EARLY INTERVENTION PARENTING PROGRAM

FINAL REPORT JUNE 2004

An initiative funded by the
Department of Family and Community Services
under the Child Abuse Prevention Program
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AUSPICE AGENCY: Jesuit Social Services

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The purpose of the Early Intervention Parenting Project (EIPP) is to demonstrate a model for the delivery of a comprehensive service to parents of young children throughout metropolitan Melbourne and rural regions in Victoria, Australia. The project is based on the model used for the national Program for Parents initiative funded by the Department of Health and Aged Care that worked with parents of adolescents, and demonstrated, through external evaluation, a reduction of risk factors for youth suicide. The (EIPP) model focuses on the universal needs of families with young children, as well as the specific needs of more vulnerable parents including those with an intellectual disability, parents of children with disabilities and indigenous parents.

The key philosophy and beliefs informing the (EIPP) project are based on those identified in the Planning Happy Families parenting program (C. Jenkin. 1988, 1993). The project emphasises the principles of adult learning, and places importance on improving parent/child relationships with a better understanding of child development and building hope and optimism in the family. Increasing the confidence of parents is important and achieved by acknowledging the strengths of parents, listening to them and teaching better communication practices and approaches. The project places emphasis on the benefits of shared experiences and caring for others in order to build strong parenting communities to overcome the isolation that many experience.

The project process involved:

- Extensive community consultation
- Training professionals to facilitate parenting groups with a focus on the needs of vulnerable parents
- Externally evaluating the training and the delivery of parent groups
- Examining the impact on community agencies and staff to deliver appropriate parent programs in the wider community
- Documenting specific findings of working within Aboriginal communities
- Final report on findings
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2. TOTAL PROJECT BUDGET AND TIME PERIOD
   The Early Intervention Parenting Project commenced on 22nd May 2001 and was completed by June 2004
   Total budget for project $288,000.00

3. SETTING
   The Early Intervention Parenting Project was implemented in four sites in Victoria. Two were facilitated in outer metropolitan areas and two in regional settings. Parent Group Training was facilitated in the four sites. The trained facilitators then held parent groups in a range of settings including Maternal and Child Health Centres, Kindergartens and Child Care Centres, Neighbourhood Houses, Community Health Centres, Prisons, church halls and family support agencies.

4. BACKGROUND/MODEL/RATIONALE
   Preliminary thoughts:
   - To make parent information and support more accessible to all families but in particular vulnerable families.
   - To assist workers in agencies to understand the needs of vulnerable families and be able to design and adapt parent programs to suit the needs of these families.
   - To encourage agencies to incorporate and use more group work with parents to reduce feelings of isolation and build on the strengths of vulnerable families.
   - To affect the culture and ways of working with families in community agencies.

5. PROJECT OBJECTIVE AND AIMS
   - To increase the understanding of how to strengthen parental and family bond and enhance resilience within the general community.
   - To create access to parent education and support for vulnerable families with children in the preschool age group.
   - To develop targeted approaches to families requiring special responses in relation to parenting from pre birth through to school aged children, indigenous parents and parents from culturally diverse backgrounds and to deliver these approaches in collaboration with local service providers.
   - To evaluate, publish and disseminate the findings of this project to assist in understanding how to effectively strengthen and support more vulnerable families.
6. METHODOLOGY/DESCRIPTIONS
An external evaluation was undertaken using both qualitative and quantitative methods.

- Information was collected pre and post the training of group facilitators.
- Information was collected from the group facilitators throughout the project.
- Interviews were undertaken with group facilitators and parent educator coordinators.

7. RESULTS

- NUMBER OF PARENTS GROUPS:
  Thirty two parent groups were delivered in a two year period across 4 geographical.

- NUMBER OF PROFESSIONALS TRAINED:
  There were a total of 64 professionals trained in the project, including two Aboriginal professionals. 40 were funded to facilitate parent groups and another 24 attended the training but were not expected to facilitate parent groups. 10 of these professional did end up running groups.

- AGENCIES AND PROGRAMS INVOLVED INCLUDED:
  - Early Childhood Services including Early Intervention, Maternal and Child Health Centres, Family Day Care, Child Care Centres and Kindergartens
  - Family Support services including a Vietnamese Family Support
  - Community Health Centres
  - Department of Humans Services
  - Intellectual Disability
  - Home Based Care
  - Strengthening Families
  - Primary Schools
  - Hospitals
  - Family Preservation Centres
  - Good Beginnings
  - Parenting Services
  - Play groups
  - Neighbourhood Houses

- NUMBERS OF PARENTS PARTICIPATING:
  Approximately 200 parents participated in these programs

8. DISCUSSION/CONCLUSION
MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS

- The successful appointment of suitable and experienced parent education professionals who acted as recruiters and coordinators of the group facilitators.
- Flexible group facilitator training using a strength based, solution focused philosophy
- The strengthening of relationships between local early childhood services
- Delivery of parent groups in the local community to meet the needs of vulnerable families
– A change in the work practice of several agency staff
– A greater understanding of the needs of vulnerable families
– The delivery of a program in the Aboriginal community that has expanded and led to other related programs involving young people

THE SUCCESS IF THE PROJECT IS ATTRIBUTED TO
– The model used
– The use of the parenting program “Planning Happy Families” as a basis for the structure of parent groups
– The commitment of the parent education coordinators and their agencies to the project
– The training and trainers
– The follow up evaluation of the project

DIFFICULTIES
For some facilitators the engagement of vulnerable groups was difficult and more time and support was required to build the trust and understanding of the parents of what the groups could offer.

For one coordinator difficulties associated with accessing practical assistance and support arose because she was not based in a community agency.

CONCLUSION
The project demonstrated that parent groups for vulnerable families could be delivered if they are flexible and the particular needs of the individual parent and family are considered. Engaging these parents and increasing their awareness of the needs of their children enhances the wellbeing and safety of the children and families.

Local agencies can support these families more effectively with greater understanding and assist in breaking down fear and isolation that can be dangerous for young children. The project demonstrated that local agency staff were better informed and understood the importance of connectedness both in the family and the community.

RECOMMENDATION FOR IMPROVEMENTS TO THE PROJECT
It would have been preferable to follow agencies for a longer period of time to build on the momentum generated in the first year of the project. It requires more time to develop trust and build relationships with vulnerable families whose past experience with community agencies has sometimes been negative. It is recommended that the project could be improved by allowing one community to be tracked over a longer period of time and that more ‘low key’ activities be developed to engage vulnerable families.
This project builds on a model for the delivery of a comprehensive service to parents of adolescents in rural and metropolitan Australia which has been trialed nationally. This Early Intervention Parenting Program is based on the successful Program for Parents delivered in 1998/99 under the Commonwealth National Parenting Initiative. The model supports:

- the universal needs of families with young children,
- the specific needs of more vulnerable groups of parents including those in non-English speaking families and Koori communities,
- prevention and early intervention,
- And, most importantly, builds on existing programs that support families and young children.

1. OBJECTIVES OF THE EARLY INTERVENTION PARENTING PROJECT

This early intervention program for families with young children in the early childhood years aims to:

(a) To enhance and strengthen parental skills and emotional competencies within the general community.
(b) To create access to parent education and support for vulnerable families with children in the preschool age group.
(c) To develop targeted approaches to families requiring special responses in relation to parenting from pre-birth through to school-aged children. For example, programs for adolescent mothers/mothers to be, indigenous parents and parents from culturally diverse backgrounds delivered in collaboration with local service providers.
(d) To evaluate and publish the results of local parenting programs and initiatives for wider application thus providing relevant up-to-date information on effective ways to strengthen and support families.

This report is written to fulfill the requirements of the fourth objective of the project (above).

2. METHODOLOGY OF THE EVALUATION

Both quantitative and qualitative data have been used for this evaluation. These data were collected throughout the project in order to assess the extent to which the project met its goals and replicated the model developed in a previous national project described briefly above. Data were collected in the following ways:

- Quantitative information has been collected about the training of parent education group leaders in the form of ‘before’ and ‘after’ training evaluation forms which provide information on the background experience of the participants, what they hoped to gain from the training, and how confident they felt after training (See Appendix A for copies of these forms).
Information on the process of setting up the parenting groups was gained at a number of meetings held by the project team in each region. The first was the information session where the project teams discussed the project with possible facilitators selected by the coordinators. The second was during the training when the facilitators discussed the parenting groups they hoped to run with the trainers. The third was after the training when group leaders discussed the stage they had reached in setting up their programs and was aimed at helping them with any difficulties and issues they might be facing. In addition the meetings provided an avenue to reflect back issues to the group leaders in an action research approach.

Information was also collected at meetings which were held with group leaders in both regions when the parenting programs had been completed. The meetings enabled the evaluator to learn more about the processes involved and to learn about the pitfalls as well as the achievements.

Data were collected from parents who attended the parenting groups and who filled in ‘before’ and ‘after’ evaluation forms (See Appendix B).

Parenting group facilitators filled in a diary for each week of the program they ran. This diary indicated the aims of the specific program offered, background information on the parents attending and the local area involved, parent attendance, a description of the weekly focus of the program and any issues and observations of relevance. The diary was in note form but under a number of relevant headings. These diaries indicated the extent to which the parenting group leaders felt that they had met the goals they wished to achieve with the parents. The diary was also concerned with the processes involved in running the group as well as meeting the aims of the particular group (See Appendix C).

It was originally planned that in each region the evaluator would meet with a group of parents who had taken part in one of the programs. This proved impossible due to confidentiality and time issues as well as the impossibility of getting any of these parents together. Instead the evaluator visited two programs, one in each region, and spoke with the group leader(s) and in one case also with a parent from the program.

3. SELECTION OF REGIONS AND THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MODEL

As described above, the model used for this parenting program focuses not only on the universal needs of families with young children but the specific needs of vulnerable families by building on existing programs which support families with young children and aims at preventing difficulties through early intervention. The selection of regions for this project took into account these aspects of the model as well as the precise objectives of this particular project listed at the beginning of the report.

The two high needs regions chosen were the La Trobe Valley Region in Eastern Victoria and the Northern Region of Melbourne. A suitable coordinator was chosen for each region and funded to manage local aspects of the project.

Potential parent group facilitators from community agencies that work with families and young children in each region were approached by the regional coordinators to participate in the project. An information session was held by the project team for this group. The selection of local professionals thus built on links with the community through existing programs and is in keeping with the model described earlier.
There were time constraints placed on this part of the project due to the timing of the signing of the contract with the Commonwealth in May 2001 which occurred at the same time as the regional coordinators were appointed. Participants had to be chosen to run the parenting groups and training had to be complete by the end of June so that they had six months in which to complete their programs.

The free three day training was carried out from the 12th to the 14th of June in Gippsland and the 25th to the 27th of June in Northern region. This time constraint limited the choice of participants to some extent as there was not a great deal of time for the coordinators to approach local professionals. Those who took part in the training complained that they did not get enough notice as they had had to reorganize their workloads. On the other hand, they appreciated having six months in which to complete their programs. The tight timelines between appointing coordinators, providing information about the program to potential participants and the actual selection of those to be funded for running programs will be avoided for the 2002 stage of the project.

4. TRAINING OF GROUP FACILITATORS IN THE TWO REGIONS

Ten group facilitators in each region were selected for training after an information session and were funded to run a parenting program. However, the training also involved a number of additional unfunded participants some of whom were going to work in conjunction with group leaders of funded programs. The regional project coordinators also took part in the training so that their skills would also be enhanced and they would have a full understanding of the program.

Most participants in the training were already involved in working in one way or other with parents and young children in the age group targeted by this project. Tables 1 (Northern Region) and 2 (La Trobe Region) show the range of work backgrounds of trainees and the reasons why they wanted to receive the training and what they hoped to gain from it. All worked in situations where the skills and knowledge from the training would benefit the families with whom they came into contact. As can be seen in table 1 and 2 the participants, funded and unfunded, wished to enhance their skills and knowledge of parenting so that they could support families and offer parent education.

Parenting Australia provided three days of free training for participants as well as written material and on-going consultancy and support. The Planning Happy Families 1992 model was used as an example of a parenting program and A Parent’s Treasure Chest: Exploring the Path to Resilience and a folder of handouts were provided as written resource material.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CURRENT WORK (FUNDED PARTICIPANTS)</th>
<th>WHY THEY WANTED THE PARENT EDUCATION TRAINING</th>
<th>WHAT THEY HOPED TO GAIN FROM THE TRAINING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. School counselor</td>
<td>To be able to run a parenting group. Refresher.</td>
<td>Skills, new contacts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Social worker at a centre for low income families and children. (Vietnamese families)</td>
<td>To develop a plan to implement effective parenting strategies within structured/non-structured setting.</td>
<td>Grass roots? Back to basics parenting strategies. Information relating to families with other issues/crisis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. DHS family team (parents with and intellectual disability).</td>
<td>To learn how to run parenting groups and parent education.</td>
<td>Ideas about running parenting groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Family support/case management outreach.</td>
<td>Enhance learning in the parent education area and to gain new ideas and tools.</td>
<td>New ideas for group work with parents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Women’s support worker with an emergency housing service.</td>
<td>To run parenting groups for parents of young children who are clients of the service.</td>
<td>Tools – knowledge to share with colleagues. To run groups for the emergency housing service clients.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Family support worker.</td>
<td>Running a supported playgroup for mothers in vulnerable and isolated families. Wants to adapt the playgroup into a parenting group.</td>
<td>Skills, information, ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Worker in early childhood intervention service. (children aged 0 to 6 with a disability and their families.)</td>
<td>Improve own skills in order to run a parenting group for parents of children with a disability.</td>
<td>Improve own skills and improve outcomes for children and families.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Children’s support worker with a housing organisation which deals with people who have experienced homelessness or are at risk of it.</td>
<td>To gain skills and training to set up young parents parenting support group.</td>
<td>As stated in reason for coming.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Family counseling for an organisation which supports families and children. (did not take place)</td>
<td>Interested in parenting training in order to run a parenting group for parents aged between 15 and 20.</td>
<td>More knowledge/skills in running groups and information, information and more information!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| UNFUNDED PARTICIPANTS |

Eight additional participants were trained including the program coordinator. All worked in organisations which worked with families. Two of these unfunded people later worked with funded participants running parenting programs.

Most of these participants wanted to gain skills or to upgrade and extend their skills and knowledge of parenting.

New information on running parenting groups. To increase confidence in running parenting groups. Understanding of early intervention parenting and confidence to conduct the program. To be able to support parents and families. How to recruit participants.
**TABLE 2 - LA TROBE VALLEY REGION PARTICIPANTS IN THE TRAINING**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CURRENT WORK (FUNDED PARTICIPANTS)</th>
<th>WHY THEY WANTED THE PARENT EDUCATION TRAINING</th>
<th>WHAT THEY HOPED TO GAIN FROM THE TRAINING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Maternal and Child Health Coordinator</td>
<td>To assist new parents.</td>
<td>(Not filled in).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Speech pathologist working in pediatrics – running information groups, 1:1 therapy and supporting families. Works with Health Service in region.</td>
<td>Parenting issues are frequently raised in families that are worked with. Therefore need skills and strategies to impart parenting advice and the confidence to do this.</td>
<td>Strategies and skills to be able to impart parenting advice – to know what I am talking about with confidence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Strengthening families case worker. Case management of families with welfare concerns.</td>
<td>To gain confidence in running parenting groups and knowledge of presenting to parents.</td>
<td>Lots of knowledge to pass on to others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Home based care. Placing children with families who either need a break or who have been removed by DHS and need a safe secure environment.</td>
<td>To learn about Early Intervention Parenting and to empower the groups of parents that do the program.</td>
<td>New ideas for group work with parents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Good Beginnings. Supporting families with children birth to 5 years old with strategies that encourage the parenting role.</td>
<td>To increase understanding and skills.</td>
<td>To be able to offer support to parents in a positive group setting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Family preservation (Koorie).</td>
<td>To help families.</td>
<td>A better understanding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Social worker, general counseling, team leader.</td>
<td>To learn about parenting, to learn skills to run parenting groups. To develop health centre policy on parenting.</td>
<td>Group skills, networking and new ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Parent educator (conducted 2 programs).</td>
<td>To gain a wide range of skills and ideas for facilitating programs.</td>
<td>More confidence about what I am doing. More variety to draw from.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Counseling, assessment, guidance. (Program did not run.)</td>
<td>To update and enhance my skills in helping parents of children from birth to 6 years.</td>
<td>Skills and resources to cater for the broad range of parenting arrangements existing today.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UNFUNDED PARTICIPANTS</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Four additional participants were trained including the program coordinator for the region. All worked with families in the region. One of these unfunded people later worked with a funded participant running a parenting program.</td>
<td>Most of these participants wanted to gain skills or to upgrade and extend their skills and knowledge of parenting.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Each group leader was funded to provide a sequential parenting program for up to six to eight weeks. It was expected that in addition to providing a parenting program, that group leaders would enhance the capacity of local services to clients.

Unfunded participants were able to purchase the written materials but were not expected to facilitate a parent group. Some of these unfunded participants co-facilitated with funded facilitators and others went on to run parent groups that were not part of the project.

4.1 – EVALUATION OF THE GROUP LEADER TRAINING

Each participant in the group leader training was given an evaluation form to fill in before the training to provide background information. At the end of the three days of training they were given another evaluation form to complete in order to ascertain their satisfaction with the training, their feelings of confidence and, their enthusiasm for running the parenting groups.

4.2 – CONFIDENCE IN RUNNING GROUPS

While many of the participants had run groups before some had only worked on an individual basis. Some of those who had worked with groups before had done so in a very different capacity and facilitating a parenting group was a new thing to them. Before they undertook the training participants were asked rate their level of confidence in running groups on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being very confident and 1 not confident. The mean average confidence in running groups scores were 7 for La Trobe Region (range of scores 4 - 10) and 6.6 for Northern Region (range of scores 3 - 9). These scores indicate that while some participants had a fair degree of confidence others had very little.

After the training was complete participants were again asked about their confidence in running groups using the same scale as before. Participants in the La Trobe Region had improved in confidence from an average score of 7 before training to an average score of 8.5 and although the range of scores was still 4 to 10 more participants had higher scores. Participants in the Northern Region had also improved in confidence from 6.6 before training to 8.1 after. There was still a wide range of scores (from 5 to 10) but more participants were rating themselves at the higher end of the scale. A couple of participants with low confidence ratings wrote on their evaluation forms that they were nervous about actually running the group. At least one of these went on to run a very successful group which has continued although the funding for the program has ceased.

4.3 – ENTHUSIASM FOR RUNNING PARENTING GROUPS

After the training participants were also asked to rate their enthusiasm for running parenting groups on a scale of 1 to 10 with 10 indicating very enthusiastic and 1 indicating unenthusiastic. In both regions there was considerable enthusiasm for running groups although the rating score was slightly higher in the La Trobe Region with an average score of 9.6 compared with 8.6 for Northern Region.

4.4 – SATISFACTION WITH THE TRAINING

Participants in both regions had a very high level of satisfaction with the training they had received. They were asked to rate their satisfaction with the training on a scale of 1 to 10 with 10 being very satisfied and 1 very unsatisfied. Northern Region group leaders had a mean average satisfaction score of 9.4 (range of scores 7-10) and the La Trobe Region 9.6 (range of scores 8-10) indicating that they were very satisfied with the training they had received. The skills and vast experience of the project leaders/trainers in running parenting groups, as well as their knowledge of early childhood development, were greatly appreciated by the professionals who attended these sessions. Many wrote their thanks on their evaluation forms.

Overall the participants appeared to have benefited from the opportunity to receive training to run parenting groups, were very satisfied with their training, which had increased in their
confidence in running groups and they were generally very enthusiastic about running a parenting
group. Funded participants made commitments to provide a range of suitable programs.

4.5 – POST TRAINING MEETINGS WITH FACILITATORS

There were post training meetings with the professionals who were to be group leaders in
the project in both regions. At the meetings participants informed their group about the
stage they were up to in getting a parenting group started. Recruiting parents and
nervousness about the actual running of groups were the two major issues. However, the
participants were able to talk about the difficulties they were having and received lots of
support and practical advice from each other as well as from the project team. These
meetings indicated that the participants had gained more than just the skills and information
for running parenting groups; they had forged links with each and had expanded their
professional networks in their own region. They had also shared their knowledge and skills
and supported and encouraged one another. Some went on to present programs in
partnership by sharing their skills and supporting each other thus giving less experienced
people the confidence and assistance they needed.

4.6 – ISSUES IN SETTING UP PARENTING GROUPS

In keeping with model for the delivery of parent education on which this program is based
the group leaders were already working in appropriate centres or organisations where they
hoped to recruit parents with young children. However, there were several facilitators,
including those who worked in the school sector, who had to recruit parents more broadly
rather than directly from the service area with which they were associated. These people
greater trouble setting up their groups than those working directly with potential
parenting group members. For example, two participants in Northern region did not work
with children in the early childhood age group; one had to take parents who had older
children and the other had to seek parents through an early childhood centre which was
not part of her working environment.

Some facilitators found that they had difficulties in recruiting parents due to the time issues
many parents face, transport difficulties and where they could not provide child care if the
groups were held in the day. Flyers were not always successful in recruiting parents without a
personal approach. The facilitators who had the least difficulty recruiting parents with children
in the required age group were those who already had direct contact with them through their
work or who drew on their work related network and credibility. Some groups were able to
provide child care and/or transport to the group meetings and this made it easier for parents
to attend. Tables 3 and 4 list the programs that took place in Northern Region and the La Trobe
Valley region respectively. (The exact names of the auspicing bodies are not given nor are the
names of the facilitators for reasons of confidentiality.) Two of the planned programs, one in
each region, did not take place as intended. The first, in the La Trobe Valley Region did not
take place because the facilitators, both of whom were funded and who had worked together
on one program, ran out of time to run another program although it had been planned (See
programs nos. 3 and 4 in Table 4). The program which did not run in Northern (program 10
in Table 3) did not get off the ground at all and the facilitator, who had originally been funded,
took part in no other programs although she had received training. It is unknown why this
program did not go ahead but perhaps because of difficulties in recruiting the parents. While
the programs in both regions were based on he parenting program Planning Happy Families
many group leaders gave their particular program a specific name as can be seen in the first
column of tables 3 and 4; others retained the name or changed it slightly. While the objectives
of the programs (see second column) had many similarities they differed in ways that were
specific to the particular program and group of parents. Reading the diaries of the group
leaders indicated that the content of the programs, while having similarities and much in
common, was also interpreted differently to suit the specific needs of the different groups
of parents, particularly with the more vulnerable groups of parents.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME OF PROGRAM, AUSPICING BODY, LENGTH OF PROGRAM</th>
<th>OBJECTIVES OF THE PROGRAM</th>
<th>PARENT ATTENDANCE</th>
<th>FACILITATORS</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Successful Parenting - Child Care Centre - 4 week program.</td>
<td>i. Build confidence of parents in parenting, ii. Build positive group relationships so each parent feels supported.</td>
<td>7 enrolled but average attendance was 3.</td>
<td>1 funded facilitator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Vietnamese Parents - Centre for Families and Children - 5 week program.</td>
<td>i. To encourage parents to think about themselves as parents and to think about their children and plans for the future. ii. To provide a safe and supportive environment for parents to express themselves and emotions associated with being a parent. iii. To provide a supportive environment where through discussion parents can gain support and confidence in their role as parents. iv. To provide and opportunity for parents to discuss particular concerns and exchange practical information.</td>
<td>4 enrolled and attended consistently</td>
<td>2 one funded and one Vietnamese assistant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Parenting Group - for parents with intellectual disabilities - DHS Family Team - 6 week program.</td>
<td>i. To improve parenting skills. ii. Build social networks. iii. Build self confidence of parents.</td>
<td>2 enrolled originally but some weeks 3 attended.</td>
<td>DHS family team. Funded program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Fun, Friends, and a Fair Go. - Family Service - 8 week program.</td>
<td>i. To enhance parents skills in parenting. ii. Provide space for parents to share ideas, experience and knowledge. iii. To help parents identify and acknowledge their existing skills. iv. To recognize weaknesses and strengths and build on them. v. To provide an opportunity to make friends.</td>
<td>10 enrolled but only 5 came to the first meeting. 5 attended on 3 of the 8 meetings and 4 the rest of the time. Parents from a number of cultural backgrounds.</td>
<td>2 facilitators – 1 funded and 1 unfunded.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. We're OK Parents. Emergency Housing Service Women’s Support Program. - 6 week program</td>
<td>i. Self esteem. ii. Self care. iii. Parenting in general. iv. Play therapy/support v. Peer support</td>
<td>The numbers attending were low due to the situation of the women with 4 attending the first time and 3 consistently for the rest of the time.</td>
<td>1 funded facilitator known to the women attending.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAME OF PROGRAM, AUSPICING BODY, LENGTH OF PROGRAM</td>
<td>OBJECTIVES OF THE PROGRAM</td>
<td>PARENT ATTENDANCE</td>
<td>FACILITATORS</td>
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</table>
| 6. Creative Playtime Group.                        | i. To provide a non-stigmatising group activity for target families.  
- For mothers and children from diverse backgrounds.  
- Family Services  
- Began before the parenting training and continued throughout 2001. | Attendance varied between 9 and 3 mothers attending but mostly around 7 or 8 attended.  
This group continued throughout 2001. | 1 funded facilitator |
|                                                    | ii. To provide opportunities for children, who may otherwise remain isolated, to socialize in preparation for kinder and school.  
iii. To provide opportunities for structuring parenting input according to the needs of the group.  
iv. To promote opportunities to enhance attachment between parents and children which encourage fun and a sense of play  
v. To provide opportunities for women from diverse backgrounds to build friendships and reduce isolation.  
vi. To ensure a safe, comfortable and accepting environment where diversity is tolerated.  
vii. To provide and social environment where parents can learn from each other in a non-threatening environment.  
viii. To increase access of the target families to Maternal and Child Health, other related services, and to provide information where appropriate. | | |
| 7. Feel Good Group                                 | i. Opportunities to meet other parents and form friendships.  
ii. Recognising that caring for children is difficult, demanding, not quite what we imagined, rewarding and enjoyable.  
iii. Supporting each other.  
iv. Sharing information, experience and techniques.  
v. Developing an understanding that there are no hard and fast rules to parenting. | 10 parents enrolled but 1 extra came and most came for the 6 weeks of the course. | 2 facilitators 1 funded and 1 unfunded. |
| - for parents of children with a disability.  
- Centre for Children with special needs  
- 6 week program. | | | |
<table>
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<tr>
<th>NAME OF PROGRAM, AUSPICING BODY, LENGTH OF PROGRAM</th>
<th>OBJECTIVES OF THE PROGRAM</th>
<th>PARENT ATTENDANCE</th>
<th>FACILITATORS</th>
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</table>
- Council Housing  
- 8 week program. | i. Support group.  
ii. Group dealing with youth issues as well as parenting issues.  
iii. Making friends.  
iv. Child behaviour management.  
.v. What to expect as children grow. | 8 enrolled and started but mostly 7 attended for the 8 weeks of the parenting sessions. Young (16-21) vulnerable mothers with financial housing and relationship issues | 1 funded facilitator |
| 9. Planning Happy Families  
- Primary school - parents had children who were aged between 7 and 11 years.  
- 4 week program. | i. To target kindergarten parents who have enrolled their children in the school for 2002.  
ii. To form a network between new parents and parents already participating in school activities.  
This program did not succeed in reaching parents in the target group instead parents who attended had primary school aged children. | 3 enrolled for 4 weeks. Mostly 2 or 3 attended | 2 facilitators, both funded but one also ran another program. |
| 10. This program, which was to be auspiced by a family counseling and support service, and which was intended for at risk parents aged between 15 and 20 did not start. | | | The facilitator for this group had originally been one of the funded participants. |
# Table 4 - La Trobe Region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME OF PROGRAM, AUSPICING BODY, LENGTH OF PROGRAM</th>
<th>OBJECTIVES OF THE PROGRAM</th>
<th>PARENT ATTENDANCE</th>
<th>FACILITATORS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Enjoying the Challenges of Parenting Toddlers and Preschoolers. - Health services including Maternal and Child Health Services and South Gippsland Shire - 5 week program.</td>
<td>i. To empower individual members of the group. ii. To identify solutions to the hurdles they encounter.</td>
<td>6 parents enrolled and 5 attended consistently. All parents had infants or toddlers. All parents involved in the farming – middle class and married most knew each other.</td>
<td>2 facilitators both funded but one gaining experience working with the other. Both facilitators also worked on the program below.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Enjoying the Challenges of Parenting Toddlers and Preschoolers. - (Auspiced by Local Shire Council and hospital and held in a community house.) - 5 week program repeat of above.</td>
<td>i. Enhance parent’s knowledge, confidence and enjoyment of this delightful but at times challenging age group.</td>
<td>8 parents enrolled with a consistent attendance of 7 or 8 parents each week. Fairly low SES locality</td>
<td>1 funded facilitator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Planning Happy Families. - (Family services) - 6 week program.</td>
<td>i. To share knowledge and experience. ii. To assist the group to learn new and creative strategies to be positive parents.</td>
<td>8 parents enrolled but 6 consistently attended after the first session. One single mother and two in blended families.</td>
<td>2 facilitators both funded but only this one ran due to lack of time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The second program planned above did not take place due to lack of time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Above facilitators – program did not run.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Planning Happy Families/Positive Parenting. - (Shire preschools) - 6 week program.</td>
<td>i. To provide parents with information on parenting with a focus on sharing and building on existing parenting skills. ii. Introducing techniques and understanding around parenting issues and behaviour management.</td>
<td>8 parents enrolled 9 attended twice but mostly 7 or 8 parents attended. Families from broad SES and most are in a relationship.</td>
<td>1 funded facilitator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAME OF PROGRAM, AUSSCING BODY, LENGTH OF PROGRAM</td>
<td>OBJECTIVES OF THE PROGRAM</td>
<td>PARENT ATTENDANCE</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Parenting Skills Program</td>
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<tr>
<td>– Learning Together</td>
<td>i. To encourage parents to enjoy their children.</td>
<td>7 enrolled but mostly only 3 or 4 parents attended and only 1 for the last 2 weeks. (This group had a number of unavoidable issues that affected attendances.)</td>
<td>1 funded facilitator.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- (Good Beginnings)</td>
<td>ii. To support parents in their parenting.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- 6 week program</td>
<td>iii. Give parents some new strategies.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Koori Happy Families.</td>
<td>i. Keeping families together.</td>
<td>8 enrolled and attended. Attendance was consistent throughout the program.</td>
<td>2 facilitators I funded. This program was funded for a second series with money from a funded program which did not run.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- (Aboriginal Family Preservation Service)</td>
<td>ii. Addressing domestic violence and drugs and alcohol issues.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- 12 week program</td>
<td>iii. Sexual assault.</td>
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<td>Presented twice: with funding from a cancelled course.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Talking About Kids.</td>
<td>i. Impact of domestic violence – building hope and resilience in children.</td>
<td>10 enrolled but only 6 attended. 6 Koori participants enrolled but only 3 attended. All have experienced domestic violence with a current or former partner and all are between 16 and 21 years</td>
<td>1 funded facilitator who already knew all participants and one other facilitator not funded or trained.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- (Community Health Centre)</td>
<td>ii. Communication skills.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- 6 week program</td>
<td>iii. Grief and loss.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>iv. Stress management.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>v. Child development.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Parenting Program</td>
<td>To provide a program that meets the needs identified by participants.</td>
<td>9 enrolled. 8 attended first session then 6 attended the last 3 sessions. 4 of the parents are either sole parents, in a blended family and there is one grandparent</td>
<td>1 facilitator who works as a parent educator in the region.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- (Neighbourhood House)</td>
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<td>- 4 week program</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Ramahyuck Parents Group.</td>
<td>To address issues identified by participants.</td>
<td>5 enrolled. Attendance varied from 6 on the first night only but mostly 3 on average. Facilitator disappointed with attendance because the program was not reaching those that are out there.</td>
<td>1 facilitator who works as a parent educator in the region.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- (Koori program)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- 6 week program</td>
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5. DID THE PROJECT ACHIEVE ITS OBJECTIVES?

5.1 - OBJECTIVE 1:
To enhance and strengthen parental skills and emotional competencies within the general community

This is the most general of the objectives for the project and both the training of the group leaders and the running of the parent education programs fulfill this objective. However, it is the training of the funded group leaders and the unfunded participants that are more likely in the long run to enhance and strengthen parental skills in the general community. These participants, who are already working in one capacity or another with parents with young children, have broadened their skills to provide another dimension to the support they can provide to the parents of young children. (See Tables 1 and 2 the second and third column – ‘why they wanted the training’ and ‘what they hope to gain’).

5.1.1 - MAJOR ISSUES FOR FAMILIES IN BOTH REGIONS

The participants in the group facilitator training in both regions were asked on the evaluation forms to list the major issues they saw facing parents/families in their region. They could list as many issues as were relevant. The following are the issues ranked in order of the number of times they were mentioned:

- Isolation and lack of connections, lack of local services, lack of support.
- Economic issues, including unemployment, low income and poverty, lack of resources, and housing related problems (rural recession was also mentioned in the La Trobe region).
- Parenting issues including lack of skills, lack of confidence.
- Child development issues including unrealistic expectations of children and child development stages.
- Behaviour management.
- Teen mothers, young parents in general, including young single parents.
- Domestic violence, and parental conflict.
- Child abuse and fear of DHS (sexual abuse was also mentioned but not to the same extent).
- Drugs and alcohol.
- Cultural barriers.
- Single parents, marriage breakdown and parenting alone (and in La Trobe region temporary separations caused by working away from home).
- Time issues for parents.

This list covers many issues which concern most families with young children as well as those that are related to vulnerable families. Although it is impossible to tackle the economic and related issues affecting families with young children many of the other issues can be addressed within parent education groups.

The descriptions of the group facilitator training and information from the ‘before’ and ‘after’ evaluation forms filled in by participants indicate that the parent education training was very successful and has added to the skill base of those who took part. This knowledge and experience will remain with these facilitators in their ongoing work in the community, and will inform their relationships and dealings with parents in the future, whether or not they are actually running parenting groups. However, they will also be able
to run parenting groups when appropriate with their clients and with other local people thus strengthening the parenting and emotional competencies of the general community as well as specific groups within the community.

The skills and emotional competency of the parents attending groups have also been enhanced by their participation and all say that they would recommend the programs to other parents (further information on the parents perspectives and experience is dealt with more fully in the next two sections under the second and third objectives).

The final meeting with facilitators indicated that they felt immense satisfaction with the parent education groups that they had run and felt that they had really assisted the parents who attended. In addition, they also considered that they had learnt a lot about parenting, not just at a theoretical level but at a practical level, in the time they worked with the parents in the groups. Facilitators looked forward to incorporating their knowledge of parenting into their ongoing work and would also try to run parenting education groups, when possible and funding permitted, in the future.

5.2 – OBJECTIVE 2:
To create access to parent education and support for vulnerable families

The program gave access to parent support and education for vulnerable families in both regions. Access to these families was due to involving and training as facilitators professionals who already had access or links to these vulnerable groups through the services for which they worked. These facilitators provided vulnerable families with the additional parenting information and support both through the parent education groups and ongoing information and parenting support within their current workplace.

Tables 3 and 4 show the groups of parents that took part in these parenting groups. Seven of the groups in Northern Region provided parent education and support for particularly vulnerable families. These vulnerable families included those where the parents had intellectual disabilities, disadvantaged Vietnamese families where English is a second language, isolated parents from diverse cultural backgrounds, disadvantaged women in temporary crisis housing, a playgroup for isolated mothers and their children some mostly from non-English speaking backgrounds, parents of children with disabilities, and a group of vulnerable young mothers (aged 16 to 21) with financial, housing and relationship issues.

Five of the groups in the La Trobe Valley Region also provided parent education and support for particularly vulnerable families. These included two that were for Koori parents, another was for disadvantaged parents who had experienced domestic violence several of whom were Koori, and another two were for disadvantaged parents a number of whom had experienced family breakdown. One of the programs in this region was for mothers with infants and toddlers to help support them in their early days of parenting and to help prevent any difficulties before they occur.

5.2.1 – WHY PARENTS ATTENDED THE PARENT EDUCATION GROUPS

One hundred and sixteen parents filled in evaluation forms at the start of parenting education groups (50 in Northern region and 66 in La Trobe Valley region) but only 97 (48 in Northern Region and 49 in La Trobe Valley region) filled in forms at the end of the parent education groups indicating a drop of attendance by the end of some programs. With the exception of the group of Vietnamese parents all could speak English although some could also speak the language of their family of origin. All except four of the parents who attended were mothers.
On the evaluation form given out on the first meeting of the parenting groups parents were asked the open ended question ‘Why did you come to this program?’ Most parents gave more than one reason for attending and answers to this question fell into 5 categories which are shown in Figure 1. Almost half the parents (47%) said that they came because they wanted to learn about parenting and to be a better parent. About a quarter (23%) because they wanted to learn about child development and behaviour management, 16% because they wanted to meet other parents, 9% because the program was recommend to them and in some cases court ordered, and a small group of parents (5%) came because they wanted to gain confidence in their parenting.

The following are quotes from parents explaining in their own words why they came:

- It would force me to relax and I might be able to express my feelings re my intellectually disabled child and so relieve some of the stress.
- To feel good about being a parent.
- Asked to.
- To meet parents who also have children with special needs.
- Work on my relationship with my child.
- To build more confidence/self esteem, meet new people in my situation, learn different ways of dealing with situations.
- To extend my knowledge of parenting and meet new people.
- Locked up inside, 4 walls, no car, no friends, a break from two kids stuck to my legs, adult company. Playgroup gives us something to look forward to.
- Just gave birth. Would be a good to meet others just to talk and exchange ideas.
- Learn more about parenting and meet other people.
- To learn ways of dealing with problems and not focus on the negatives.
- To help my house be a loving and happy place for my children. To have my children feel that they are always loved and they have a loving home.
5.2.2 – THE CONFIDENCE OF PARENTS

On the first night of the parent education groups parents were also asked to rate their confidence in parenting on a scale of 1 to 10 with 1 indicating not confident and 10 very confident. Parents in the Northern region on average rated themselves at 7.1 with scores ranging from 4 to 10. Many of the parents felt reasonably confident about their parenting while others lacked confidence. Parents in the La Trobe Valley region had an average confidence rating score of 6.7 with a range of scores from 3.5 to 10 indicating again that while some parents were quite confident others were lacking in confidence.

On the last night in all groups the parents who had attended were asked to fill in a simple evaluation form which asked them to rate different aspects of the project. Parents were asked once again to rate their level of parenting confidence (on the same scale as before). Parents in Northern region had a mean average score of 8.6 (with the ratings ranging from 5 to 10 with only one person scoring 5) and those in the La Trobe Valley an average of 9.8 (with a range of ratings from 4 to 10 but with most parents scoring towards the higher end of the scale) indicating a rise in parental perception of their confidence in parenting after attending the parenting education groups. It is important to note however, that a number of parents wrote on their evaluation forms that their confidence level varied and at times they felt less confident depending on the situation. However, on the whole the confidence of parents rose after the parent education program.

To gain information on the overall experience of parents in the various groups they were asked if they would recommend the program to other parents. All parents in both regions, without exception, said that they would recommend the program they had attended to other parents.

Enjoyment is an important aspect of adult learning. The parents who attended the parenting education groups in both regions appeared not only to benefit from the experience but to enjoy it also. Parents were asked if they had enjoyed the program on a scale of 1 to 10 with 1 indicating not enjoyable and 10 indicating very enjoyable. Scores ranged from 5 to 10 (with only two people scoring below 7 and most rating themselves above 7). The mean average scores for parent enjoyment of the program for Northern region was 9.2 and for La Trobe Valley region 8.9 indicating a high degree of enjoyment of the programs.

5.2.3 – THE BEST THING ABOUT ATTENDING THE PROGRAM

Parents were also asked on the last night ‘what has been the best thing about attending this program?’ As this was an open ended question some parents indicated more than one thing. Figure 2 shows that the best thing mentioned by the greatest proportion (30%) of parents was learning new ways of parenting and new approaches and strategies.

A large proportion (27%) of parents mentioned that knowing you are not alone and that other parents have similar problems was the best thing about the groups for them. Just over a quarter of parents (26%) said that it was meeting other parents, making friends and feeling accepted. The three other categories that parents mentioned to a lesser extent were learning about children’s behaviour and development (7%), the facilitators themselves (5%) and greater confidence (5%).
The following are quotes from parents describing the best thing about the parenting groups:

- Feeling that you are a ‘real’ human being, that most of the time you do your best, sometimes you fail and that’s OK. Realising that I’m doing OK and having a few strategies to work with.
- Hearing different views on different matters and to know everyone is the same. Thank you guys very much, as a male I thought this program was great, not only did it help me to understand certain things better but now I know what women talk about at these things!
- Knowing that not only Kooris get hurt.
- More confident in dealing with child’s behaviour in a positive way.
- I’ve gained confidence in discussing parenting techniques with my partner. I have more confidence in myself. The facilitator made it good fun and I looked forward to going back.
- To learn that you are not alone and that your child is not that bad after all!
- Talking to one another. Sharing our feelings. Tea and coffee.
- Sharing your experiences as a parent with others in the group.
- It gave me an outlet to discuss problems I face in dealing with my children. The facilitators have been fantastic in giving me great strategies for dealing with basic problems. It has been extremely worthwhile and effective.
- I feel that my parenting skills have improved and my relationship with my children has improved. This is mainly because of implementing the strategies discussed in this course. Especially using natural and logical consequences calmly, referring to family rules and using ‘I’ messages. And most of all I have really enjoyed it.
- I was supplied with very useful information to improve my parenting skills. The program is full of wonderful support and very helpful links. Thank you for all your help.
- Meeting other young mums.
- Getting out of the house and meeting people.

5.3. - OBJECTIVE 3:
To develop targeted approaches to families requiring special responses in relation to parenting, from the pre-birth stage through to school aged children for example, adolescent mothers/mothers-to-be, indigenous parents and parents from culturally diverse backgrounds. This would be done in collaboration with local service providers.

Information on the way in which these targeted approaches have been implemented, the successes and the problems, has been documented through meetings with parenting group leaders before and after running parenting education groups, through information
forwarded regularly by the coordinators in Northern and La Trobe regions, and most importantly information from the group leader’s weekly diary which was sent to the evaluator at the completion of the parenting groups.

This program was successful in engaging a number of vulnerable groups of parents in parent education programs. Parents from a range of different backgrounds, including Kooris, parents from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, very young mothers, parents with intellectual disabilities, parents of children with disabilities, and families where there had been domestic violence, received parenting education in their local area. The focus of this education varied to some extent from group to group as indicated in Tables 3 and 4.

Five important steps were involved in developing targeted approaches to families requiring special assistance in relation to parenting with the first being the contact and recruitment. They are:

a) The original approach to suitable professionals in the area through the regional coordinator and the invitation to attend an information session about the project.

b) Careful selection of those to be funded and trained by the local coordinator in the region in conjunction with the project team.

c) The successful training of professionals with access to vulnerable families through the services to which they are attached.

d) The targeted recruiting, often requiring a personal approach, of vulnerable parents to take part in the parent education program through professionals (facilitators) they already knew or knew of.

e) A flexible and responsive approach to parent education and adaptation of the content and processes involved to suit the particular needs of these vulnerable parents.

The parenting education groups for vulnerable parents reached through this program included the following:

- **Koori Happy Families** - Koori parents (with 2 Koori facilitators who were known and trusted and had previously worked individually with Kooris) with domestic violence and drug and alcohol problems some of whom were very young and had youth issues as well.

- **Talking about Kids** - A group of disadvantaged families including some Koori parents with problems of domestic violence and drug and alcohol problems (the facilitator was already working with these parents in an individual support role).

- **Parenting Program** - for disadvantaged Vietnamese mothers living in high rise accommodation. (This program was facilitated by a worker in a centre that these parents knew and trusted and was co-facilitated by a Vietnamese worker).

- **Parenting Group** - This group was for parents with an intellectual disability and was co-facilitated by a group of professionals working for DHS who were already known to the parents. This group was limited by lack of transport and child care. Meetings were not held on DHS premises.

- **We’re OK Parents** - This program was run for women in temporary crisis housing and the facilitator already worked with women in the program in other ways. Most of these women have been involved with child protection services. The training and funding added another dimension to the support that could be provided for these very vulnerable women.

- **Creative Playtime Group** - This was a playgroup for parents and children from a diverse range of backgrounds including Turkish, Greek, Italian, Maltese, Croatian, Lebanese and Anglo-Celtic. Most were from low SES families some with unemployed husbands. The playgroup was already in existence and the facilitator added to her
skills through the parenting training which enabled her to extend the support and information available for these mothers who were referred to the playgroup by Maternal and Child Health and other agencies. The playgroup is for families with pre-school children with additional needs.

- **Feel Good Group** - This is a group for parents of children with disabilities. The auspicing body was a centre which works with children with special needs and their families and the facilitators were already working with the children at this centre. The funding and training enabled them to extend the support and information offered to parents.

- **Planning Happy Families** - This group was started as a support group for very young mothers aged between 16 and 21 who were from disadvantaged backgrounds who had help from a local government housing agency. The facilitator worked as a children’s worker for the agency but there had previously not been funding available for the extra hours to run a parenting group.

The diaries kept by the facilitators indicated the ways in which the parenting programs actually progressed, the processes involved, and issues that arose. The major feature of these programs was that the facilitators responded to the parents needs and adapted the program accordingly. For example, those working with parents with an intellectual disability quickly responded to the needs of the parents. They always had two facilitators present and one from the previous night always attended the next meeting.

The facilitators who worked with the parents of children with disabilities said that the agendas for the group meetings ‘went out the window quickly’ and that they planned carefully for the group to cope with the needs of particular parents and that they also involved other staff as needed. The children attended a playgroup while the mothers were at the parenting group but the mothers were always given feedback from the playgroup about their children. Co-facilitating was necessary and enabled the facilitators to attend to all the needs of the group and to complement each others skills. One of the facilitators had not had the experience before and gained a lot from working with a more experienced person. The success of this program has meant that DHS will fund a staff member for an additional half day to run another program.

The facilitator running the We’re OK Parents, not unexpectedly, had small numbers in the group as the women were transient and in temporary crisis housing and had had lots of trouble, often with authorities, in their lives. The facilitator went to a great deal of trouble to prepare a welcoming and suitable environment for them with bean bags, and by allowing smoking breaks outside. The women did not know how to parent because of their own lack of parenting. This facilitator also reported that the prepared program ‘went out the window’ and instead the program was tailored to the needs of the women. Nevertheless the women read homework information on things such as ‘bedwetting’ and ‘biting’ because these were things that they had asked about. Since the program has come to an end the women still drop in to see the group leader and she reports that their confidence has increased. There were issues of confidentiality and sensitive issues raised within this group. The facilitator hopes to present the program again with help from another member of staff.

5.3.1 - TWO CASE STUDIES OF SUCCESSFUL TARGETED APPROACHES

The following are fuller descriptions of two of the parenting groups which worked with vulnerable families in somewhat different circumstances both have been mentioned briefly above. The first is a Koori program in the La Trobe region and the second a program for disadvantaged young, mostly teenage, women with infants or toddlers in Northern region.

- **Koori Happy Families**: This parenting program took place in an Aboriginal Family Preservation agency which aims to keep families together. The parenting program wanted to directly address domestic violence, drugs and alcohol and sexual assault
issues. Both the funded facilitator and the unfunded co-facilitator attended the three
day training. Both still felt somewhat lacking in confidence about running the group
at the end of the training but openly acknowledged their nervousness.

The facilitators had no problem in recruiting parents to their program as they were
well known in the area, were trusted by the Koori community, and are Kooris
themselves. All the parents who took part were Kooris and none were married. The
facilitators described domestic violence, drugs and alcohol, and sexual assault as
impacting on families in this group. There is not much indigenous tradition in the
group due to displacement and children being taken away.

The parenting program was advertised by flyer but was handed out personally by the
facilitators so they could talk to possible participants and tell them that they would
have fun. Feuding families and overly aggressive people were not asked. Some
participants were self referrals while others came from other services. The program
was advertised as informal and providing a light supper.

Eight parents enrolled and all came each night of the program with the exception of
one parent who died. Although the program went for a period of 12 weeks
attendance was the most consistent of any program in the whole of the project.
Participants were told that they must respect each other in the group. They were
picked up and taken to the group but had to be ‘kicked out’ at the conclusion as they
did not want to leave.

The program took place in the kitchen of the house where it was held and although
it was quite cramped the parents did not want to leave it and go to a larger room as it
had good ‘vibes’ and they were accustomed to it. The group very quickly formed
into a whole and had lots of fun as well as worthwhile discussion of important issues
although sometimes it was difficult to talk about particularly sensitive issues.

Each night they started by preparing a meal together and even visitors to the
program joined in and helped with simple home cooking. This participation in
preparing a meal gave an additional dimension of nutrition and meal preparation to
the parenting program without formal teaching.

The program covered a range of relevant issues including setting the scene, family
styles, assertiveness, listening to children, sex education, loss and the grieving
process, loss of land and displacement, drugs and related issues, conflict resolution,
food and eating and individual and family life cycles. These topics were mostly
much the same as other parenting groups but the diary kept by the group facilitator
indicated the differences in this Koori group that were relevant to their
backgrounds. There was an emphasis on keeping children safe due to the
prevalence of domestic violence, sexual abuse and drug and alcohol problems
Mothers had not had much chance to learn parenting from their own mothers who
had often been keeping one step ahead of the department and also many parents had
lost their children at some stage. There was also a focus within the group on the
loss of land and displacement of children. Most of the mothers had experienced
many moves in their family life and few had photos of their families.

A number of relevant guests met the group. These included representatives from
Centrelink, the Child Support Agency, Neighbourhood House, Child Protection and
so on. Including the guests in the food preparation helped to break down barriers
and make them appear more human and understanding.
One of the parents said that she came to the program to understand and learn more about her children’s development so she could help them more. She ranked her enjoyment of the experience at 10, her satisfaction as 10, and at the end her confidence in her parenting had risen from 7 to 10. Unfortunately the open ended question about what was best about the program had been left off all the forms for this group.

The facilitators ran another parenting program at the end of the first program and have continued to find various funding sources to make this program ongoing.

ii) Planning Happy Families - parenting for disadvantaged young mothers: The facilitator for this group indicated in her diary that her aim was to extend a program that she was already involved in. ‘There has been a great need for a support group for young mums in my area. My part-time position as children’s worker for the housing program did not allow funding for extra hours to run a group. The funding for this program provided extra hours to establish the group and incorporate a parenting program that this group relates to – not strictly structured but empowering’.

The mothers in this group were aged between 16 and 21 and dealing with youth issues as well as parenting issues. They were also struggling with financial, housing and relationship difficulties. The area in which they live has few support services for families there is also a lack of transport which restricts access to what services there are. Furthermore, this group of young mothers does not respond to any program/service which is too authoritarian or rigidly structured. Mainstream mother’s groups and playgroups have proved inappropriate for this group of women. ‘They say they feel looked down on for being so young and do not relate to mothers in their 30s, with 3 kids, a Volvo, mortgages and worries about piano lessons!’

The goals of the eight week program were: making friends, ideas for discipline, information on child behaviour and what to expect as the child grows. The program included the usual topics: family and parenting style, family life cycles, loss and the grieving process, assertiveness, empathic listening, drugs, and a concluding group party at Christmas. However, while the topics were similar to other groups the focus was suited to the needs of this particular group. These young women were still closely linked to issues in their families of origin particularly when their own mothers had new partners themselves. They also had a fore-shortened age gap between becoming a parent and being parented themselves. In becoming mothers so young they have lost their youthful lifestyle and freedom and their friends did not have the same responsibilities that they did. They feel left out because they had to care for a child. They often had very high and inappropriate expectations of their children and thought that normal behaviour was ‘playing up’ or being a ‘brat’. Many had used drugs and alcohol recreationally before their pregnancy but had given up since then although their partners continued their old life-style. This placed a strain on relationships.

The facilitator reported that the young mothers quickly cohesive group and have continued to meet since the end of the program. The program was empowering for the women who attended, particularly the assertiveness session, and role playing and brain storming also worked well.

The mothers in this group reported that the best thing about coming to this program was meeting people and the friendships that developed, the helpful information, getting out of the house, the helpful hints and advice, and learning new things.
6. CONCLUSIONS OF YEAR 1 - 2001

The parent education groups conducted in both regions have addressed in one way or another all the issues in the local areas mentioned by the facilitators earlier. For example, the Koori Happy Families addressed issues such as cultural barriers, drugs and alcohol, behaviour management and child development as well as domestic violence at the same time as sharing information about parenting. The only local issues mentioned by the facilitators that could not be addressed in the parent education groups were economic issues and poverty.

However, there are cost problems in running these parent education groups although the training is free and a limited amount of funding was provided to be used as seen fit by the facilitators and auspicing bodies. There were additional costs that had to be born by auspicing agencies as $800.00 was not enough to cover all costs especially if venue hire, transport or child care was needed. Child care was important for many parents especially for groups run during the day. It made a difference to attendance if child care was available but unless it was already available through the auspicing body it was often too expensive to provide. Parents from low income and vulnerable families do not always have access to transport and this can make a difference to the possibility of attendance. The Koori program discussed earlier provided transport for the group.

Recruiting is a critical stage of the project and is the key to these parent education groups. Where facilitators do not have direct access to parents with children in the correct age group it is much more difficult to set up a parenting group. It is also more difficult to recruit vulnerable parents if the facilitators do not direct access or links to these parents so that they are trusted. A couple of parenting programs ran with such small numbers, particularly those where they failed to connect with vulnerable families, that the cost was hardly worth effort. However these were exceptions. In the case of the groups in the emergency housing and the parents with intellectual difficulties, both in Northern region, where the parents are very difficult to reach, small numbers are a different matter as they could be seen as a starting point for the future.

One of the most useful outcomes was that more experienced people often co-facilitated with a less experienced person. Often this meant a funded person working with an unfunded person although not always. Group leaders reported that having two facilitators added to the cohesion and processes operating within the group of parents. The second person could often see what the other may have missed particularly when sensitive issues were discussed and/or with particularly vulnerable parents.

Despite two programs which failed to run, and a couple which had trouble recruiting suitable parents, most facilitators successfully recruited parents in the target groups and provided worthwhile programs which were enjoyed by the parents and which they considered had benefited them. The facilitators, funded and unfunded, benefited from the training and the experience of conducting parenting groups. Co-facilitation, especially where one was funded to run a program and the other was unfunded, was a useful strategy in enhancing the skills of the facilitators and supporting the parents.
The evaluation of the second year will build largely on what was found in the first year of the project. The model proved successful in the first year and in this second year the extent to which this success is repeated is examined. Attention is also focused on the extent to which success in providing programs to vulnerable families was repeated. Issues in the process of setting up and running the programs and the coordination of the two regions are also addressed.

The methodology and project aims are described fully in the report on the first year. The methodology of the evaluation is also described and the evaluation instruments are contained in appendices to the report.

In this second year of the project two new regions were chosen by the Commonwealth and the project team. They were the outer Western Region of Melbourne and the South Gippsland Region which joins the first year’s La Trobe Valley Region which was involved in the first year of the project.

7. GROUP FACILITATOR TRAINING

All procedures and training were the same as described in last year’s evaluation report and the objectives also were the same. The evaluation of the group facilitator training in the first year report indicated that it was of high quality the ‘before’ and ‘after’ training evaluation documents for this second year indicate that participants again were very satisfied with the training, very enthusiastic about running parenting groups, and felt confident to very confident in their ability to do so although, as before, some participants who had not run groups before indicated that they were a bit nervous. This nervousness was often overcome through co-facilitation with a more experienced partner.

Tables 5 and 6 show that, as in the first year, participants in the training were already working in one way or another with parents who have children in the age group targeted in this project. Both funded and unfunded participants in both regions wanted to enhance their skills and knowledge of parenting so that they could support families and offer parent education.
TABLE 5 - WESTERN REGION PARTICIPANTS IN THE TRAINING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CURRENT WORK (FUNDED PARTICIPANTS)</th>
<th>WHY THEY WANTED THE PARENT EDUCATION TRAINING</th>
<th>WHAT THEY HOPE TO GAIN FROM THE TRAINING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Vietnamese worker in family services</td>
<td>To obtain training experience and skills to run groups.</td>
<td>The skills to run parenting groups successfully.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Supporting and resourcing playgroups</td>
<td>To gain confidence and knowledge about conducting successful parenting programs.</td>
<td>Confidence, knowledge, icebreakers, how to impart the ‘issues' without just droning on to parents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Maternal and Child Health Nurse</td>
<td>To learn about parenting to assist with my families.</td>
<td>Learn more about assisting parents and to help with the transition to parenting and community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Family Support worker</td>
<td>Offer parenting support and group work in my role and hope to obtain a theoretical background along with practical strategies to assist the same.</td>
<td>Confidence and information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. In-home Family Support</td>
<td>To gain skills in group work and to run a group with another worker</td>
<td>To be able to start running parenting groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Family Day Care Resource Officer</td>
<td>To gain new skills which can be shared with parents using the service.</td>
<td>Information and skills about early intervention parenting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Family Support</td>
<td>I work with parents who have parenting issues and want to learn a different approach to work with parents other than PPP.</td>
<td>Ideas to run parenting groups and ideas to work individually with families.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Neighbourhood development</td>
<td>To deliver programs and support to the Homestead run estate, and to complement the playgroup support portfolio.</td>
<td>Knowledge and skills to deliver the program. Broader concepts of early intervention and positive parenting.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

UNFUNDED PARTICIPANTS

Eight unfunded participants and the coordinator received training. All were working in relevant services and some co-facilitated groups with funded participants.

To enrich roles and to develop skills to run parenting groups in a high needs community

Training provided an opportunity to expand current work to include some parent support. Practical ideas to support parents in their roles. Strategies for running groups
### TABLE 6 - SOUTH GIPPSLAND PARTICIPANTS IN THE TRAINING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CURRENT WORK (FUNDED PARTICIPANTS)</th>
<th>WHY THEY WANTED THE PARENT EDUCATION TRAINING</th>
<th>WHAT THEY HOPED TO GAIN FROM THE TRAINING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Speech pathologist – works in schools.</td>
<td>Run groups with parents of children with language learning difficulties or ADD/ADHD</td>
<td>Specific skills in training re-parenting. Structured program to assist with groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. In-home Family support</td>
<td>To gain procedures and strategies knowledge in running groups on parenting.</td>
<td>Confidence – has not run groups before.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Teaching p/t at primary school and relief teaching in kinders and primary schools.</td>
<td>To extend my interest in parent education and to have an opportunity to learn about this particular program.</td>
<td>To learn how to give ‘real’ long term assistance to parents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Group facilitation in relationships and family skills</td>
<td>Further awareness of project and to develop skills in delivering parenting programs.</td>
<td>Information and procedural processing strategies and to develop skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Paediatric Occupational Therapist with children who have developmental difficulties, autism etc.</td>
<td>To extend knowledge and expertise in running groups for parents.</td>
<td>A format to follow that has been tried and tested.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Psychologist in private practice (was unable to gain sufficient participants and did not proceed.)</td>
<td>To increase my skills in running parenting courses.</td>
<td>As before.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Speech pathologist – paediatric 0-5.</td>
<td>To reinforce skills previously gained in PHF course.</td>
<td>More confidence to undertake parenting courses – depth of skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Speech pathologist</td>
<td>To improve parenting skills so I can give advice to parents.</td>
<td>Parenting skills with some back-up as to why I recommend certain parenting practices.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**UNFUNDED PARTICIPANTS**

Four additional people, and the coordinator, who were unfunded but from appropriate work situations were trained.

These unfunded participants, some of whom later co-facilitated groups with funded participants, wanted to broaden their knowledge of parenting, to be able to give appropriate advice to parents.

To improve parenting skills and to gain greater knowledge of running parenting groups.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME OF PROGRAM, AUSPICING BODY, LENGTH OF PROGRAM</th>
<th>OBJECTIVES OF THE PROGRAM</th>
<th>PARENT ATTENDANCE</th>
<th>FACILITATORS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. Hillside parent’s group  
Shire Family Services.  
4 week program. | 1. To provide support to parents who may be isolated living on a new estate away from extended family supports.  
2. To emphasise relationships and communication with children.  
3. Promoting strength and existing resources in families | 7 enrolled.  
4 attended first night and 3 for the rest of the program.  
Parents of varied ethnicity. | 2 facilitators one funded |
| 2. Planning Happy Families  
City council.  
5 week program. | 1. To provide support and resources to parents and families in new housing estates.  
2. To provide practical strategies for families.  
3. To encourage social networks in new housing estates. | 10 enrolled, 7 attended first week but mostly 4 or 5 and only 2 on the last week.  
Mostly middle class parents. | 2 facilitators both funded. |
| 3. Building great relationships with your kids  
Youth and family services.  
6 week program. | To provide a forum where parents feel confident to raise issues, share experiences, gain support and possible future strategies. | Enrolled 8 but attendance was mostly about 6 or 7 parents.  
All parents are on benefits as their sole source of income. All except one has experienced domestic violence. | One funded facilitator. |
| 4. Parenting group  
City council.  
6 week program. | 1. For parents to share the experience.  
2. To learn communication praising and encouraging.  
3. To learn more about nutrition from pregnancy to 12 years old. | 12 enrolled and mostly attended the only week when there were only 7 parents was a time when children were sick.  
All parents were Vietnamese. | One funded Vietnamese facilitator. |
| 5. No name provided  
Maternal and child health.  
Appears to be 5 weeks but diary not used so difficult to tell. | No objectives given. | 6 enrolled and attended for the five weeks.  
Middle income, mostly married but some single parents. | One funded facilitator. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME OF PROGRAM, AUSPICING BODY, LENGTH OF PROGRAM</th>
<th>OBJECTIVES OF THE PROGRAM</th>
<th>PARENT ATTENDANCE</th>
<th>FACILITATORS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 6. Parenting made easy ISIS 8 week program.       | 1. To gather parents together to share support.  
2. To address isolation issues in new residential areas.  
3. To boost confidence.  
4. To nurture parents and encourage exchange of skills and ideas within a village concept. | 7 enrolled and attended for the first 4 weeks attendance then dropped to five and four on the final night. Varied background. | One funded facilitator. |
| 7. Vietnamese parenting group Family services 8 week program | 1. Address parenting issues for children 0-4 taking into account Vietnamese culture.  
2. Increase self esteem and confidence in parenting.  
3. To break barriers of isolation. | 10-12 parents enrolled. Seven consistently attended. All parents Vietnamese | Two facilitators, one Vietnamese funded. |
| 8. Parenting preschoolers City council. 5 week program. | 1. To develop confidence and provide more skills to parents.  
2. Mums at home with issues of isolation on new housing estates. | 10 enrolled 9 attended the first two weeks and then dropped back to six or seven. | Two facilitators, one funded. |
<p>| 9. New home, new baby, new life, new friendships Playgrouping 4 week program planned but cancelled due to timing the numbers were too low to run the group. | Cancelled due to insufficient interest and low numbers. | Two facilitators, one funded. |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME OF PROGRAM, AUSPICING BODY, LENGTH OF PROGRAM</th>
<th>OBJECTIVES OF THE PROGRAM</th>
<th>PARENT ATTENDANCE</th>
<th>FACILITATORS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Enjoying the challenges of parenting toddlers and preschoolers 6 week program</td>
<td>1. Empower parents to recognise and appreciate the parenting skills they already have and to trust their skills based on love for their child. 2. Normal ages and stages. 3. Learning about themselves and factors which influence their own parenting.</td>
<td>10 parents enrolled but attendance started with 5 and averaged at 3 or 4 and finished with 2. 3 were attending due to court orders. Of these one couple attended the first session. Other parents middle class.</td>
<td>2 Facilitators only one funded. One facilitator (unfunded) had trained and co-facilitated in the La Trobe Valley region last year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Enjoying the challenges of parenting toddlers and preschoolers 6 week program</td>
<td>1. To empower parents to positively parent their children. 2. To recognise that parenting is not prescriptive and everyone comes with a different background of experience. 3. By following the general principles of this program parenting becomes and even more enjoyable experience.</td>
<td>7 parents enrolled. With an average of attending 5 or 6 each week. Parents always apologised when they could not attend. Mostly middle class parents.</td>
<td>The same 2 facilitators as above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Parent information sessions 6 week program</td>
<td>1. Developmental progress – knowledge. 2. Parent support. 3. Practical strategies for dealing with children – autism and siblings. 4. Building resilience and self esteem in children.</td>
<td>16 enrolled but mostly was between 12 and 7 but averaged at 8 or 9. This group mixed parents with integration aides.</td>
<td>2 facilitators both funded but provided only this program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Parenting skills workshop Relationships Australia 2 weeks in workshop format all male group of prisoners.</td>
<td>1. To encourage active fathering. 2. Raise awareness of own parenting skills and how to develop them. 3. Educate re developmental discipline, listening for feelings and building positive relationships.</td>
<td>8 enrolled. Consistent attendance. All separated from their children. Some in relationships outside with step children.</td>
<td>1 facilitator funded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name of Program, Auspicing Body, Length of Program</td>
<td>Objectives of the Program</td>
<td>Parent Attendance</td>
<td>Facilitators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. <em>Your parenting can assist your child’s development at school</em>&lt;br&gt;Partly supported by local primary school but mostly by facilitator herself.&lt;br&gt;6 week program</td>
<td>1. For parents to gain more understanding of themselves in their parenting role.&lt;br&gt;2. For parents to gain a new understanding of their children.&lt;br&gt;3. For parents to feel relaxed and comfortable in the program.</td>
<td>6 enrolled and nearly always came. The couple that missed a session apologised.</td>
<td>1 funded facilitator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. <em>Raising and enjoying your children.</em>&lt;br&gt;Local hospital.&lt;br&gt;8 week program.</td>
<td>1. To build confidence and establish friendships.&lt;br&gt;2. To raise understanding of child development.&lt;br&gt;3. To encourage participants to build support networks in their own community</td>
<td>9 enrolled&lt;br&gt;Attendance ranged from 8 to 6 but was mostly 6 or 7. A mixture of parents attended including sole parents, unemployed, teenage mothers. There are problems of physical and social isolation in this area.</td>
<td>1 funded facilitator</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
8. ISSUES IN SETTING UP PARENTING EDUCATION GROUPS

There was much more lead in time to appoint the coordinators for the Western and South Gippsland regions than in the first year. The project appointed the Coordinator of the Parenting Service in the Western region as Coordinator of the project. Looking for an appropriate Coordinator in the South Gippsland region proved more difficult as the Coordinator for the Parenting Service in the Gippsland region had been involved in the first year of the project. The project leaders therefore approached one of the participants who had participated in the training and had run a successful parent group in the first year to take on the task of coordinator for the region. This professional had been in a position where she was well connected to the services in the South Gippsland region. However, since the time of the appointment she has gone into her own consultancy business. In addition, the South Gippsland region had other limitations, as it does not as many services as in city areas and therefore had fewer potential participants for the training because it is a rural area.

8.1 – SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS

Selection of participants for the training involves an information session then training followed up by a meeting a little later to see how they are getting on with engaging parents for their groups and any difficulties that might have emerged. The follow-up meeting is also an opportunity for facilitators to share experiences, to motivate each other, or to pair off with an unfunded trainee. Neither the information session nor this follow-up meeting were held in South Gippsland because of issues of time and travel in this rural area and also because it was thought that the coordinator could answer queries from the perspective of her experience as a facilitator in the first year. This group of facilitators missed out on the learning opportunities that occur at these meetings and not as many groups as expected got underway although twelve professionals committed to the training in the first place and were funded.

8.2 – RECRUITING PARENTS

Both sessions were held in the Western Region. In the follow-up meeting it was found that the same difficulties setting up the groups were encountered as in the first year of the project (see the description in the first year report). It seemed that the difficulties encountered in recruiting parents could not be avoided in this second year despite attempts in the training to advise facilitators of the best ways of recruiting and things to avoid. Participants found it was it was difficult to engage parents and get parent groups started in both geographic areas. However, in the Western region, the facilitators who were unable to engage parents were able to utilise the Coordinator who had the resources because of her position in the regional parenting service and could direct them to other parents awaiting a group. This allowed them to successfully complete their groups. Western region also had other advantages. With nineteen participants attending the training two of those in unfunded positions were able to take over funded positions when facilitators found that they could not run their groups. Most unfunded participants in the training were very keen to take any opportunity to run a group.

In South Gippsland region similarly to the Western region some facilitators could not engage sufficient parents to form a group and the Coordinator did not have the infrastructure to be able to offer other parent contacts. Thus only six groups eventuated in this region compared with nine in Western region. With only twelve participants attending the training and ten being funded there was not much flexibility if funded facilitators were unable to run their groups for any reason. In addition, during the training, it was realised that one of the participants in a funded position was not suitable to be part of the project.
One of the unfunded participants was able to pick up a funded position but when two other funded facilitators had trouble engaging their parents and starting their groups, there was no fall back.

Thus the South Gippsland group failed to get ten parent education groups running and only six were carried through successfully. One of the facilitators, a psychologist in private practice, had great difficulty in getting parents to join a group despite two attempts. She was forced to abandon the attempt as she is self employed and could not afford to keep going in this seemingly fruitless attempt. (It is interesting to note that in the first year psychologist in a similar position had similar great difficulties until he worked with a family member to recruit parents through the child care centre where she worked. This means that care should be taken in selecting participants so that they have direct contact with parents through their work situation so they can build on that as the model suggests. It has become quite apparent that it is difficult for funded participants if they are self employed although they may well benefit from the training.)

8.3 – THE PARENTING PROGRAMS

Tables 7 and 8 show that many of the programs have names to suit the particular objectives of the parenting groups. There were many similarities in the objectives of the groups in both regions but they also differed somewhat so as to apply to the particular group of parents they were targeted at. There were also differing attendance patterns in the groups with some indicating ongoing commitment and attendance and others dropping away. The groups where parents apologised to the facilitator when they couldn’t attend had more commitment and better attendance patterns than when parents just didn’t turn up.

Examination of the evaluation data indicated that parents attended the parent education groups for reasons identical to the first year. On the whole the parent’s confidence in their parenting rose to the same extent as the first year and all but one parent, who was ‘unsure’, would recommend the program that they had attended to other parents and had enjoyed their experience. The ‘best thing’ about attending was identical to the first year and involved new approaches and strategies for parenting, the fact that other parents had similar problems and they were not alone, that they met other parents and were accepted, that they learned more about children’s behaviour and development and that they grew in confidence.

9. RUNNING THE PARENTING GROUPS

The major issues for families in both regions in this second year were almost the same as those listed in the first year report. The results as seen through the eyes of the facilitators were much the same and they felt satisfaction in assisting the parents who attended.

Once again the parenting groups that focused on vulnerable families were successful but fewer groups this time targeted specifically vulnerable families.
9.1 – TARGETED APPROACHES TO FAMILIES

The same as in the first year of the project five important steps were involved in developing targeted approaches to families requiring special assistance in relation to parenting. They are:

a) The original approach to suitable professionals in the area professionals by the regional coordinator, including those in contact with vulnerable families, through the invitation to attend an information session about the project.

b) Careful selection of those to be funded and trained by the local coordinator in the region in conjunction with the project team.

c) The successful training of professionals with access to vulnerable families through the services to which they are attached.

d) Targeted recruiting, often requiring a personal approach, of vulnerable parents to take part in the parent education program through professionals (facilitators) they already knew or knew of.

e) A flexible and responsive approach to parent education and adaptation of the content and processes involved to suit the particular needs of these vulnerable parents.

There were fewer groups presented to vulnerable parents in this second year. This was partly due to the changed emphasis by the Commonwealth. There were only two of these programs in the South Gippsland Region due to lack of choice of facilitators who had access to vulnerable parents in the course of their work. However, there was one particularly vulnerable group of fathers in prison where the established relationship that the facilitator had with the prison made it possible to run a parenting group. To suit the prison situation this group was in workshop format involving longer time periods and only two meetings.

There was only one group presented in the Western Region which reached vulnerable parents and two which reached Vietnamese parents. These programs were adapted by Vietnamese facilitators to suit the cultural needs. The Vietnamese parents were of mixed socio-economic background.

Many of the other groups in both regions were for mothers at home with their children many of whom were isolated either through living in rural areas or through living in new estates in the city. However, it must be pointed out that most mothers can be isolated by circumstances before their children go to school it is not just mothers in new estates and rural areas. Poor public transport, fewer mothers having babies due to the low birth rate in Australia, and the larger number of working mothers can make most suburbs as well as rural areas isolating these days. While most mothers that attend these parenting groups found that they benefit from the contact with other mothers and sharing their parenting issues they are only one small support for a limited period of time however, they may make the difference in terms of mothers continuing to make links and connections in the community.
The following section describes the parenting education groups for vulnerable parents or those from minority groups in both regions.

9.2 – WESTERN REGION PROGRAMS FOR VULNERABLE PARENTS
(SEE TABLE 7)

9.2.1 – BUILDING GREAT RELATIONSHIPS WITH YOUR KIDS (SEE PROGRAM 3 IN TABLE 7)
The facilitator of this group worked with the mothers who had been attending a playgroup run by a family service facility. All participants rely on benefits as their sole source of income and only one was married, three lived in de facto relationships and the rest were sole parents. All had experienced family violence in the past or were currently experiencing it. They live in an area where unemployment is high, where there is little public transport and little child care available.

These parents were reluctant to engage, had little energy and were hard work for the facilitator initially. It took until week four before they became willing to share and discuss experiences in their backgrounds. Many of the women had had abusive childhoods and relationships and are aware that they needed to break this cycle. At the end of six weeks the facilitator still found it difficult to get them to open up but they were interested in attending further programs and their patterns of attendance at this program was quite consistent over the time period.

9.2.2 – PARENTING GROUP (SEE PROGRAM 7 IN TABLE 7)
The Vietnamese facilitator for this group works in family support and had access to these parents. She works with people who have parenting issues and wanted to find a different approach other than PPP. Most of these parents were married mothers at home and all spoke Vietnamese at home. The program went for six weeks with quite high and consistent attendance except on one night when a number of children were sick. The mothers were interested to learn about discipline and causes of misbehaviour, active listening, domestic violence and the effects on children, and about using positive language with children.

9.2.3 – VIETNAMESE PARENTING GROUP (PROGRAM 7 IN TABLE 7)
This group was co-facilitated with one Vietnamese facilitator who worked in family services. This group addressed the parenting needs and issues of a mixed group of Vietnamese mothers some of whom were in paid employment and some of whom were at home with their children. They were of varied socio-economic status and most were married. There are limited opportunities in the region for Vietnamese women to work and also to get together to find support.

The group focused on cultural issues in discipline, eating, child development, and language issues for children. The parents were also concerned with drug issues that might occur when the children reach adolescence. Playing with their children was also discussed. The group had consistent attendance over the eight weeks indicating continued interest.
9.3 – SOUTH GIPPSLAND REGION PROGRAMS FOR VULNERABLE FAMILIES (SEE TABLE 8)

9.3.1 – PARENTING SKILLS WORKSHOP FOR FATHERS IN PRISON (PROGRAM 4 IN TABLE 8)

This program was for fathers in prison and took the form of two workshops. It was the only exclusive fathers group in the two years of the project. The facilitator had an established relationship with the prison and prisoners. The prisoners were in for different lengths of time. The men were in a mixture of relationship arrangements outside but often in stepfamilies with the children on their partner and sometimes with their own children as well; some had biological children with a former partner. A couple owned houses, some had mortgages and some owned nothing. All had a passionate regard for their children. However, being in prison means being separated from children and the rural location of the prison meant that they only had occasional visits from family rather than regular. Phone was public meant that phone calls were not frequent either, partly due to lack of money and partly because there was only one public phone.

Each workshop covered more topics than the usual format of parenting groups. The participants had suffered a lot violence and neglect in their own childhoods and were actively looking for positive strategies and alternative approaches to use with their own children and stepchildren. They were very interested in discipline and especially the concept of consequences as opposed to punishment. They were also very interested in the feelings associated with ‘acting out’. The prison does not cater well for visiting children and there was much discussion about how to provide better for children and also to have some private time as parents with their partners. These men were very interested in identifying what they wanted to leave behind from their own pasts and how to build good relationships with children.

Because they are prisoners this group of men had had lots of time to reflect on their past experiences and choices. In the second session where they viewed the video ‘Consider the Children’ they were amazed at how aware and perceptive children are. They were all keen to do things differently to what they had experienced as children and what they have done to their children in the past. They were very keen to protect their children from violence and they are now very aware that they are role models for their children. One father was determined to find his natural children with whom he has lost contact and to apologise for past behaviour and to establish a relationship with them.

The men mostly indicated on their ‘before’ forms that they wanted to learn to be better fathers to their children. All said after the program that they would recommend it to others. Some said that the best thing about the program was feeling better about themselves and ‘opening up fully to everybody’. Most said that they learned more about relationships with their children. One father wrote a hearty thank you to the facilitator. This facilitator has now completed a second parenting program for the prisoners.

9.3.2 – RAISING AND ENJOYING YOUR CHILDREN (PROGRAM 6 IN TABLE 8)

This program included a number of vulnerable parents including: teenage mothers, sole parents, and those who were unemployed. It was provided under the auspices of the local hospital by one facilitator. Child care and transport was offered. Attendance was consistent and participants rang and apologised if they couldn’t come indicating an ongoing commitment to the program. The facilitator hadn’t run groups before but was encouraged in the workplace. The parents in this group had experienced both social and physical isolation in this rural area. The eight week program was adapted to suit these mothers
but covered the usual topics and they bonded well as a group. The group will continue once a month as ‘creative living’. The leader had found that PPP does not work for these clients but some input from PPP can be used. She also said that some brokerage money could be used for the groups.

Groups are now seen as an essential feature in family services so the training for this project was seen as timely. It is planned that in 2003 that the whole family services team will take part and be trained by this facilitator as this suits clients of the generic service.

9.4 – Issues in running the parenting groups

– Groups which had small numbers took a lot of energy from the facilitators due to the intensity of the relationships that could develop.
– Sometimes a married couple comprised too big a proportion of a small group and had a dominant position.
– Confidentiality is an issue in rural areas when parents know each other. This particularly applies where the group is sponsored by a local primary school. Parents are reluctant about revealing difficulties.
– There are also problems where principals of primary schools try to ‘help’ get parents to attend and some come because they ‘want to help the school’ and sometimes expect the parenting group be a ‘teaching’ session rather than a participatory experience.
– Parents who have severe personal issues or who are particularly psychologically vulnerable are sometimes too much for the group and may need to be referred some sort of counselling. However, this takes sensitivity and to some extent experience.
– Individuals who dominate groups because they are strong personalities and/or think they know better than everybody else are also a problem although some facilitators appear more skilled at dealing with these people than others. However this situation is more difficult for less experienced facilitators particularly if they are working alone. Some individuals who dominate groups have very different issues from others in the group. This may happen with grandparents, although not always.
– Individuals who are judgemental of others are also a problem for beginning facilitators but do not seem common.

10. Conclusions of Year 2 - 2002

In this second year, as could be expected from the experience of the first year, there were cost problems in providing these parenting groups even though the training is free. The amount of funding provided by the project was not sufficient to cover all costs unless there was an auspicing body such as a community centre, hospital, or local council service which was prepared to cover the costs (or provide some facilities free of cost) such as photo-copying facilities, day-to-day items that are involved in supporting the groups and a place where the group could be held. Child care was a big and expensive issue and in many cases could not be provided because of costs and/or lack of local opportunities. Transport is another limitation, in rural areas in particular, and can make if difficult for parents to attend sessions. Where transport and child care was provided by the auspicing body it was a big plus for the program and aided parent attendance.

The same as in the first year, recruiting was found to be a critical stage of setting up parent groups and some facilitators did not get sufficient parents interested to be able to go ahead. This was more likely to happen where the facilitator was self employed or without a service backing them. For example the psychologist, mentioned earlier, who trained in South
Gippsland was unable to get a group together and could not afford to keep trying because it took up time from her business. When facilitators targeted groups with whom they were normally not in touch they often had difficulty in raising numbers of parents to run a group. Some parenting programs in both years ran with extremely low numbers and if these dropped off during the course of the sessions, as happened occasionally, they were hardly worth the expense and the trouble. However, the facilitator probably learned something from the experience and may go on to provide more successful parent education.

What is apparent in this second year of the project is that facilitators could have benefited from a second year of support and the opportunity to run another program or to develop other ways of supporting parenting. There were two people, the coordinator and a facilitator, in the South Gippsland Group who had done the training previously in the La Trobe Region. The facilitator, who was not funded this round, co-facilitated two groups with a new facilitator funded in this current round. This facilitator, who was inexperienced in the first year wrote that she had gained in confidence and was able to take a leading role this year where-as last year she had co-facilitated with a more experienced person.

Co-facilitation was once more found to be a useful approach to running parenting groups especially for the less experienced person. However there was one group this year that was co-facilitated by two funded leaders but the second group, which should have followed, did not eventuate as promised. In co-facilitation the second person can attend to certain aspects of the group while the leader can concentrate on the focus of the weekly program.

The South Gippsland Region had much more difficulty, as a rural area with fewer services operating locally than city regions, in finding suitable people to participate in the training and to present groups. In addition, this region, because it was so close to the La Trobe Valley Region which took part in the project last year before, had even more difficulty because of the overlap of the area.

11. LEARNINGS FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF THE PROJECT LEADERS

It seems evident that to give the model the best chance of success several things must be in place:

a) The coordinator of the training/parent group part of the model must be in a relevant organisation that can:
   - attract early childhood professionals to be part of the project with a good number of unfunded positions as well as the ten funded;
   - the professionals must be attached to an appropriate agency/organisation;
   - must offer support and resources to the professionals who attend the training so that they can successfully access parents and start their groups;
   - can offer ongoing support when difficulties arrive with engaging parents or during the process of running the group.

b) We need to be more aware of what the agencies, where the participants work, offer to the project such as:
   - 3 days for their staff to attend training (jobs still had to be covered);
   - time to prepare flyers, photocopying, postage to send out invites etc;
- time to find a suitable venue, phone calls or visits etc;
- time to engage other agencies to help engage families to group;
- venue hire (if unable to obtain free);
- refreshments from biscuits, tea/coffee to lunches and suppers;
- child care - either paying workers to care for children while group is happening or payments to parents allowing them to find their own child care;
- co-facilitation if the paid facilitator preferred to facilitate with someone else;
- time for workers to prepare for group in terms of both practicalities and planning materials etc;
- photocopying etc materials for use in the group;
- time for workers to run the groups;
- time for debriefing/writing up evaluations/diary etc for the evaluation section of the project.

c) A range of meetings is available as part of the model but for the model to be fully effective all the meetings must happen and participants are expected to attend these.

i) It is essential that there is a meeting between project staff and prospective participants so that all aspects of the project can be explained including all the obligations of the participants.

ii) After the training and 3 months into the running of parent groups there needs to be another meeting to see where the participants are up to and who needs support.

iii) At the end of the training there also needs to be a final meeting to close off the project and feed back to the participants how the project is going. This meeting needs to be in a fairly formal environment so that the feedback can be shared.

11.1. EXTENDING THE EVALUATION

One frustrating aspect of the evaluation was that after the project had collected the final data we heard of some further wonderful outcomes and developments that had come out of the project that were not captured by the annual evaluation format.

These included flow on effects of the project such as:

a) Facilitators who have been asked back to the venue, where they facilitated the first group, to facilitate another group organised by the venue.

b) Parents ringing facilitators and asking for a parent program – so they have the numbers they struggled to get the first time.

c) Facilitators using the model of working with parents of young children, in a group situation, with parents of different age children.

d) Facilitators who are enthusiastic and want to continue to facilitate other parent programs using the model from “Planning Happy Families”.

e) Changes in work practices due to the project.

f) Taking the skills learned through the training and the parent group into other parts of their work.

g) Knowledge of parenting that helps with their work with parents.
11.2 – REFINING THE MODEL

If this project was to continue we would use the above learning’s to redesign the model. The model would then allow for:

a) Participants both funded and unfunded to participate in three days training. Good numbers of unfunded positions to allow for the possibility that some of those in the unfunded positions can actually facilitate groups if the opportunity arises.

b) Recognition that the training provided uses Adult Learning Principles, builds on the strengths and skills of workers, their knowledge of the demography of their locality and clients of their workplace.

c) Participants to facilitate a parent group

d) A more active support /quality assurance component where the project officers visit the programs as they are running.

e) Meeting to assess feedback of the groups

Participants could then either:

f) Facilitate another group with some differences such as larger numbers in the group facilitating the group on their own or as a mentor to a less experienced facilitator best practice using their previous experience as a guide as to what needs to be changed.

OR

Be part of an interview process a few months further on to see what they have learned from the project including any learning that was able to be transferred into their workplaces.

12. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the project continue into a third year taking into account the findings of the evaluation and the things that the project leaders have learned in the course of the project.

It is also recommended that people who have taken part in this project over the two years be re-contacted to see what the longer term results of their training and running of parent education groups have been.
The Early Intervention Parenting Project for parents of preschool children was evaluated in each of two years (2001 and 2002) and was found to have achieved its objectives. However, at the conclusion of the report on the second year it was pointed out that the annual evaluation format did not capture any longer term outcomes of the project experience. These longer term outcomes included flow on effects of the project such as:

a) Facilitators who are enthusiastic and want to continue to facilitate other parent programs using the model from “Planning Happy Families”.
b) Changes in work practices due to the project and greater knowledge of parenting.
c) Taking the skills learned through the training and the parent group into other parts of their work.
d) Parents ringing facilitators and asking for a parent program – so they have the numbers they struggled to get the first time.
e) Facilitators who have been asked back to the venue where they facilitated the first group to run another group organised by the venue.
f) Facilitators using the model of working with parents of young children, in a group situation, with parents of different age children.

As a result of these observations the Commonwealth has provided funding to do a small follow-up of the project. It is useful when looking at longer term outcomes of the project to review the model on which the project was based and what the original objectives were.

13. THE PROJECT

The project built on a model for the delivery of a comprehensive service to parents of adolescents in rural and metropolitan Australia which had been trialed nationally by Parenting Australia and in the successful Program for Parents delivered in 1998/99 under the Commonwealth National Parenting Initiative. The model supports:

– the universal needs of families with young children;
– the specific needs of more vulnerable groups of parents including those in non-English speaking families and Koori communities;
– prevention and early intervention;
– and, most importantly, builds on existing programs that support families and young children.

The specific objectives of the Early Intervention Project for families with children in the early childhood years were:

a) To enhance and strengthen parental skills and emotional competencies within the general community.
b) To create access to parent education and support for vulnerable families with children in the preschool age group.
c) To develop targeted approaches to families requiring special responses in relation to parenting from pre-birth through to school-aged children. For example, programs for adolescent mothers/mothers to be, indigenous parents and parents from culturally diverse backgrounds delivered in collaboration with local service providers.
d) To evaluate and publish the results of local parenting programs and initiatives for wider application thus providing relevant up-to-date information on effective ways to strengthen and support families.

This longer term follow-up in the third year aims to examine the extent to which the model operates rather than focusing specifically on the immediate objectives of the project as in the evaluations of the first two years. The concentration is therefore on the experiences of the regional coordinators and the facilitators/participants who trained with the project.

13.1 – PROGRAMS IN THE FIRST TWO YEARS OF THE PROJECT

It is useful to look once again at the programs which were carried out in the first two years of the project so that the information collected in this third year can be seen in the light of these.

In the first year 8 programs were run in Northern Region and 9 in the La Trobe Region (one program for indigenous parents was repeated with funding from a program that did not run). This was a total of 17 separate programs and 18 if including the repeat.

In the second year of the project 8 programs were run in the Western Region and 6 in South Gippsland (14 programs in total).

Overall, 31 separate parenting programs were presented and one very successful program for indigenous parents was repeated (32). The number of original programs is significant when considering the number of contacts with the original participants that could be made for this follow-up as the project was not designed with this later data collection in mind.

Two additional programs for Western Region will now run in 2004 as the leaders have had difficulty getting sufficient numbers of parents before this. They have now built up their connections to enable them to run the programs but there is insufficient time in 2003 to complete a program.

14. THE METHODOLOGY OF THIS STAGE OF THE EVALUATION

It was decided to contact each of the coordinators for the four regions and as many of the participants in the project as possible. The limitation of this follow-up is that no provisions had been made to keep in contact with participants in the longer term.

A qualitative approach was used for this follow-up data collection. It involved:

- telephone interviews with each of the four coordinators;
- a short questionnaire sent out to all participants in the project that could be located;
- telephone interviews with a small number of participants who have gone on to do more parent education often with difficult to get to vulnerable parents.

The questionnaire (Appendix D) asked for information on the number of parenting groups run by the participant, co-facilitation, confidence in running parenting groups, whether the experience has changed approaches to working with families, differences in their own parenting, and anything else that they wanted the project team to know.
In addition two participants who could not get their groups going last year have been given money to run programs in the New Year (2004) and two participants who have already carried out successful projects were given additional money to do another program each as part of this third year program.

14.1 – THE PROCESS OF DATA COLLECTION

The coordinators were contacted by telephone and appointment times were set up for telephone interviews. Each participated in this process with enthusiasm and provided as much information as they could about the process of coordination and what it had meant to them personally and for their organisation.

It was more difficult contacting the participants as no procedures had been put in place to keep up with changes of work places and addresses. Participants were contacted by e-mail, when this was available, by ordinary post, and sometimes by telephone. One of the coordinators had also been a participant in the first year.

Each of the participants that could be reached was sent a letter explaining that we were re-contacting them to find out if the training and experience had had any longer term consequences. Nineteen questionnaires were received back from participants.

Information was obtained from 11 participants who had gone on to provide additional parenting programs. One participant from the first year of the project had sent in an additional 5 evaluations of parenting programs she had done because she is a parent educator and these were included in this longer term evaluation of the project making 12 participants who had run more than one parenting group.

In addition information was collected from eight funded participants who had done one parenting group and from one unfunded participant who felt that she had benefited from the training although she had not run a parenting group. Thus data were collected from 21 participants in all, 20 of whom were funded and 1 who was unfunded.

15. THE EXPERIENCES OF THE COORDINATORS OF THE FOUR REGIONS

The coordinators in each of the four regions were the key people in setting up this project and in selecting participants from suitable early childhood services in their regions. They were paid for their administrative contribution and much depended on their knowledge of the services in their local area. It is therefore important to examine their reasons for participating and the pros and cons of their experience from both a personal and organisational perspective. Information from each coordinator is provided in the following section followed by a listing of the points they had in common.

15.1 – NORTHERN REGION:

Anglicare Plenty Valley Family Services (2001)

Taking part in the project was a positive and constructive thing for the organisation. The project was designed to build on the core business of the organisation and therefore suited Anglicare well because as a community based project it built on an existing commitment to families. Equally importantly, the project provided the opportunity to build connections with other services in the area and to extend networks through getting to know key staff.
After the training enough successful parenting programs got going in the region to know that they are a good thing. The reason that most are not going still is that there is no continuous funding available: these days all available funding, including this project, is short term.

The project exposed people to Constance Jenkin’s model of parenting – Planning Happy Families – which the coordinator believes is flexible and well suited to working with vulnerable families. For example, the facilitator of a playgroup for vulnerable and isolated mothers and children which is sponsored by Anglicare took part in the project. This playgroup continues to run but is not able to provide parenting programs in a form that is separate from the actual playgroup as there is not the money to provide an extra person to take care of the children while the mothers attend as happened during the project. Nevertheless, the facilitator now uses her parenting knowledge within the program.

The coordinator also pointed out that it is sometimes unclear what is meant by parent education. From his perspective, and experience with both the project and with the various groups run by Anglicare for vulnerable families, success rests on the strength of group processes rather than simply an input of information about parenting. The coordinator argues that professionals working in family support are aware of the importance of group processes with vulnerable families but that sometimes people working from other perspectives rely too much on ‘chalk and talk’ input. The coordinator has found that this is the case with some parent educators and the coordinator also argues that PPP does not work with these families for this reason as it is too concerned with ‘input’ rather than group processes. The focus with vulnerable families needs to be with building relationships and food is often at the core of successful groups.

15.2 – LA TROBE VALLEY REGION:

The coordinator had just started as manager of Parentzone when she became the coordinator of the project for the La Trobe Valley Region. The Early Intervention Parenting Project provided the opportunity for making stronger links and direct contacts with services in the area that the coordinator had not had contact with before. The coordinator tried to select a wide range of professionals in the area representing different target groups to take part in the project and the training.

Aside from the objectives of the actual project, her personal and organisational aims were to create links with other agencies in East Gippsland as she wanted to gather together non-Parentzone people. In doing so she hoped to be able to recruit some suitable contract staff for her own organisation in the long term so she could deliver services in other ways. She wanted to expand the DHS parenting model but had little experience of other service models.

From her experience in the project the coordinator has been able to select some suitable contract people for her own organisation. In addition she has learned a great deal from the process as there are training issues with contract staff and difficulties in the ongoing monitoring of quality. As a result, Parentzone has developed a contract staff manual for the organisation which explains the role of contract staff and has involved them in team days. In the long run the organisation has returned to employing staff in preference to using contractors but they still retain the services of some key people from the first lot of training for the EIP project.
The coordinator learned a lot about issues such as costing out programs, including the infrastructure cost and management time, and this has been part of her own career development as a manager.

In terms of parenting education the project gave the coordinator a different focus on how you engage parents. The coordinator thought that the method of delivery of the program was great although from her perspective content was a bit light. She has huge admiration for the Constance’s way of managing a group and believes that she is a great role model.

15.3 – SOUTH GIPPSLAND REGION:
Independent Coordinator (2002)

The coordinator is a Maternal and Child Health nurse who took part as a participant in the first year of the project in the La Trobe Valley Region. Her experience as a coordinator in the project is somewhat different from that of the other coordinators. Through her work and her experience as a participant the year before she seemed appropriate for the task. However, soon after the project commenced she went into private consultancy and was no longer attached to an organisation which could provide infrastructure support although she had good contacts in the field.

The South Gippsland Region which she coordinated has a smaller population and fewer services than the La Trobe Region although they are both rural areas. Selection of participants in the training was limited by the small population and lack of services which are available in larger regions. In the end only six parent education programs were completed successfully.

Similar to the other coordinators, she found that although the programs that got going in the region were good, there was nowhere to go with them after the initial funding ran out. Applications for further funding were unsuccessful.

Personally she found that the philosophy of the Early Intervention parenting Project and the training improved her role as a Maternal and Child Health nurse. She is currently involved in the Enhanced Home Visiting program and one to one work with families rather than group work.

The coordinator has also found that the training and experience has given her more confidence in how to do things in her own parenting and she now works in a more grounded way. She is aware that the more you know the more you need to know and has been studying family therapy and incorporates knowledge from that into her work as well. She has found that PPP doesn’t take account of the emotional aspects of relationships and development.

15.4 – WESTERN REGION OF MELBOURNE:
Mackillop Family Services (2002)

The coordinator found that there were a number of organisational benefits in taking part in the project. Several things had influenced the initial decision to take part. Firstly, the project was timely as she had just taken over the Parenting Network for the region. The project thus provided a great opportunity for the new service to reach out. Secondly, the coordinator had noticed that people working in the field desperately wanted/needed training in group work but that it was difficult to get at a reasonable cost and the project offered three days of free training in group work. In addition she wanted to build up connections with other services and key staff in the region and to develop a network. The project provided an ideal opportunity for this.
Finally, the coordinator also liked the way that Pat and Constance go about the training and the parenting and group philosophy that they promote.

At a personal level she did not learn a great deal from the training as she had done similar things before. Nevertheless, she gained a great boost to her enthusiasm from the training.

In the long run a number of participants have joined the parenting network meetings and have received professional development from the experience. Some have not done anything relating to parenting since the project but this is due to the lack of funding available.

The relationship with MacKillop as the auspicing/coordinating organisation has gone on to develop in two ways. First, it ‘brought people out of the woodwork’ and she has found that they are a ‘good bunch’. Second, MacKillop has been able to employ some participants from the project as contract staff as they know they have had suitable training and she knows the standard of their work.

Through her contact with participants involved in the training and the project she became aware of the isolation and lack of support some of these workers experienced and was able to provide some support for individuals in a minor way.

15.5 – LEARNING FROM THE EXPERIENCES OF THE FOUR COORDINATORS

All four coordinators found the experience of managing the project in their region a positive experience. None found the task of administration too onerous. The most difficult task was the selection of suitable participants; three of the coordinators had no real difficulty and were able to invite more than the required number of participants to the training; some unfunded participants who were trained went on to co-facilitate programs with funded participants. One region, South Gippsland had a much smaller population than the other regions and fewer services. For this reason there were fewer suitable participants available for training and there were fewer programs completed.

15.6 – BENEFITS FROM THE COORDINATORS EXPERIENCES WITH THE PROJECT

– it built on the core business of the organisation;
– it provided an opportunity to connect with other related services in the region and to network;
– it gave the coordinators the chance to get to know professionals from other services;
– it gave coordinators the opportunity to assess the professional quality of the participants who took part in the project;
– it ‘brought people out of the woodwork’;
– it provided experience in project management;
– it gave the coordinators a professional boost;
– in two regions the opportunity was timely as the managers had just taken over a parenting service.

All coordinators saw the philosophy of the training program and the group skills learned and modelled as a major value of the project.
Only one of the coordinators said that taking part in the training had influenced her own parenting and given her a basis to be more confident. The others had children who had grown up and/or had already done similar training or knew the work on which the training was based.

16. THE GROUP FACILITATORS

Information was received from 21 facilitators. Twelve of the facilitators from whom we received information had gone on to run further parenting programs. Some of these were repeats or extensions of the original programs. (Some of these programs are described later in this report). Eight responses were received from facilitators who had run only one parenting group. The one unfunded facilitator in the training who returned a questionnaire had already had experience as a parent educator with Parentzone but had nevertheless found she had benefited from the training and in the long run had more in common with the 12 facilitators who went on to run additional parenting groups. She said that the training had changed her approach to families: ‘I am now very conscious of listening to parents, trying to understand where they are coming from and giving them the opportunity to talk about their concerns’. It had also made a difference to her own parenting by making her ‘a better listener’. She has also ‘incorporated much of the philosophy and ideas into many parenting programs that we run at Parentzone in Gippsland’. This participant now rates herself as between 8 and 9 on the 1 to 10 scale of confidence in running parenting groups.

16.1 – CO-FACILITATION

Thirteen participants had at some time co-facilitated a parenting education group. Often an inexperienced participant worked with a more experienced person and gained confidence as well as learning skills and strategies.

Co-facilitation can also play an important part in the continuation of a group. One of the participants who run only one parenting program pointed out that the support group of vulnerable young mothers who took part in this program have continued to meet as a cohesive group and have been going for five years now. The co-facilitator, a Maternal and Child Health nurse continued to run the group after this participant had left to have a baby.

Of the eight funded facilitators who ran only one parenting group four had co-facilitated with other people. The following are their comments about co-facilitation:

- “Enjoyable – I usually run domestic violence groups which seem “heavier” in content. The parenting group was ‘lighter’ and there was more fun involved.”
- “Worked well to share the load”.
- “Very good, picked up more information as we did the sessions.”
- “Very helpful. The other worker was very experienced in group work and we worked well together.”

The majority (9) of facilitators who had gone on to run further groups or continued with their original group had co-facilitated with someone else at some time or for the duration of their group. The following are their comments about this experience, which like those who ran only one group, they found valuable:
“Personally, I learn more when working with another person. It gives you the opportunity to watch both the process and the content more comprehensively.”

“Fantastic, only way to go, especially when doing an intensive course over two full days (with male prisoners). This is the most effective way of working with male inmates at the low security prison because they are often leaving soon. It is great timing for them and works well. So, for security and sanity reasons co-facilitation is the best. It means that the experience can be more organic and flexible than working alone where more preparation and sticking to the plan is required. The ability to cross fertilise, back each other up and allow turns in taking the lead is great. The other benefit is it allows for a real example of parenting (I co-facilitate with a male) and respectful gender relations.”

“Great opportunity to have two facilitators (with parents of children with disabilities). Offering support, feedback and backfill. More aware of each others skills the second time and aware of both having increased confidence.”

“Less work for me. More fun, more ideas – more support physically and mentally.”

“It was good. I took the second position and acted as an assistant. It worked really well like this”.

“I co-facilitated with an experience leader the first two sessions. I would not have gained the confidence I have now if I had not done that. For the second two groups I was more experienced but found it supportive to have someone to back me up.”

“Positive experience and knowledge. Enhanced information sharing.”

A participant who was running a playgroup had a rather different experience and need for another worker as the children were present at the same time as mothers. “It was a positive experience for most women but very difficult to run because we have children in the same room.”

An indigenous participant ran a program which involved co-facilitation from the beginning of this ongoing group and has found it a useful and positive experience.

16.2 – CONFIDENCE IN RUNNING PARENTING GROUPS

Facilitators were asked to rate their confidence in running parenting groups on a scale of 1 to 10 with 1 being least confident and 10 the most confident.

Facilitators who had run one group seemed relatively confident about their ability to run parenting groups with confidence scores on a scale of one to ten ranging from 6 to 8 with only one scoring 6 and two scoring 8.

Facilitators who had run more than one group or who have continued to run the original group were somewhat more confident scoring from 8 to 10 and with most scoring 10. One participant rated herself at only 4 but she has co-facilitated most groups and appears to be on a learning curve that she is quite satisfied with.

16.3 – CHANGES IN APPROACHES TO FAMILIES

Respondents were asked if the experience of the training and running parenting group/s had changed their approach to families in any way.

Six out of the eight who had only run one group felt that the experience and training had changed their approach to families. The following are comments about these changes:

“The changes are in terms of giving back the power and authority to parents and relying on parents to come up with their own answers with just a little help along the way. Accepting that I am not the expert.”
I work with individuals and families rather than with a group. I use many of the principles and strategies gained from the training in my work eg. resilience, the importance of relationships, and strengthening positives. Especially important in all my work is resilience to people and communities who have suffered the trauma of the East Gippsland fires.

“Assuming parents know some things when they don’t.”

“I feel more confident and understanding of their needs and of childhood development.”

Most of the facilitators who had run more than one group or had continued running the original group also felt that the experience had changed their approach to families. A facilitators who did not believe that her approach had changed explained that this was only because she was already using some of the strategies that were part of the training.

“Changed from being a facilitator to seeing parents as having ownership of program.”

“Has endorsed the belief that the positive energy that comes from running such groups is an important component in maintaining my self confidence.”

“As a worker theory is always intellectual it is applying this in practice that is a challenge. Providing training allows this to happen.”

“Made me more aware of family dynamics and thinking about ‘where people are coming from’. Using many of the skills in my daily work when doing speech therapy/counselling parents. All family dynamics are very different.”

“It has helped me to appreciate the complexity of families and to remember that each parent is doing the best that they can.”

“Yes, significantly! Demonstrating the importance of parent to parent support. Also parents when together speak more freely about their experiences as they do not feel that they are being judged. Isolation is reduced.”

“More depth of understanding and preparedness to listen for their values and aspirations and acknowledge and encourage those then build on them.”

16.4 CHANGES TO THE FACILITATORS OWN FAMILY LIFE AND PARENTING

Participants were asked if their experience in the project had changed their own approaches to family life or parenting. Thirteen participants believed that they had changed to some degree and these are worth examining as they are valuable indirect outcomes.

Four of the participants who had only run one group felt that the experience and the training had made a difference to their own family life and parenting:

“The biggest impact on my parenting has been around focusing on building resilience in my children. The idea of skilling them up to be able to handle life’s hurdles. Also the idea of building ‘knowing’ that whatever comes up we will always find a solution – so it’s that idea of hope and always being able to find a way out of problems.”

“Taking into consideration parenting patterns in my own life and trying not to repeat them. Taking into account the overall concept ‘not to damage the relationship’ with my children and to get out of control over small things.”

“Able to relate to the issues and put them in perspective personally.”

“We have no children yet but we are planning for some soon. I feel a lot more confident about what to expect as a parent and for children as they develop.”
All but three of the participants who had run more than one group or who had continued with the same group believed that taking part in the project had made a difference to their family life and parenting.

- “More empathy and understanding of the enormous demands of parenting – I know what it is like to feel ‘stuffed’.”
- “Personally – being patient; being more flexible and looking at family dynamics in a family centred approach.”
- “Just reminded that the precious time with our own kids is finite. And again and again that we are all just humans doing the best we can.”
- “It has helped me to look at problems other people have.”
- “More tolerant, more understanding of issues in the community. Ability to make better judgements and more informed. I get out and play with my grandkids more – run around with them – I would have been more sedate before (indigenous facilitator).”
- “I am more comfortable with the differences I perceive in my own parenting. I have identified and solidified my own values and feel more comfortable in sharing those and encouraging them with my children. It has also helped my partner and me in shared parenting – by me letting go of some my expectations and being able to more gently articulate my thoughts without the pressure for him to comply. He has become more gentle and understanding as a consequence and we spend more time discussing our actions and thoughts, concerns and fears, before we then discuss our children. The whole atmosphere is far more settled and grounded. When things go wrong we are more responsive, quicker to consider what our child has experienced rather than going to a place of embarrassment or linking in to something in our past. I’m not sure that all of this is a result of the training, but the training is offered in a similar way to what I have just described and endorses a gentle, respectful and positive focus, which is intended to build on strengths and was such a grounded time – it provided a really great springboard (facilitator who has worked with prisoners).”
- “I want to do everything right when I have a kid. I think I will do it very differently from before. I also feel slightly sad at my own parents.”
- “Try very hard to reduce conflict and get family members to listen to each other; Always trying to use reasonable and open lines of communication and I think this really helped.”

16.5 – FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT THE EXPERIENCE

All respondents were asked if there was anything else they wanted to pass on about their experience of the project. The following are the responses from those who had only run one group:

- “Dead keen to do it again! Constance and Pat were very dynamic and I felt privileged to do the training. It was inspiring and changed the way I work.”
- “This was a good chance to enhance the skills associated with the delivery of parenting programs.”
- “Resilience and questions about ‘resilience’ are important to me. How do you foster resilience in the community? How do you assist people to rediscover that resilient core that appears lost following trauma?”
- “I really liked the exercise in training where we were invited to visualise an important person in our lives who has taught/passed on important messages to us and to remember what it was about that person that we really valued.”
- “Would have done more groups but I am on maternity leave with my third baby!”
— “All experiences have been positive. Would like to keep up with information on parenting.”
— “This was a fabulous experience and I’ve recently been thinking of proposing to the school (where I work) that I implement a parenting program in 2004 – I’d love to know if there is any funding.”

The facilitators who had done more than one program said:

— “Very worthwhile – thank you.”
— “Next year our plan is to run two – HAVE you any cash?”
— “Despite the fact that we planned the sessions the parents steered them (parents of children with intellectual disabilities). This is what we hoped for and we need to be prepared as it is vital that the role we play in the management of the dynamics of the group and the possible or probable content. It wasn’t a ‘how to’ parenting group or the solving of problems – but – and more importantly - it provided links with other parents. Hopefully these will be maintained. It also removed (or at least assisted) with their feelings of isolation and despair. The provision of these groups is vital in the Early Childhood Intervention sector.”
— “Food is always a good way to attract people. We provided food every week. People turned up regularly and another positive thing about this group is that they continue to meet even after the group finished (Vietnamese parents).”
— “The training was quite uplifting and respectful of each person there. I would like to do more parenting work but time and energy make it difficult. This project gave me a push to do extra.”
— “Seeing what parents have to face has made me more understanding about how hard it is with peer pressure (for young Koori parents).” (The experience of running this program for Kooris has changed this participant’s career a lot and she is now confident about speaking about the program.)
— “It would be good to have transport and adequate child care for parents when they attend otherwise it makes it difficult to run (the playgroup and include parenting) and for parents to attend.”
— “I think that having kids of my own made me seem less ‘worthy’ in the eyes of the parents when running the course. I enjoyed the whole experience. Thank you for being such gorgeous, approachable facilitators!”
— “I feel frustrated that these courses are not getting masses of media so that families are aware of the values and feel that it is a must do. So many problems down the track could be alleviated if individuals had an understanding of how to manage difficult situations and knew where to get help and early intervention.”

17. CASE STUDIES OF SUCCESSFUL PROGRAMS THAT HAVE CONTINUED OR BEEN REPEATED

The replies to the questions asked in the questionnaire tell a positive story in many ways but the following two brief case studies show how successful programs can develop when staff already working with a vulnerable client group can add to their skills through the training provided by this project.
17.1 – PARENTING SKILLS WORKSHOP FOR FATHERS IN PRISON

This program was for fathers in prison and took the form of two workshops and was provided by a counsellor working for Relationships Australia (Vic.). This program was described fully in the report on the second year but to sum up it was the only exclusive father’s group in the two years of the project. The facilitator had an established relationship with the prison and prisoners. The prisoners were in for different lengths of time. The men were in a mixture of relationship arrangements outside but often in stepfamilies with the children of their partner and sometimes with their own children as well; some had biological children with a former partner. The children were of all different ages not just pre-schoolers. All had a passionate regard for their children. However, being in prison means being separated from children and the rural location of the prison meant that there were only had occasional visits from family and the telephone was public which meant that phone calls were not frequent either.

Each workshop covered more topics than the usual format of parenting groups. The participants had suffered a lot violence and neglect in their own childhoods and were actively looking for positive strategies and alternative approaches to use with their own children and stepchildren. They were very interested in discipline and especially the concept of consequences as opposed to punishment. They were also very interested in the feelings associated with ‘acting out’. The prison does not cater well for visiting children and there was much discussion about how to provide better for children and also to have some private time as parents with their partners. These men were very interested in identifying what they wanted to leave behind from their own pasts and how to build good relationships with children.

They were all keen to do things differently to what they had experienced as children and what they have done to their children in the past. They were very keen to protect their children from violence and they are now very aware that they are role models for their children.

Since running the original group this facilitator has now completed a second parenting program for the prisoners but only because some money had become available through this project. It was presented once again in workshop form. It is the availability of this money that has been the crucial factor in this second program not the fact that this was a needy and worthwhile group and the first program had been so successful. (The facilitator has also run relationships skills workshops at the prison under the auspices of Relationships Australia (Vic.) as part of the core business of her agency.)

Seven prisoners attended the second workshop called Parenting Apart which was again run over two days. This is how the facilitator describes the group overall: ‘The venue of the group is very equalising, their clothes are all green (and they hate it) and they all get the same amount of money each week. However, their personal stature varies and while some are able to stand tall others crumble a little in prison. This was a serious and reflective group who did not shy away from expressing, and obviously feeling, sadness at the lack of contact with their children’. This second group faced much the same problems and issues as the first group.

The facilitator ran the group with the help of male co-facilitator and this helped by modelling respectful male-female relationships which are sharing and cooperative as well as enabling the two to take turns at sharing the lead. The facilitator is very confident (score of 10) about running these groups and acknowledges the great value of the training in both her personal and professional life. She was also very positive about this follow-up
to the project and said: 'I think the awareness that Consie and Pat are backed up by a research focus and a wealth of experience means that all those ways of working that are right there with the participants, and not just passing on information, is really valuable and important to increase if possible. Again the breadth and respect that this project holds is testament to this method and I am pleased that it will be further distributed via this process. Great work gang!'

17.2 – Koori happy families

This parenting program took place in an Aboriginal Family Preservation agency which aims to keep families together. The program has continued due to additional funding initially through this project but since then it has received funding from FACS for two years. In the beginning both the funded facilitator and the unfunded co-facilitator attended the three day training but still felt somewhat lacking in confidence about running the groups. They openly acknowledged their nervousness. The coordinator in a recent telephone interview said that she is now totally confident about her ability to run parenting groups and would rate herself as 10 on a scale of 1 to 10.

The facilitators had no problem in recruiting parents to their program as they were well known in the area, were trusted by the Koori community, and are Kooris themselves. All the parents who took part were Kooris. The facilitators described domestic violence, drugs and alcohol, and sexual assault as impacting on families in this group. There is not much indigenous tradition in the group due to displacement and children being taken away.

In the beginning eight parents enrolled and all came each night of the program with the exception of one parent who died. There are now between 16 and 23 attending. The program has changed gradually over time and the parents have ownership of the program. They make it an amazing experience, according to the coordinator of the program. Grandparents come to the parenting program too. The youngest parents attending now are 14 years old.

A number of relevant guests met the group in the initial program and these included representatives from Centrelink, the Child Support Agency, Neighbourhood House, Child Protection and so on. Including the guests in the food preparation helped to break down barriers and make them appear more human and understanding. This has process has continued but adding in such things as financial counselling.

There is another program running for adolescents to prepare them for parenthood which the coordinator of the parenting program sees as very relevant. In a program run by the midwife they have four real life dolls some of which have been drug and alcohol affected. Eleven 'kids' have gone through this program of caring for the dolls which record what they have done re the care and out of this experience only one wants to have a baby in the future because they realise what a responsibility it is to care for a child. In this virtual reality program they also do a budget for a set amount of money and go to the shop and price what they would need to buy so that they can see what is left and how they could manage.

The key to the continuation of this group and the additional programs has been the trust which has been developed by the facilitators, the appropriateness of the program for the client group, and most importantly the availability of funding.
18. CONCLUSIONS OF THE EXTENSION OF THE PROJECT

The reports on the first and second year of the project indicated that it had achieved its set objectives; however it was not possible in such a short time frame to examine any longer term outcomes. Data collected for this follow-up report indicates that there are additional achievements in terms of continuity and longer term outcomes. Some of the most important positive outcomes are in terms of changes in the professional practices and attitudes of facilitators and in their own parenting and family life.

There are also clear advantages to the regional community services and the auspicing organisations of the model used in this project as participants used their knowledge in their everyday work as well as to run parenting education groups. The auspicing agencies have also benefited by having access to staff who are trained in the flexible and respectful philosophy of the program and who are now part of the local network. They also gained valuable links through these people to other services and sometimes went on to employ some participants on contract in their own programs. The training thus had positive career path implications for many of those who took part.

Parental skills and emotional competencies (objective 2) were enhanced not just for the parents who took part in the parent education programs but the parenting of participants with young children also appeared to have been enhanced.

The continuing programs, which had found additional sources of funding, all targeted and supported vulnerable families with children (objective 3). These included indigenous families, parents of children with disabilities and fathers in prison.

The most important issue however is the availability of funding for the continuity of successful programs and for any additional programs. Agencies do not have the money in their own budgets to run additional programs.
POST SCRIPT TO THE EVALUATION - 2003

Two additional groups were run during the latter part of 2003. The extra parenting group that was carried out in the men’s prison in the South Gippsland region was possible only because money left over from cancelled groups was provided by this project. The other parenting group was funded by the City of Maribynong. This group was provided by one of the facilitators from the Western region 2002 training who had to cancel her originally planned parenting group because the closeness of Christmas made it impossible to complete. These two groups both had successful outcomes for those who attended but were rather different in the outcomes for the group facilitators.

19. PROGRAM 1: WESTERN REGION

This parenting program was funded by the council in the Western region and was advertised by them as focusing on play. It was intended for parents from non-English speaking backgrounds but because the actual advertising used complex English those that applied to attend were all from Anglo Australian backgrounds. The facilitator faced a number of hurdles in the program. First, the co-facilitator who had attended the project training became ill and unable to take part in running the parenting program; this meant that someone who had not attended the training co-facilitated. This person was in many ways unsuitable for the task and approached the group in ways that were sometimes counter to the training.

The facilitator also felt that the program was presented in such a way that it didn’t go far enough for the type of parents who attended. The mothers explained in the final session that although the experience and information gleaned was useful that they had wanted more depth. This left the facilitator feeling that she had failed in some way although she also knows that the group has bonded and planned to continue their contact with each other. The attendance at this group was consistently five mothers with two or three others attending once or twice over the four weeks of the program.

The group was also somewhat daunting for the facilitator because a mother who had attended on the first night had discussed her problems with domestic violence which went beyond what the group was able to deal with. The facilitator rang Parenting Australia for advice and rang this mother and referred her on. However, it left the facilitator feeling inadequate at the end of the process and she felt that she had just ‘muddled through’. The positive outcomes have been that the five mothers attending consistently have organised ongoing babysitting swaps and contact. As these mothers were mostly new to this area the group has provided them with local connections and broken down feelings of isolation.

The end result for the facilitator is some frustration and lack of confidence about running parenting groups and the wish for further training even if for only a day. She believes that a follow-up day of training would enable participants to concentrate more on some of the more difficult aspects of running a group rather than the get together and ice-breaking aspects. She would like to move forward but her confidence has lapsed over time. She says that the training has not changed her approach to families she feels that she had a good understanding anyway but that it has made her reflect on the intensity of parenting and how full-on it is while children are young.
20. PROGRAM 2: SOUTH GIPPSLAND REGION

The prisoner father’s parenting program was much more successful and the facilitator feels very positive about her ability to run parenting groups even under quite difficult circumstance. She co-facilitated with a male to model positive male-female relationships. Much of what this facilitator said about the process was included in the 2003 evaluation from the questionnaire that she filled in, however, she also sent in her formal evaluation forms with greater detail from the fathers themselves.

The objectives of this program were to:

– provide an opportunity to focus on parenting and create a sense of normalcy about discussing feelings in regard to;
– fathering;
– types and styles of family;
– discipline styles;
– listening to understand;
– child development – what children are learning and needing at different ages;
– settling arguments;
– parenting apart;
– step families.

The fathers were from a very mixed background and were very serious and sad about their lack of contact with their children due to their prison circumstances. Issues of confidentiality and trust in the prison situation were important to these men and agreements were necessary. This made it easier in the getting to know you stage of the group experience and in sharing experiences within known boundaries.

The fathers wanted: better skills, something positive, a better idea about parenting and to fill a gap around parenting that they had because of their own backgrounds. The group relaxed gradually over the course of the two days and were not ashamed to be ‘soft’. The group was not confined to parents of pre-school children as the fathers had children of all different ages including teenagers. The age range of their children was from four years to 25. The program therefore included information about older children as well as younger.

On the ‘Before’ evaluation forms the fathers rated their confidence in parenting with scores ranging from 1 to 8 with 1 being least confident and 10 the most confident. After attending the sessions the confidence scores rose to between 7 and 10. All fathers were very satisfied with the program and would recommend it to other parents. The following are their comments on the best thing about attending the program:

– “Being able to relate on a personal level with other prisoners about parenting in an honest way. Maybe it can continue this way through the rest of the sentence about these kind of matters. (Thanks very much for coming in guys I appreciated it a lot and it got me thinking a lot).”
– “Discussions regarding parenting also different approaches.”
– “All things out of it.”
– “Understanding how children felt.”
– “Learning (and I did).”
The men also enjoyed laughing, thinking and some learned to think ‘before I go off’.

Additional Questionnaire

One additional Questionnaire was received from a facilitator who trained in the South Gippsland region. She had not been able to run a parenting group and had been unfunded. She had met with the facilitator of the continuing indigenous parenting group in the La Trobe region and had thought that she would be able to run a group for Aboriginal grandparents in conjunction with this group. This was rejected because she is not indigenous herself. She said that the training for the project had been ‘fabulous’ and that she uses lots of the information in her current work with mandated clients for the Queen Elizabeth Centre for Early Parenting. She would still like to run a parenting group using her training experience and believes there may be an opportunity coming up soon through her work.
21. **AIMS**

- to expand on knowledge learnt from the EIPP model used in the previous two years in the Warrnambool area;
- to provide training in Aboriginal communities in this region;
- to support facilitators to run groups and evaluation.

22. **BACKGROUND**

The Aboriginal communities in the Warrnambool region do not receive services because of their low numbers of child abuse notification. In order to maintain this good record the Department of Family and Community Services recommended that early intervention services would ensure that the status quo remained.

23. **THE PLAN OF ACTION**

To engage influential local community leaders to promote and assist in the delivery of parent support groups using the EIPP model.

To begin this process contact was made with the Department of Human Services, Koorie unit and other relevant contacts in head office and relevant Early Childhood specialist in the region. From these contacts we identified three Aboriginal communities in the region. These are:

- Gunditjmara – in Warrnambool
- Framlingham Trust – 15 mins outside Warrnambool
- Winda Mara – at Heywood

It was determined that the appropriate process to contact these communities was through an official who was known, respected and trusted. This process took several months and it was in October that a meeting was established between the project co ordinators and representatives of the three communities. This meeting did not work out as planned as the community representatives did not all arrive at the same time. From this point we were advised that each of the three communities should be treated individually and three meetings were arranged.

Our next individual meetings were set for November but before these meetings could occur one of the community centres temporarily closed.

From the meeting with five key workers from Gunditjmara it was identified that all workers were unable to engage with the project due to incredible work demands already placed upon them. Much of this work involved assisting individual family in crisis.

However from discussions it was realized that many quality initiatives and were already in place. These included a water awareness group for parents of young children, programs for young men, an exciting initiative that involved making a possum skin cloak of significant meaning to community. The initiatives that had the most potential for the EIP program was the walking group that was open to everyone. This involved anyone in the community.
meeting at a certain place at a certain time and walking together to strengthen bonds between the younger and older members of the community. The walking group was a finalist in the Community Participation Initiatives Award.

With a turn over of staff it has been difficult to maintain contact with this community despite creative attempts to keep in contact.

The meeting with the Winda Mara community identified the need for training with the Koorie Early Childhood Workers. This process began with a meeting of the potential training participants and the community Co ordinator. At this meeting the Workers decided on the content and purpose of the training. A date for the training was to be set for early in the following year.

The training occurred at the end of January for three days duration. From the training the Early childhood workers agreed to:

- talk to the parents in the playgroup about coming together at Lake Condor on the last Friday of the month;
- send a survey out to parents about topics they might want to discuss at the monthly Friday sessions;
- meet and work out who would do what at the parent sessions – in the training we planned the first session they would do.

24. EVALUATION

The evaluation of the training indicated that all six participants rated their satisfaction with the training, on a scale of 1 – 10 (1 being very unsatisfied and 10 being very satisfied) as 10.

All indicated that their confidence and enthusiasm to run parent groups had increased after the training.

25. PROGRESS TO DATE

- A playgroup that was struggling to function has been able to attract new members.
- The Koorie Early Childhood workers involved with the playgroups feel more confident to work with parents within the playgroups.
- Parents from three playgroups have successfully met together and shared parenting information at Lake Condor. Decisions have been made by the parents to change the venue of this gathering and to encourage other parents to attend and become involved.

26. FUTURE PLANS

An opportunity to work within Gunditjmara to incorporate discussion of positive and relevant parenting within the walking group.
1. EARLY INTERVENTION PARENTING PROJECT

Trainee Information (Before training)

Location of training: ____________________________

Date of training: _______________________________

Name of trainee: _______________________________

Organisation represented: _______________________

Location of organisation: ________________________

Postcode: ____________________________

English speaking: YES □ NO □ Other language spoken

1. What is the nature of your current work? (brief description only)

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

2. What do you hope to gain from the training?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

3. What sort of groups have you run before?
   (brief descriptions only and indicate if they were parenting groups, if no experience please state.)

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

4. How confident do you currently feel about running groups?
   On a scale of one to 10 with 10 being the very confident and 1 not confident. Please indicate on the
   numbered line below your current level of confidence by circling the appropriate number:

   1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10
   NOT CONFIDENT  VERY CONFIDENT
2. EARLY INTERVENTION PARENTING PROJECT

Trainee Information (After training)

Location of training: ____________________________

Date of training: ____________________________

Your name: ____________________________

1. How would you rate your satisfaction with the training that you have received here?

On a scale of one to 10, with 10 being the most satisfied and 1 the least satisfied, please indicate satisfaction by circling the appropriate number below:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

VERY UNSATISFIED  VERY SATISFIED

2. How enthusiastic do you feel about running parenting groups after the training?

On a scale of one to 10, with 10 being very enthusiastic and 1 unenthusiastic, please indicate your level of enthusiasm by circling the appropriate number below:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

UNENTHUSIASTIC  ENTHUSIASTIC

3. How confident do you feel about running groups since the training?

On a scale of one to 10 with 10 being the very confident and 1 not confident, please indicate your level of confidence by circling the appropriate number:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

UNENTHUSIASTIC  ENTHUSIASTIC

4. What do you see as the major issues facing parents/families in your location?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
APPENDIX B

BEFORE FORM – EVALUATION FORM FOR PARENTS

To be filled in before the program starts.

Your name: __________________________________________________________

Name of program facilitator: _____________________________________________

Location: __________________________________________________________________

Country of birth: _______________________________________________________

Language spoken at home: _______________________________________________

1. Are you Male ☐ or Female ☐

2. How many children do you have? ☐

What are their ages?: ____, ____, ____, ____, ____.

3. Why did you come to this program?

_______________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________

4. What do you hope to get out of attending this program?

_______________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________

5. How confident do you feel about your parenting?

On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being most confident, please indicate your level of confidence by circling the appropriate number below:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

NOT CONFIDENT

10

VERY CONFIDENT
AFTER FORM – EVALUATION FORM FOR PARENTS

This form is to be filled in at the completion of the program.

Your name: __________________________

Name of program facilitator: __________________________

Location of program: __________________________

1. Did you enjoy the program?

On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the most enjoyable and 1 not enjoyable, please indicate your level of enjoyment by circling the appropriate number below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NOT ENJOYABLE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>VERY ENJOYABLE</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. To what extent are you satisfied that the program met your needs?

Please indicate your level of satisfaction by circling the appropriate number below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VERY UNSATISFIED</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>VERY SATISFIED</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. How confident do you feel about your parenting since attending this program?

Please indicate your level of confidence by circling the appropriate number below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NOT CONFIDENT</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>VERY CONFIDENT</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Would you recommend this program to other parents?

Yes [ ] No [ ]

5. What was the best thing about attending this program?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Thank you for filling in this form. Please hand it to the course facilitator.
APPENDIX C

EARLY INTERVENTION PARENTING PROJECT

Diary for the Facilitator,
Please fill in this cover page. After each weekly session please write up your weekly diary notes straight after the group has met. There is one page per week and there are more pages than you will need. Just fill in the appropriate number for your program. It is important that you make your diary notes as soon as possible after the group has met as it is amazing how much can be forgotten as time passes. It is important to the evaluation to know who is present at each session so please take care to mark the roll each week.

_The diaries will be used in evaluating the overall program in Victoria._

Name of Group Facilitator: __________________________

Agency sponsoring program: __________________________

What have you called your Program: _______________________

Number of parents enrolled: ____________________________

1. What are the major objectives of your program:

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

2. Describe the general background of the parents involved (include such things as marital status, ethnicity, socio-economic status, or any other things that you think are important):

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

3. Describe any locality features that may be impacting on the parents/families in this group:

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
1. Names of all parents present for this session:

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

2. Focus of the program this week:

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

3. Describe any particular issues or comments which arose in the group:

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

4. Observations of group members: (describe anything that you feel is important or relevant to the program or any changes you observe in group members or particular individuals)

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________
WEEK 2 – DATE ________________

1. Names of all parents present for this session:

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

2. Focus of the program this week:

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

3. Describe any particular issues or comments which arose in the group:

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

4. Observations of group members: (describe anything that you feel is important or relevant to the program or any changes you observe in group members or particular individuals)

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
Dear all,

At some time in the last two years you took part in the Early Intervention Parenting Project funded by the Commonwealth and held in four Victorian regions. All of you received the training but not all of you were funded to run a parenting group although most were. Most of the funded participants went on to run successful parenting groups and some of the unfunded participants co-facilitated groups with funded participants.

We now want to know more about any longer term influences the training has had and we have been funded to do this. We also personally want to hear what you have been up to. For this reason we are re-contacting as many of the original participants as we can locate and sending you a brief questionnaire to fill in.

We know anecdotally that some people went on to run additional parenting groups and that a few people were unable to get their groups running despite their efforts; we also know that for some people their experience was a stepping stone to some changes in their work with families. Others have found that the information from the training and/or experience was important in their personal and family life. Some of you may have had some quite different results from participation. We have heard only bits and pieces about your experiences through chance meetings or being told by someone else. We would like to know about any of these things from your perspective, even if you did not manage, or have the opportunity, to run a parenting group (some of you may be running your first parenting group now).

Please fill in this questionnaire as fully as you can and remember this is your opportunity to tell us about the experience from your own perspective. We really look forward to hearing from you and finding out what has happened to you.

All the best,

Gay, Constance and Pat
EARLY INTERVENTION PARENTING PROJECT 2003

Your Name:

Were you a: Funded □ or Unfunded □ participant?

What is your current Work Position:

1. Please indicate the number of parenting groups (including your original group) that you have run since doing the training by ticking the appropriate box:

   0 □ 1 □ 2 □ 3 □ 4 □ 5 or more □

2. Did you co-facilitate any of these groups?

   Yes □ or No □ If yes, how many did you co-facilitate? □

3. If you co-facilitated can you comment briefly on the experience?

   __________________________________________

   __________________________________________

4. How would you now rate your confidence in running parenting groups: (Please fill this in even if you have only run one parenting group.)

   On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being most confident, please indicate your level of confidence now by circling the appropriate number below:

   1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10
   NOT CONFIDENT  Very CONFIDENT
5. Has the experience of the training and/or running parenting groups changed your approach to families in any way?

Yes [ ] or No [ ]

If yes, can you please tell us in what ways:

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

6. Has taking part in the training and/or running parenting groups made any difference to your family life and parenting?

Yes [ ] or No [ ]

If yes, can you explain briefly how?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

7. Is there anything else you want to tell us about your experience with this project?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________