

The Family Wellbeing Empowerment Program for Young Aboriginal Men Knowledge Circle Practice Profiles

 apps.aifs.gov.au/ipppregister/projects/the-family-wellbeing-empowerment-program-for-young-aboriginal-men

Overview

Practice focus	Indigenous social and emotional wellbeing; social engagement
Delivered by	The Family Wellbeing Empowerment Program (FWB) was delivered by two Aboriginal male community workers from the Central Coast NSW Medicare Local (now known as Central Coast Primary Care).
Location(s)	The FWB program was located on the Central Coast of New South Wales (NSW). The program was implemented in the two local government areas of Gosford and Wyong.
Issue being addressed	The FWB program aims to address low social and emotional wellbeing among Aboriginal young men and the low participation among Aboriginal young people living on the Central Coast of NSW in education and schooling.
Service type	Indigenous social and emotional wellbeing; social engagement
Target population	The target population for the FWB Program was vulnerable Aboriginal young men living on the Central Coast of NSW in the local government areas of Gosford and Wyong. Data from the Medicare Local primary healthcare network indicated there was a high risk of suicide among young Aboriginal men. Four groups of young Aboriginal men were identified for the FWB program. Three of the groups that participated were “at risk” and vulnerable students from local schools. One group consisted of young men who were incarcerated juveniles. Participants were aged between 16 and 25 years.
Aims and objectives	<p>Consistent with previous implementation of the FWB Program in several other Australian locations, the FWB program on the Central Coast of NSW aimed to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• implement a project that would be culturally safe and appropriate and address the causes of the poor social and emotional wellbeing among young Aboriginal men; and• improve the participation of young Aboriginal men in employment, health, education and their community by improving their social and emotional wellbeing and enabling them to feel empowered to take control of their lives.

The FWB program addresses the social determinants of health and wellbeing by undertaking activities that are based on ideas of individual empowerment, self-development and healing. The program brings together small groups of people in a safe learning environment and provides them with information and skills to be able to use their own resources to address life's challenges.

The FWB program was developed in 1993 by the Aboriginal Education Development Branch in the South Australian Education Department. It has been delivered in various Aboriginal communities and is currently implemented by three organisations based in South Australia, Alice Springs and Cairns. The standard FWB is a flexible five-stage program where students undertake six months equivalent of full-time training and obtain a vocational education and training certificate II qualification. The curriculum focuses on topics related to counselling; identifying and dealing with emotional issues (e.g. relationships, grief, loss, crisis); self-help strategies (e.g. caring for oneself, healing) and self development (e.g.. self expression, understanding personal values and strengths).

Two Aboriginal male community workers were recruited by the Central Coast NSW Medicare Local to adapt and facilitate a 10-week program (per group) with the young men. Core topics of the FWB were combined with physical activities (swimming, football, basketball) and visiting cultural sites with a local elder. A Facebook page was set up for participants. In addition to the modules, the community workers also linked the young men into services that supported them to access education, work experience opportunities, employment and safe accommodation. Ongoing advice was also provided by the FWB staff after the men finished the program.

Program basis

Cultural relevance

The adaptation of the FWB program to the local area aimed to address the low participation among Aboriginal young men living on the Central Coast of NSW in education and schooling. In general, educational participation for Aboriginal young people aged 15-19 years was lower than their non-Aboriginal counterparts in the two local government areas of Gosford and Wyong.

This situation occurs within a broader context of relatively lower socioeconomic circumstances, higher unemployment, higher representation in the criminal justice system, higher rates of preventable disease and lower life expectancy for Aboriginal Central Coast residents.

The program participants often came from families impacted by violence, drug abuse, mental illness, homelessness and family separation. Some of the young men had issues related to emotional impulsiveness, drug use, violence or school attendance and discipline. Practice wisdom and research also indicates low social and emotional wellbeing can impact on an individual's engagement in education and training. Accordingly the program aims address some of these barriers.

Local community context

The local Aboriginal community was involved in identifying the need for the program and in its implementation through:

Involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders

- a steering committee consisting of Aboriginal representatives from local agencies including Aboriginal health, drug and alcohol services. (This also included other non Aboriginal representatives from other local agencies such as police, education, child protection and the youth sector); and
- the employment of two male Aboriginal workers on the program.

Cultural practices and materials

As part of their respect for cultural protocols, the program facilitators engaged the local community from the beginning of the program. Community engagement involved the facilitators introducing themselves to Aboriginal organisations and ensuring local community endorsement. This process of community engagement enabled the establishment of an effective steering committee. Cultural activities were integrated into the program. The Central Coast is rich in historical cultural sites, so young men were taken to see these, accompanied by a cultural advisor. The process of FWB itself was viewed as similar to traditional cultural practices whereby men would gather and talk “men’s business”.

Evaluation

Evaluation status

A journal article outlining the results of the formal evaluation of the FWB program with Aboriginal young men was published in 2016. The evaluation was completed by the Lowitja Institute research partners (James Cook, La Trobe and Griffith University) as in-kind contributions.

Link to evaluation

The article outlining the evaluation can be found at:
<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/0312407X.2015.1137101>

The participants in the evaluation included:

- six program organisers (including the Medicare Local's mental health program manager);
- two FWB program workers;
- three members of the project steering committee; and
- the program participants, comprising 30 young men aged 16-25 .

The evaluation collected data through the following methods:

- pre and post questionnaires comprising five parts that were administered to the 30 participants (demographics; the psychological distress scale; and nine post program progress items and two open-ended items); and
- semi-structured interviews with the six program organisers, the two FWB program workers and three members of the project steering committee. The interviews covered topics such as their experiences of the FWB; their views of the relevance of the program to the NSW Central Coast; how the program was adapted to local circumstances; which aspects of the program worked best; what improvements could be made and the outcomes they observed in participants. The qualitative results were analysed through a thematic analysis approach.

This mixed-methods approach ensured that a wide range of participants were included in the evaluation, which helped create a strong understanding of the program's effectiveness.

The Indigenous community were involved in the design, planning and implementation of the evaluation. In particular the community had input into the adaption of the intervention to make it appropriate to local needs and opportunities.

Evaluation details

Effectiveness

Most effective aspect

The capacity of the FWB program to engage and empower young Aboriginal men to re-engage with family, education, employment and other social systems.

The quantitative and qualitative results suggest that the FWB program has the capacity to engage young Aboriginal men and make a contribution to their social and emotional wellbeing. The evaluation indicated that the FWB is an effective intervention to enhance the social participation of young Aboriginal men who are disengaged from school and other systems. Specific findings include:

- Demographics: 20 of the 30 initial participants had completed the FWB program;
- None of the participants had completed year 12 and only 6 had completed year 11. The majority of participants came from small regional NSW communities;
- Relationship improvements: 75 per cent of participants reported major improvements in their relationships and 65 per cent reported major improvements in dealing with their emotions;
- Employment and Education: Over 47 per cent of participants reported major improvements in their attitudes to work and 60 per cent indicated increased interest in further education. One participant had secured part-time work on the FWB program;
- Mental Health: 55 per cent of participants reported major improvement in feeling able to cope with stressful situations and feelings of safety. The FWB facilitators believed many young men had developed new coping skills, including greater emotion control. Anecdotal evidence indicated some young men had reduced their drug taking and some had entered rehabilitation; and
- Physical Health: 50 percent of participants indicated there had been a major improvement in their health, with anecdotal evidence that some had engaged in more exercise and lost weight.

Demonstrated outcomes

Resourcing

The FWB program on the NSW Central Coast was funded by the Australian Government and implemented by the Central Coast NSW Medicare Local. The program continues to be delivered by the successor organisation Central Coast Primary Care.

Evidence base and opportunities

The FWB program has been implemented in various locations and has been reviewed through several micro community-specific qualitative evaluations. These smaller evaluations have shown that the program enhances participants' social and emotional wellbeing. Extensive information about the FWB program can be found at:

- <http://www.healthinonet.ecu.edu.au/key-resources/programs-projects?pid=106>
- Whiteside, M; Tsey, K; Cadet-James, Y & McCalman, J (2014). Promoting Aboriginal Health - The Family Wellbeing Empowerment Approach. Springer Briefs in Public Health. DOI: <http://www.springer.com/gp/book/9783319046174>

Other

Profile added 6 April 2016

Last updated 16 June 2016

[Send CFCA updated information on this profile](#)