16. FAMILY AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT WORKER UPDATE

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The purpose of this report is to provide complementary information, including the original aims of the project, to the report received from Manuka Cottage regarding the progress of the Family and Community Development worker position.

This project, over the course of its existence, has been known as the "Children at Risk" project. To date it has been running for nearly 15 months under the umbrella of Manuka Cottage, with Kay Gardiner employed as the Family and Community Development worker. This report needs to be read in conjunction with the report and letters of support received by Manuka Cottage, which is included in the attachments.

ORIGINAL AIMS OF THE PROJECT

As reported to the Community Affairs Committee meeting of 16 June 1998 the main objective was to support and strengthen the families of Spreydon and Heathcote to become more involved and actively participate in their community. It was stated the project would use a **community development process with associated strategies** working towards community safety from crime, improving health standards and encouraging education.

AIMS

- Increased awareness and confidence building in families, professionals and others working with families.
- Build new and strengthen existing, support networks for families e.g., Plunket, Barnardo's, Early Childhood Development Unit, Manuka Cottage, Rowley Resource Centre, Waltham Community Cottage, Whareora Community House etc.
- Co-ordinate and co-operate with community organisations to support and if necessary initiate new supports.
- Identify families at risk and facilitate communication between these families and available services e.g., counselling services, budgeting, Housing New Zealand, Police and Children, Young Persons and their Families Service.

It was identified that the worker was to:

- Source and contact existing organisations.
- Work with existing service providers e.g., Plunket, GP, Practice Nurse, Barnardo's and other community groups to identify:
  - families at risk
  - key people to encourage and support families and community activities.
  - set up or support existing groups for young parents and creative play for under two year olds.
- Notably, this would include identifying families with babies most at risk of poor childhood outcomes and their referral to the extended Early Start Project Ltd.

The job description for the current position was based on these original aims.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT APPROACH

The original intention of the project was to use a community development approach, as indicated above. At its inception, it was recognised that approximately 10% of parents of children at risk were slipping through the cracks – that those people were distrustful of and feared Government agencies and therefore would not access the help required. It was thought that a community development worker (using a community development approach) based from a community organisation would be less threatening and enable appropriate links to be made within the community including accessing, where appropriate, the necessary agencies.

The reason why the project was based at Manuka Cottage was because of the "fit" in terms of the community development approach. It was also recognised that the Community Development worker would be offered the kind of support and supervision needed when involved in this kind of fieldwork.

At this stage of the project it is evident that relationships and trust have been built with many key agencies in local communities, resulting in referrals being made. It is important to recognise that in today's "climate of distrust", referrals only begin once an organisation/position has been tried and true and this takes more time than it used to!

For some of these referrals a certain amount of one on one work is required before the parent is able to participate in any group. To that end Kay Gardiner's skills as a social worker are being utilised, however the aim is to get the person to a stage whereby they feel confident in participating in some way in the community in order to identify and obtain the resources they need. Using the community development approach, parents of children at risk, can become better integrated into the local community which contributes to outcomes such as reducing social isolation, improving health standards and encouraging education, which again, link back to the original aims of the project.

GROUP PARTICIPATION

There has been concern articulated about the level of involvement in a variety of groups not just young parents groups. This involvement is based on the following premises:

- That the supports and learning some young parents require will not come from like parents, instead they need support and will learn from people who have more resources/experience and knowledge. Therefore it is important that links are made into groups where this may be able to happen. For example, a young parent might require babysitting and transport to the supermarket, however these resources may not be available from a group of like young mothers who are struggling to make ends meet. In order to get those needs met that mother needs to be integrated into a group where it would be possible to access those resources.
- That there may be some participants in those groups that are parents of children at risk, therefore participating in those groups enables a relationship and trust to be established and the possibility of further contact.
- That working with other groups may enable the identification of other key people to encourage and support family and community activities (as identified in the original report).
- That it is recognised there is a need to work with parents of children at risk in an holistic way. Although it is good to share common experiences in a group of like people, there is often a need to "get away from it all". Involvement in other groups allows links to be made for parents needing to "get away from it all" and ensuring that those groups will be "safe" for the parent. One analogy is elderly people do not necessarily want to spend all their time with elderly. They also want to spend time with children, young adults, and "middle aged" (for want of a better term) all in different settings.

GEOGRAPHICAL AREA

Several concerns have been raised about the geographical demands upon the position. Recently, the areas that have been focussed on have been Addington and Rowley. Manuka Cottage has indicated a willingness to extend the hours of the position to address some of these geographical concerns.

CONCLUSION

The current work being undertaken by Manuka Cottage very much fits with the original aims of the project. The relationships that have been built within the local community are now leading to referrals, from both individuals and community agencies and schools. It is at this stage of the project where staff will begin to investigate an appropriate outside evaluation of the project and report options to the Board in the New Year.

Recommendations:

1. That the Board receive the information.
2. That the Board task the Children at Risk Sub-Committee to address any arising concerns with Manuka Cottage and report back with recommendations.