

Speech Pathology: Improved Access for Children from Vulnerable Families Project

Julie Merryfull, Speech Pathology Project Officer

June 2005 - June 2006

Overview of Project

Target Group

- Children attending Families First Supported Playgroups in the Shellharbour Local Government Area
- Children attending Noogaleek Children's Centre and Winnanggay Preschool
- Children in the Shellharbour LGA who have been identified as requiring Transition to School assistance, but who are not accessing prior to school services
- Parents and families of the above children
- Staff at Supported Playgroups, Aboriginal Preschools, and referring agencies

Time Frame

The project was originally funded by Families First for 8 hours per week of speech pathology service, from July 2005 to April 2006.

Additional funding was provided to enable extension of the project until June 2006.

Rationale

This project was proposed by the Speech Pathology Project Steering Committee and approved and funded by *Families First* in direct response to the recommendations of a previous *Families First* funded project – **Speech Pathology: Pilot Partnership with Supported Playgroups and Aboriginal Pre-schools.**¹

There is a need for effective partnerships between government stakeholders and the community with a strong emphasis on a whole-of-government approach to service provision. Meaningful and substantive collaboration is required to inform planning, reporting, service delivery and budgeting.²

In line with this policy mandate, this project aimed to facilitate the trial of a cooperative approach to the provision of speech pathology services to the target group.

¹ Julie Merryfull, Speech Pathologist, Families First and South Eastern Sydney Illawarra Area Health Service. **June 2005**

² NSW Premier's Department, 1998

Collaborative planning and consultation between educators and speech pathologists has been found to be effective in treating and managing communication difficulties because it bases the service within the environment in which the child is experiencing difficulties, it involves a shared responsibility for the outcomes identified for the child, and it encourages knowledge of and respect for team members' roles and expertise.³ Providing speech pathology services directly to children, families and staff within playgroups and prior to school services provides a variety of service delivery options and as a result facilitates intervention with children in families who may not otherwise access centralised services because of differences in cultural background,⁴ or because of higher than average needs for care.

Feedback gained from families and staff in playgroups and key non-government organisations during the *Speech Pathology Pilot Project*⁵ suggested that South Eastern Sydney Illawarra Area Health Service (SESAHS) speech pathology and other services may not provide enough flexibility in options for service delivery, and do not always have effective means of providing feedback about children's progress and supporting communication between services. By providing intervention within the context of the playgroup or prior to school service speech pathologists are able to develop closer relationships with supporting staff, and opportunities for providing education and developing strategies for intervention are increased.

Aims

This project planned to offer a range of services aimed at addressing the needs of the children, families and staff in the target group, as determined by the speech pathologist and in consultation with the staff and families themselves. These included

- in-services and parent/staff education,
- screening and assessment of targeted children
- group therapy activities
- planning and home/pre-school programming.

The project also aimed to continue the development of relationships with individuals, families and organisations in the Aboriginal community, and with significant non-government agencies, with a strong emphasis on collaboration and empowerment. This was an identified positive outcome of the preceding *Speech Pathology Pilot project*.

Expected Outcomes

Expected outcomes of the project included

- improved access to speech pathology services for families in the target group
- improved education of staff and parents about speech and language development and treatment
- improved Transition to School outcomes for children in the target group
- strengthening of collaboration between staff in playgroups, prior to school services, referring agencies and SESAHS staff

³ Elksnin, 1997; Hoylnadn, 1999

⁴ **Aboriginal Childrens Project: Access to Allied Health Services at Kids Cottage.** Karol Petrovska, Occupational Therapist, South Eastern Sydney Illawarra Area Health Service. **January 2006**

⁵ **Speech Pathology: Pilot Partnership with Supported Playgroups and Aboriginal Pre-schools.** Julie Merryfull, Speech Pathologist, Families First and South Eastern Sydney Illawarra Area Health Service. **June 2005**

- continuing the sharing of information with SESIAHS speech pathologists and other staff about issues affecting access for vulnerable families, and about access and cultural issues relating specifically to Aboriginal families
- continuing development and consolidation of resources appropriate for Aboriginal families and families in supported playgroups

It was expected that these and other outcomes from the project would provide useful information that can be applied across SESIAHS services.

Description of Service Delivery Model

The speech pathology service delivery model was based on the model trialled in the preceding *Speech Pathology Pilot Project*.

Service to Supported Playgroups

Over a 12 month period, the speech pathology project officer made a total of 41 visits to 14 Supported Playgroups. These included mainstream playgroups co-ordinated by Barnardos, Illawarra Childrens Services (ICS), Illawarra Multi-cultural Services, Baptist Community Services (BCS); the COOINDA Aboriginal specific playgroups co-ordinated by the Illawarra Childrens Resource Unit (ICRU), and the Aboriginal specific playgroup coordinated by Barnardos/ICS.

Playgroup visits were scheduled according to need (for staff/parent education, or screening/group intervention for children) as determined jointly by the speech pathologist and playgroup co-ordinators.

OUTCOMES

Some playgroups required only one visit – because of low turnover of families, or because the families in the playgroup were not assessed to be in need of intervention/education. Several playgroups had 5 or 6 visits scheduled.

Over the course of the 12 month project

- A total of 51 children were screened by the speech pathologist for potential speech and language difficulties at the request of parents or playgroup staff.
- Education about speech and language development, speech and language difficulties, and ideas for working on speech and language skills was provided to parents and playgroup staff during each playgroup visit.
- 18 children and their parents were individually targeted for intervention/education by the speech pathologist. (NB Intervention occurred within the group setting, but children identified as needing specific help were focused on particularly)
- 11 children identified or targeted at playgroup attended hospital or CAITs speech pathology clinics for further follow-up on referral by the speech pathologist
- 6 children were referred for hearing tests at Kids Cottage or the Illawarra Child Development Centre
- 11 referrals were made for other follow up including referral to occupational therapy, physiotherapy, psychology, private speech pathology, Early Intervention Units, other specialists (eg paediatrician),
- 7 children had follow-up at preschool (for assessment or preschool programming)

Transition to School Intervention/Noogaleek and Winnanggay

The original *Families First Pilot Project* aimed to provide some outreach speech pathology service to children attending Aboriginal pre-schools (Noogaleek and Winnanggay). It was recommended that in this project the speech pathologist would continue to provide speech pathology outreach services to Aboriginal pre-schools, by providing speech and language assessments for children who had been targeted for Transition to School assistance by the pre-school staff.

OUTCOMES

The speech pathologist gave speech and language assessments to 12 children at Noogaleek and Winnanggay, and provided reports and ideas for programming for parents and for the primary schools the children will be attending in 2007. The pre-school teachers will continue to provide feedback to the speech pathologist about the children targeted for Transition to School in 2007 as part of the re-funded *Families First Transition to School Koori Kids Pilot Project*.⁶

Continuing Collaboration and Development of Partnerships and Sharing of Information

A significant outcome of the original *Speech Pathology Pilot Project* was the development or enhancement of partnerships between SESIAHS speech pathologists and other SESIAHS staff; and supported playgroups' auspicing agencies, other non-government organisations, Aboriginal specific agencies, staff at Aboriginal preschools, and families in the Aboriginal community. The original **Transition to School Koori Kids Pilot Project**⁷ identified the value for Aboriginal families of liaison and collaboration between services.

OUTCOMES

During this project the speech pathologist aimed to continue to support liaison between key services involved with the target families by

- Attending Aboriginal Child Youth and Family Strategy meetings and distributing meeting minutes to SESIAHS speech pathologists and other staff in CAITs
- Continuing active involvement with the 'Transition to School for Aboriginal Children' committee, and sharing of information with other SESIAHS staff
- Liaison and exchange of information with Aboriginal specific services and members of the Aboriginal community, and representatives from the education department at the '*Transition to School for Aboriginal Children forum*' (Dapto Ribbonwood Centre. September 2005)
- Distributing relevant Aboriginal specific information received from various sources to SESIAHS speech pathologists and other staff
- Developing and distributing a *Families First Supported Playgroups* contact information flyer, and distributing general information about Families First

⁶ Manola Rocchi-Schembri, BA Teacher E/C Edu.Sup/Teacher Noogalekk Children's Centre. **2006/2007**

⁷ Manola Rocchi-Schembri, BA Teacher E/C Edu.Sup/Teacher Noogalekk Children's Centre. **2006**

projects. (Feedback from Child Assessment and Intervention Teams (CAITs) staff and SESIAHS speech pathologists indicated that this was a very useful way of providing information about *Families First* Supported Playgroups and other services

- Giving a presentation of the *Speech Pathology Pilot Project*, and providing updates on the progress of this project to SESIAHS speech pathologists and other staff at appropriate meetings
- Providing assistance and consultation, and sharing resources and information with the speech pathologist involved in the Shoalhaven extension of the *Speech Pathology Pilot Project*⁸
- Participating in a parent education workshop by giving a talk and providing information on speech and language development and disorders to parents at Noogaleek and Winnanggay
- Continuing to follow-up on developments in cultural awareness training for SESIAHS speech pathologists and other staff

Development and consolidation of resources

This project allowed for some time to be allocated to continuing development or production of resources that are culturally appropriate for Aboriginal children and families, or resources that may assist with referral or exchange of information between key services, including

- Continuing development and preparation for printing of the “Now I Can Talk” book
- Redesign and distribution to pre-schools, schools, supported playgroups and Aboriginal specific services of a speech pathology pamphlet and speech pathology handouts which are more culturally appropriate for Aboriginal families
- Development of speech pathology assessment summary template for assessments of children at Noogaleek and Winnanggay
- Development and distribution of a ‘*Supported Playgroups Resource Kit*’ which includes appropriate referral forms and information on SESIAHS speech pathology and other services, and basic information for playgroup parents and staff on speech and language development and difficulties, and speech and language stimulation ideas

⁸ **Families First Shoalhaven Speech Pathology Project.** Lisa Schmierer, Speech Pathologist, Shoalhaven District Memorial Hospital. **June 2006**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to once again express my thanks to the professionals, community members, parents and children in the following groups and organisations. Their feedback, suggestions and support were essential and most valuable to this project.

Illawarra Children's Resource Unit (Barrack Heights and APR) COINDA Supported Playgroups

Baptist Community Services (Barrack Heights, Warilla PS, Warilla North PS, Mt Warrigal PS) Supported Playgroups

Barnardos/Illawarra Children's Services (Bellambi, POPPY, Koonawarra (Aboriginal specific), Berkeley, West Dapto, Warrawong) Supported Playgroups

Illawarra Migrant Services (Spanish, Multicultural) Supported Playgroups

Barnardos/SUPPs Supported Playgroup

Noogaleek Children's Centre and Winnanggay Pre-school

I would also like to thank the ***Speech Pathology: Improved Access for Children From Vulnerable Families Project*** steering committee – Trish Bradd, Kay Ryan, Sophie Egan, and Jenny Claridge - for their guidance and support.
