

## 5. Community education programs

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As with previous prevention program audits (James 1994; Tomison 1995a; 1997b), programs identified as having a community education focus could be broadly classified into a number of types. First, large-scale media campaigns with a regional, State-wide or national focus, such as:

***National Child Protection Week, NAPCAN Australia (NSW and nationally).*** National Child Protection Week was initiated by NAPCAN in 1990 to promote the value of children. Objectives include: to educate society on the dangers and damage to children as a result of corporal punishment; to offer advice on alternatives to physical punishment; to educate parents about nurturing children in their early years and choosing suitable carers; to increase literacy and self-esteem in children; to inform parents and adolescents about substance abuse; to lobby for policies and laws which value and protect children and young people. As part of the Week, educational material is distributed widely promoting positive ways to nurture children, and activities are held throughout Australia promoting community awareness about positive parenting and prevention of child abuse and neglect. By selecting a different theme for each year, the annual campaign provides the opportunity for all involved in the child protection/child abuse prevention field to promote their own projects and programs at both a national and State/Territory level. The campaign is recognised by governments and the community as a most effective national initiative.

***Every Child Is Important – Australians Against Child Abuse (Vic.).*** This is a national public education campaign that aims to encourage a change in public attitudes regarding the low status of children in our society and that affirms the value and significance of children to adults, families and society. The campaign addresses the commonly-held belief that children are a cost to society, the perceived suspicion that any application of children's rights will mean an erosion of parents' rights, and the public's lack of understanding about the extent and nature of child abuse in Australia. The campaign utilises television, radio and print advertising featuring Rod Stewart's version of the song 'Have I told you lately that I love you' (written by Van Morrison). The campaign also includes information kits, parenting education seminars and a 'Celebrating Children' concert.

***Katherine Community Awareness Program, Territory Health Services (NT).*** The project was a community awareness campaign (primary prevention) using media strategies to raise awareness of child abuse and child protection issues. The campaign was centred around the theme 'Protecting Children is a Community Responsibility', and was designed to provide information to adult members of the community about child abuse. In order to reach as large an audience as possible, it was decided to use the mass media. Five campaign elements were designed: (1) a newspaper article in the local weekly newspaper and in the monthly RAAF newsletter; (2) a one page flyer distributed to private mail boxes in Katherine and Tindal; (3) the design of a picture and caption on the local dairy's plastic milk containers; (4) a segment on the local radio station, 8KTR; (5) a static display in Katherine's major shopping centre.

Second, information packages, resource centres and community development programs operating at the local community level, for example:

*The Devonport Playhouse, The Devonport Playhouse Inc. (Tas.)*. The Devonport Playhouse opens each weekday, 48 weeks per year. Parents come and stay with their children on any day, at any time, for as long as they wish. The objectives of the Playhouse are: to provide an informal meeting area for parents/carers of children aged 0–4 years which will facilitate the development of supportive social networks; to provide a forum where good health, parenting and life skills practices will be promoted; to provide a resource centre with information and equipment relevant to the early years of parenting; to provide a play environment which is specific to the physical and social needs of children aged 0–4 years. The Playhouse liaises and works together with government and non-government services, including schools, health centres, the Parenting Centre, Playgroup Association and Nursing Mothers Association. Organised activities include guest speakers and workshops for adults, play-gym and hands-on fun activity sessions for children, post-natal depression support group and an adoptive grandparent scheme.

*Community Education and Training Package, Jannawi Family Centre (NSW)*. Jannawi Family Centre is a specialist child protection service working with ‘at risk’ and abused 0–9 year old children and their families. ‘Change Could Come’ and ‘Creating the Future’ is a video resource package for children and families affected by domestic violence and child abuse. Written and directed by Chris Bourke, and presented by Noni Hazelhurst, the video features a number of puppets, with indigenous actors Ernie Dingo and Bob Mazza as narrators and Pauline McLeod as story teller. The stories and resource materials assist children to recognise and talk about violence and abuse, understand the effects on their relationships, and identify strategies to develop alternative and positive family relationships and friendships. The kit is also a good example of an holistic approach to violence prevention.

*Child Friendly Village– Ongoing Activities, Bangalow Chamber of Commerce, Bangalow (NSW)*. The Bangalow Chamber of Commerce applied for and received funding for a parent education initiative run over three years which was called the Parenting Support Project. Funding for this project has now ceased, however the Chamber of Commerce and the local community continue to be active in initiating child-friendly initiatives in their community. The Bangalow Child Friendly Village, has a primary prevention, community development focus and works in partnership with other agencies including the Northern Rivers (NSW) Area Health Service. Partially inspired by reports of Swedish attempts to create an environment designed specifically for children, the Child Friendly Village was developed to improve the environment for children via the utilisation of existing community groups and networks. The aims of the Village are to raise awareness of children’s needs in decisions affecting the physical environment, and to extend beyond the purely physical to address the social and emotional environment of children as well. Activities currently include placing parenting videos in the local video shop and working with the Road Traffic Authority on a ‘Safer routes to school’ project.

Third, local and State-wide training for professionals or community groups. One third of all community education programs were directed at educating professionals, with the training of mandated notifiers a major area of education, for example,

*Child Abuse Prevention Public Speaking Kit, Department of Families, Youth and Community Care Brisbane (Qld)*. The Department of Families, Youth and Community

Care has recently developed a Child Abuse Prevention Public Speaking Kit. The kit has been created by the Positive Parenting Coordination Section at the department in response to an identified community need for resource support in the provision of education and information on child abuse and its prevention. It is designed to assist those who work in government departments, community organisations, parent groups and other areas where there is a need to present material about child abuse prevention and the role of the community. It can be used with a range of audiences and is particularly useful for the general public, parents and people who work directly with children. The kit includes: tips on public speaking; session plans for workshops; activity sheets; overhead transparency masters and handouts; a list of available services and agencies; a guide to contact and referral; and evaluation forms.

***Cross Cultural Perspective's on Child Protection, Ethnic Childcare, Family and Community Services Co-op (NSW).*** This is a professional education program specifically developed for children's services workers. The program aims to assist children's staff in dealing with cross-cultural issues of child protection including information and strategies on how to resolve cross-cultural dilemmas.

***Mandated Notification Trainer Training Program, Family and Youth Services (SA).*** Since 1989, comprehensive mandatory notification training has been offered to mandated professional groups, including: medical practitioners, pharmacists, registered or enrolled nurses, dentists, psychologists, members of the police force, community corrections officers (where their duties include the supervision of young or adult offenders in the community), social workers, teachers in any educational institution (including preschools) and approved family day care providers. It is also available to any other person who is a manager, supervisor or direct service provider of a government or non-government agency, that provides health, welfare, education, child care or residential services wholly or partly for children. The training program is provided by accredited trainers who come from a range of community organisations, government departments and agencies as well as individual contractors. The program consists of a three-day workshop that equips trainers to run the one-day or seven-hour module called the Mandated Notification Training Program (which has been nationally accredited).

***'Effect of Domestic Violence on Children' Training Program for Early Childhood Workers, Port Pirie Domestic Violence Action Group Inc. (SA).*** The training program is a negotiated package designed to enable early childhood workers to explore the effects of domestic violence on children. The objectives are that Early Childhood workers understand the issues surrounding domestic violence and the impact and effect of witnessing violence in the home on young children's development. Workers are made aware of legal issues and professional responsibilities related to the mandated reporting of child abuse. They become aware of the principles of effectively working with children who are experiencing violence in the home and the local services and supports available for families experiencing violence. Resource kits are provided to participants and the Action Group works to assist service managers develop policy and procedures for working with children affected by domestic violence in their homes.

***'Preventing Abuse Before the Cycle Begins' Interactive Workshops with Dr Sue Packer, PECAN – Prevention and Education (Child Abuse and Neglect), Casuarina (NT).*** Dr Sue Packer was enlisted to run a series of interactive workshops with paediatricians and GP's, members of the judiciary and others involved in the administration of justice, and family support service providers. The workshops targeted key professional

groups who work with families at risk of abuse or in situations where early intervention could prevent abuse occurring. The aims of the workshops were for each professional group to: identify current child maltreatment issues; determine any training and educational requirements; identify and share resources useful in early intervention of child abuse and neglect; initiate discussions about developing a coordinated approach to child abuse prevention; provide a framework for future directions in early intervention in child abuse in the NT; promote partnerships in child protection across professions, agencies and departments; increase reporting rates of child abuse and neglect by medical professions; elicit support for intervention in systems abuse of children within the legal system. Strategies included ensuring wide representation within each of these groups.

## Parent education

The provision of *parent education* in a variety of forms, has become a cornerstone for working with 'at risk' and maltreating families to reduce the likelihood of child abuse and neglect (Tomison 1998b). Parent education is currently advocated as a significant component of any comprehensive set of preventative services for parents at high risk of abusing or neglecting their children (Dubowitz 1989, Chalk & King 1998). It can be defined as 'a systematic and conceptually based program intended to impart information, awareness and skills to the participants on aspects of parenting' (Fine 1980:5). The underlying tenet of parent education is that a parent who is:

'well-prepared for the life changes associated with childrearing is less likely to succumb to the increasing stress factors that prevail. This viewpoint supports the principles of preventative mental health – skills, knowledge, and experiences that boost the individual's coping abilities . . . will increase their resistance to the forces that oppose their healthy adjustment' (Wolfe 1993:98).

Parent education is generally assumed to benefit families, in part, by increasing parents' knowledge of child development and appropriate methods of childrearing, problem solving and home management (DePanfilis 1996; Reppucci, Britner & Woolard 1997). Analysis revealed that 63 per cent (258 of 408) of all community education programs, incorporated parent education messages (see *Parent education, Family Support programs*, page 68, for more detailed discussion), with half of these programs targeting 'at risk' families.

***Parent Support and Community Education, Parentzone Gippsland (Vic.)***. Parentzone Gippsland provides information, support and referral to all parents and caregivers of children from birth to 18 years. The service also has a community education role in the form of training and consultancy to professionals in facilitating parenting groups and establishing parent education in local areas; a quarterly newsletter on issues, programs and groups; and a library service offering books, brochures, newsletters, videos and cassettes.

***Young Parents Group, Belconnen Youth Centre Inc. (ACT)***. The Young Parents Group provides support and information and a play group. A child activities worker is employed to provide structured, age-appropriate activities for the children while parents under 25-years informally meet, plan and prepare a free healthy lunch, with access to a youth worker for support information and referral. Community nurses and general practitioners visit and provide free and confidential consultations. Occasionally there are outings and guest speakers. The objectives of the program include: to provide fun, interesting, developmentally-appropriate activities and a social setting for children; to increase young parents knowledge of parenting skills and referral services, while providing opportunity for interaction with professional support and other young parents.

## School-based programs

In addition, one-third (34 per cent – 140 of 408) of the community education programs were provided in a school context, with the majority (64 per cent – 89 programs) designed to provide students with information on health and wellbeing, and the development of positive relationships (see *Personal safety programs*, page 60, for further discussion of the role of schools).

***Hearing Clinics and Virtual Parenting– School-based Youth Health Nurse, Townsville Health Services (Qld)***. The Health Service provides various school-based programs for both primary and secondary school children. The Health Service provides a school-based youth health nurse at secondary schools in the Townsville area. The aim of the school-based youth health nurse is: to educate children about health issues, pregnancy and suicide prevention; to offer referrals, counselling, drug and alcohol issues, teenage issues and reducing teen pregnancy. The role of the nurse is a preventative one. A part of the strategy to reduce teen pregnancy is to run a program in schools called Virtual Parenting. Virtual Parenting seeks to reduce the rates of teen pregnancy and empower children in the role of parenting when they have made a conscious and informed decision to have a child. Virtual Parenting involves school children caring for three- and-a-half kilogram baby dolls. The dolls cry, wet themselves, scream if shaken or if they are put to sleep incorrectly.

Of the remaining programs, many were designed to provide educational staff with information and training in identifying and managing child maltreatment:

***Training for School Communities to Support Students Affected by Family Violence, The Savvy Schools Kit, Education Queensland (Qld)***. The program aims to assist staff at primary, secondary and special schools to understand the issues for children who are witnesses to domestic violence. It also aims to strengthen the capacity of schools to provide appropriate supports to students. In 2000, Education Queensland developed the Savvy Schools Kit, a resource to assist school communities in raising their awareness of domestic and family violence.

## Level of prevention and type of maltreatment

Traditionally, community education has most often been used as a primary prevention initiative. This has been reflected in the Audit data where half of all community education programs had a primary prevention focus. A smaller number of community education programs targeted 'at risk' groups (32 per cent) while fewer still, were designed as tertiary level initiatives (17 per cent). Community education programs reflected the general Audit trend (see Table 3) of focusing predominantly on addressing issues of physical abuse, emotional abuse and neglect (over 80 per cent of programs), those forms of maltreatment typically targeted in parent education initiatives. However, like the Audit as a whole, sexual abuse and domestic violence issues were also well represented (two-thirds of the programs).

## In summary

It was clear that community education initiatives are being undertaken in substantial numbers across the nation, not only by governments and regional child protection interest groups, but by individual agencies, services and groups at the local community level. There was some evidence of the better known community education programs, particularly the many NAPCAN community educational programs, being used in a number of different settings by a variety of agencies and groups.

It was also apparent that a number of training programs and information packages of similar content had been developed independently by different communities. The unnecessary duplication of community education (and other prevention) resources could be reduced via the enhancement of interagency coordination and communication at the local, regional and state levels. Apart from the general benefits of developing professional relationships and sharing ideas, greater knowledge of pre-existing prevention programs already in operation and the increased collaborative development of programs would reduce unnecessary program duplication and thus free up valuable resources that could be better employed in refining or developing new programs.

One of the aims of the Audit was to identify programs from which service providers could learn, and thus avoid 'reinventing the wheel' with regard to program development. It is hoped that the documentation of a variety of community education (and other prevention) programs through the Audit and on the Child Abuse Prevention Programs database (see Appendix 1), will enable service providers to identify pre-existing programs that meet their needs and access those programs, reducing the need to always produce a new program that may add little to the prevention field as a whole. The Clearinghouse also has an extensive national collection of community education and training materials (including audiovisual resources) available for borrowing that can also inform service providers and possibly reduce program duplication.

Consideration should perhaps be given to the development of stronger partnerships with peak bodies to ensure the Clearinghouse collection remains up to date. In addition, although the resources are already used frequently when responding to requests for information on prevention activity, greater publication of their availability might reduce further, the duplication of activity.

### *The next step forward*

Previous analyses have suggested that the general community is broadly aware of child maltreatment (Donovan Research 1992). Despite public recognition that emotional abuse occurs and is probably more prevalent than either physical or sexual abuse (Donovan Research 1992), the public perception of child maltreatment appears primarily to be associated with severe physical abuse or sexual abuse, due mainly to media coverage of various court cases and associated feature articles (Wilczynski & Sinclair 1996). Similarly, child neglect is mainly perceived in terms of the severe cases of physical neglect portrayed in the media (Donovan Research 1992).

It has been contended that Australian community education campaigns need to follow the trend set by the United States in re-targeting programs to provide the public with detailed knowledge of specific aspects of child abuse and neglect (Tomison & McGurk 1996). McGurk (1995) advocated the use of 'dramatic' television as a means of providing detailed information about child maltreatment to the public in Australia. He referred to the success of hard-hitting advertising campaigns to discourage drink-driving and driving without the use of seatbelts. These advertisements illustrate the unacceptable and undesirable nature of these actions and present the consequences of such behaviour explicitly. McGurk believed that such an approach would be useful for the secondary and tertiary prevention of family violence, and advocated a trial media campaign explicitly portraying family violence with the intention of confronting 'perpetrators with the grossness, grotesqueness and total unacceptability of their behaviour. For victims, the campaign would be directed at encouraging them to come out of the cupboard' (McGurk 1995:11).

However, despite the growing acknowledgment of child maltreatment as a societal problem, it is often difficult to convince those in the broader community that they,

themselves, may be part of the problem. It is easier to think of maltreaters in stereotypical ways, pathologising them as mentally ill, abnormal or evil, enabling non-offenders to distance themselves from the problem rather than to address the true causes of maltreatment, such as poverty, or a lack of social support (Wilczynski & Sinclair 1996). There is also some evidence indicating that families are more likely to turn away from confronting messages, and those that merely identify inappropriate or abusive conduct (Hawkins, McDonald, Davison & Coy 1994). What works, appears to be programs that provide alternatives to inappropriate behaviour, or that merely promote positive, healthy interactions and the valuing of children, such as the *Every Child is Important* campaign described above.

An older example was *Use Words That Help Not Hurt*, based on a highly successful United States campaign (Garbarino 1990) and developed by NAPCAN. Begun in 1995, the program aims to: increase community awareness of the harmful and long-term effects of harsh and abusive words on children; encourage positive communication which nurtures and supports children; and expand the 1995 National Child Protection Week theme *Let's Talk With Children*, which outlined positive ways adults could communicate effectively with their children. The program also encourages support for adults in parenting children by informing them of resources available to assist them when needed. It involved a Community Service Announcement television advertisement, community education kit, poster and brochure.

Further extensions of the health promotion approach, as applied to community education, would be the greater 'mainstreaming' of such messages via the inclusion of 'positive relating' and/or child empowering stories and messages in the media. It appears that a number of researchers and practitioners have actually begun further development of a mainstream media strategy, with the intention of having health promotion, positive parenting and child maltreatment themes embedded in television 'soaps' and/or as part of a dedicated parent education program (for example, Sanders, Montgomery & Brechman-Toussaint 2000).