



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Parenting Workshop/Camps Project at Albury Community Health Centre

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The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Parenting Workshop/Camp Project was funded by Families First and designed to facilitate a culturally appropriate model of care which would deliver parenting education, recognising the local community's expertise and individuals talents.

The project responded to a NSW Cabinet Office report that identified a number of issues and needs across Aboriginal communities in some areas of NSW, including Albury. The recognised issues included:

- limited parenting information on the care of children's, health, safety, nutrition, child development and behaviour management
- the need for culturally appropriate parenting programs
- otitis media awareness
- antenatal care (Aboriginal women needed to be engaged early in their pregnancy)
- engagement of fathers and young parents.

The project aimed to respond to these issues by working with the local Albury Aboriginal community including Elders' groups to deliver parenting education in a discrete and non-threatening environment. It was proposed that the project would:

- review the local community's needs
- develop education session by session through either a workshop or camps approach
- give pertinent education for parents and the community
- deliver parenting and self-care education with a different approach than previously experienced
- recognise every ones' own personal skills and build on those skills
- empower parents to be teachers
- address parenting education and social issues.

A multi-agency approach was adopted which included:

- Families First
- Greater Southern Area Health Service
- Koori Kindermanna
- Woomera Aboriginal Corporation and
- Wodonga Regional Health Service.

A cross section of the Indigenous community were consulted – including Elders, parents and carers, Koori Interagency Network, local council, Albury Wodonga Aboriginal Medical Health Service and many other local service providers both Indigenous and non Indigenous.

In response to data collected through informal interviews with local Elders, Indigenous parents and carers and Indigenous workers, many issues were repeatedly voiced:

- parents were unsure of or had no knowledge of local services (both Indigenous and mainstream)—available for their children, themselves and their families
- parents were reluctant to engage in mainstream services due to previous negative experiences which included cultural discrimination, limited or inappropriate service delivery and poor confidence to ask and seek—this in particular was voiced towards DOCS, Centrelink, Education and Health
- poor self-esteem and personal boredom was frequently identified
- lack of recognition of ones own personal strengths
- limited knowledge of services throughout all the local community was identified. This occurred across a wide spectrum, which included the Aboriginal community, and Indigenous and non Indigenous workers and mainstream services. This issue had also been recognised at the Koori Interagency Network meetings
- confidence to access mainstream services presented as a constant issue
- limited access of appropriate respite for childcare, especially in the evenings and for short-term crisis periods. Families did not trust DOCS and thought of DOCS as “Taking away the Children”
- transport was an issue for many families due to cost
- limited appropriate places to take children for play/outings where parents and children felt culturally safe.

From the data we began to see a clear picture of the struggles of parenting. Many parents spoke of ‘Giving Up’ and two parents spoke of the extraordinary lengths that they had gone to before others believed that their children had major medical illnesses and educational needs.

Men spoke of “not knowing what to do” to help. Fathers had not considered attending playgroups and workshops.

Elders and community members were aware that many families and children were living in difficult and isolated situations.

Mainstream workers in the Indigenous community were also interviewed and voiced the same issues and in addition identified:

- engagement of families by professionals was identified as being difficult at times and many families felt poorly supported due to this issue
- Aboriginal families needed to be engaged through a different approach than that of mainstream families
- cultural respect, customs and belief systems needed to be followed. Some non Indigenous service providers and professionals found this issue challenging
- deficits in knowledge of services and entitlements available to individuals and families outside the workers’ own disciplines became very apparent and had been identified at the KIN meetings over the past few years.

From KIN meetings and the review of previous minutes. The 0–4 years age group had been identified as having a large void in the local community. This was particularly pertinent with the engagement of families and service provision.



Elders, parents and carers – Indigenous and non Indigenous workers formed a reference group.

An Invitation to join the reference group was placed in the local Indigenous newsletter. On the day of the meetings individual community members who were present at the meeting centre were also invited to sit with the reference group, which gave more community representation.

The reference group aimed to:

- identify specific parenting topics important to the local Elders, Aboriginal parents, carers, and all community members
- develop ideas for delivering a culturally appropriate parenting program that addresses parenting topics
- plan for and include local service providers as participants and/or contributors in the program in order to strengthen links between the Aboriginal families and local service providers.

The project was divided into three sections:

- workshops
- expanding the current playgroup – which would also aim to engage parents antenatally
- website – which would be a resource base for accessing services in the Albury area both Indigenous and Non Indigenous. This tool had been identified as an area of need by the KIN meeting over the past 18 months. It was identified as being beneficial for the Indigenous community and worker alike.

While the project funding was for a one-off information program for Indigenous families it is a great opportunity to:

- develop ongoing resources to improve services for the local Albury Indigenous community
- strengthen the relationship for the local Aboriginal communities with mainstream and community based service providers
- provide a culturally appropriate model of education for parenting workshops designed for Indigenous parenting that may be further developed, maintained or repeated in the future.

A workshop approach was chosen as it would:

- give time to know and engage with parents and children
- allow time to develop sustainability. At the completion of the program we aimed for the group to continue to network as a playgroup
- parents did not have to be committed for long periods of time. Some parents we spoke with identified that they could not commit to days away from the family. Also many families had older children at school
- workshops gave us the opportunity to change the program if we were not engaging families. Educational needs and direction could also be changed with the reference group's permission if so needed.

An Indigenous Women's camp had been offered in Albury over the past years.

The Reference group identified that there was an existing play group which had limited members but good housing, some resources and services. The Project chose to build the playgroup and the existing services.

It recognised that many community members had previously experienced negative outcomes with education and support services. Due to these experiences many people were reluctant to engage in projects.

Therefore a design needed to be developed that would change these educational experiences, provide a different environment for delivery of knowledge and give families beneficial education, pride, and strengths for positive parenting outcomes skills and knowledge.

Parenting education and family fun strategies together with parent and carer self-care was the focus of the project design. Teaching through an alternate medium, that did not reflect old school days, was the foundation of the model. It aimed to develop a teaching tool that empowered individuals, families and the community:

- role modelling through play and interacting with families and individuals was recognised as a valuable teaching aid
- empowering the group to share parenting experiences, knowledge and outcomes was viewed as a means to engage individuals and install confidence and recognition of people's own abilities
- attending craft while teaching was adopted as it was a good medium to show the community some respite activities, allow individuals participating to engage with the group when they felt comfortable and was a good resource for child /parent/carer interaction and play at home.

In developing this teaching design strategies for project aimed to:

- enhance parenting skills and knowledge
- provide positive parenting choices
- equip parent/carer with positive self-care strategies
- provide a teaching tool that would empower the individual, family and the community
- provide pathway that would provide support
- increase community awareness of parenting needs and skills
- empower the parents and carers to be teachers and leaders for future parenting programs, playgroups and the broader community education sessions
- engage families as a group to support each other
- develop pathways for the project/playgroup to continue after the workshops were completed.

These strategies would provide positive pathways for sustainability of the project.

To engage families we focused the workshops around activities that would engage all family members. Role modelling of play, child and adult interactions and behaviour management were the key focuses for the workshops.

Delivery of the program was presented through seven 6 hour workshops that were developed around:

- play and recreation
- education
- self-esteem
- role modelling



- respite and craft
- autonomy building
- production of “Tip Sheets”
- information awareness for and of the website.

First five sessions were conducted at Wodonga Sports and Leisure Centre. This venue was chosen as there was no facility in Albury that could accommodate the needs that we had for this project:

- 1/2 hour professional water confidence class started the sessions
 - this was an education setting where parents, children and workers were all learning together
 - the benefits of chlorinated pools with otitis media were discussed
 - using public pools was great family activity and exercise
 - water safety and confidence was taught.
- A one-hour water play with parents and preschool teachers and health professionals followed:
 - discussion on importance of play
 - teaching through role modelling
 - ideas of no cost/lost cost toys
 - building children/parent and carers relationships.
- Lunch
 - healthy food choice options were discussed and available, families were given the choice to eat as a family unit or join with the group.

The afternoon sessions was divided into:

Children:

- In to registered Childcare at Sports and Leisure Centre to allow some respite and education for parents.
- An Aboriginal culturally sensitive program was developed for the children.
- At least two preschool workers from our local Koori Kindermanna were present with the children at all times which included the preschool Director.

Adults:

- Craft – respite activities that included scrap booking and jewellery making.
- Education sessions were presented where the topic of the day was briefly discussed and parents and carers discussed what they knew in regards to the topic. Pooling the information gave individual self-esteem and value to the group. Most of the education that we wanted to present was given by the group as a whole. This teaching tool was quickly accepted and provided the individual with self-achievement.
- Empowering the group to develop further their ability to teach peers and the community and to develop a culturally sensitive tip sheets.

Week 1—"Time out for me"

- Viewing self-worth and the importance that a parent or carer brings in a child's life. Raising self-esteem and worth was the key focus for this session.
- Respecting and valuing respite for all parents and carers.
- Affordable activities that can give respite to a parent and carer.
- Exercise as fun and a good relaxation strategy for good general health.
- Appropriate child care choices. Local services that are available in the Albury area.
- Funding and child services available locally.
- Information presented and gathered during the workshops will be used on the website.
- Choosing a parenting topic of choice form the group.

Choosing a topic of choice was difficult for the group. We suggested we could invite an Occupational Therapist for play actives which was agreed on.

Week 2—"Positive Parenting and topic of choice"

- Discipline management
- Childhood behaviours
- Behaviour management
- Recognising when negative behaviours start
- When it's all too much!
- Topic of choice

Presenters: Kerry Brown and Catherine Gibb.

Group participation in presenting a culturally sensitive 'Tip Sheet' on topic of the group's choice. We found that the group did not respond well to being asked about the tip sheets and did not have the confidence at this stage to partake in giving information freely therefore only one tip sheet was developed over the workshop settings.

Week 3—"Saying NO"

- Why do Kids say no!
- Responding to No!
- When I need to say No!

Week 4—Local supported play groups

Respite, community services and appropriate child care choices:

- the importance of play
- ask for help – it's OK
- childhood development.



Week 5—"Otitis media"

Group participation in presenting second culturally sensitive "Tip Sheet 3":

- education and prevention
- the importance of hearing screening was also presented
- hearing tests were planned for later in the play group.

Week 6—Session with the occupational therapist

- Play and child development was role modelled and discussed
- Easy, free and cheap activities for play at home were used and demonstrated
- Parents had an opportunity to talk about any concerns with their children
- Introduction of the pre school environment—home for the play group.

This session was held at Koori Kindermanna, the housing of the playgroup. At this stage many parents and carers had become comfortable with the program and were starting to interact with each other and the workers were handing over the program to the parents and ownership of the playgroup was taken by parents with initiating tasks and giving suggestions for the future direction.

Week 7—Resuscitation certificate

This was the only formal teaching session due to the recognition of the importance of formal certificate. It was presumed that we had gained trust of the group by this session. The Department of Sport and Recreation delivered this session and were aware of the importance for all participants to successfully gain their certificates.

Parents and carers showed obvious pride and achievement at the end of the session and at the presentation of the certificates.

An extra session was factored into the program as we noted some of the children with dental caries. When speaking with the parents a parent identified that they had approached the local government dental clinic and were on a waiting list. The tidd-a-lick program was bought for this session and enough resource for up to four future days at the playgroup in the following year.

This session was held at Wonga wetlands where culture and traditional knowledge was imparted for those who have lost their traditional connection.

Website

A website had been recognised by the Kin meeting group as a vital need for the local Aboriginal community and professionals that are involved in helping within the community.

The website will enable community members and professionals to access information to improve levels of care for the local Aboriginal Community.

The website will be financially supported for two years by the Families First project. The development of and ownership for the website was taken in partnership by Woomera Aboriginal corporation.

An easily accessible site for the general public and professionals has been designed.

Computer access has been made available for families, who do not have computer access at home. This can be accessed through Woomera—Aboriginal Corporation Albury, West Side Neighbourhood house and the town library.

A parent's page will be developed with information for the new parent and the hospital discharging Nurse. This aims to ensure that Aboriginal clients are aware of all available care. Followed up in parenting care including health checks and Immunisation will also be explained in a culturally appropriate manner. Parents will also be followed up in the Aboriginal Playgroup if parents consent to this care.

Discussion

Sustainability of the project has been achieved with the leadership from a local Aboriginal Kindergarten. The Kindergarten has provided the leadership of the playgroup which has increased in numbers since the project completion.

From this model parents and carers chatted and exchanged ideas with people sitting near them and as the sessions preceded people gained confidence and shared information and ideas with the complete group. This information was broad and informative and delivered in a culturally appropriate setting. It instilled confidence in all participants and built on personal strengths.

Many of the group members have now added to the project by bringing their own interests, skills and crafts to the group. Knitting and crocheting has been a great favourite with scarves, hats knitted for children and adults and baby blankets for new arrivals being created. Aerobics classes have been given by a group member which is also a great favourite for the playgroup.

Today parents continue planning many other sessions with in the play group which include baby massage, First Aid Certificate, craft and sporting activities. Participants have become more confident with their own parent craft practices and to share knowledge and ideas. Ownership of their own and the communities' parent craft education has been enhanced and development.

It has been noted that individuals gain:

- confidence in themselves
- pride in their own knowledge base
- participants started to advocate for themselves and the broader community.
- participants started to advise and direct further sessions and direction
- children became more confident and mixed with the group as a whole.
- length of concentration at tasks improved.

Children's and adults displayed positive behaviour changes.

It is envisaged that all new Aboriginal and Torres Strait births and families will be supported into the playgroup. The role of Aboriginal Education Officer has been changed to achieve this in partnership with the Child and Family Health Nurses.

Presenters

Catherine Gibb is the Aboriginal Project Officer for the Families First Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Parenting Workshop/Camps Project. She is a registered nurse, midwife and child and family health nurse who has worked in her hometown of Albury and in western and central Sydney. She has worked with many cultural groups and families both here and in England and believes that she has been enriched by being able to share with others their life experiences and cultures.

Margaret Murray is a mother and grandmother. She has worked in Dareton and Albury in community health as an Aboriginal Health Education Officer. She is currently now the Aboriginal Hospital Liaison Officer at Albury Base Hospital. Her interests include her family and following her children in their sporting achievements, but her greatest love is spending time with her grandchildren.