



to make this project sustainable by involving local community members as leaders or to transfer their skills and knowledge to others.

How are you going about it?

With guidance from the Port Pirie and Peterborough Reference Group members, the Bright Start Project workers are very much focused on following the objectives of the project to: improve partnerships between

service providers to more effectively respond to identified needs; provide opportunities for parents to access and influence service providers; enable parents to enhance their parenting skills and family relationships; promote safe and healthy development of children; improve community responsiveness to the needs of families and children; and work with aboriginal families to enhance parenting skills.

CONNECTING THE COMMUNITY, VICTORIA

The project setting

Connecting the Community is a community development project focusing on strengthening families and community building in Clayton South. The community of Clayton South (in Melbourne) is characterised by great cultural diversity with more than 50 nationalities represented and less than 40 per cent of residents being born in Australia.

The lead agency for the project is the City of Kingston, Community Services. Other project partners include Southern Family Life who will provide family support services, including case management, in-home family support and group work; and the Centre for Community Child Health who will assist the project evaluation.

Why is the project needed?

Need for the project was primarily identified through community feedback, which was supported by socio-demographic analysis. In early 2001, Council's Access and Equity Committee conducted a consultation in South Clayton community to identify the needs and concerns of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse families (Source: Report from the Kingston City Council's Access and Equity Committee February 2001). The project will build on this consultation with further input from the community.

The following sample of views typify how residents perceive their community at present:

"Women are very isolated as a result of traditional role differentiation and a tendency to become house-bound."

"The need for services to respond on an individual basis and enable a trusting one-to-one relationship to develop."

"Families tend only to present at times of crises – there is lots of scope for prevention work."

"You should limit information that is spread through the written word – there is a need to find other methods of communication to be effective."

"Some families will need a lot of practical assistance in accessing services – we shouldn't take anything for granted."

"Some families in the area will need education about parenting norms and laws – for example, child abuse. The message needs to be delivered in an educative context, not in a judgemental manner."

What are you trying to do in this project?

The project aims to connect families into a coordinated and responsive service system to improve family functioning and build a stronger and self-reliant community.

The objectives of the project are to:

- improve family health and functioning by building on existing services and developing a more comprehensive and inclusive network of service options with an early intervention focus;

- actively engage the community in the planning, development and evaluation of the project;
- improve coordination and linkages between services to ensure continuity of care, responsiveness to individual needs and cost effectiveness outcomes;
- maximise local leadership and partnership opportunities through building structured links between the local community, service providers, government and non-government stakeholders;
- support the community to build capacity to address social risk factors and create a more supportive and safer environment for families and children; and
- build on existing knowledge and through action research develop new insights into best practice approaches to service delivery and capacity building.

How are you going about it?

The establishment stage of the project has been completed which has included communication and promotional strategies; community engagement for consultation and volunteer involvement in the project; development of the local service system, including new services to the area through outposting and community and professional network groups formed; and a ranges of supports provided to individual families and local community groups. Stage two is set to begin where a range of specific projects will be implemented in conjunction with the community in response to issues identified during consultation processes.