

Presentation on Koorie Community Involvement with Central Highlands Division of
General Practitioners
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Susie Latham and Deborah Pepper

Deborah Pepper

First off I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of this land.

My name is Debbie Pepper and I would like to take this opportunity to thank you in scheduling some time to listen to our experiences today. First and foremost I am a soul parent to five wonderful children.

I am a qualified Youth Worker and at present work as a Youth & Family worker on the JPET (Job Placement Employment & Training) program. It has been running since June 1998. The primary focus of the program is to service homeless and at risk young people aged 15-21yrs and their families, the issues which I have come in contact with in doing so are:

- ❖ Homelessness
- ❖ Early school leaving
- ❖ Drug and alcohol issues
- ❖ Gambling
- ❖ Family and associated welfare issues
- ❖ Lack of employment
- ❖ Low socio economic status
- ❖ Mental Health issues

In this position it is very important to be an effective advocate, and important to have good linkages with other service providers who can assist the community, they are:

- ❖ Juvenile Justice
- ❖ Department of Human Services
- ❖ Secondary Schools
- ❖ Koori Community
- ❖ Central Highlands Division

To name a few

Background on the community

The Seymour koorie community acknowledges the traditional owners of the land, Taungurung. The koorie community has become strength in itself in the last 3 years. The first of the establishment was the Tjapukai homework centre, which was begun in the living room of a friend's house where about 8 koorie families were represented, which I was one.

We got together as we were concerned that there were no services outreaching Seymour, and we wanted to access them for our families. We were under the understanding that Rumbalara Co-operative in Shepparton were funded for our region, although because of cut backs etc were not outreaching to meet the demand. Also because no one had contact with them and they did not realise themselves how many koorie families were actually living in the Seymour area.

Then a report came out by the Mitchell Shire, which stated that there were no Aboriginal families in the region, which obviously was not the correct information. The fact that we wanted to do something positive for our mob in Seymour and take responsibility for our children's education and the report is what motivated us to act. Great timing by the division in Susie Latham's phone call to me, we were able to meet with community representatives and asked them what they wanted, with that the Heart Health Checks were organised and conducted over a period of a month in three sessions. A great positive connection was made, we met and then it was backed up with positive personal action.

As you would be aware that the years of disempowerment the indigenous community have experienced has been shameful and the ripple effect from the Stolen Generation is still felt to day and will continue to quite some time into the future. If we can give back by taking some of the shame and work positively with our people that will assist to acknowledge that we are all one.

Central Highlands division gave and assisted in allowing the community to say what it is they needed from the division, they empowered them and were actively listened to which shows respect of which the indigenous people live their life, they are a very proud culture and this has allowed and cemented the growth to continue to occur.

How did the community find the divisions involvement

The community found it to be very important as they gained knowledge and awareness of their health and what they need to do to stay on track to living as healthy life which impacts on quality of life for as long as possible. It also allowed the young people of the community to see the adults taking responsibility for their health and therefore acting as good role models.

It allowed the community to be aware that other services could access Seymour and that they could stay within their own towns to access it. Obviously this proves to be a great way to work as it then addresses the issue of transport.

What did the division do well

The combination of having some koorie workers involved was a great partnership as this allowed the participants to see some commonality and connection.

It lifted the spirit to know that some one cared which was genuinely felt with all attendees.

The division met and worked together with the community in seeking what it is they wanted not what they thought was good for them, the division involvement was respectful and open.

A lot of the community did not realise how many were here, both koorie and non indigenous, we were able to add to the database we had started up with the homework centre, in connecting with older members of the koorie community.

So once again the community found the divisions involvement to be positive, respectful and empowering experience.

What could have been done better

Maybe more time was a comment and agreed by most. This would allow the people to get to know the GP's on a personal level and feel their trust and therefore lead onto opening up about other issues. At this time they did name local GP's that they have had positive experiences with. They commented about having a link with a dental service, as part of the scheme is very important to them.

A place they could call their own to sit back and talk to medical practitioners about their problems, the opportunity will come in the future with the opening up of the Jaambie Neighbourhood House which we are working on at the moment. To recognise spiritual sickness, closer look at doing an overall check for young people especially regarding Mental Health issues.

Concrete things that happened in the process – was it good for the community?

As mentioned it brought the community together, which strengthened the community and would very much like for it to happen again.

It was quite an exciting time for them community as they felt that their needs were being looked after and they were treated with respect and importance for the first time within this community, and that for anyone will allow the gates to open when it comes to how we feel about ourselves.

What seems to stand out to me is that their were positive connections made from the Division to the koorie community, the process was open and respectful and they felt they could trust that they were in good hands.

The Taungurung community thank-you the division whole-heartedly and look forward to further relationships with them in the future.