

Wodlitinattoai Program

Housing

A LOCAL initiative Salisbury

Indigenous families are offered holistic support to find and retain suitable accommodation.

Introduction

Safe, affordable and culturally appropriate housing is not readily available for Indigenous families. The Wodlitinattoai program addresses the limited accommodation options for Aboriginal people.

Wodlitinattoai, one of eight such projects throughout Australia, is an early intervention program that identifies families who are at risk of losing their accommodation because of their inability to pay rent. This may be for a variety of reasons including drug and alcohol problems, or overcrowding by family members through kinship responsibilities.

The program works holistically with Indigenous families and can involve rebuilding bridges with other services while acknowledging the historical past hurts which continue to effect the survival of Indigenous families in today's society. Wodlitinattoai supports families in areas such as family counselling, advocacy/support, budgeting skills, building stronger connections to services, provision of an outreach service and provision of one-to-one support with families. In South Australia, Salisbury was chosen as a suitable location for the Indigenous-specific program.

Aims and objectives

The objectives of the program are to:

- Identify Indigenous families who are at risk of homelessness
- Support families who are experiencing difficulties in maintaining their accommodation.

Project

The Wodlitinattoai program targets Indigenous families who are at risk of losing their accommodation. The criteria for selecting entry to the program are:

- A family must consist of two or more people regardless of blood, adoption or cultural identification.
- The client must be Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.
- Clients must be housed, but experiencing difficulty in maintaining accommodation as a result of financial, personal, family or relationship issues.

The Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services, in partnership with Centrelink, invited tenders from agencies to provide programs within the community in each Australian state. In South Australia Centacare was the successful agency. A working party/advisory committee was devised consisting of the Aboriginal Housing Authority, Centacare, South Australian Housing Trust, Child, Youth and Family Services, Salisbury Council, Kumungka and Muna Paiendi Health Service.

The program covers the Salisbury and Elizabeth areas (Para Hills West to Andrews Farm).

Once a partnership was established between the participating groups, an Advisory Committee was formed to develop the program. An action research model was used to help the program identify effective strategies for preventing homelessness.

Research has shown that involving people and working in partnership with those who are affected by health issues contributes to the acceptance, relevance and sustainability of a program. Community consultation and evidence-based literature led to the choice of the strategies adopted for this project. The Department of Family and Community Services consulted with the Aboriginal community to identify the strategies and guidelines needed to work effectively in this community.

Project outcomes

The program was evaluated by RPR Consultancy. The evaluation showed that early intervention has been successful in preventing homelessness among Indigenous families in the Salisbury area. For example:

- Housing situations have significantly improved by 71% for families who remained with the program for a support period of no less than 12 months.
- At the end of the support period families stated that their own personal stress levels had decreased and that they were feeling happier in general.
- School attendance by children improved quite significantly.
- There were increased numbers of adult participation in training and employment.

The original pilot is now a fully funded program until June 2008. Centacare has benefited from the program by becoming more aware of and responsive to cultural difference and change. Centacare has recognised that Wodlitinattoai works holistically and has given the program expert advice on becoming a successful and efficient tool for the Indigenous community.

For the initiative to be sustainable, ongoing funding, community participation and direct input from Indigenous elders and young people is required, as the program is constantly evolving to meet the needs of the Indigenous community.

This model can be adopted by other communities with similar population and socioeconomic characteristics, provided that it is adapted to local realities. Involving the local Indigenous community is of crucial importance in shaping a program that will deliver culturally acceptable and effective services.

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