Caring Communities Program – Project Overview/Main Messages

Organisation: Mt Olivet Community Services

Name of Project: Community Bereavement Support Service for Children, Adolescents and their Families

Length of Project: 2 years

Project Summary:
Establishment of a child bereavement centre which will provide counselling and support to grieving children, adolescents and their families. This centre will also support and provide consultancy to school communities who have close contact with the child. Support will be offered pre and post death. Need for such a centre was identified in a study conducted by University of Queensland in 2001. This study identified a lack of bereavement support for children and adolescents in the Brisbane area.

This project will be in partnership with the key palliative care/oncology providers in Brisbane. They include Princess Alexandra Hospital, Prince Charles Hospital, Royal Brisbane Hospital, Mater Hospital, Wesley Hospital and Karuna Hospice Service.

The partners will participate in an advisory group and be involved in the ongoing networking and professional development. Referrals to the proposed centre will be received from partners and other agencies/services.

Project Objectives:
1. To provide accessible counselling and support to grieving children, adolescents and their families.

2. To raise awareness in the wider community (particularly schools) regarding the needs of grieving children and adolescents prior to and after death in the family.

3. To develop and maintain a network of Social Workers and Counsellors within the Brisbane area who work in palliative care and associated services.

Project Activities:
1. Appoint an experienced and qualified counsellor, administration officer and project officer.

2. Establish the physical environment for the bereavement centre and purchase counselling resources (video's, sand trays, miniature animals, strength cards, puppets etc).

3. Develop protocols, assessment and intake procedures, fee scales, ground rules for the centre, filing systems, confidentiality, tiered referral system, hours of operation, eligibility.

4. Develop programs for support groups.

5. Recruit, train, support and provide supervision for volunteers associated with the service.

6. Provide individual counselling for children, adolescents and parents. I.e. Centre or home.

7. Conduct support groups for children, adolescents and families (parent, caregiver, grandparent).

8. Develop supportive material for grieving families, children and for those who grieve.

9. Provide consultancy to schools, school counsellors/guidance officers, teachers and admin staff.

10. Apply for ongoing funding and corporate sponsorship.

Main Messages

The Children's and Young People's Bereavement Centre project set out to:

- provide a counselling service for bereaved children, young people and their parents
- try to raise the level of awareness in the community about bereavement issues
- develop a support network of professionals in the area.

What we did

- Set up a child-friendly space for bereaved children and young people
- Provided counselling individually, and in groups
- Provided support and information to parents and other family members about how to assist their child/young person
- Liaised with and educated other professionals involved with a child or young person
- Networked with others working in the area of bereavement, to promote the service
- Developed resources for families and professionals.

What has been learned?

- Children and young people benefit from their own space to grieve; however they may have to wait until others in their family regain the capacity to mobilise for them
- Many children can be helped indirectly by providing specialist information to others (eg parents, other counsellors, guidance officers). These others may need support while assisting the child
- Groups need to be flexible in timing and composition; one-off groups are more viable
- There is an ongoing need for education of other professional groups (teachers, social workers, occupational therapists, nurses) about children's bereavement needs
- Networking is very important to maintain professional linkages and encourage referrals
- Volunteers who commit to the work are likely to be mature aged rather than students.

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What is useful to other projects/communities?

- Availability of the service is particularly useful to palliative care service providers working with families who have school-age children
- Schools have been consistent users of the information/advice service
- The Centre continues to refine a specific model for bereavement work with children.

Resources developed which are available to others

- The CYPBC website www.childbereavement.org.au. Links to other useful sites.
- *When a student is grieving, a guide for teachers*. Booklet.
- About the Centre (brochure with dot points about recognising when help is needed).
- One-page facts sheets on a range of topics. These are regularly updated.

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

- More families and professionals have been made aware of the availability of support for children and young people when a family members dies
- More parents and professionals have had the knowledge to respond to the needs of individual children and young people
- Widespread dissemination has resulted in a wide range of sources of referrals.

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

- Mt Olivet Community Services has made a commitment to fund the operation of the Centre for a further three year term
- Information dissemination and networking are key activities which must be ongoing to maintain awareness of the service and to build understanding of children's and young people's bereavement needs.