cent of residents live in public housing. The issues of service provision for children under 12 years was raised in Campbelltown in two independent forums – one with residents of Minto and the other among key service providers. The Minto Under 12s Project is the outcome of those forums.

Why is this project needed?

The purpose of this project is to create better opportunities for children in the Minto Public Housing Estate and to normalise the experiences of children. It is also to provide children with opportunities to reach their potential.

Since the announcement of the redevelopment, the project has also undertaken to provide children and families with opportunities to explore and express their feelings about the impact the re-development is having or will have on their lives.

What are you trying to do in this project? and how are you going about it?

It is intended to re-introduce the concept of community caring, to celebrate childhood and to intervene before serious problems develop. It is also recognised that in order to make changes there needs to be a focus on parents and on the community of Minto as a whole. A priority of this project is in gaining

parental involvement and having parents enjoy spending time with their kids. In terms of the redevelopment, the Minto Under 12s Project's objective is to ensure children's voices are heard in the larger forums.

The Minto Under 12s Project is best described as a series of partnerships – with children, parents, schools, community groups and leaders and other service providers. These partnerships may be one-to-one or interwoven. They exist in all aspects of the project including family work, group work, community events and activities, advocacy and education.

The Minto Under 12s Project is driven by community-identified needs and this is due to our continued commitment to consultation and participation.

The project is very aware of the strengths, resources and skills that are abounding within families and the community in Minto. We have used a strengths-based approach in implementing this project. The project recognises these pre-existing strengths and builds on them (instead of dwelling on the deficits) to achieve the goals set by the community.

Use of action research

The practice of action research has a close relationship with the strengths-based model of working with families and communities that Burnside adheres to. The Minto Under 12s Project arrived in Minto at a time of massive community upheaval. The introduction of the concept of action research and how we document and record our work coincided with a community needing to record its culture and its history.

We have found the creative techniques of documenting and evaluating – such the use of scrapbooks, journals, drawing, painting, collaging, writing and recording stories – have satisfied both the needs of the project and the community.

The project has worked very closely with Australian Institute of Family Studies in developing an Action Research framework. The Stronger Families Learning Exchange workers

ran some training for the staff and facilitated one of our parent planning forums in the early days of the project and provided ongoing support for the project.

The Minto Under 12s Project's biggest action research initiative was the development of the paper – "This Used to be my Playground" – a consultation with children living in Minto about how the re-development of the Minto Public Housing Estate has impacted on their lives. The paper has been presented at a number of different forums across Australia. More recently, children involved in the consultation have also co-presented the paper at the National Association for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect Community Forum and later in a May a special forum for NSW Parliament. This paper has given children an opportunity to have their voices heard in a meaningful way.

The Minto Under 12s Project also played a pivotal role in putting together "Minto: More than bricks and mortar: The social and economic costs of redeveloping public housing estates' Community Forum in March". The forum featured resident speakers who were able to share their experiences of the re-development with approximately 300 participants – and the national media!



Children involved in groups with the Minto Under 12s Project. ➤

Results and evaluation

The project is nearly completed and is on track to achieve all of its original objectives, plus a whole lot of other community-identified needs. The highlights so far include:

- the project has remained flexible and responsive to the changing needs within the community and reordered priorities were appropriate with input from the community, advisory committee and local services.
- steadily increasing attendance and new families at all activities including groups and community events – a fantastic achievement in light of the community being relocated and redeveloped at the same time.

- children and parents have achieved most goals in all formal groups.
- the four local primary schools have shown their strong support of the Minto Under 12s Project and children in Minto by agreeing to support the action research project exploring the impact of the redevelopment on children. This support is also echoed by service providers, particularly those involved with the Advisory Committee.

Sustainability

The Project is supporting five resident-driven groups and initiatives to raise awareness of the issues that families in Minto are facing, mostly as a result of the redevelopment of the public housing estate.

The Project is well placed to be able to resource children with the skills and abilities they need to build long-term resilience and manage the loss associated with relocation. Our goal is to secure ongoing funding. The community will be involved in planning what happens after the project ends – whether it be continuing on reduced resources or new funding and new approaches.

Even though Minto is being torn down around us, it continues to demonstrate its amazing spirit and strength ... bulldozers can't destroy Minto's heart and soul!

Youth talking about youth issues – the future for stronger communities

The Wide Bay Burnett Indigenous Stronger Family Program is a regionally based, FaCS funded action research program, servicing around 6,000 persons who identify as Indigenous Australians, spread over 86,484 square kilometres of the upper south east corner of Queensland.

The last major project was a single youth forum, run across the region, involving young people between the ages of 16 and 25. In September 2004 an opportunity arose to employ two Youth Project Assistants through CDEP. Two young men in their late teens were engaged. The approach was youth planning, youth controlling and youth "owning" this forum. There is no doubt that it was this ownership and planning that enabled the success of the forum.

Initial planning stage

The initial planning, a half-day meeting, established the importance of youth ownership, which is needed to develop the project in a meaningful way.

A youth reference group was formed and included two young people from each of the program's areas. These young people were identified from past



projects. Over the next three months this group met on seven occasions in five different locations to discuss and refine a draft forum schedule and establish the protocols for engagement of participants, guest speakers and topics for the forum, and the other activities that were to make up the five-day forum program. Program staff allowed this planning to take place independently of all adult input and usually only returned to the planning meetings to be briefed on any changes and additions to the draft schedule.

Logistics, rationales and forum management

Obviously, the young people of the reference group could not make all the decisions and worked within a logistical, philosophical and financial framework set down by the Program Co-ordinator and staff. While the financial cost of this project was no real object, the need to have the forum meaningfully address some of the issues that had been previously identified within past projects was of paramount importance. As was the ability of this event to set a foundation onto which a number of sustainable

outcomes for youth in the Wide Bay Burnett region could be based.

Success in a number of smaller projects over the previous months leading up to the forum had pointed to a simple, yet very effective method of engaging and assisting youth participants. Cultural empowerment and utilisation of cultural and traditional learning methods was seen as a very viable option in running this forum and the forum's motto of "Past seasons for Present Reasons" was born.

"Past Seasons for Present Reasons" was conceived around a need for our younger people to find out who they were and where they came from, before they could know what they were and where they were going. Being able to identify with their ancestral values, beliefs and ways was seen as a way to empower the young people who attended the forum in order that more contemporary empowerment and knowledge could be passed between them during the forum. What had previously been achieved on a micro scale with five and six project participants, was to be put to the test in a larger group setting.

Over seventy applications were received from all over the region. Each applicant was required to answer six questions with regard to their reasons for wanting to attend, what they expected from the forum and how they thought that the forum could help them personally and their community. The applications were then processed by the program staff, the Project Management Committee and the Youth Reference Group. It was decided to accept all applicants, despite reservations in some quarters that some youth were seen by their community as “bad” kids. A total of forty-five participants registered.

Forum facilitation and supervision

It was obvious to the program staff that a good degree of supervision would be required, particularly given that the forum venue chosen was to be a licensed resort and the age of the forum participants was to include those of legal drinking age as well as minors. The original rationale that this event be strictly drug and alcohol free was reinforced within the registration process, with all participants and supervisory staff signing an agreement to abstain for the period of the forum.

The program staff consisting of the Co-ordinator, two Project Officers, the Administrator and the Program Mentor were not adequate to fully supervise or facilitate this number of young people over such an extended period. Subsequently, a number of other agencies assisted by providing the human resources needed for an event of this magnitude.

The facilitation of the forum sessions was undertaken by invited day guests in addition to the supervisors. The guests, from government and business, were impressed by the participants’ interest and insights.

Forum topics and how they were discussed

The five main areas of discussion, set by the reference group were:

- education;
- health;
- social issues in communities;
- sport and recreation; and
- the law, the government and you.



Group photo of the mob following the final presentation with Linda Lavarch MP, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

Applicants nominated five topics, in order of preference, and all were allocated their first or second choice. This process created five geographically diverse groups of between nine and eleven people. The groups worked with facilitators and resource presenters with knowledge or experience in those fields to prepare a final presentation to the larger group.

The discussions took the form of open round-table talks, run by the youth themselves, with resource presenters only taking a role when asked by the group. This maintained a strong sense of ownership of the topic and the subject matter, while allowing knowledge sharing among the participants and guest resource presenters. Facilitators were all briefed to allow this process to occur and to be aware that the ownership always remained with the youth.

Many of the simple solutions passed on by the young participants were taken on board by those who came to advise. The “teachers” became the students in many cases, some suggesting that the complexity of the problem, and the system it existed within, often got in the way of solutions. The clarity of thought shown by these young people allowed the real causes to become evident. Certainly the staff of the program were able to better grasp basic solutions to what had seemed insurmountable community problems.



The men's business component at the Butchulla campground on K'gari or Fraser Island.

Other forum activities

The adage that “all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy” also informed the forum activities. Instruction in Traditional Games, an inspirational talk, a traditional and a hip hop dance, and a song group from Brisbane, provided a social release for the young participants. At the same time these reinforced the cultural nature of the week. Further cultural knowledge was passed among the participants when the group spent a full day visiting K'Gari or Fraser Island as it is generally known. This traditional home to the Butchulla people proved to be an appropriate setting for the Men's and Women's business, facilitated by Butchulla descendants who travelled with the group across the island by a four wheel drive coach.

Forum presentation and follow-up activities

The final two days of the forum were an extremely visible manifestation of the success of the methods used to empower and unite this group of young adults. On the second last day the groups worked tirelessly with their

facilitators and guest resource presenters to put together their planned half hour presentations. Such was the interest shown in getting these presentations right, some young people worked well into the night refining and practicing their presentations.

The final presentation was held at the Scrub Hill Aboriginal and Islander complex. The forum participants were able to present their findings for the week to the Parliamentary Secretary for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy, the Hon Linda Lavarch MP, the deputy mayor of Hervey Bay, Mr Mick Kruger, Michael White and a number of the Central Queensland ATSI Regional Councillors and the Regional Managers. In Linda Lavarch's closing address she praised the youth for their input and solutions. Moreover, she said she had learned more about Indigenous issues in the past three hours than in the past three weeks of her being in her present portfolio.

Why the forum worked

The forum changed the lives of many of the participants and this was continued in a series of follow-up com-

munity presentations. Parents, teachers, employers and other family members also made reference to changed behaviour patterns and increased self-esteem which was evident in those who participated.

The staged progression of cultural value identification, identity challenge and reassurance, cultural empowerment leading to personal empowerment and leadership building through collective learning were seen as the success of this forum and community based follow-up activities. A forum about youth issues in Indigenous communities is only telling half the story. This forum was also about building capacity in a section of the community, who will very soon be the community leaders. Dispelling feelings of helplessness and instilling a sense of self recognised their worth as a Aboriginal person, a leader and an individual in a wider society.

What now?

Sustainability of a one-off event is often hard. The staff at the Wide Bay Burnett Indigenous Stronger Family Program were very aware that the youth would need somewhere to

utilise any newly discovered skills, spirituality and cultural values. The follow-up community presentations by the youth to their parents, elders and to other leaders of the Indigenous and non-indigenous communities went some way to reinforce a sense of worth in those participants who took part. Interestingly, many of these young people had already begun to put some of the measures they discussed at the forum in place in their communities. Others came with proposals considering how they could be a part of their towns.

The prospect of an ongoing Regional Indigenous Youth Council is also being considered and actioned through local agencies. A three-day follow-up inter-regional forum was also held with a number of attendees from the Hervey Bay Forum. Those attending discussed issues and the concept of culture as a teaching tool on a deeper level.

For further information please contact: Graham McLoughlin, Program Coordinator.

Promoting family wellness in the Spanish speaking community of Victoria

The Spanish Latin American Welfare Centre: Centro Español Latino Americano de Asistencia Social (CELAS) in working at a grassroot level for many years has experienced and assisted the Spanish speaking community at many levels and on many issues. The aim of this project is to fulfill the needs and interests of the Spanish speaking communities living in the cities of Brimbank and Hume. The centre joined efforts with Victoria University and conducted research to more clearly identify the main areas in which to concentrate its efforts. The result led to the conclusion that many issues in the Spanish speaking community derived from family issues not being addressed at home.

Project focus

Not knowing how to talk to children, how to discipline them or how to direct them were some of the issues related to lack of parenting skills. Cultural conflict between parents and children were also presented. Parents kept a stronghold on their culture of origin while their children were slowly integrating into the new culture and following a different way of life. This caused great stress within the family environment and broadened the gap between parents and children as it extended to conflict of interests and different life views.

In its quest to reach the Spanish speaking community CELAS engaged all available Spanish speaking media including radio, television and newspapers. The project also developed a number of publicity materials including flyers, posters and material for

internet pages. The project also made use of other community services, such as family, community and youth services, while also expanding to any other service reaching the target community.

Some of the services the project offered and delivered to the community included: forums in many areas of interest; parenting courses; community events; information sessions; consultation and research to, better understand the communities needs and interests. The project also formed partnerships with Schools teaching Spanish and groups working directly with the Spanish speaking community. Whilst providing these services the project also looked for funding to deliver specialized services to young people.

The project has also engaged community members through recruitment

and training of volunteers and employing community members to deliver services through the use of funds obtained from successful grant applications. It has also worked directly with groups in the planning and delivery of social, recreational and educational activities and in engaging community workers in the delivery of activities.

In essence the project has made use of numerous available resources, tried novel ideas that offer some opportunity for success and remained open to change and input from the community. In its aim to promote family and community wellness the project developed activities, which actively engaged the community without even realizing they were being part of the project. This saw the beginning of a cooking book idea, a community celebration, which included activities and attractions for all family members, delivery of parenting course specifically for the Spanish speaking community as well as other small community gatherings.

The project has been successful in reaching the community through engaging volunteers, working in partnership and participating in the various programs. Some of the programs and activities include: parenting courses, community events, and delivering programs such as homework support programs and other educational and recreational activities for young people.

The project has achieved a great deal. It has reached the community and delivered many beneficial services some of which are still working and, some of which are work in progress. Nevertheless, the project has also encountered some limitations including the restric-

tion in terms of geographical boundaries whereby being restricted to two cities has meant that if these communities did not respond to the project, little could be done with the Spanish speaking communities based elsewhere. In addition, more resources are needed to engage the community and to organize community events, which will greatly benefit the participation of the community and encourage community interaction.

Sustainability

Much has been learned through the life of this project including:

- identifying the needs and developing strategies to address the communities needs and interests;
- actively involving the community in the achievement of their wellbeing; and
- introducing the concept of approaching services for help when needed.

We need to continue and sustain the work that has been set in motion to ensure that the knowledge, experience and community progress is not lost. It is very important to acknowledge the need to continue this project and to resource it appropriately to maximize its benefits to the target community and the community at large. Without structured programs, the Spanish speaking community becomes apathetic about taking action to solve their problems and the family issues, which were tackled during the funded period may begin to resurface again.

The response obtained to date from the community has been very positive and encouraging. Continuing this



work is of crucial interest to the wellbeing of the Spanish speaking community in general. There is at the moment an expectation that CELAS will continue what has been started, however this will depend on CELAS receiving adequate support to enable its staff to work with the community.

A possible way to maximise the benefits of a project like this, and especially important when working with a community as small as the Spanish speaking community (25,000 members representing about 22 Spanish speaking countries), is to set boundaries wider than those set out in this Project. Therefore, the Project needs to be flexible enough to work with the community as it responds regardless of the area in which they live, as seeing the benefits being obtained by areas involved will create a chain reaction and will see more and more community members benefiting from the service the project offers.

For further information go to the CELAS website which offers information about services being delivered to the community as well as other relevant information. www.celas.org.au

Strengthening Mining Families in the Eastern Goldfields

The project is a joint initiative of Eastern Goldfields Medical Division of General Practice Ltd and Goldfields Men's Health Inc. In 1999, the Practice and Goldfields South East Health Region (Public Health) identified the necessity for a needs assessment to target men and service providers in the

Kalgoorlie-Boulder area. A Men's Health Interest Group, initially facilitated by the Goldfields Region, was established to plan, develop and implement initiatives targeting men. A Men's Health Forum was held in December 1999 to recruit consumers to the Men's Health Interest Group.

The community

The project is located in Kalgoorlie Western Australia and covers the

Northern Goldfields and surrounding region. The city of Kalgoorlie-Boulder is located 596 kilometres east of Perth and has a population of approximately 30,000. The project works within the Eastern Goldfields Medical Division of General Practice Ltd boundaries, categorised as a rural and remote area, which covers almost one-third of Western Australia's total land mass. Goldfields Medical Health collaborates with other projects ►

within the Goldfields Practice region to extend the scope of the Men's Health Project. The primary target group for this project is men in the Kalgoorlie-Boulder region with a focus on those working in the mining industry. Mining is the predominant industry in the region and accounts for 18.3 per cent of Goldfields-Esperance total employment (GDEC 2003). Goldfields Medical Health project activities were initially conducted within a 100-kilometre radius of Kalgoorlie-Boulder. This was later extended to mine-sites surrounding Kalgoorlie-Boulder, Leinster, Norseman, Laverton and Wiluna.

Our project story

The Eastern Goldfields Medical Division of General Practice Ltd facilitated the Men's Health Interest Group meetings from May 2000. The group then became incorporated and was known as Goldfields Men's Health Incorporated (GMH). Goldfields Men's Health successfully obtained funding for the project from the Australian Government Department of Family and Community Services under the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy. The Eastern Goldfields Medical Division of General Practice Ltd was contracted on behalf of Goldfields Medical Health to hold the funds and manage the daily operation of the project on behalf of Goldfields Men's Health. Goldfields Medical Health provides the direction for all project outcomes. The Goldfields Men's Health committee consists of representatives from the

Goldfields General Practice, general practitioners, police, local health and social service providers (Centrecare, Community Mental Health, Community Legal Centre, Centrelink, Carelink), Goldfields South East Region, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Chamber of Minerals and Energy.

A project officer has been employed to implement the strategies and meet the project objectives. The objectives of the project are:

- to improve awareness of issues affecting the target group's psychosocial and family wellbeing and health through parenting advice and information, in order to improve men's insight into their needs and willingness to access appropriate services.
- to improve the occupational health and safety skills of professionals and mine-site nurses to support men in the mining industry, and refer men and their families to appropriate health and social services.
- to raise awareness of employers on the impacts of current shift work and other practices on the psychosocial wellbeing and health of their employees and their families.
- to improve access for early intervention and management of social, family and health issues.
- to improve links and integration between key stakeholders and service providers.
- to incorporate action research methodology throughout the life of the project.

Results and evaluation

Action research is a key element of the Men's Health Project. It has been an integral strategy within the project to generate national longitudinal data on effective practice, prevention and early intervention strategies. Support in action research evaluation has been provided by the Australian Institute of Family Studies. Each activity conducted by Goldfields Medical Health has been individually evaluated. Both quantitative and qualitative data is collected and reported, depending on what is appropriate for

the activity conducted. All results are presented to the Goldfields Medical Health committee and reflected upon. The event is then considered for repetition and possible expansion. This process helps us to identify how to continuously improve our work.

With the support of the Australian Institute of Family Studies, it has been identified that we could be including additional anecdotal information in our current reporting style. In the future this information will be incorporated in a separate section of the report and will include verbal feedback received from men attending events and notable occurrences in the planning and implementation of events.

The project outcomes and work of the project officer in increasing awareness of men's health issues is clearly visible in the Goldfields area. The nature of the set up of GMH Inc has encouraged inclusivity and representation of community members across a range of work places. Goldfields Medical Health continues to be a community-owned group with the enthusiasm of members driving the momentum and the desire to seek further funding and to continue the service to the men and their families in this community.

The success of Goldfields Medical Health events has been attributed to an ease of communication with stakeholders. The project's links with key stakeholders in the community, assists in the organisation and coordination of project activities. Subcommittees and working parties are often established to provide support and direction to the project officer when organising major events.

Sustainability

The Kalgoorlie-Boulder community has continued to respond positively to the project with ongoing support from all, including the mining industry. A number of mining companies and community organisations support the project with sponsorship. This year alone, we have received over \$5,000 from local mining companies to assist with 2005 activities. Although we need to seek further



Community Men's Health Night, 2nd September 2004



Father's Day Picnic in the Park, 5th September 2004

funding to continue the employment of a project officer, the community has proven supportive of ongoing activities and has demonstrated their willingness to assist financially.

Lessons learnt

Men do have an interest in their own health!

Each year Goldfields Men's Health conducts a number of annual events. These include a Men's Health Night and a Father's Day Picnic in the Park. These events continue to grow every year and attract a substantial number of men. Our men's health nights are held in a local pub, which is seen as a familiar and comfortable setting for men. On average 80 men attend the night and enjoy a light-hearted evening of men's health information. The Father's Day Picnic provides an opportunity for Dads to spend some time with their family on Father's Day, being the final day of West Australia's Men's Health Week. Activities on the day focus on family connectedness, promoting health and wellbeing to men and their families and providing information on local health and social service providers. In 2004 over 200 men's health information packs were distributed to the men attending the picnic.

The importance of networks

The project is based on linkages and partnerships between the local health and social services, the Goldfields community and the mining industry. Consultation with community stakeholders has been extensive. The advantage of having established the Goldfields Men's Health Inc. over the

past four years has resulted in the collaboration in this project by many organisations. In order to promote health to mine site employees it's been important for Goldfields Men's Health to have a strong working relationship with mine-site representatives. An occupational health and safety Health Promotion Network meets quarterly to discuss workplace health promotion strategies, men's health issues and local events. The purpose of this group is to achieve a constructive, collaborative network for occupational health and safety personnel in the mining industry in the Goldfields, through peer support and education. This network has been the essential link between Goldfields Men's Health and men working in the mining industry.

What did the project learn from the first phase of the Strategy and develop into this round of funding?

There are a few key points that have been highlighted since the first phase of funding. First, that sustainability is crucial for the project to continue to expand the activities. Second, the need for a resource specifically for Goldfields mine workers on common mental health issues and local services that deal with those issues. As a result of the additional funding in the second phase, an Emotional Health and Wellbeing resource has been developed and is soon to be launched at mine sites within the target area.

The first phase of funding highlighted the need to expand the project to focus on other target groups. Goldfields Medical Health Inc continue to seek addi-

tional funding for an extra project officer, so that the lessons learnt, and activities developed, could focus on groups such as men in prisons, the police force, transport industry, and local business. Given the demographics and population there is also an extreme need for an Aboriginal specific focus for improving the health needs of men.

The health centre staff are hopeful that funding bodies recognise the impressive steps that have been taken in primary preventative health care for the men in our region and continue to support the community effort to improve and expand upon the health messages which strengthen the mining families in the Eastern Goldfields.

Contacts/links/resources

■ Media partners

An essential element of the Men's Health Project has been our strong relationship with local media. As a result the awareness of the project in the community is considerable. For each major activity, a media release is forwarded to each media outlet, followed up by interviews. In addition, GMH also has a regular radio segment on 6KG RadioWest's Goldfields Today programme. The segment, presented by GMH project officer and research officer with the assistance of a guest speaker, highlights a different health issue each month. The potential reach of the segment is vast.

■ Website

A major strategy of the project is our website (www.wellman.org.au). Since the launch of the website in September 2003, there have been in excess of 1,490,255 hits. The website offers a directory to Goldfields Health Services and a search engine to find specific topics. To ensure the website is a useful resource, it is updated regularly with new health topics and calendar items.

Reference

Goldfields-Esperance Development Commission 2003, *Goldfields-Esperance Perspective – An Update on the Economy of WA's Goldfields-Esperance Region*, Department of Local Government and Regional Development of Western Australia.