

## The Family Well Being Program

- ***What is the Family Well Being Program?***

The Family Wellbeing Program was developed in the early 1990's by a group of people working in the Aboriginal Development Education and Employment Program in Adelaide, South Australia. Many people in this group had been directly affected by policies of the Stolen Generation, experiencing substantial social and emotional trauma linked to severe grief and loss. As they shared many stories of personal survival and growth in overcoming barriers to social and emotional wellbeing, they realized they had important learnings to share with others. A program was then developed around the key understandings and skills that help Indigenous people to heal and become leaders in their communities. The content was enhanced with additional resources and skills building exercises from mainstream and Eastern philosophies to enhance feelings of calmness and inner peace.

Over the last 12 years, the Program has been delivered across many regions and involved over 1,000 participants. James Cook University/University of Queensland researchers have been so impressed with the program that they have worked side by side with communities and work teams to understand how it helps people make changes in their lives.

The Program has also been shown to be universally effective - helping enhance the lives of non-Indigenous Australians and of people outside Australia. The Program starts from the belief that no matter how desperate [or positive] a person's situation is, there are always things that they can do to improve their own lives and their ability to help others.

- ***What do people gain from doing the Program?***

Many people have talked about the changes they were able to make in their lives after doing the Family Well Being Program. For example, people have described how the Program:

- is an "eye-opener" and helped them understand the many things that have influenced them, the emotional burden (often anger) they carry from unresolved issues in the past and the reasons why they are struggling to find hope and meaning in their lives;
- helped them to think about situations before reacting in a harmful way – by understanding how emotional reactions can lead to negative actions allows people to make positive choices ;
- gave them skills to recognise the drama that locks us into harmful relationships and to change them into positive ones where growth can happen;
- enhanced their self-esteem and problem solving skills to be able to reach for higher goals, better jobs, study opportunities and greater achievements;
- helped them to work better in groups, find their voices to speak out and become better listeners, be more supportive and sensitive to the needs of other people and work towards a better community.

- ***How can the Program be used to assist organisations and their programs and services?***

There are many benefits that happen when staff of an organisation do the Family Well Being Program together and becomes a more empowered group. The Program works by creating a safe space for people to:

- open up and talk about themselves,
- recognise their own strengths as well as those of others,
- understand what makes a good, respectful relationship,
- become able to see the opportunities that even painful loss can bring,
- gain greater understanding and respect for their fellow workers,

- recognise and foster each other's strengths and challenges,
- and learn to speak out and be heard assertively when something is not right.

The later stages in particular help people remember to relax and take care of themselves so that they can stay in control of situations and keep up their energy levels for the challenging work they do.

Organisations benefit tremendously from a workforce that uses these positive qualities and skills with each other in their everyday work. We encourage all levels of staff to take part in the program, from managers to administration, so that a cooperative, not judgemental and positive environment can be created. Under these circumstances of trust, there can be enhanced commitment and skills sharing which is essential especially when working across cultures. This increases confidence so that every person is more able to contribute their skills and knowledge to work with clients and families more holistically.

Furthermore, it is these same skills that successfully promote the inner strengths of clients and families to address the problems that often underlie alcohol and drug and mental health issues. Thus while enhancing workforce capacity and collaboration the staff also learns to use empowering approaches with their clients.

- ***How does the Program run?***

The Program is run through Four Stages of approximately 32 hours per stage. These can be run as four one-week blocks. A fifth 32-hour Facilitator training stage can also be delivered in one week. This stage, plus supported facilitation experience, leads to full accreditation as a Family Well Being facilitator.

Although one week per stage delivery is a frequent method, there are no restrictions on how the 32 hours can be provided. The Program can be delivered flexibly and creatively, aiming to maximise the engagement and strengths of the group and the Facilitator.

- ***How does the Family Wellbeing Program articulate into accreditation and University qualifications?***

Participants and organisations who would like to gain accreditation for their involvement can earn a Certificate II Family Well Being at Batchelor College in the Northern Territory. A Certificate III is granted when the individual has completed Stage 5 Facilitator training plus 120 hours of supported facilitation. There is a cost involved in accreditation that is not included in the course delivery fee.

The Program is also adapted as a short course/Masters elective subject at James Cook University. This one week intensive *Empowerment & Change* will introduce participants to the concepts of empowerment and social and emotional wellbeing and their roles in enabling change even in the most challenging and difficult situations. Through experiential learning hands-on small scale projects participants will explore how empowerment can enhance the work of wide range of community and social development organisations.

- ***How do we know if the Program has benefited the participants?***

Through the Empowerment Research Program, we have developed the Growth and Empowerment Measure (GEM). The GEM has been validated and appears to be a useful measure for the changes that the Family Well Being Program promotes in people's lives. The GEM is delivered at the beginning of Stage 1 and five to six months later. Individual feedback brochures are given to each participant who completes the GEM and a group report can also be provided to the auspicing organisation.

- ***How will we know if the Program has benefited the Service?***

Services themselves can choose a range of instruments that can be administered before and after the Family Well Being Program is delivered to staff. There are a range of continuous quality improvement, alcohol and drug service capacity and workforce and service satisfaction measures available that can be used to detect differences that happened over time. The facilitators based at the University of Queensland and James Cook University are experienced researchers and able to guide services to match needs with evaluation options. For more information, contact [Teresa\\_gibson@health.qld.gov.au](mailto:Teresa_gibson@health.qld.gov.au) or [Melissa\\_haswell@health.qld.gov.au](mailto:Melissa_haswell@health.qld.gov.au).