Caring Communities Program - Project Overview/Main Messages

Organisation: Wide Bay Division of General Practice

Name of Project: Bundaberg Palliative Access Link (PAL) Project

Length of Project: From 1 April 2003 to 30 May 2004

Project Summary:

Enhance community awareness of the role and benefits of palliative care through a network of work, school and community-based individuals serving as Palliative Access Links (PALs) to provide information about and linkage to Palliative Care services.

Project Objectives:

- To improve the knowledge and skills of families, carers and community groups so they can better support relatives, loved ones or individuals within the community who are dying, and work optimally through their bereavement.
- To enhance community awareness of the role and benefits of palliative care in meeting the needs of people who are dying and their families.

Project Activities:

1. Establish steering committee for project to provide strategic advice and information.
2. Identify local services, activities and supports available for patients who are dying and their families and carers, to form the basis of PALs resources.
3. Develop evaluation framework for measuring project outcomes.
4. Identify baseline of community awareness of palliative care using appropriate aspects of Center to Advance Palliative Care Community Yardstick and infrastructures Assessment tool (http://www.capc.org/content/27/?words=community+yardstick)
5. Assess potential risks of the project. (Especially to PALs as individuals and to community attitudes to palliative care generally).
6. Develop PALs information kits and other resources.
7. Develop PALs training program.
8. Recruit, train and resource a network of work, school and community-based individuals to serve as PALs.
9. Develop mechanisms for ongoing support and resourcing of PALS.
10. Conduct evaluation.

Main Messages

The PALs Project has met the following objectives of the Caring Communities Program:

- To improve the knowledge and skills of families, carers and community groups so they can better support relatives, loved ones or individuals within the community who are dying, and work optimally through their bereavement.
- To enhance community awareness of the role and benefits of palliative care in meeting the needs of people who are dying and their families.

What we did

- Recruited, trained and supported 40 PALs volunteers to act as ambassadors for palliative care. PALs act as contact points, or links, for information about a range of services that people who are dying, their families, carers and members of the community may find helpful, comforting or necessary.

What has been learned?

- The inclusion of a multi-disciplinary steering committee to provide advice and guidance to the PALs Project has been necessary to cover a wide range of information and knowledge about palliative care and help form appropriate linkages to the larger community palliative network.
- The project's administrative resources developed needed to be user friendly and structured in a synchronised manner as it progressed. This has been a key factor in enabling the project to be embryonic.
- Volunteers have been able to operate in an autonomous manner without encumbering restrictions mainly due to the quality of the information / resources, training and ongoing education and support provided.
- Volunteers have played a key role in the course of the project's developments and success with their contributions and valuable input to influence the future direction of the project. This has enveloped a message of community ownership.

What is useful to other projects/communities?

- Currently the WBDGP has submitted a proposal to produce a generic "Resource Training Package" for modification and implementation by other interested parties to utilise.
- This will ensure the unnecessary duplication of information and resources required to set up a new project site.
- The PALs Project has also improved the capacity of the community by ensuring a skilled, supported and well connected group of volunteers.
- The PALs Project Model in itself can be adapted to other health related areas with the added benefits of ensuring an improved flow of information between health care providers, their networks and the community.

What have been the benefits of disseminating information about this project?

- The dissemination of material relevant to the PALs Project has proceeded via various media outlets and sources. Promotional flyers, in lay terms, have been distributed to various business places to be viewed by their customers.
- The main benefits of dissemination have come via contact with community groups and especially small presentations, by the project staff, have given the project an identity.

What needs to happen in order to sustain the key achievements of this project?

A baseline amount of funding is required on an ongoing basis to cover volunteer costs and project management and momentum.