

Family Connections

Introduction: “It takes a village to raise a child” (an African Proverb). The wider community plays an important role in raising children and young people. It influences family functioning, child development and the availability of helping resources. Evidence shows that when family and community work together to strengthen the family unit, and focus on quality family life and the health and well being of family members, they complement each other to enhance family strengths, decrease societal issues such as child abuse, parenting problems, youth suicide, bullying, family violence, substance abuse, relationship breakdown etc and accomplish and maintain a healthy lifestyle and wellbeing (Tomison, 2002).

Family Connections:

- Is an early intervention family support programme which uses holistic and comprehensive ways to strengthen the family unit.
- Is family centred, preventive and collaborates with the community for services.
- Stabilizes and strengthens the social and economic conditions of the family.
- Engages families in a culturally sensitive manner to enhance service accessibility.
- Is a voluntary relationship; promoting individual rights and responsibility to enhance their own healing potential and resilience.
- Is strength based and solution focussed in its approach.
- Collaborates with the family and the community to find solutions to problems that the family identify as most disruptive to their well being.

Family Connections Model:

Family Connections use a Crisis Intervention Model, when a person faces an obstacle to important life goals, for a time, insurmountable by the customary means of problem solving (Golan, 1986, p303). Quick response services are used to give immediate, short-term relief to help families who are facing crisis situations, such as, chronic medical issues, or loss of job or environmental situations, which impact on the family's financial situation; resulting in loss of housing, social isolation, stress and behaviour changes in the family.

Many of these families do not meet the threshold of current social services, which prohibits them from access to support. Whilst they await access to other financial support, such as a partner finding employment, or access to a superannuation fund, the family struggles to feed their children, pay the bills and maintain a healthy lifestyle.

Family Connections enlist professionals who connect with personal experts in the local social services and also link in with 'Not for Profit' Organisations to help organise support which the client identifies. As well as this, Family Connections provide an opportunity for the family to debrief with trained professionals in confidentiality and find strategies to enhance family communication and interaction.

Objectives:

- To identify families within the education system, who are facing a temporary crisis that disrupts family stability and functioning.
- To provide early intervention in a family crisis situation in the school community.
- To provide a short term, immediate and appropriate response to alleviate a family crisis without the necessity of involving statutory child protection services.
- To identify physical, emotional, psychological, social and spiritual risk factors, that influence the optimal health and well being of the individuals and the family as a whole.
- To assess the family needs and provide a response that positively affects the family well being and ensures the protection of the children.
- To encourage families and the community to build resilience and a capacity to manage problems before they become severe.
- To alleviate financial pressure and stress through accessing community social services and Charities or Not for Profit Organisations.
- To listen to families and their individual family members, so that they feel valued and respected.
- To link with cultural leaders in the community to enhance family relationships and connection and to contribute to better cultural understanding and acceptance in the community.
- To keep family members and families as a whole connected to their community and reduce family isolation and dysfunction.
- To build links between the schools and the community to help support families.
- To build a database of community social services which help support families and develop an awareness of and increased use of these services.

Outcomes:

- Families are supported in a collaborative approach between Family Connections, School Professionals and Community Social Service Agencies.
- Family stress and dysfunction is addressed and replaced with coping mechanisms.
- Families discover their individual strengths and problem solve to find solutions to their own problems.
- Families stress and hardship is alleviated through financial support solutions from community social services and Charities or Not for Profit Organisations.
- Families feel respect and valued.
- Families realise their importance in the community and feel an integral part of its workings.
- The cultural heritage of the families and the community is respected and valued, so that it enriches the school and wider community.
- Families and the community build resilience.
- Families thrive, so that they are able to contribute positively to their school and local community.
- Family problems are solved before imposing severe and debilitating effects on the family and community.
- A set of physical, emotional, psychological, social and spiritual risk factors that are inherent to the local community are developed for use in identifying where support is needed and for future reference.
- A database of community social services is set up for use and future networking.