

An Aboriginal Family and Community Healing Program in Metropolitan Adelaide

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Abstract

An Aboriginal Family and Community Healing (AFCH) Program was developed in the Central Eastern and Western metropolitan region of Adelaide to address Aboriginal family violence in the context of social and economic disadvantage, ongoing emotional distress, grief and loss, problems with alcohol and other drugs, and concurrent physical and mental illnesses. The AFCH Program comprised an inter-related and dynamic set of group activities for Aboriginal women, men and youth built around community engagement. The key focus of the Program was on family and community healing to equip people with the skills for effective communication and conflict resolution. The AFCH Program operated for over 2 years (2006-8), and has been formally evaluated through a participatory action research process.

Strengths of the AFCH Program included evidence-based design, holistic approach, clinical focus, committed staff, inter-sectoral linkages, peer support, mentoring, and Aboriginal cultural focus. Strategic partnerships between health and human service sectors including creative use of funds and human resources as well as a strong long-term vision for the AFCH Program in the context of wider Health plans for the region, kept the AFCH Program going despite the challenges of ongoing organisational restructure, insufficient staff and short term, restrictive funding. Clients and workers were overwhelmingly unanimous in their support for the AFCH Program, and their stories provided ample evidence of the beneficial impacts on Aboriginal clients, families and the community. The evaluation showed clearly that the AFCH Program met its objectives despite many obstacles. The AFCH Program was clearly a successful model for family and community healing, building community and service capacity to support safe families. Healing takes time, often many years, and therefore the AFCH program and similar initiatives should be supported in the long term.

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