HOBSONS BAY CITY COUNCIL

MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTH SERVICE (MCHS)

WORKING WITH HOMELESS FAMILIES:
A PARTNERSHIP APPROACH
Issues leading to Initiative – Working with Homeless Families

- **Families with children are the fastest growing group among Australia’s Homeless**
  (Mission Australia 2000)

- In 2002-2003 - 19,850 children accompanied a parent or guardian into accommodation services in Victoria

- 42% of these children were aged 0-4 years, with 43% aged 5-12 years
  (SAAP 2004)
Strengthening Interagency Relationships

In 2005 the MCHS organised a forum to:

“strengthen the service’s relationship and actively work in partnership with local agencies working with homeless families in caravan parks and Supported Accommodation Assistance Programs (SAAP)”

There was good attendance by a number of local services working with homeless families
Outcome of forum

On going initiatives that developed from this forum included:

- Improved liaison between the MCHS and local services – “Buddy system”
- Involvement in Bay West Young Parent Group
- Involvement in Half Moon Caravan Park Project
Bay West Young Parent group
(15 – 25 age group)

Why a Young Parent Group?

• Research suggests that the new parent group service model does not reach vulnerable and isolated families (DHS 2004 First time Parent Group Resource & Facilitation Guide for M&CH Nurses)

• Participation by young marginalized mothers is low in mainstream groups - barriers include poverty, social isolation, health problems, family violence, history of protective services involvement, low self esteem, depression
What we know from research

- Teenage parents are more likely to be single women, smokers & socio economically disadvantaged
- Difficulties within families - having a number of dysfunctional family traits, e.g. Abandonment, physical and substance abuse
- Problematic peer relationships and poor interpersonal communication skills
- Experience high levels of distress, substance abuse & domestic violence
- Have spent periods of their life with child protection involvement

What we know from research
Mental Health Issues

- Adolescent mothers have a greater risk of developing depression
- Depression deters young mothers from engaging with health – promoting behaviours, both for themselves & their children
- Self esteem is related significantly to parenting skills and role expectations
- Loneliness is a more prevalent and serious problem in adolescence. This has also been reported by those suffering from postpartum depression (Skinner & Hickey 2003)
Issues for Children with depressed Mothers

- Are more likely to have problems with:
  - Sleep disorders
  - Accidents
  - Growth failure
  - Psychosomatic complaints
- Mothers who display little affection & lack of attachment towards their toddler
- Sadness
- Delayed language development
- Engage in less exploratory behaviour (Field 2000)
Homeless Experience for Teenage Parents

- Impact on both generations – parents & child
- Disassociation from support networks
- Series of refuge experiences
- Homeless peer group
- Drug & alcohol issues
- Behavioural problems
- Mental Health Illness
- Forensic/correctional backgrounds
Issues for Children – Newborn to 5 years who have experienced homelessness

• Socially – range from withdrawal from social situation to attention seeking behaviours, attaching to any adult indiscriminately
• Emotionally – experienced violent domestic situations, multiple moves, chaotic life style
• Physical – disturbed sleep, not enough/ healthy food to eat – delayed growth and development
• Intellectual – lack of opportunity to experience stable life style – reading books, delayed language
Bay West Young Mothers Group: A Partnership Approach

Who is involved and how?

• Melbourne City Mission – Young Pregnant & Parenting Program (YAPP)
• Bay West Youth Housing Group
• Hobson's Bay MCHS
• “Outlets” Co-op (Neighborhood House) Newport
How was it Implemented?

- $4,000 funding though Hobson's’ Bay City Council’s Local Community Grants Program in 2005
- The four agencies involved worked collaboratively on the project development brief and project steering committee group.
- Active participation in - recruitment, sustaining group, program planning and facilitation
Bay West Young Mum’s Group – Project Aims

The Young Mum’s group offers these benefits:
• Regular meetings in a safe and accessible location
• Positive social interaction
• Support networks, including peer support
• Parenting education to increase parenting skills and increase positive bonds/attachment
• Health promotion and education
• Opportunities for education, training and employment pathways
• Links and pathways to mainstream services
Program Activities

- A variety of activities were provided under the following categories:
  - Social
  - Parenting skills
  - Maternal Health
  - Education, Training and Employment Pathways
Successes and Achievements

Successes and achievements:
• Over 13 families and 15 children attended
• Met regularly - Parents felt accepted and supported, both parents and children made friends
• All participants attempted new things and experienced achievements
• Desire to continue the group
• Working in partnership with four unique organizations enhanced working capacity to assist families through shared care
Sustainability – Bay West Young Mothers Group

• Successful new funding received earlier this year from Family-Community Services Local Answers Round 3 Community Strengthening Strategy Grants - $50,000.

• This funding will support a permanent group facilitator, two existing and two new groups in the Western Metropolitan Region.
Young Mum and Son

- Mother encouraged to come by peers
- Often drug affected and depressed
- Very little eye contact or conversation with son or facilitators
- Kept coming
- Took part in some activities
- Gradually responded to group
- Joined First Aid group & at same time housing found
- Took part actively in discussions with group
- Young son came into group chatting to mother and others in group
- Mum & son took part in activities e.g. Making Mothers Day card
Half Moon Caravan Park Project

• Lack of supported crisis accommodation options means that there are more individuals and families with complex needs, in housing crisis, residing in caravan parks, such as the Half Moon Park, Brooklyn

• Council has been working closely with local services and the caravan park operator to improve the health and wellbeing of residents
Challenges in working with families

- Complex health and social needs
- Reluctant to engage with services – concerned about Protective Services
- Families are transient and difficult to contact
- Not linked in with kindergartens or schools
Half Moon Caravan Park Community Strengthening Project

- Partnership between Council and Salvation Army and strong linkages with other services. Received Community Support fund grant from DVC
- Revitalised shop front on park’s perimeter - now serves as resource centre for program and service delivery. Activities include
  - Homework and Job Club
  - Health promotion activities eg Health and Well Being Day for residents held in June 2006
Initiatives for Families

• Fortnightly outreach service by Maternal and Child Health in partnership with RDNS Homeless Persons Program
• Weekly playgroup supported by Council’s Family Resource and Development Officer and Salvation Army
• Monthly immunization outreach service
• Linkages with community health paediatric allied health services
“Bridging the generation gap”
A combined Playgroup day for Young and Old

- A joint activity day initiated by Newport M&CH Centre, Bay West Young Mum’s Group & Hobson’s Bay City Council -Adult Day Activity Support Services (ADASS) @ Sloan House
- The Newport M&CH centre is co-located with ADASS @ Sloan House
“Bridging the generation gap”
A combined Playgroup day for Young and Old

• This day evolved to bring seniors, young mum’s, families and children together.

• “Intergenerational activities help bridge the generation gap, reconnects communities and enhances socialization, development and health for all involved”
Who attended

- Bay West Young Parent Group & staff
- The Current Newport M&CH New Parent Group
- A past Newport M&CH New Parent Group who now meet independently of the centre as a play group
- Half Moon Caravan Park Play group
- Seniors from ADASS & staff
- The Mobile Animal Farm
- Face Painters
A Combined Playgroup Day