



formality and they will allow us to use this room. This will entail recruiting volunteers, training them and support – a lot of work. The parents room has been a great networking tool for us as a lot of the communities and organisations are excited about there being this kind of facility available in Moree. This has meant approaching business and organisations for funding to supply some of the equipment we will need. We have been successful in finding some sponsors but are always on the hunt for more.

A Project Advisory Group has been formed. There has been problems with availability of some members so I have sent letters to other organisations and community members who may be willing to attend. We have spoken about the formation of an Early Intervention Interagency Group and how we get members. There are many services that attend meetings in Moree and sometimes feel there are too many meetings. Still negotiating.

Project marketing has occurred. As a result of the marketing, Outward Bound has sponsored six young leaders in Moree. Feedback has been positive at this stage.

A new project to support Aboriginal women in South Moree is being undertaken. Consultation has been occurring and a great interest is being shown in the formation of this group. The idea for this group came about as the young mothers who were out of

the target group for the Community Midwifery Team had no other service to engage with. We hope to get the Aboriginal workers from local government and non government sector to come and speak (very informally) with the women about services and what they do in their jobs.

Some of our work plan has been hindered by circumstances beyond our control. The local Murray community has been in disarray due to renovations that are occurring in Stanley Village and Mehi Crescent. All of the families have been moved out of their homes and into town or with other family members which has had a huge impact on consultations and attendance at Playgroups. Some of the families are gradually returning but it looks as though the renovations will be occurring until next year.

#### *How has the project incorporated action research into its work?*

Action research is an ongoing process for us. We certainly talk with community members about their thoughts on everything that has anything to do with their community. We realise, especially in Aboriginal communities, that they really need to be part of the process otherwise it is just another program that will fail. We are flexible when we realise that something may not be working and look at why and strategies for how it can be changed so the program will not fail. Particularly in Playgroups this has meant in some

communities that it has helped in building community capacity.

#### *How is the project recording its processes and learning (including but not only action research)?*

There are numerous strategies I personally do such as small file notes with dates and times. We record supervision sessions on a table where some of the issues we face are talked about. I have worked on action sheets in relation to some projects that have been occurring. We also provide Family Support with monthly reports where some of these processes and learnings are talked about. The Early Intervention workers keep sign-on sheets for Playgroups and use the Smart software package for their statistics.

#### *What has been learned in the last six months that may be of interest and value to other projects?*

One valuable thing we have been taught is that sometimes we may not get the desired goal but it does not mean we should give up hope on goals. As long as the programs that we run, now or in the future, changes something (big or small) in a child's life, or gives a child a positive experience, then it is worth it. With the renovations that are occurring in some parts of Moree the numbers for the playgroup has been very low. However the playgroup activities will go ahead with one child in attendance. Staff at the agency realise that things will not change for communities overnight.

## **Tilligerry Family Network Project**

### *The project setting?*

The Tilligerry Family Network in New South Wales is based at Tilligerry Place, a community shopfront shared with Tilligerry Youth Project and Tilligerry Adult and Community Education. The

Tilligerry Peninsula is a geographically isolated community situated between Tilligerry Creek on the south and the southern shore of Port Stephens on the north, with the only land access being via Lemon Tree Passage Road. Tilligerry consists of the small villages of Tanilba Bay, Mallabula, Lemon Tree Passage, Oyster Cove and Salt Ash,

and has a current population of approximately 5,600 people. There is a predominance of families with children and older residents; 23.7 per cent of the population are under 14 years.

The project particularly targets those families of Tilligerry who are disadvantaged – that is, sole-parent families, young parents, families experiencing



violence, families who have had a long involvement with the welfare system, low income families, geographically and socially isolated families, families with a member with a disability including mental illness, Indigenous and culturally and linguistically diverse families, families living with the effects of drug and alcohol use, and families with child protection issues, including specifically the children of all of the above families.

**Why is the project needed?**

The nearest centre for social services for families of the Tilligerry Peninsula is Raymond Terrace, located 40 km away. Inadequate transport for Tilligerry is the largest single barrier for families in being able to access this service. The combination of poorly run services and facilities and difficulty in reaching those that do exist, means that many community members, particularly those on low incomes and/or without reliable access to a car, simply have no choice but to cope with the reduced quality of life. According to the Port Stephens Crime Profile 2001, "a leading risk factor for criminal behaviour is poor access to social and community services". The recently opened Landcom Estate with 300 lots will see a dramatic increase in families with children on the Peninsula. Increased services are needed to meet the needs of this expanding community.

The services that do outreach to Tilligerry have identified the need for a coordinated response to service provision on the Peninsula. The Tilligerry Family Network project aims to bring the services together and lobby for

and promote new services to the area. This would avoid duplication and provide a vital link between service providers and local families. This provides the opportunity where community services, information and resources can be shared and utilised. The venue for this is Tilligerry Place.

**What are you trying to do in this project?**

Our aims are to: support disadvantaged families of the Tilligerry Peninsula in their parenting role; make services accessible to families; to break down social isolation; and link in with the network of support and referral services and contribute to its expansion.

Our objectives are to: strengthen the social fabric of the Tilligerry community through access to a range of services and activities, otherwise unavailable to disadvantaged families; encourage families to provide the best possible environment for their children's health and wellbeing; encourage participation by the client group in locally driven community projects; and develop the Tilligerry Family Network's ability to work directly with children in Tilligerry.

Through extensive community and service providers consultation we are aiming to provide a service that is truly representative of what this community sees as needed and wanted. The service grows and changes term by term in line with feedback shared by service users, including children. This feedback shapes and moulds the project, strengthening the community by its approach.

Various means of obtaining the necessary information are employed from low-key conversations, art work, message boards, drop-in at Tilligerry Place, forms (though these are not very popular), sharing narratives, scrap booking and collages, group gatherings, community cuppas, newsletters, and lots of eavesdropping (with permission). Participants in all groups, including children, have their own journals which grow and develop week by week. The playgroup journals are mostly artwork and

photos. The kids groups include arts, crafts, recipes, photos, memoirs and self esteem building information. The parents' groups include personalised information and shared inspirational narratives both self produced and copied from various sources. The community cuppas include a lot of arts and crafts and share a Tilligerry Family Network photo album.

The service provision approach is non-threatening and focuses on *fun*. A light-hearted atmosphere is created and encouraged, and the breaking down of divisions within the community is the desired outcome.

**How are you going about it?**

The project is currently staffed by one project leader, two casual early intervention children's workers, one administration officer, and 11 volunteers.

The project offers: Tilligerry counselling service; Tilligerry Place drop-in; Tilligerry parents group; Tilligerry playtime group; Tilligerry Family Network Community cuppa; Fun Kids Club (for children aged 5-8 years); Good Kids Club (for children aged 8-12 years); Tilligerry volunteers group; participation at the Tilligerry Fair; and participation at the Tilligerry Festival.

The project has been very well received within the community. All the activities are very successful and well attended. The children's groups are all full with waiting lists. We have far more requests for service and activities than what we can accommodate.

Though the use of action research methodology to guide the project has been quite time-consuming we're sure that it has contributed to the community taking ownership of the project and promoting its aims and objectives. We would like to be able to provide more activities for children in particular, however are restricted by lack of resources in this area. We are constantly looking at ways to fund these requests.

To finish, I would like to quote one of the children from Fun Kids Club when asked: "What do you like about Fun Kids club?" The response was: "It is the best kids club in the whole wide world!" This is what motivates the staff and volunteers and assures us we are definitely on track.

**Opening of the Gwabegar Community Link Centre**

Gwabegar State School children began the official opening by singing a number of classical folk songs much to the delight of many onlookers.



This cake commemorated the official opening of the Gwabegar Community Link Centre. At the end of the day this giant size cake had been devoured without a crumb to be found.