

Taking a whole of community approach *and keeping good things going*



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"FACET's Father's Day celebration event"

The Family and Community Enhancement Team (FACET) works in 12 suburbs¹ situated 10-15 kilometres south-west of Brisbane City. The area is primarily detached housing, although pockets of industry are also located in several suburbs. A number of highways, freeways and swamp land, together with a lack of cross-suburb public transport, serve to isolate the suburbs from each other. The region has a large population of people from culturally and linguistically diverse and Indigenous backgrounds, with some suburbs having up to seven times Brisbane city's average population percentage for these groups. In 1996 Inala, Wacol and Acacia Ridge were identified as highly disadvantaged under the Socio-Economic Index for Areas (SEIFA)².

The need for additional services and resources in the area was identified by a number of Inala-based service providers over a number of years and eventually led to the establishment of FACET under the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy. FACET is a partnership between the Young Women's

Program (CAICP Inc), Inala Youth and Family Support Service (IFYSS), Anglicare Family and Youth Support Service, the Pathways to Prevention Project (Mission Australia and Griffith University), Childcare Access and Equity Resource Support Unit (CAERSU), and Community and Individual Support Service (CISP). The project operates under the auspice of Inala Community House (ICH) and works in collaboration with the local communities.

FACET aims to develop an early intervention and strengths-focused approach to enhance the capacities of these communities to respond to the needs of families. The project focuses on including families with young children (up to five years), young parents, those from diverse cultural and Indigenous backgrounds, and families with children with challenging behaviours or a disability.

The project commenced in 2002, although due to difficulties in employment of staff and finalising the purpose of a new type of service,

FACET did not open its doors until early 2003.

In this article we share some of the ways FACET is working toward a sustainable whole of community approach. When we speak of "sustainable" we are referring to ways in which the work and actions flowing from the activities of FACET will be enduring. To do so we are committed to ensuring that our actions and outcomes are "whole of community" inclusive.

Developing sustainability

The project has used action research to guide its development. This means that as we have developed we have been able to identify needs, build on our achievements and learn from our mistakes.

FACET supports interventions led through community input and direction. We encourage local participation and solutions to meet the needs of local families and communities. We work in collaboration with individuals, families, community groups,

community sector organisations (both government and non-government operating within or into the area) and their networks, schools and businesses. This approach helps ensure that the project and its outcomes are “whole of community” inclusive.

Starting out

The early work of the project was dominated by the need of the project partners to get to know and trust each other and to develop common goals and agreed approaches. The project team spent time carefully attending to this developmental stage. We had to build a new organisation where all contributions were valued. At this stage decisions needed to be made about how to prioritise FACET’s actions and energies. This meant, at times, leaving some areas of need until later.



We believe that by extending the whole of community approach we can further engage in relevant indirect work with services active throughout the project area and continue to positively impact on family functioning.

Initially we focused on four aspects of our community, although there were many other areas of need some of which were very close to the partner members. We prioritised a geographic area (Carole Park), a cultural group (the Indigenous community), a special needs group (families with children with a disability, and a demographic group (young mothers). Addressing these areas involved developing links through our partners, then either (a) helping communities set up new initiatives, or (b) building on something that was already in place, or (c) providing additional support to early intervention programs that were already in the community.

Facilitating a new initiative: In Carole Park we worked with the school and community house to progress a community festival for young families. The establishment of a local festival committee, which operated two local festivals that were a great success.

The Carole Park Festival Committee independently conducted a third festival with FACET only providing some financial support. Currently, the Festival Committee is planning to conduct its fourth festival and is fully sustainable.

(b) Building on something: The Murri Elders “Yarning Place” in Inala is a space where the Indigenous community holds various activities. The community identified the need for a parents group and we ran a this in partnership with the community and the Pathways to Prevention Program, one of FACET’s partners.

Providing additional support: The Inala Young Mum’s group was threatened by closure after a worker left. FACET provided worker support to enable the group to keep it going and

ensure the wellbeing and self-reliance of families and communities, leading to sustainable outcomes for the whole community into the future.

FACET and its partner organisations are now focusing on community capacity building. The aim is to build family and community capacity to deal with challenges and issues, and to, in partnership with other organisations, networks and the community, initiate and develop local solutions to identified local problems. As a part of an overall strategy, FACET aims to encourage the building of partnerships between all levels of government, community based organisations, the broader community, individuals and business. Aiming to embed local social capital, community building is a “whole of community” approach to program and policy development.

The OECD (2001) defined social capital as “networks, together with shared norms, values and understandings which facilitate co-operation within or among groups”. This definition guides the FACET commitment to both its partners and the ongoing developmental process of the Inala Combined Interagency Network. For FACET partners an important step was for the Steering Committee was to finalise the development of a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) which is designed to establish clear parameters around the roles of all parties involved in FACET.

The Inala Combined Interagency Network was an existing network that had potential to be strengthened and over the last 12 months, FACET has contributed substantially to facilitating its future directions and activities. FACET has provided personnel and resources and this enabled the running of an information workshop focused upon collaboration and partnerships. The workshop was attended by 67 people representing 49 organisations located both within and outside the area, but all with work in the area. FACET then hosted another training and information day on the Early Years with a focus on early intervention. During the quarterly future directions meetings, FACET has provided a locally trusted independent facilitator to assist the network

members to consider how they will work together, facilitate the information exchange and collective decision making in and between the various interagency networks and to decide on actions pertaining to the redevelopment of the combined structure.

FACET submits that one of the key principles for the local human service's sector is to promote co-operative interaction between all levels of government, community organisations, the broader community, individuals and business so as to respond effectively and efficiently to identified local needs through the planning and development of human services and community facilities and resources.

Building on the activities of the first and second year, we have observed that stronger and more extensive relationships have been formed with community members and service providers, and as a result the project has allocated funds to a much broader and more extensive range of ventures. The following are three examples of how this work has the potential to build sustainable outcomes with the use of brokerage funding greatly assisting the development of these program areas.

- The Vietnamese/Australian Alliance Network aims to strengthen Vietnamese Australian families and has used brokerage funds to develop an information package for workers and families and is working on the operation of a Vietnamese Family Fun Day.
- The Early Years Development and Childcare Alliance Network has used brokerage funding to work on the establishment of an interagency collaborative case management protocol, area-wide calendar of parenting programs, an area-wide fund for the support of parenting programs, web-based vacancy lists for child care, and pre-schools, and child protection issues.
- A brokerage grant to the Childcare Access and Equity Resource Support Unit has been used to employ a project worker to initiate the development of a social skills program that could be appropriately operated through childcare and pre-school centres. The lack of appropriate

social skills development resources was cited as a leading issue among these child focused services

Keeping good things going

We are now looking at how to further extend a sustainable whole of community approach. We are currently proposing to provide a community-friendly fully interactive website to enable those who work and live in the area to access information about local activities and events and communicate with others. This will also facilitate greater collaboration and partnerships between organisations.

The Inala Combined Interagency Network has examined its future. It will now become the South-West Brisbane Inter-Network Alliance and be a peak voice that is representative and inclusive of the whole of community, by working proactively to strengthen the capacity of community to work collectively, enhance social connectedness and lobby for appropriate issues as necessary. It aims to provide community member groups and services access to practical resources, training and education. It also aims to provide support to smaller organisations and groups to increase their ability to participate equitably, while retaining their independence. In total, FACET has resourced and supported four of the six networks existing throughout the area, resourcing a total of 239 workers representing 169 organisations.

The development of the concept of an Area-Wide Conference in 2005 that will target local workers, their management structures and the consumers of services has generated a high level of interest and excitement in the local area. The conference aims to provide training, information exchange and to provide input into local area medium and long-term planning.

Conclusion

FACET works in an area where need has outstripped the capacity to meet it. Often initiatives have had a start but have not been able to be supported to develop enduring sustainable outcomes. There are many reasons. One way forward is to ensure a coordinated approach that gains strength by engaging the whole of community.

FACET has been able to build a sustainable whole of community approach on the foundations established during the initial developmental phase. Creating trusting partnerships and shared goals have been crucial elements. Integral to this approach is the capacity to get involved with local projects. This has meant being able to build on what has been happening, assist in creating new initiatives or helping things to keep going at difficult times. It has also been important to work with the existing interagency networks and, where the community identified gaps, to work collaboratively to initiate new networks and build their capacity to act in their local community. Building capacity to act in the local community relates to improving service delivery elements, providing education and training and increasing the ability to lobby about issues.

We believe that by extending the whole of community approach we can further engage in relevant indirect work with services active throughout the project area and continue to positively impact on family functioning. This approach strengthens the capacity to make the work of FACET and it's partners enduring. Being able to use a flexible action research approach has enabled the project to grow and develop new ways of responding to the needs of families in our region, and thereby enhance the knowledge base of what works, when it works and why.

Endnotes

- 1 Acacia Ridge, Archerfield, Carole Park, Darra, Doolandella, Durack, Forest Lake, Inala, Oxley, Richlands, Wacol and Willawong,
- 2 Inclusion is determined on the basis of demographic data such as high levels of unemployment, low income, prevalence of unskilled jobs and low educational attainments.

Reference

OECD (2001), *The Wellbeing of Nations: The Role of Human and Social Capital*, Centre for Educational Research and Innovation, Paris.

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