

Wellington Community Networkers

What has the project been doing since the last Bulletin report?

This is an update of the what the News South Wales *Wellington Community Networker's* project at Barnados has been doing since the last Bulletin report (see SFLEX Bulletin No.5 for background information on this project). We have continued to engage with a wide range of people from mainstream services and Aboriginal families living locally and from nearby Stuart town and Nanima Aboriginal community. The early intervention developments to date focus on ongoing family support, education, social and health programs according to the needs of the Aboriginal community.

Barnardo's *Community Networkers* are continuing to work with the community to identify and work on strategies to overcome the barriers identified to accessing family services. Strategies have included establishing a women's group for Aboriginal women of all ages, mentoring young men through a TAFE course which will enable them to apply for jobs at the gaol that is being built in Wellington, working with collaboratively with youth and family services to run a program for young people called "Our Journey to Respect", holding supported playgroups, involvement with the homework centre and facilitating referrals of aboriginal clients to other local services. The role of the *Community Networkers* project and an understanding of that role within the communities is developing and evolving.

What has been learned in the last six months that may be of interest or value to other developing projects?

When we started the project, awareness of the agency, Barnardos, in the community was limited. This affected participation but continues to improve as we progress and members of the Aboriginal community have become more informed about local programs and services.

Developing an understanding of the role of the *Community Networkers* in the community needs time to build

up trust. It is important for our credibility to be seen to be doing something concrete and not just be another service consulting without doing anything for the community. It has also been very important to be seen to be doing something for the whole community and not just selected parts.

Getting other services involved in projects can be frustrating – for example, waiting for a decision from a Board before they can commit to any involvement.

How has the community responded to the project so far?

Because of the very new and different (to anything else in the community) approach of this project, it has been very important to take the time needed to put ideas out into the community, allow people to think and talk about them, ask for their responses and then act on those responses.

Recruiting people who are known and trusted in the community has meant that generally people are very open and willing to talk about the issues in the community with them.

When consulting with people from the community, going into people's homes and talking rather than asking them to come to the office or attend a meeting has been more effective.

When working with the *Community Networkers* we have been guided by their views in terms of how they wish to work with Barnardos and their community. We have found that the most effective way to "train" is by working closely together in the development of a specific community project, such as the family day, the homework centre and the supported playgroups. We

have then been able to offer training in areas of particular interest and need and where they feel they can be most effective. In this way the community workers are immediately on the job, talking with people in the community, developing their network of contacts and at the same time are developing the skills and confidence needed to get the project off the ground with the backing of an agency that is able to give them practical support.



Terry and Sandy Hayek are members of the Nanima community. Terry is a Community Networker at Barnardo in Wellington, N.S.W.. Both Terry and Cynthia are proactive in the Wellington/Nanima communities who seek to improve links and access for Aboriginal families residing in this area

Non-Aboriginal staff have been working collaboratively with the *Community Networkers* and have developed positive trusting relationships within the Aboriginal communities. One non-Aboriginal Family Support worker had the following to say:

"As a white person going in to a Koori community it has been a whole lot easier having one of the community networkers to introduce me. And I feel the people they have introduced me to are more comfortable this way." (Family Support Worker)

