



Annual Report Family Action Centre

08



Towards a truly civil society





The Family Action Centre *towards a truly civil society*

The Family Action Centre is a multidisciplinary Centre with the vision of a truly civil society and a belief that family wellbeing is the cornerstone of healthy communities.

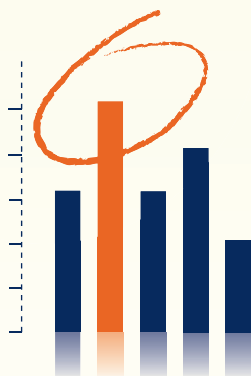
Where are we?

We are located at the University of Newcastle, New South Wales.

We exist to strengthen families and communities by developing and implementing programs, undertaking research and training, and creating models of practice that promote sustainability, social justice and community leadership. Our programs include the Boys in Schools Program, the Fathers Program, the Caravan Project, Home-Start, Communities for Children (Raymond Terrace and Karuah) and our Indigenous Program.



Our goals



- A practice leader in strength-based service delivery with families, schools and communities.
- A centre of excellence in engaged scholarship, research and dissemination.
- A developing role in strength-based Indigenous programs.
- A sustainable Centre with a secure financial base.
- A Centre that promotes strength-based work culture and practices.



vision

A truly civil society.
The Family Action Centre is a national leader in strengthening families and communities.



values

At the Family Action Centre we:

- value ourselves and others
- believe in the power of family and community
- work as a team to achieve our vision and purpose
- celebrate the joy of life.

purpose

The Family Action Centre combines community service, research, dissemination and advocacy in order to impact on policy and practice in relation to supporting families and building communities in Australia.

mission

Supporting families and building communities.

Director's Report



This annual report is like a photograph of a bird in flight: it is a snapshot of an organisation at a moment in time, an organisation that was different in the moments before and will be different in the moments that follow, an organisation on a journey. This report is a useful record of where we stood at the end of 2008 and, in true Family Action Centre style, it allows us to reflect and evaluate on work and then use the conclusions we draw to inform future practice.

So did we achieve in 2008 all or any of the tasks that we set ourselves at the end of 2007? And, if so, how well did we do them? Did we make a difference in the Australian community? And how can we improve our performance in 2009?

As the director of the Family Action Centre I can look back on 2008 with a sense of great pride and accomplishment. The briefest of glances over our Highlights page (overleaf) provides an indication of the breadth and scale of our work. While we draw on a tradition of practice and hands-on work, our research profile grew dramatically this year. We now have the research capacity necessary to build teams, and the reputation to attract other organisations and faculties who wish to participate in our work.

Teaching and learning took on a much greater role too, with several of our staff delivering more courses either face to face or, increasingly, through the University's on-line delivery system.

Our work as practitioners was not diminished by this rise in research and teaching and learning; quite the opposite, in fact. Our practitioners have grasped the opportunity to work with researchers on projects that inform and evaluate the work we carry out in the field. More and more we see a multidisciplinary approach to new projects, marrying research with community engagement. The University

recognised this and, with the Special Education Centre, we were invited to represent the University at the Hunter Means Innovation community engagement event where we delivered our story in a presentation titled "Taking it to the Streets".

We also support exploratory practice and research, often supporting outstanding projects that, by the nature of their innovation, have no "home" or champion. The Special Needs Unlimited Group (SNUG), a unique family camp program for families from rural areas who have a child with special needs, had failed to attract funding for several years, in spite of the tireless work of a dedicated team of volunteers. In late 2008 we received the exciting news that the Steve Waugh Foundation would fund two family camps and an evaluation, an outstanding way to end a successful year on a high. Similarly, our work with Indigenous communities has led us into collaborative arrangements with World Vision, which is working with remote Warlpiri communities in the Northern Territory.

Holding three national conferences in one year was a great

achievement and the inaugural National Indigenous Family and Community Strengths Conference was inspirational to all who attended. The FAC staff has now developed the skills and capacity to organise and administer our own conferences—an excellent resource for the University.

I continue to be heartened by the Family Action Centre's staff: a dedicated group who never sway in their focus, whatever the funding gods might throw at them. I was particularly pleased to see Craig Hammond, leader of our Indigenous Program, receive the Award for Outstanding Achievement at the Faculty of Health annual dinner. Well done, Craig, for all your work.

As 2008 closed we prepared ourselves for our 2009 staff retreat: a time to reflect, evaluate and, once again, plan for the future. The coming year will inevitably throw up unforeseen obstacles and challenges, but with this dynamic and stable team around me I look forward to continuing our work to improve the policy and practice aligned to Australian families and communities.

Judi Geggie
FAC Director

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Judi Geggie".



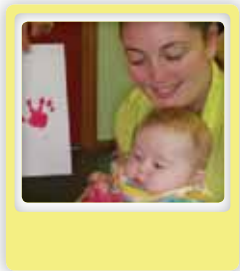
Prof. John de Frain, of the University of Nebraska presents Judi Geggie with the international Herb Lindgren Award for Strengthening Families at the Families & Community Strengths Conference.

Highlights of 2008



Research

- Fathers program successfully co-tendered (with Interrelate Family Services) for four FaHCSIA-funded research contracts examining the impact on fathers and families during separation.
- A systematic review for the South Australian Department of Health led to the publication of a major report on that state's new children's centres.
- A joint state–federal government-funded action-research project into “Disaster Planning for Park Communities” commenced and was carried out by the Caravan Project team.
- Researchers, including Deborah Hartman, Victoria Clay, Graeme Stuart and Richard Fletcher, produced a wide range of papers, keynote addresses, seminars and research outputs in the fields of boys' education, father-inclusive practice and domestic violence (see individual program reports).
- Fathers program established the Australian Fatherhood Research Network and distributed a regular bulletin to over 200 email subscribers.
- Richard Fletcher completed and was awarded his doctor of philosophy.



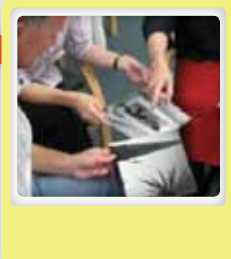
Strength-based practice

- Home-Start successfully ran its first course for volunteers to work with families from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds. Thirteen volunteers graduated from the course.
- Communities for Children supported the delivery and evaluation of several projects in the Raymond Terrace and Karuah region, including the highly successful Stories on the Street, Transition to School and Family Bus Project.
- Supported the international Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) Pacific Network. Conference was held in December.
- Indigenous Program staff delivered the Brothers Inside workshop for Indigenous fathers in the St Heliers Correctional Centre. The program also worked with World Vision to develop resources for Warlpiri communities in the Northern Territory.
- Craig Hammond was presented with the Award for Outstanding Achievement at the annual Faculty of Health dinner, recognising his ongoing work in developing partnerships and relationships with community organisations.



Teaching and learning

- The Boys in Schools program's Masters in Educational studies continued to attract large numbers of students. Victoria Clay led a team that developed two new courses that will run in 2008 as online general electives for undergraduate students.
- Placement of students (from the disciplines of Community Services (Welfare), Occupational Therapy, Social Work and Nursing/Early Education Teaching) from Hunter Institute of TAFE and the University of Newcastle within Home-Start and the Caravan Project.
- Several staff delivered and taught courses, such as the postgraduate “Current developments in the human services” course to the University's School of Humanities and Social Science and units on strength-based school-community engagement.
- Student feedback to our on-line courses showed high levels of satisfaction with the content of the work and its applicability to students' professional lives: 87.5% strongly agreed that “I can see how community engagement could be relevant to my work”.



Dissemination

- The fifth Family & Community Strengths and inaugural Indigenous Family & Community Strengths conferences were held in April, attracting hundreds of delegates over five days to the University.
- The inaugural Asset Based Community Development Asia Pacific Network conference was held in December, drawing delegates from Australia, New Zealand, the United States and South-East Asia.
- The first two editions of the *Boys in Schools e-Bulletin* were published as a free on-line journal.
- *Focus on Fathers*, a CD of resources and assets from the Dads in Schools project, was published.
- A DVD targeting first-time Indigenous fathers, *So Now You're A Dad*, was published and promoted.
- New territories for the delivery of the highly successful Rock & Water program were negotiated with creator Freerk Ykema.
- Numerous workshops were held across the country, including the extremely popular Results-Based Accountability series.

Research



Fathers

The year began with the program successfully co-tendering (with Interrelate Family Services) for four research contracts, funded by the Commonwealth Attorney General's Department through FaHCSIA, to examine issues relating to fathers and their families during the process of family separation. The four projects were based in Family Relationship Centres (FRCs) at Taree, Coffs Harbour, Gosford and Dubbo, and were in addition to previous tenders in FRCs in Sutherland and Newcastle. Each project was required to be unique, which presented both challenges and opportunities to explore different topics and methodologies.

The research included the development of a screening tool for practitioners who wish to work with fathers; exploration of the meaning and operation of Indigenous fatherhood; production of child

development information and support for separating parents; and identification of the strengths of young parents and grandparents in relation to separated families. Several of the projects have implications beyond FRCs, with the potential for their results to be adopted by a range of family services.

A systematic review for the South Australian Department of Health was conducted assessing the evidence surrounding fathers' roles in that state's new children's centres. The review led to the publication of a major report on men's roles in children's centres, which was widely distributed and quoted. With the Australian Government's national rollout of children's centres, our report allowed us to contribute to parliamentary investigations and gave us a voice in policy development in this area.

Other research and dissemination highlights included:

- the completion of materials for NSW DoCS on engaging vulnerable fathers for the Brighter Futures program
- establishment of the Australian Fatherhood Research Network, with bulletins on fatherhood research distributed to over 200 subscribers (see box for URL)
- the delivery of an advanced skills workshop for working with fathers at the inaugural Indigenous Family & Community Strengths conference
- the staging of a national seminar on Indigenous fatherhood
- team leader Richard Fletcher receiving his doctorate for his thesis, and

being invited to be part of the National Men and Family Leadership Group

- publication of four papers in national and international refereed journals, two reports, a briefing paper and an article for professional bulletins.

The status of the team's reputation was reflected in the increased number of requests to deliver keynotes and invited addresses at conferences. Among many engagements, Richard

Fletcher spoke at the Child Support Agency National Conference, the Family Relationship Services Australia inaugural conference, and the Queen Elizabeth Centre's biennial international conference.

At an administrative level, the research team was consolidated. The cutting edge nature of our research has led, in the past, to difficulties in attracting suitably qualified staff. Actions such as the preparation of father-related reading files for prospective em-

ployees led by mid year to the creation of a small but stable, focused team.

This background work has created a platform for our research activities in 2009. The FRC contracts, which will continue throughout 2009, will form the nucleus of our research. However, we also anticipate carrying out more research on Indigenous fatherhood, and creating bridges between men's health, boys' health and fathering.

C4C evaluation

Communities for Children (see page 5) is a five-year early intervention approach to child protection and development for children. The FAC was commissioned to carry out three evaluations of C4C over four different sites: Taree, Mount Druitt Raymond Terrace and Miller.

Our evaluators quickly discovered that C4C's impact diverged hugely between sites. There were many factors that influenced this, but a common theme was the level of commitment from key partners, which in itself was often linked to the level of funds made available. Raymond Terrace, for example, was extremely successful, reflecting the commitment made by Port Stephens

Shire Council.

Early indications show that participating bodies generally increased the benefits and outcomes of C4C when they systemised their relationships with partners and their involvement in the evaluation process. Evaluation helped them focus the question "Will the principles of C4C continue once the federal funding ends?" The answer appears to be that, for those sites with good participation, good resources and good evaluation procedures, the answer is "yes". Raymond Terrace in particular has taken huge steps to make its community child-friendly in a sustainable and ongoing way, with the dedication of adequate human and financial resources.

Other research

Graeme Stuart was appointed Team Leader, Community Services Research and Evaluation in April 2008. Projects that he undertook or oversaw included an early career research grant "Strength-

based assessment by family and community workers: an action research project" and research into "Dads in the workplace", contracted by Port Stephens Council. This latter involved interviews with 32 fathers, and data analysis and explores the relationship between

work and fathering (including how the interviewees' experience as fathers informs their work at council) and strategies for making Port Stephens more child-friendly. The University of Newcastle also invited the FAC to investigate engaged research at the University.

To subscribe to the Australian Fatherhood Research Network bulletin, go to <http://www.newcastle.edu.au/centre/fac/efp/afrn.html>

Strength-based practice

The Family Action Centre has many community programs, all of which work from a strength-based philosophy. A focus of our work this year was to more clearly articulate our conceptual understanding of strength-based practice (SBP) and the way it informs our practice. In February, Kerrell Bourne and Graeme Stuart ran a workshop on SBP at our staff retreat to ensure that we clearly identified and evaluated the ways in which our practice, teaching, and research are based on a sound and consistent con-

ceptual framework. Kerrell and Graeme repeated this workshop, for welfare and community workers, in Newcastle and (by council invitation) Muswellbrook.

The Caravan Project and Home-Start underwent some managerial changes at the start of the year, changes that reflected the FAC's shifting research-practice balance. Graeme's reclassification as an academic position mirrored his move away from practice-based activities; Kerrell is now Team Leader of all our community programs.

Communities for Children (Raymond Terrace & Karuah)

Communities for Children (C4C) is a five-year, FaHCSIA-funded early intervention approach to child protection and development aimed at infants and children aged 0–5 years. C4C Raymond Terrace and Karuah are two of 45 sites across Australia developing and delivering sustainable outcomes for children and families; we deliver these programs in partnership with The Smith Family.

This was the final year of C4C, and so we invested a huge amount of effort into consolidating the relationships we've helped to build up in order to ensure their sustainability, and in preparing the evaluation reports for the program and its various subprojects (see page 4). In April we facilitated a sustainability forum to assess our

achievements and to plan the post-C4C future. The forum identified four key areas for sustainable action: early literacy and school readiness; child-friendly communities; building on successful strategies to engage with families with young children; and sustaining and enhancing partnerships and community connectedness.

The key principles of C4C are the linking of services and the creation of sustainable community partnerships, and this year fulfilled our aim of services being delivered by community partners. Port Stephens Library Services exemplified this commitment through the employment of a worker to carry on the highly successful Stories on the Street mobile reading program. Similarly, Ports Stephens Shire Council committed to maintain its Transition to School project, initiated a number of policies and practices around child-friendly

communities, and collaborated with the NSW Government's Commission for Children.

As the evaluation discovered, sustainability is tied to the allocation of resources—always a challenge for small regional organisations. A similar challenge is the stewardship of projects; that is, once the external lead agency is gone, who champions the project? While C4C drew people and service providers together, we are aware that in some cases those networks and collaborations lack the structure and resources needed to continue once C4C ends. The Family Bus Project, for example, has engaged with Indigenous families and will continue, but at a reduced level.

With C4C drawing to a close, under-expended resources were allocated towards a new partnership with Port Stephens Family Support Service (FSS). The FSS is in the process of rolling out MARVIN, a software program that uses animated characters

to share important messages about services, business and culture in Indigenous languages. Port Stephens Shire Council and FSS is also collaborating to develop a culturally appropriate approach to engage Indigenous men through language and literacy activities. These include story telling around campfires at Family Camps and language forums with a focus on Worimi (Gadhung) language.



Stories in the Park proved to be a hugely successful project in the Port Stephens Shire Council region. Engagement by lead agencies is critical if child-friendly practices are to become sustainable.

SMILING: Sharing the Magic in Learning about Infant and Newborn Growth

SMILING is made up of two separate but interlinked projects in the C4C Raymond Terrace and Karuah sites—the “Perinatal Care Project” and the “Pharmacy Project”—with the primary aim of working closely with parents-to-be and parents/carers of children aged 0–2 years.

SMILING coordinator Kathy Lumsdaine discovered that some families were not regularly accessing mainstream community/health services. Based on her talks with these families, Kathy focused on first aid, baby massage, nutrition, support in child behaviour, sleeping, and breastfeeding, and provided this information through supported playgroups.

The playgroups, held at Thou Walla Family Centre (within Irrawang Public School), Raymond Terrace Public School and Karuah Community Centre, were extremely popular and successful in raising parents' confidence in their parenting skills and in building social connections with other families. A community action group was formed by participating parents to promote perinatal services in Raymond Terrace, with a focus on having input to council decisions in the development of policies, as well as parks and play areas.

Brian Morrison, Father Inclusive Practice Community Worker, developed a series of posters promoting the importance of fathers in the early years. The posters were provided to local health and community organisations, including preschools and John Hunter Hospital. “Dads Cards”, wallet-size cards that provide quick reference to support services, were also developed. Feedback from local dads and service providers was overwhelmingly positive.

Caravan Project

The DoCS Community Programs Officer, providing feedback to the Caravan Project team on our year's work, said, "I'd like to congratulate you on your success. I would particularly like to acknowledge the innovative and flexible methods of service delivery the Caravan Project have employed, in particular the employment of a support worker to offer intensive support to families who reside in Caravan Parks." These comments clearly acknowledged the innovation and dedication of the team.

Our ties with Freeman's Springs Caravan Park were strengthened when we installed a demountable building to store equipment and carry out activities such as a supported playgroup, after-school activity group and support group for adult residents. Initial funding for the rental of the demountable was provided by StreetSmart Australia; it was so successful that funds were committed to its continuation.

Following requests from parents and children, the homework club for primary school-aged children living at the park was re-established. Jacquie Howard, Child Specialist Worker, with the assistance of volunteers and University and TAFE students on placement, successfully ran the club at Cooranbong Public School. We know that 95% of the children from the park attended the club regularly.

In order to intensify our children's activities and support adult

residents we developed the skills and range of our specialist staff, training them in techniques such as art therapy. Several excursions extended the horizons of park children and led to better engagement with project activities. We took teenagers from Freemans to Port Stephens for a day at the toboggan park, and residents from Maitland Caravan Park went on a fishing trip.

An innovative concept that proved to be hugely successful with park residents was our Big Ideas Grants (BIG), which was trialled at two parks. Residents may apply for small grants (as little as \$50) to do something that improves park life. The initiative was inspired by Asset Based Community Development training undertaken by FAC staff. At one park, a group of parents redeveloped a neglected cement slab into a play area and cooked their favourite dishes, and a smorgasbord was provided for residents.

Sadly, we were called upon to provide support during crises again this year. In one event we supported the residents, park management and staff following a fatal shooting. The park manager welcomed our offer to arrange group gatherings and organisation of counselling from the local community health centre. Feedback from the manager and residents was amazingly positive; no other organisation provided this much-needed service.

In an average week we conducted four playgroups, three after-school programs, three other specialty children's groups and three adult social groups. We made over 350 home visits (with over 500 residents); referral reasons included assistance with parenting, budgeting, mental wellbeing and, in addition, the support worker gave personal support to over 35 individuals and families. We provided information and referral to residents, managers and other service providers plus provided practical support to residents and provided personalised support to those seeking extra assistance. We accomplished this by working in partnership with over 20 other service providers.

In August, a client satisfaction survey was distributed to residents of all parks we visit. When asked if the service provided by the Caravan Project helped, responses were overwhelmingly positive:

- 100% of respondents felt less isolated
- 95% able to get to know other residents better from attending activities
- 85% felt more confident accessing other services
- 70% felt more confident in their parenting
- 60% felt their relationship with their child/ren had improved
- 100% of the residents with children at school felt their children had improved at school.



Thinking BIG to make a big difference: our Big Ideas Grants are used by park residents to improve their lives in big ways with a small budget.

Disaster Planning for Caravan Parks

A staggering 70 per cent of the Hunter's caravan parks were affected by the June 2007 floods. Following an application to the Hunter Community Recovery Fund, we received funding to carry out a project titled "Disaster Planning in Park Communities". Despite some initial hesitation, the parks that participated were enthusiastic and committed.

An audit was completed, with 46 parks out of 56 in the Hunter responding (a response rate of 82 per cent). Of the completed surveys:

- 74 per cent of parks accepted permanent residents, but of these only 34 per cent accepted families with children
- 31 per cent accepted referrals from DoCS, and 34 per cent accepted referrals from NSW Housing.
- only 22 per cent had a disaster management plan
- 60 per cent had not known of the approaching storms at the time of the June floods
- 70 per cent had been affected by the storm (7 per cent were "badly affected" and 10 per cent "very badly affected").

Almost all participating parks are interested in being assisted to develop a disaster management plan. A social work student placed with the FAC was an integral part of a planning workshop.

Home-Start

In its nineteenth year, the Home-Start team of three part-time coordinators trained over 40 new volunteers and supported close to 80 families who have young children living in the Newcastle and east and north Lake Macquarie areas. There were many highlights to celebrate. Thirteen volunteers graduated from our second volunteer training course aimed specifically at preparing volunteers to support families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Pleasingly, the volunteer cohort came from a wide range of backgrounds themselves. This course was financially supported by Complete Office Supplies.

In order to take advantage of the higher numbers of volunteers at the beginning of each year, and to make the course accessible to more people, we offered two volunteer courses in different locations and on different days. One course was held in Belmont during the afternoon, while the other was in Edgeworth, beginning in the morning.



Our Home-Start Christmas Party is eagerly looked forward to by participating families, their children, and the volunteers. Always a great way for everyone to mix informally, this year's event saw Santa present gifts funded by the annual Home-Start Trivia Night.

We supported Newcastle Family Support Service to initiate a supported playgroup in Jesmond Shopping Centre. Home-Start and the FSS held an informal playgroup in the courtyard near the entry on Big W for six weeks. Following feedback and community consultation, a supported playgroup in a room (provided free of

Families Learning and Growing (FLAG) Project

Area Assistance funding provided by DoCS allowed the Program Coordinator and volunteers to trial positive approaches of support to families in the Hamilton South Department of Housing estate.

This second year of the three-year funding saw a consolidation of the doorstep reading initiative known as Rainbow Readers, based on a model that began in Cessnock. Over 20 families with preschoolers are read to by volunteers weekly—the love of and appreciation for books has been the clear result of this initiative.

Six volunteers graduated from the first FLAG / Rainbow Readers training course in December (two males and four females). Port Stephens Council's Raymond Terrace Library supported our FLAG Program Coordinator to deliver the inaugural training.

Another five volunteers completed the 10-week home-visiting training; three of these volunteers were estate residents who went onto promote community involvement in the estate by establishing regular community barbecues in which residents provide food, games and laughter. These barbecues still continue.

charge by centre management) was held each Wednesday morning.

At the end of the year we held an appreciation lunch to acknowledge the wonderful work of our volunteers. The lunch was attended by 50 volunteers, with catering provided by FAC staff. A children's Christmas party was also held, during which a volunteer dressed as Santa provided numeracy puzzles to 35 children.

Articles promoting the positive work of volunteer home-visiting were published in the state-wide magazine *Sydney's Child* and the Hunter-region publication *Sunny Days*. Two families supported by Home-Start volunteers were interviewed for *Sunny Days*, both commenting positively on the support they receive from Home-Start upon their arrival in Newcastle.

In September, 10 volunteers attended The Smith Family's Financial Literacy course and graduated with a Certificate I.

We know that we are making a difference for families and volunteers from the positive responses received in all evaluations, including comments from the DoCS Community Programs Officer who wrote, "I would like to acknowledge the collaborative partnerships you have developed in response to emerging needs of families you are working with ... the excellent training and continued support you provide to your volunteers."

Special Needs Unlimited Group (SNUG)

SNUG is an outreach program for geographically isolated families with a child with a severe disability, families who face the combined challenges of isolation and lack of infrastructure. Based on the Swedish Agrenska program, SNUG involves a five-day residential camp at Myuna Bay recreation facility in Lake Macquarie, near Newcastle. The camp allows families to access Newcastle-based specialist den-

tal, neurological and other vital specialised medical care that is not available in rural communities.

After three years of knock-backs by government funding agencies, the SNUG project finally secured funding from the Steve Waugh Foundation to carry out two trial programs, while Northern Oral Health Network committed \$10,000 towards the evaluation.

The camps will take place in January and March 2009.

The families attending the camps will be supported by a trained program coordinator and student volunteers. In December, 16 University of Newcastle undergraduate students from a range of disciplines completed a two-day induction in preparation of the forthcoming camps.



The Playtime program at Biraban School increased its profile and parental involvement through the dedication of the Playtime team.



Teaching & Learning

Boys in Schools

Teaching and Learning is a new area within the FAC. It was established to coordinate our teaching activities and to develop a platform for the dissemination of the research results and practice learning which flow from the myriad activities of the FAC.

Included in this area is the work of the Boys in Schools Program. The conclusion of the federally funded Success for Boys Professional Learning Program meant that consultancy support to schools decreased during 2008. However, this had been anticipated and prepared for, and the work of the Boys in Schools team over the past few years was able to be showcased in a variety of ways.

A great deal of work went into preparation for the Family & Community Strengths Conference, not only through paper presentations but also

with the development and finalisation of resources such as the *Focus on Fathers* CD. The CD gathered together the resources and assets from the Dads in Schools project, providing a central resource for schools that included templates on how to develop and sustainably maintain a register of dads' skills, how to create a dads' corner in the classroom, how to host a successful dads' breakfast, and lesson plans for children in K-6.

Externally, Teaching and Learning conducted popular, well-attended seminars for workers in the human services sector on strength-based practice and community development. FAC staff also conducted guest lectures for nursing, education and allied health students.

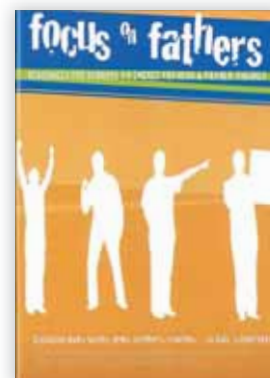
Victoria Clay and Deborah Hartman received internal

travel grants to attend, and make presentations at, the International Learning Conference in Chicago, USA, in June 2008. Both Victoria and Deborah had their articles published in the refereed journal from the conference, and presented refereed papers at the Australian Association for Research in Education in December at Brisbane.

The *Boys in Schools e-Bulletin* had its first year as a full, electronic-only publication. This is part of the rethinking of the way in which we disseminate our boys' educational resources, and will feed into the way we think about and present our postgraduate courses. The alignment between the *e-Bulletin's* themes and the postgraduate students' work created an opportunity for students to showcase their work; this worked very well, with all

published students reporting positive feedback.

"The Master of Educational Studies (specialising in Boys' Education) continued, with 104 students in 2008. The courses have undergone significant reviews and revisions, and a new course focusing on school-community partnerships will be delivered in Semester 2, 2009.



PlayTime

The PlayTime program is progressing well at Biraban Public School. Two playgroups were established in partnership with other local service providers. Playgroups were well attended, averaging 10 families each session. The after-school family activities had a patchy response, and this strategy will be rethought for 2009.

The team is also rethinking the timing and format for the nutrition information sessions. We are trialling morning presentations to coincide with school assemblies. The Heart Foundation offers great support for this activity. The first

progress report was submitted to the Department of Health and Ageing. The research question arising from the project will address the impact on project activities on relationships between the school, the community and families.

An ethics application was prepared, and the research component will be conducted through 2009. John Andriunas is also assisting the school with a focus-on-fathers component which has begun this term.

Teaching

This year FAC staff taught or contributed to numerous graduate and postgraduate courses:

- Kerrell Bourne taught “Primary Teaching Course Families, Schools and Communities”, which focuses on strength-based school–community engagement.
- Graeme Stuart completed teaching of “Capacity building in the human services”; there were 13 students, including two students from Africa and a woman working in Afghanistan.
- Penny Crofts and Graeme Stuart jointly taught a postgraduate distance course in the Master of Social Science “Current Developments in Human Services”.
- Victoria Clay taught seven postgraduate courses in “Boys Education”.

Two on-line courses were run through Health Sciences: “Community Engagement : Cross-disciplinary perspectives” and “Working with Men and Boys in Human Services”. The courses are general electives and have a diverse enrolment, including students from the schools of education, occupational therapy, speech therapy, physiotherapy and radiation therapy. Student feedback was excellent, showing that students of the Community Engagement course found it to be enlightening and thought provoking, as well as being relevant to their future careers. Of the 24 responses (68.6 per cent response rate) to a survey of students:



Many of our staff are engaged in teaching or presentations; Here Richard Fletcher opens an inter-agency seminar on fathers at the Family & Community Strengths conference.

- 87.5 per cent agreed or strongly agreed that “I can see how community engagement could be relevant to my work”
- 87.5 per cent agreed or strongly agreed that “I am learning a lot from this course”
- 79.2 per cent agreed or strongly agreed that “I am enjoying the course”
- 75 per cent agreed or strongly agreed that “I would recommend this course to my friends”.

Student placements

The FAC has a long tradition of improving students’ learning experience by offering placements to enhance their work through integrated learning. A final-year health science student from Northern Arizona State University undertook a 10-week placement. She was the driving force behind supporting a group of 20 parents securing funds to be trained in senior first aid. The parents had attended the baby first-aid information session conducted within the supported playgroup.

Eight students, several from the University of Newcastle, had placements in FAC Community Programs in 2008. Disciplines and institutions included Social Work (three students), Occupational Therapy (one), Hunter Institute of Technology TAFE–Community Welfare (two), University of Northern Arizona–Community Health (one) and Charles Stuart University–combined Nursing / Early Education Teaching (one).



Students placed with the FAC are expected to get involved! Sarah (Social Work above) and Robin (Nursing/Education below) were two of our students who worked with the Caravan Project in 2008.

Inter-agency work

We work with many, many agencies and departments at all levels of government, and so nurturing links and relationships within and between them is a job we take seriously. Dee Brooks facilitated a forum attended by DoCS’ “Better Futures” Space Project workers, and also met with Newcastle Youth Service to promote the work of the FAC. Dee also pre-

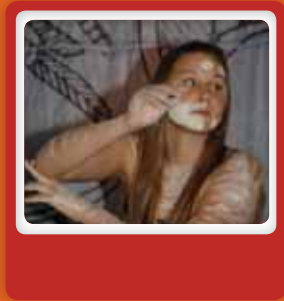
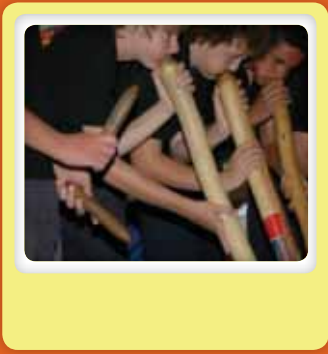
sented on ABCD to a Home-Start volunteer preparation course.

Penny Crofts and Victoria Clay attended a two-day workshop of leading organisations in Australia and New Zealand involved in strength-based training. The workshop was jointly convened by St Luke’s Bendigo and Light-house Resources, Brisbane,

and was held in Brisbane. The meeting developed a clearer understanding of key concepts, principles, practices and standards that should be common to strength-based training.

Graeme Stuart, Dee Brooks, Gus Eddy and Kathy Lumsdaine attended an ABCD think-tank for Port Stephens Council.





Indigenous Program

Demands for involvement in Indigenous programs continued to grow, stretching our workforce across several different projects.

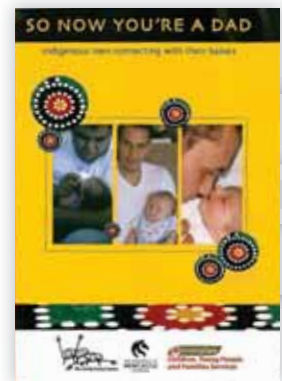
Craig Hammond, Trent Davidson and Graeme Stuart ran the first Brothers Inside workshop at St Heliers Correctional Centre. Brothers Inside supports Indigenous inmates to explore their experiences as fathers in order to obtain a greater awareness of the needs of incarcerated Indigenous fathers and to trial the workshops in a prison setting. The program highlights the importance of fathers in children's lives; explores the roles the participants play as fathers (both in and out of prison) and ways in which they could strengthen these roles; and identifies ways in which the participants can strengthen their connections with their children. Eleven inmates completed the workshop and were very positive about its outcomes.

Craig worked closely with two organisations. A series of *Fathers Tip Sheets* were drafted for SNAICC, the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care. Later in the year, discussions were held with World Vision to evaluate an innovative early childhood training program for early childhood workers and parents in four Warlpiri communities in the Northern Territory. Also, as part of his links with the Fathers program, a work plan was established for Craig's involvement in the Dubbo Interrelate research project.

Craig produced, directed and created a DVD resource, *So Now You're A Dad*, in conjunction with UnitingCare Burnside. The DVD, aimed at first-time Indigenous fathers, showed a series of

new fathers discussing their thoughts, excitement, fears and hopes. Among those involved was Jade North, captain of the premiership-winning Newcastle Jets football club.

At the annual Faculty of Health dinner, Craig was presented with the Award for Outstanding Achievement. The award recognised Craig's ability to develop relationships and partnerships with a wide range



Craig Hammond won the Faculty of Health's Award for Outstanding Achievement.

of organisations and communities, work that culminated in the inaugural Indigenous Family and Community Strengths conference.

DREAM Team

design resources events and marketing

In 2007 a strategic direction was set for the Design, Resources, Events And Marketing (DREAM) Team, one that would reflect our clients' increased demand for events, training and conferences.

The year began with the combined fifth Family and Community Strengths and inaugural Indigenous Family and Community Strengths conferences in April. Any conference requires a huge amount of planning and preparation; this dual conference—with one overlapping day—demanded a massive effort from our small team. The result was a spectacular success, particularly for the Indigenous component. Several FAC staff made presentations, including Gaye Sheather and the C4C Raymond Terrace and Karuah team; Gus Eddy on Learning Together about Partnerships; Gaye Sheather and Deaynne Bourke on child-friendly communities; and Victoria Clay on using strength-based tools.

At the conference dinner the FAC Award for Outstanding Contribution to the Australian Community was presented to the Rev. Tim Costello, while the FAC Award for Outstanding Contribution to the Hunter Community was presented jointly to Delece Manton and Michelle Perry. Professor John DeFrain, from the University of Nebraska, presented the international Herb Lindgren Award for Strengthening Families to Judi Geggie and the FAC (see page 2).

Following the conferences 22 people took part in an Inland Australian Study Tour, organised by the DREAM Team, to central Australia. Visits to Indigenous communities allowed local leaders to speak on culture and industries, and the impact of the Australian Government's Emergency Response ("the Intervention").

A second conference, the inaugural ABCD Asia Pacific Conference, took place during the first week of December 2008, and drew delegates from six nations. Keynote speaker Prof. Jody Kretzmann also worked with Community Development and Corporate Partnerships, School of Nursing and the School of Education in Port Macquarie on ways to strengthen the University's relationship to its local community.



The University invited the FAC to be its representative at the Hunter Means Innovation community engagement festival. Judi Geggie met with business and community leaders, such as Newcastle Lord Mayor John Tate.



Prof. Nick Saunders (left) presents the Rev. Tim Costello with the FAC Award for Outstanding Contribution to the Australian Community at the fifth Family & Community Strengths conference.

The PVC Health invited the FAC to represent the University at the Hunter Means Innovation Festival. At a cocktail reception at City Hall we joined forces with the Special Education Centre to showcase the University's engagement in the community. A resource, simply titled *Local Directory*, was disseminated to local service providers in Raymond Terrace and Karuah as part of the C4C Pharmacy subproject. A one-page evaluation sheet was also included for stakeholders.

An agreement was finalised with Freerk Ykema, founder of the Rock & Water Program, for the FAC to take over responsibility for the delivery of all Rock & Water training in Australia (with the exception of WA) and New Zealand from 2011. This will have a large impact on workload and income in the coming year and beyond.

With the focus on conferences and events, our published output was slightly down. A CD of resources for schools wishing to better engage dads, *Focus on Fathers: Resources for schools to engage fathers and father-figures*, was created by the Fathers in Communities subproject.

So Now You're a Dad: Indigenous men connecting with their babies was produced by Craig Hammond of the FAC's Indigenous Program. This inspiring DVD featured Indigenous dads from the Hunter Valley sharing their thoughts on what it means to them to connect with their babies. Funded by UnitingCare Burnside, the DVD was launched at the Indigenous Family and Community Strengths conference.



The Eye Spy gallery, one of the many add-on features that make FAC conferences into special events, showcased family and community strengths from a variety of social and cultural backgrounds.

The Future

looking ahead



As we look forward to 2009 the FAC team is planning to increase activities in research, dissemination, teaching and community programs.

The research team will strengthen the work in their three areas of focus: fathers and family; schools and community; and strength-based practice.

The DREAM Team's events area will undertake additional tours, such as the new Drum Beat program in three states and ABCD in six states, while maintaining the existing Australian tours of Rock and Water and Results-Based Accountability. The FAC, in partnership with SNAICC, will conduct the 2nd National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Family and Community Strengths Conference in December at the University of Newcastle.



Academics will develop more undergraduate and postgraduate programs including working with a number of international universities to develop the International Postgraduate Course in International Studies in Family and Community.

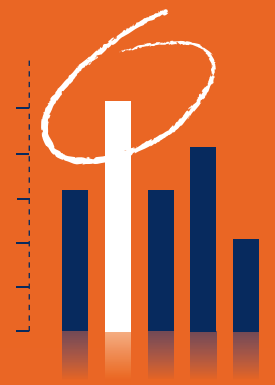
Community programs are seeking funding to operationalise the SNUG model with ongoing funding from The Steve Waugh Foundation and will seek funding for other community initiatives when appropriate funding packages become available.

2009 will be a dynamic year where the activities are in line with the strategic priorities of the University and contribute to the purpose of the FAC: to improve policy and practice in family and community services.



Expect to see more conference delegates, such as these attendees at the December ABCD conference, at the University in 2009.

Governance & Centre culture



Centre culture

- One of our quarterly full staff meetings was addressed by Mike Calford, Pro Vice Chancellor of Faculty of Health. The discussion focused on the University's future directions and ways in which the University could benefit from the FAC's outstanding record of community engagement.
- A restructure of our management and research activities allowed managers to reduce their administrative commitments and focus on research.
- Our annual Home-Start Trivia Night raised \$3,700.00 to support our volunteer training program.
- Our annual staff retreat was held at Port Stephens, allowing staff members to communicate and discuss research, teaching and practice directions for the coming year.



Our annual staff retreat is an opportunity to share, reflect, evaluate—and have fun!

Our Supporters

The Family Action Centre was established in 1986 through funding from the Bernard Van Leer Foundation. We receive support and funding from several sources, principally the Australian Government's Department of Families, Community Services, Housing and Indigenous Affairs and the NSW Government's Department of Community Services. The University of Newcastle provides in-kind support, which makes our development possible.

Our patrons are Ms Geraldine Doogue and Dr John Irvine. We receive support and strategic direction from an Advisory Board made up of representatives from academia, community services and our own staff. During 2008 the FAC Advisory Board underwent a number of changes. At the February 2008 meeting Phil Foreman and Margaret McMillan tendered their resignations, and we welcomed Jenny Cameron and Jenny Gore. In May Nancy O'Connor resigned, and Judith Scott officially replaced Margaret

McMillan as the Faculty of Health's representative. Finally, in December 2008 John Mather tendered his resignation, with a replacement to be appointed by the Department of Education and Training in early 2009. The full list of Board members, as at December 2008, was:

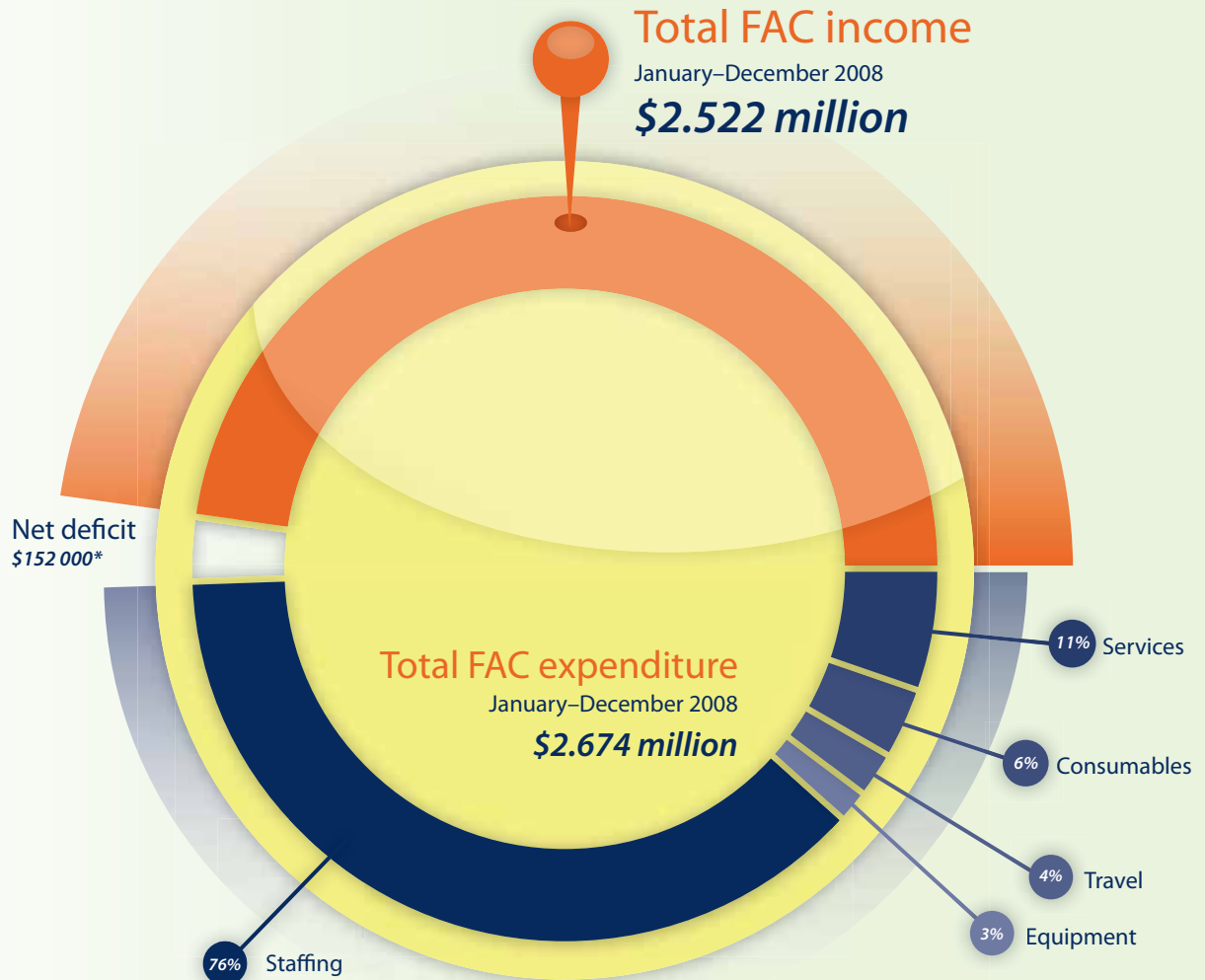
- Prof. Leonie Ashman
- Assoc. Prof. Jenny Cameron
- Prof. Jenny Gore
- Ms Deborah Hartman
- Prof. Diana Keatinge
- Prof. John Maynard
- Mr Bill Robertson
- Prof. Judith Scott



We bade a sad farewell to FAC Board member Nancy O'Connor. Nancy retired in 2008 after 20 years of loyal and valued service.

The FAC was successfully awarded \$1.210 million in new grants in 2008

This was another successful year for the Family Action Centre. Successful grants included the following: Special Needs Unlimited Group (Steve Waugh Foundation) for two trials and an evaluation; PlayTime (Australian Government's Department of Health and Ageing); Disaster Planning in Park Communities (Hunter Recovery Fund); a cluster of grants for the Interrelate Family Centres (Department of Family, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs). Several equity, early career, travel, and research grants were also received from within the University.



*Net deficit offset by \$380,000 opening balance in hand.

The following abbreviations appear in this report:

ABCD	asset-based community development
BIG	Big Ideas Grants
BRICK	Building Resilience in Cooranbong Kids
C4C	Communities for Children
CALD	culturally and linguistically diverse
DoCS	NSW Government Department of Community Services
FAC	Family Action Centre
FaHCSIA	Australian Government Department of Family, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
FLAG	Families Learning and Growing
FRC	Family Relationship Centre
FSS	Family Support Services
SBP	strength-based practice
SNAICC	Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Childcare Centres
SMILING	Sharing the Magic in Learning about Infant and Newborn Growth
SNUG	Special Needs Unlimited Group



The Family Action Centre maintained 25 full-time equivalent positions across 40 employees in 2008.



The Family Action Centre

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT

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