

Stronger Families Fund PROJECT PROFILES

COMPILED BY ELLEN FISH AND COLLEEN TURNER

One of the major themes that has emerged from our work with Stronger Families Fund projects is the sheer diversity and complexity in the work that projects do. In this section of the Bulletin, as in previous Bulletins, we are pleased to publish project responses to a series of questions about their work.

FIRST GLIMPSE

These are the first reports from a number of the Stronger Families Fund projects. All the projects were asked the same questions – these are their responses.

SOUTHSIDE GOOD BEGINNINGS VOLUNTEER HOME VISITING PROGRAM, ACT

The project setting

Southside *Good Beginnings* Volunteer Home Visiting Program, based in Canberra, is auspiced by Southside Community Services Inc and supported by the National *Good Beginnings* Office. Southside *Good Beginnings* is a service for families with children under the age of six years, living in the inner south suburbs of Canberra, including Griffith, Kingston, Oaks Estate, Narrabundah, Red Hill and Symonston.

Why is this project needed?

Research has shown that early experiences and the quality of nurturing and cognitive stimulation received by children in their early years have a significant impact on social, behavioural, physical and cognitive development. Ideally, a network of friends, other family members and a range of community services support families in their parenting during the early years. However, many parents today feel isolated and lack social networks to help them in their role of parenting. The majority of requests for assistance received by Southside Community Services are from parents with little or no family support.

Isolation for families living in the inner city suburbs of Canberra can be caused by social, cultural, health, economic or geographic factors.

What are you trying to do in the project?

The Southside *Good Beginnings* Program hopes to reduce parents' feelings of isolation and encourage good



Southside *Good Beginnings* celebrates the graduation of its first group of Community Parents.

parenting practices by fostering social and community support for families with young children.

How are you going about it?

Volunteers, called Community Parents, are recruited from the southern suburbs of Canberra. After completing a six-week comprehensive training program, they are linked to a family where they offer friendly, informal

social support and home visits as well as help the family access community services and social groups.

To ensure the program has local ownership and relevance, a reference group of 10-15 people from the Canberra community informs the Southside *Good Beginnings* Program. Individual reference group members consult with their individual networks

Social and geographic isolation

- No telephone
- Lack of awareness/knowledge of local resources
- Transport difficulties
- No access to extended family or friends
- No contact with family, friends or neighbours

Child and/or family with additional needs

- Frequent pregnancies
- Multiple births
- Teenage parents
- Premature or low-birth weight baby
- Recent arrivals/refugees
- Child/family member with physical disability
- Family member with a mental illness
- Family member with special developmental needs
- Language difficulties
- Culture-specific needs

Disadvantaged socially & economically

- Limited education
- Financial stress or inadequate or unpredictable income
- Unemployment
- Frequent moving or no established residence
- Inadequate housing

Reasons why program may not be suitable for the family

- Every referral will undergo an assessment. Appropriate support for families and the safety of the Community Parent is a priority.
- Families living outside the inner south of Canberra
 - Parent(s)/carer(s) with a current drug-related dependency (excluding those whose medical condition requires medication such as epilepsy, diabetes)
 - Parent(s)/carer(s) with severe untreated or unmanaged mental illness
 - Parent(s)/carer(s) with severe post-natal depression or puerperal psychosis
 - Confirmed or suspected child abuse
 - Domestic violence (depending on discussions between agency and program coordinator)





Gunghalin Young Parents Peer Support and Education group (GYPSE) spokespeople talk about the needs of young parents during a Volunteer training session.

and offer the coordinators honest and constructive feedback on the planning, reporting or promotion of the program.

The coordinators network and liaise with community groups, agencies and families within the Canberra

region to identify the needs of families and look for ways to make agencies more accessible and effective for families.

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BARRWAYAMBANG GIRRAWA GROWING COMMUNITY PROJECT BOWRAVILLE, NSW

The project setting

Bowraville is a small rural community in northern New South Wales approximately 70 km south west and inland from Coffs Harbour, in beautiful Gumbaynggirr Country. Twenty per cent of the population of 2000 is Indigenous, and Bowraville was ranked the seventh most disadvantaged community in the state in Tony Vinson's 1999 report "Unequal in Life". Further to this alarming statistic, Bowraville is adversely reported in crime, unemployment, education and other social indicators. Social welfare practitioners widely comment on the continuing problems and difficulty of resolving what is commonly known as the "Bowraville problem". The situation is multi layered and complex, reflecting the issues that many Aboriginal Peoples in Gumbaynggirr Country face on a daily basis.

Why is the project needed?

Unfortunately, powerless people are often trapped on a merry-go-round, and don't make the first step toward changing dysfunctional ways of living until something critical happens. Until that time there is often an experience of acceptance – "frog in hot water syndrome". This "acceptance" – of inadequate health care and diet, poor living conditions, alcohol and other drug addictions, extreme violence and family dysfunction, children not attending school – often exists because people don't know any different. And so the

situation can remain until at least one person makes a move and breaks out of the cycle. When individuals do manage to make a change, the community is confronted with, and can be further fractured by, the "tall poppy syndrome". It is only when a connected group grow the same ground together that the change is validated and significant enough to bring about better relationships and widespread community development. The project is needed to facilitate this community growth and to establish a shared community vision.

What are you trying to do in the project?

The main aim of the project is to promote family resilience and community capacity through direct engagement of individuals and families in formal and informal learning opportunities. The program will improve access to services by Indigenous residents through service networking, promote active reconciliation and healing, foster better family relationships through parenting training and develop community leaders. Other elements of the project include establishing mutually supportive relationships among community organisations, developing a united community vision, and promoting economic and social participation through direct employment development and placement.

How are you going about it?

The project is supporting learning opportunities and activities that will lead to the development of a strategic group of community leaders, working within and enhancing community cohesion and growth. These include:

- Training for MiiMi Mother's Aboriginal Corporation Inc. Board about: roles and responsibilities; MiiMi's constitution and identifying the need to update; understanding community issues (what the project is about); and understanding the importance of good oral communication.
- Responding to the community's identified needs – for example, through development of an Indigenous Fashion Design Course, or a collaborative project to address family violence, or a kitchen garden project to support better nutrition.
- Including specific skills of new Aboriginal peoples to the area.
- Self-esteem activities through workshops and one to one support, especially through use of story and images.
- Enhancing the communication between community members.
- Being positive role models and leading the community by using examples of how we as a team relate to each other through training processes, through strategic processes, and through conflict resolution processes.
- Maintaining a project line of thought (not losing focus).
- Learning new skills and acting on necessary decisions for the good of the organisation, the community and for ourselves.

The usual pattern for change happens through the social action research method, and it is the shift back and forth between action and reflection that supports a process of community cohesion and growth.