

**FAMILIES NOW,
BEENLEIGH, QLD**

What has the project been doing in the last six months?

Families NOW ran a Communications Camp to give families referred through community agencies the opportunity to go away for the weekend, spend quality time with each other and build on communication through play. Seven families attended and overall the weekend had very positive outcomes for the families. We planned the camp using the action research cycle, and gathered feedback from parents and children. The report of our camp can be found on the Families NOW website at www.familiesnow.net under action research.

We increased our volunteer positions to include a volunteer Resource Officer, Administration Officer, and Child Minder. The volunteer Child Minder recruits volunteers to engage children in play activities while their parents are participating in our courses.

Families NOW received state government funding for a creative play project to be run from the Families NOW playroom. This project involves engaging children in creative play activities through the playroom in the hope of recruiting parents as volunteers to go on and train other parents in the community on creative play and communication. The project has one paid full time worker, Donna Hanson, who will be supported by a team of trained volunteers. Donna has been with the team here at Families NOW as Volunteer Playroom Supervisor for over 16 months, a role in which she was artistic, creative and enthusiastic.

Families NOW have conducted two home budgeting and two parenting courses. As a result of enquiries from parents and a suggestion from our client reference group, we are currently running additional courses, aimed at parents of young children, and self esteem and assertiveness. We are currently developing courses in Parental Frustrations and a course in Building Family Confidence which will focus on volunteering role modelling and work.



We have completed three action research cycles. One was completed by our volunteer Research Officer James Houghton, "Families NOW: A Story in

Families NOW. We also produced and launched a video about our services, courses, and volunteering. We invited key stakeholders, such as Kay Elson, our local Federal Member and Patron, the chairman of Lutheran Community Care, Sue Vardon, the Chief Executive Officer of Centrelink and our clients from the Families NOW reference groups. We also had a compact disc made with similar information on it. Both the CD and the video are available in the AIFS library.

We have also been revisiting the role of the Beenleigh Area Family Support Network (BAFSN). This network was



Pictured (from left) Marita Holt, Coordinator of Families NOW and Dorothy Aldred, Senior Social Worker, Beenleigh Centrelink.

Two Voices", with interviews from project partners Dorothy Aldred from Centrelink and Vince Vernick from Lutheran Community Care. It is displayed on the Australian Institute of Family Studies website. A second cycle on volunteering, with a section by James, is also on the Australian Institute Of Family Studies database. The third action research cycle is on the Story of the Communications Camp which is also available on the institute's website and database.

Families NOW had stalls at the Family Fun Day in Brisbane and at Under 8s week at Eagleby State Primary School to showcase our work. We gave out show bags with information for parents on parenting ideas, activities and giveaways.

The Families NOW volunteer Administration Officer produced a newsletter with information about activities at



Activities at the Under 8's week celebrations.

initiated by Families NOW. In Queensland the Community Centre and Family Support Network (CCFSN) works across regions throughout Brisbane, and as Beenleigh is located in the middle of three regions, it was an excellent opportunity to regularly



meet with local agencies and call ourselves a sub-branch of the Northern Gold Coast CCFSN. As local agencies we wanted to make the issues more relevant to our community and our families. The issues we see here are not necessarily the same as at the Gold Coast. The BAFSN reports back to the Beenleigh Interagency that meets every six months. We aim to promote positive relationships and collaboration and discourage competitiveness and competition between agencies working for families.

How has the project changed your community? How do you know?

We have provided the community with a parenting course that is flexible and accessible. We know this through feedback given from course participants in our reference groups and through written feedback given to the course facilitators in their evaluations.

We have supported and strengthened the families within this community, establishing relationships with community agencies in the BAFSN and with families as a whole.

Families NOW aims to build on community capacity through family participation in reference groups, parent education courses and by providing families within our community the opportunity to attend a family camp to build on communication skills.

We are beginning to see how our project is changing the community through families revisiting Families NOW and telling us their stories of change, and families revisiting Families NOW before a situation occurs, for example, child behavioural problems or family or relationship breakdown. We have documented written and verbal feedback from families using workshops, comments books and reflective journals.

Families NOW also gathers evidence of change through doing action research, such as by identifying what is working and by changing what isn't. For example, we have been able to identify changes in volunteer roles and implement change as a result of to volunteer reflections in the volunteer reference group, individually

through use of reflective journals, our volunteer suggestion box and individual discussions with the coordinator. Identifying and documenting needs and current trends helps us deliver efficient and effective courses that are adaptable and flexible to families within our community, such as the new courses mentioned above.

How do you plan to maintain and build on the work you are doing into the future?

Through action research we can identify what is working and what doesn't and implement the changes into the program. However, as our funding ends in December 2004, Families NOW is on the sustainability rollercoaster.

Families NOW has been staffed primarily by a strong team of volunteers who invest substantial time and experience in their roles. Maintaining a solid core of committed volunteers, and planning for ongoing recruitment and training of volunteers as individuals move on, is an important part of our work. Sustainability has been assisted by state government funding for the Creative Play Project. The target group is parents and children at risk of entry into statutory, crisis and other intensive support. The outcomes are prevention and early intervention: prevention through supports they need to remain out of statutory, crisis and intensive support systems; and early intervention when clients have the capacity and motivation required for their earliest diversion from, or further entry into, statutory, crisis or other intensive service systems.

Other sustainability options we are looking into further are Centrelink, recurrent funding options and business sponsorship.

Since Families NOW has become better known in the community, we have had an increase in demand for information, referrals and courses. Providing the services, and using participatory processes, in line with action research, has seen our numbers increase. This, together with the positive feedback from our activities, demonstrates the need for this service to continue.

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

What has the project been doing since the last report?

Plans were in the pipeline previous to this report for the commencement of a new community facility accessible to families living in the surrounding public housing estates. This initiative has really taken off. Since commencement of programs in September 2003, we have had at least 60 families utilise the facility. Apart from an initial Open Day, to launch the opening of the facility, families are participating in the programs largely by word of mouth. Families who are already well connected are telling others about the facility and bringing them along. From the outset, residents have been encouraged to see the facility as their own, to participate in the planning and to set the direction for the future. Formal mechanisms have supported this process and residents and facilitators meet on a regular basis to discuss programs and planning. The current programs are those which have been decided upon by residents and regular reviews and consultation with residents are paramount to providing what they feel is relevant.

Towards the end of our previous six month review, we interviewed parents and children who had participated in our Homework Club at the facility at Highett Estate. Their feedback indicated that much had been gained for their children particularly, in attending for the last 12-18 months. However, parents also felt that there were many families that we were not reaching who had no interest in attending the Homework Club. The parents of children who were regularly attending decided they would like to start a separate Parents group of their own to begin to discuss these issues in more depth and find ways of reaching these other families. Parents door-knocked their neighbours to invite them along. The group members doubled in one week as a result! These parents are currently working on a project which will help to welcome new families on the estate. This involves compiling a folder with information