The Caravan Project is part of the University of Newcastle’s Family Action Centre. We support children, families and residents who live in caravan parks and manufactured-home villages. For more information, visit our website:

Supporting residents of caravan parks

Principles of promising practice

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Contents

Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................ iv
Principles of promising practice ................................................................................... v
1. Introduction .............................................................................................................. 1
2. Caravan parks: an introduction ............................................................................... 5
3. Principles of promising practice .............................................................................. 10
   Principle 1: Services will make building strong relationships with residents a high priority ........................................................... 10
   Principle 2: Services will be flexible and creative ................................................... 13
   Principle 3: Services will work with park management ......................................... 14
   Principle 4: Services will build on the strengths of park communities ..................... 17
   Principle 5: Services will go to caravan parks ....................................................... 20
   Principle 6: Services will build strong partnerships and networks ......................... 21
   Principle 7: Services will advocate on behalf of residents ....................................... 22
   Principle 8: Services will pay particular attention to the needs of children ............... 24
   Principle 9: Services will have well-supported, skilled staff .................................... 26
4. Engaging with family members who are suspicious of services ............................. 29
5. Working with children on caravan parks ................................................................ 33
6. Working with primary school-age children in caravan parks ................................. 35
7. Working with caravan park managers .................................................................. 38
8. Providing outreach ................................................................................................. 41
9. Engaging men and fathers ..................................................................................... 43
10. Health promotion .................................................................................................... 47
11. Mental health in the park ...................................................................................... 50
12. Domestic violence .................................................................................................. 53
13. Advocacy (1) .......................................................................................................... 57
14. Advocacy (2) .......................................................................................................... 59
References .................................................................................................................... 62
Appendices .................................................................................................................... 64
   Appendix 1: Workshop notes ................................................................................... 64
      1. Working with children ...................................................................................... 64
      2. Education ......................................................................................................... 65
      3. Working with extreme poverty ......................................................................... 66
      4. Engaging families who are highly suspicious of services ................................. 68
      5. Working with park managers .......................................................................... 68
      6. Advocacy .......................................................................................................... 70
      7. Tenancy ............................................................................................................ 71
      8. Park closures .................................................................................................... 72
      9. Domestic and family violence ........................................................................... 72
     10. Drugs and alcohol .............................................................................................. 73
     11. Health ............................................................................................................... 75
     12. Mental health .................................................................................................... 76
     13. Providing outreach ........................................................................................... 77
     14. Working with fathers and men .......................................................................... 78
     15. Working with Indigenous communities ............................................................. 79
     16. Sustaining workers in the workplace ................................................................. 80
   Appendix 2: Forum agenda ........................................................................................ 82
List of tables
Table 1: Marginal residents of caravan parks and number of dwellings ............................. 6
Table 2: Level of satisfaction ........................................................................................ 8
Table 3: Positive aspects of caravan parks .................................................................... 9
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- members of the steering committee for assistance in organising the forum
- the participants at the forum for their enthusiasm, insights and sense of fun
- the residents of the caravan parks, who have taught me a great deal.

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Principles of promising practice

**Principle 1:** Services will make the building of strong relationships with residents a high priority.

- Staff will treat residents with respect and dignity.
- Staff will be open, up-front and honest with residents.
- Services will be inclusive.
- Staff will avoid being judgemental and making assumptions.
- Staff will be reliable and consistent.
- Staff will listen carefully to residents.
- Staff will be given the time they need to engage and build relationships with residents.
- Staff will provide practical assistance.

**Principle 2:** Services will be flexible and creative.

- Staff will respond to issues as they arise.
- Staff will adapt their programs according to the needs of residents.
- Services will have negotiable rules, and flexible guidelines and eligibility criteria.
- Staff will engage residents through non-threatening, low-key and informal means.

**Principle 3:** Services will work with park management.

- Services will treat park managers with respect as individuals.
- Services will promote the benefits of services to park management.
- Services will acknowledge the challenges faced by park managers and provide support where appropriate.
- Services will put time and effort into building a working relationship with park managers.
- Services will set limits to how much they will compromise in order to maintain good relations with park management.

**Principle 4:** Services will build on the strengths of park communities.

- Staff will identify and support gatekeepers in the park community.
- Staff will help residents build a safe environment, particularly for children.
- Staff will help build inclusive park communities.

**Principle 5:** Services will go to caravan parks.

- Services will actively seek out residents.
- Services will have permission from park management to run programs on the park.
**Principle 6:** Services will build strong partnerships and networks.

- Staff will develop networks that allow them to access a wide range of information and services.
- Services will assist residents to fast track appointments.
- Services will work in conjunction with Indigenous services.

**Principle 7:** Services will advocate on behalf of residents.

- Staff will have a working knowledge of relevant legislation and know how to use it.
- Staff will assess the risks of advocacy especially when working with less-powerful residents.
- Staff will assist residents to advocate on their own behalf.
- Staff will adapt their style of advocacy to the situation.

**Principle 8:** Services will pay particular attention to the needs of children.

- Staff will have an understanding of the issues faced by children living in parks.
- Staff will have an understanding of the importance of play for children.
- Staff will foster the wellbeing of children and take steps to address issues of concern.

**Principle 9:** Services will have well-supported, skilled staff.

- Staff will be provided with adequate supervision and debriefing.
- Staff will have the resources they need to undertake their work.
- Services will encourage diversity within their staff.
- Staff will regularly reflect upon their practice.
- Services will have policies in place to protect the health and safety of workers.
- Staff will share the responsibility for caring for themselves.
1 Introduction

Caravan parks play an important role in Australian housing, particular for those who have few or no other options. Marginalised residents of caravan parks often face significant disadvantage and it is therefore important that a range of health and welfare services work closely with park residents. This publication explores principles of promising practice. It is based on discussion at a national forum on supporting residents of caravan parks.

Between 1994 and 2003 the National Dissemination Program of the Family Action Centre’s Caravan Project (see page 3) held 10 national caravan park workers’ conferences. These conferences allowed participants to build links, initiate joint ventures, reflect on their practice, promote improvements in policy and practice, raise awareness of issues facing park residents, and be inspired and re-invigorated. However, when funding ended for the National Dissemination Program the conferences also ceased. As part of its twentieth anniversary in 2006, the Caravan Project obtained funding from the Australian Government under the National Homeless Strategy to again bring caravan park workers together, this time for a national best practice forum.

Supporting Caravan Park Residents—A national best practice forum aimed to improve service delivery to marginalised residents of caravan parks by:

- promoting best practice when working with marginalised residents of caravan parks
- developing and disseminating a guide to best practice based on the forum’s outcomes
- fostering greater connections, collaboration and partnerships between services working with caravan park residents nationally
- promoting awareness of issues affecting marginalised residents of caravan parks.

While the focus of the forum was the marginalised residents of caravan parks it was also relevant to other communities with similarities to caravan parks such as manufactured home villages, long-grass communities (e.g. people living in campsites around rural towns) and some public housing estates.

The forum, held over two days in October 2006, attracted 60 people from the ACT, NSW, Queensland, South Australia and Victoria. It focused on sharing stories and experiences, identifying successful strategies and developing principles of best practice. (The agenda is included in Appendix 2, page 82.)

The aims of the Australian Government’s National Homelessness Strategy, which funded the forum, are to:

- provide a strategic framework that will improve collaboration and linkages between existing programmes and services to improve outcomes for clients and reduce the incidence of homelessness
- identify best practice models, which can be promoted and replicated, that will enhance existing homelessness policies and programmes
- build the capacity of the community sector to improve linkages and networks
- raise awareness of the issue of homelessness throughout all areas and levels of government and in the community.
In the lead up to the forum a background paper and 11 discussion papers were produced to provide some introduction and examples of good practice. The papers, which are included in this publication, formed the basis of discussion in some of the forum workshops. They are:

1. Engaging with family members who are suspicious of services (Chapter 4)
2. Working with children on caravan parks (Chapter 5)
3. Working with primary school age children in caravan parks (Chapter 6)
4. Working with caravan park managers (Chapter 7)
5. Providing outreach (Chapter 8)
6. Engaging men and fathers (Chapter 9)
7. Health promotion (Chapter 10)
8. Mental health in the park (Chapter 11)
9. Domestic violence (Chapter 12)
10. Advocacy 1 (Chapter 13)
11. Advocacy 2 (Chapter 14)

The forum took the form of a series of concurrent workshops on a range of topics faced by caravan park residents and/or caravan park workers, as well as a number of plenary sessions. The workshops, lasting 60 to 100 minutes each, were designed to encourage the sharing of experiences and discussion among participants. The workshop facilitators were asked to adopt the following process:

1. Introductions.
2. Five or so minutes for reading the discussion paper (if one was available).
3. Brief introduction to the topic by the facilitator or the person who wrote the discussion paper.

4. Group discussion around a series of questions:
   - What are some challenges (either for workers, residents or managers) in relation to the topic?
   - What are some examples or stories about good practice in relation to the topic?
   - What works when addressing the topic?
   - Drawing on the above, what are principles of good practice in relation to the topic?
   - [If time] What skills and competencies do workers need to implement these principles?

These principles of promising practice were developed following the forum based on the principles of practice developed at the forum and content analysis of the forum notes and discussion papers. Drafts of the principles and the implications of practice were distributed to forum participants for comments.

All names of park residents used throughout this report are pseudonyms. Notes from the workshops relating to challenges and what works are included in Appendix 1, page 64.

**The Family Action Centre’s Caravan Project**

The Family Action Centre operates within the University of Newcastle, NSW. Its purpose is to strengthen families and communities by developing and implementing programs, research, training and creating models of practice that promote sustainability, social justice and community leadership. Current programs include the Boys in Schools Program, the Caravan Project, Communities for Children, the Engaging Fathers Program, Home-Start, Indigenous Programs and Rock & Water. The Family Action Centre receives funding from NSW and Australian governments, private and philanthropic organisations, sales of its publications and resources, and the delivery of training and consultancies.

The Caravan Project, a foundation program within the Family Action Centre, has worked with marginalised residents of caravan parks in the Hunter Valley since 1986. Its objectives are to:

- assist residents of caravan parks to improve their quality of life
- provide on-site support to families
- design, deliver and support strengths-based programs in collaboration with residents
- encourage and support residents to achieve personal goals
- promote leadership and a sense of community among park residents.

Most of its work is direct service provision, such as running playgroups and after-school activities for children, facilitating social groups for adults, home visiting, organising community building activities or events, and providing information and referral.

It is also involved in community development, community education and research. At the time of the forum the Caravan Project was conducting activities in seven park communities in the local government areas of Lake Macquarie, Cessnock, Port Stephens and Maitland. In a typical week Caravan Project staff facilitated four playgroups, three after-school programs and four groups for adults, as well as conducting home visits with up to 30 individuals. During the groups,
project workers address a wide range of issues including parenting, building positive relations, domestic violence, living on caravan parks and child development.

The Caravan Project frequently conducts research or pilot projects. As well as organising the best practice forum, between June 2006 and July 2007 the Caravan Project also carried out the following projects and programs:

- It worked with students living in caravan parks via the Stepping Stones: From caravan park to school project. This project was funded by the Telstra Foundation Community Development Fund.

- Staff conducted action research exploring ways in which family, friends and neighbours can help stop or reduce the impact of domestic and family violence, particularly in caravan parks and Indigenous communities. The project was funded by the Australian Government’s Domestic and Family Violence and Sexual Assault Initiative through the Office for Women.

- It supported marginalised families (not living in caravan parks) through a partnership with the Port Stephens Family Support by providing a mobile parenting program in Raymond Terrace and a local Aboriginal community. The latter project was funded by the Australian Government under the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy.
Caravan parks play an important role in the Australian housing sector (National Conference for Caravan Park Workers, 2003). In general, people who live permanently in caravan parks fall into one of three groups, those who:

- choose to live in a park as a lifestyle choice (particularly older residents in manufactured homes)
- are itinerant or seasonal workers choosing to live long term or permanently in parks (particularly in rural caravan parks)
- have few, or no, other options: they may have been blacklisted from other housing, may not be able to afford the bond and rent in advance, may not have a strong rental history or they may be homeless (Wensing, Holloway & Wood 2003).

Parks vary considerably in their resident make-up and across a number of other criteria, some of which are listed below.

- The mix of tourist and permanent residents: this can range from those that cater solely for tourists through to those that only offer accommodation to permanent residents.
- The permanent residency arrangements: for example, residents can own their own dwelling and rent the site (owner-renters) or rent both (renter-renters); stay for a few weeks or months, through to many years; and live in a three-bedroom relocatable home through to a small caravan with no annexe.
- The geographical location: there is great variation in the locations of parks although many are poorly located in terms of their accessibility to local services and facilities. Some parks are on prime real estate in terms of tourist income or re-development potential, which increases the likelihood that the park will close.
- The park standards: parks vary from very successful parks with a high standard of facilities to derelict, poorly maintained caravan parks with considerable variation in between. The poorer quality parks are more likely to cater for people who live there as a last resort.
- The perception of park residents: some residents see parks as a positive housing choice while others see them as a negative option over which they have little control.
- The park management: some parks are very well managed and there are good relations between residents and park managers or owners, while others are poorly managed and have a history of conflict (Wensing, Holloway & Wood 2003).

People who live in caravan parks as a last resort are a significant and often vulnerable group in the community. In particular, there is a close relationship between marginalised residents of caravan parks and homelessness:

- Chamberlain and MacKenzie (2003) argue that marginal residents of caravan parks are best understood as part of the tertiary homeless population and that their housing situation is similar to that of residents in boarding houses.
- Forty per cent of the participants in a survey conducted by the Caravan Project of 142 residents in eight Lower Hunter caravan parks stated that they had experienced homelessness (Stuart 2005).
Caravan parks play an important role in pathways in and out of homelessness (Giles et al. 2006).

On census night 2001 there were 22,868 marginal residents of caravan parks nationally (Chamberlain, 2005; Wright-Howie, 2005). Queensland and NSW had the largest number of marginal residents, followed by Victoria and Western Australia (see Table 1). “Marginal residents” were defined as:

- people who were renting their caravan on census night
- where no-one in the household had a full-time job
- they were at their usual address (Chamberlain & MacKenzie 2003).

Table 1: Marginal residents of caravan parks and number of dwellings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>QLD</th>
<th>NSW</th>
<th>Vic</th>
<th>WA</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>NT</th>
<th>Tas</th>
<th>ACT</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Persons</td>
<td>7,989</td>
<td>6,881</td>
<td>3,407</td>
<td>2,503</td>
<td>932</td>
<td>775</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>22,868</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dwellings</td>
<td>5,132</td>
<td>4,531</td>
<td>2,307</td>
<td>1,506</td>
<td>599</td>
<td>437</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>14,773</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source Chamberlain 2005)

The role of caravan parks in providing housing for people with few or no other options can present a dilemma to service providers. As Newton (2005) argues, caravan park accommodation is seen as “both a problem and a solution by welfare services”. While caravan parks provide an important housing option, especially for those with few other choices, there are concerns about the levels of disadvantage on some parks and the difficult conditions for residents, particularly families with young children.

Marginalised residents of caravan parks face significant disadvantage. The Caravan Project survey (Stuart, Silberberg & Hughes 2005), which included some people living in manufactured home villages, found that:

- 85% relied on pensions or benefits from Centrelink
- 68% had completed no more than Year 10 at school
- 30% had experienced mental health problems
- 55% of the women and 42% of the men had experienced physical/verbal abuse in the past year (80% of the women aged 18 to 25 reported physical abuse in the past year)
- 9% identified themselves as being from an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background (but less than 1% from a non-English speaking background)
- 48% had no car in their household
- 21% of the families with children had had contact with the Department of Community Services in the past 12 months.

In a qualitative research project involving 10 families living in Melbourne caravan parks as crisis housing (Hunt & Wegener 2005), HomeGround Services found that:

- the caravans were expensive and of a substandard construction
- conditions were cramped and put pressure on family relationships, which were already in crisis
- children were at risk in an unsuitable and unsafe environment
- children’s play and development opportunities were limited
- caravan parks were located away from services and support.
Caravan parks are not necessarily cheap alternatives to permanent housing, with rents ranging between $150 and $320 per week (Wright-Howie 2005). While these rents are not cheap, it is “just much easier to become a caravan park tenant, and if your residential history is less than perfect, in some cases it’s the only option left” (Stuart & Ellis 2005, p. 26).

A study by the Gippsland Housing and Support Services Network, involving telephone interviews with managers of 95 of the 108 caravan parks in Gippsland (Gilbert 2005), found only 25 were willing to accept housing referrals from the Office of Housing. Many managers reported that they had ceased to accept referrals or had strict selection criteria because of past experiences in which people were assisted into caravan parks without ongoing support or without the necessary intensive support. Other park owners “spoke of losing money, often thousands of dollars in damage and rent arrears” (p. 5). They also reported a range of undesirable behaviour including “drug and alcohol abuse, mental health issues, self-harm, criminal, violent or antisocial behaviour by residents or their visitors, and excessive noise” (p. 5). Interviews with 10 caravan park managers in Melbourne suggest managers have a “strong focus on maintaining order and receiving rent and practice selective gate-keeping” (Newton 2005).

**Strengths of caravan park communities**

While caravan parks provide many challenges for some residents, there are also many strengths in caravan park communities. The Caravan Project survey of 142 residents (Stuart 2005) found that most participants said they were satisfied (45.8%) or very satisfied (31.7%) with their current living arrangements and only 22.5% were not satisfied. People who were not living with their children were more likely to be satisfied than those who lived with their children (see Table 2).
It needs to be noted that 13% of the residents were satisfied because a caravan was better than the available alternatives (“it beats living in a tent”). Most residents identified positive features of living on parks. These included having friends, the social aspects of park life, good neighbours, a sense of community, good management, a convenient location and a nice environment (see Table 3).

The Caravan Project has completed in-depth interviews with 10 residents (all of whom moved onto a caravan park as a last resort) about how they have made a success of park life. Preliminary findings from the research, which is not completed, identified a number of strengths in caravan parks:

- Residents reported that they appreciated the sense of community often found in caravan parks. In particular they appreciated the friendships they made and the support they received from other residents.
- The type of residents on the park made a big difference to the life of other residents. As one residents said “Here it is nice and quiet and people generally get along with each other . . . I’ve lived in some caravan parks where there are fights and arguments and bangs and crashes, people blaring their music at ungodly hours of the day and night.”
- Some residents reported that they had good park managers who helped improve life on the park. Managers played an important role in ensuring that there were good tenants, the park standards were adequate and problems were dealt with.
- Some parks had facilities—such as swimming pools or communal areas—that promoted a sense of community and helped improve the quality of life of residents.
- Having a good dwelling (e.g. a cabin or a caravan with an annexe) was preferable to just a caravan. In particular, having an ensuite made a big difference to life on a park.
- The location, setting and atmosphere of the parks suited some residents; for example, the park might be close to family, it might have a rural setting or just “feel good”.

**Table 2: Level of satisfaction**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lived with</th>
<th>Not satisfied</th>
<th>Satisfied</th>
<th>Very satisfied</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children (n=38)</td>
<td>36.8%</td>
<td>52.6%</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
<td>99.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No children (n=104)</td>
<td>17.3%</td>
<td>43.3%</td>
<td>39.4%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All residents (n=142)</td>
<td>22.5%</td>
<td>45.8%</td>
<td>31.7%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3: Positive aspects of caravan parks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive aspects caravan parks</th>
<th>% (n=100)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friends, social aspect</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convenient location</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighbours</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good management</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nice environment</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peace and quiet</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lifestyle</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roof over head</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom/independence</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safe/secure</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low maintenance</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affordable</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stability</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caravan park amenity</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being a homeowner</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The strategies residents used to make the most of their situation included:

- building and maintaining positive relationships with other residents and the manager
- maintaining personal boundaries, knowing when to “mind your own business” and balancing privacy with “getting on with other people”
- being flexible and adaptable
- maintaining a positive attitude.
The principles of promising practice developed through the forum are relevant to services and staff who visit parks on a regular basis to provide programs or outreach. However, it is worth pointing out that they are also relevant to a wide range of other services and service providers, and many of the principles apply to settings where there are communities of marginalised residents. The purpose of the principles is not to have a prescriptive list but rather to act as a starting point for reflection and discussion. Based on many years experience from a range of services, the principles provide an important starting point for best practice.

**Principle 1: Services will make building strong relationships with residents a high priority**

Building a trusting relationship with adults and children can take a while. It is worth being patient. Caravan parks are unique environments to work in. They are families’ homes and backyards, and we are guests. Settling into caravan park life as a worker took some months but now everyone knows me, the manager, the cleaner, the maintenance guys, the residents. I am part of the place and I have found my niche and my own working style. It has been a gentle engagement (see Dandy in Chapter 11).

Building strong relationships with residents is central to successful work in caravan parks. Without the active engagement of residents, support services are unlikely to succeed. Marginalised residents of caravan parks are frequently mistrustful of service providers, and building relationships can be a slow process. Although building relationships with residents is not the goal in itself, it is a vital foundation for ongoing work. Staff need to be skilled at building relationships and have the time for engaging residents and building strong, trusting relationships. When residents have had negative experiences of government or non-government agencies, they can be slow to trust service providers and be fearful of service providers coming into their homes or backyards and seeing things that could otherwise be kept out of sight (e.g. drug use, child protection issues). Residents can be fearful that staff will report them to child welfare authorities or implement other unwanted interventions. Agency managers and funding bodies thus need to recognise the importance of allowing time to build relationships with residents.

It took some time to gain the trust of the Smith family, and Julie in particular. Pain and disappointment caused by the people you love and are meant to trust had been a recurrent theme in Julie’s life. She had been neglected by her mother, who abused substances until her death 6 years ago, and was sexually assaulted by a man at three years of age while under her mother’s care. She had been betrayed by “friends” and mistreated and discriminated against by physicians and law enforcement officials to name just a few. Why would I be any different?

*Family support worker.*

Strong relationships allow staff to gain the trust of residents, broach sensitive issues and build partnerships with residents assisting them to achieve their goals.
Implications for practice include the following

Staff will treat residents with respect and dignity
In order to build strong relationships, residents need to know that they will be treated with respect and dignity. Staff should recognise residents as experts in their own lives and demonstrate unconditional positive regard.

A community worker was supporting a single dad and his 12-year-old daughter but had concerns about the impact the father’s drinking had on his care of his daughter. There was a possibility he was physically assaulting her and there were reports she was having a relationship with an adult male living in the park. After making a notification, the worker spoke to the father about her concerns and told him she had made a report. Although the father denied that accusation and was angry, he eventually appreciated the honesty and, after a few weeks, was willing for the worker to maintain contact with them. While the relationship with the father continued to be uneasy, progress was made and he allowed the staff member to work closely with his daughter.

Community worker

Staff will be open, upfront and honest with residents
Forum participants spoke about the importance of being open, up-front and honest with residents (and park managers). Staff need to be clear about issues such as the levels and type of support they can and cannot provide, limits to confidentiality (including mandatory reporting of child abuse) and any expectations they have. Even when making child protection notifications a number of participants believed it could be helpful to tell the parents involved.

A park, which had a poor reputation and very few facilities, was closing. When discussing other alternatives, a resident asked “Where could I find another park like this one?” While the conditions were poor he appreciated the sense of community he found there. It had been easy for the staff to assume that nobody would want to live in the park.

Community worker

Services will be inclusive
Residents have often experienced social exclusion, so programs need to ensure that they are inclusive. Practices that make it clear that everybody is welcome include having visual clues (e.g. leaflets incorporating Aboriginal colours or images), employing diverse staff (having a male worker in a playgroup can encourage fathers to participate), using inclusive language and actively encouraging participation by marginalised groups.

Staff will avoid being judgemental and making assumptions
Although staff often need to make judgements (e.g. in relation to child protection) forum participants spoke about the dangers of being judgemental and making assumptions. When working in caravan parks, staff are working in people’s back yards and need to be aware of their biases and assumptions so that they do not impose their values and beliefs on residents.

A park, which had a poor reputation and very few facilities, was closing. When discussing other alternatives, a resident asked “Where could I find another park like this one?” While the conditions were poor he appreciated the sense of community he found there. It had been easy for the staff to assume that nobody would want to live in the park.

Community worker

Staff will be reliable and consistent
In order to build trusting relationships, residents need to know that staff can be relied upon and will do what they say they will do. Forum participants also emphasised the importance of consistency in staffing, programming and routine. Relationships are much harder to build when there are frequent changes in staff, times or availability.
Because they are held out in the open, when it is raining, we are not able to run our children’s programs. Rather than just ringing to cancel, we try to visit the park to let residents know we aren’t coming and to drop of some colouring-in sheets for the children.

*Children’s worker*

**Staff will listen carefully to residents**

In order to ensure that residents are treated as experts of their own lives, staff need to listen very carefully. Research evidence suggests that families are more likely to become, and remain, engaged when they feel heard (Berry 2005). By asking lots of questions and exploring what has and has not worked for the people involved, it is possible to individualise and personalise responses.

**Staff will be given the time they need to engage and build relationships with residents**

There is often significant fear and mistrust of services amongst residents and relationships can take a long time to develop. Agency managers and funding bodies need to recognise the importance of engagement and that building relationships takes time. Having the time to be seen around the park, to chat to residents and managers, and to socialise with residents (particularly when food is involved) can form important foundations for future work. If premature, intervention can undermine the process of engagement and even encourage the family to move to another park.

We focus on establishing relationships with our families. Taking the time to develop real rapport and establish trust enables us to better engage care around issues of concern as they arise. This is a slow and at times painful process, but has seen the greatest successes! At time it requires extreme patience and tolerance to maintain rapport with clients living in difficulty, and exposing children to less than ideal circumstances (see Mobile Playscheme Team, Save the Children Qld in Chapter 5).

**Staff will provide practical assistance**

Providing concrete, practical assistance helps in building relationships with residents by demonstrating that staff understand their needs, and are willing and able to help. Practical assistance could include transport to appointments, providing emergency relief, addressing problems with Centrelink payments, help in applying for housing, collecting their belongings from storage or assisting them to negotiate with park management. Ideally services will have access to brokerage funds so that they can pay for services or resources when needed.

When the children are not enrolled in school, I offer assistance in obtaining the necessary forms and information. I usually carry an enrolment kit in my boot. Even the children who won’t be in the park for long usually are keen to go to school once some of the obstacles are removed. Some obstacles are the lack of money for uniforms, books, lunch box and school bag. Often in the move things have been lost, damaged or left behind in a hasty move. I’m able to buy these things with my petty cash (see Verrall in Chapter 6).
**Principle 2: Services will be flexible and creative**

Early on in our project when I had only engaged with a few families, I would often find myself with a spare hour or two. At these times I would buy a cup of tea and a newspaper at the caravan park shop and sit outside at the table. I rarely read past the front page before someone would approach me. Often I would have a chat with the shop owner—who has referred several clients to me, and often primary school age kids would come over and ask what I was doing (see Verrall in Chapter 6).

Services and staff without the capacity to be flexible and creative are likely to struggle within the context of caravan parks. New staff sometimes find it hard to adapt to the unpredictability of working in caravan parks and can become frustrated when carefully made plans are forced to change. Staff need to have the skills, and management support, to respond quickly to changes within a park and to adapt their programs as needed.

**Implications for practice include the following:**

**Staff will respond to issues as they arise**

Opportunities for intervention or support can arise suddenly and, at times, staff need the flexibility to respond quickly. For transient residents in particular there may only be a brief window of opportunity and, unless there is an immediate response, the possibility of intervening may be lost. A chance comment in a group could lead to a meaningful discussion about a sensitive issue. A crisis in a park may mean that residents are willing to risk opening up with staff and address issues they have previously been unwilling to explore. By being in regular contact with residents, staff can respond quickly and easily when issues arise.

A child and family health nurse sometimes meets residents who are willing to have their children immunised then and there. By carrying child immunisations in her car she is able to respond straight away without requiring the family to make it to a clinic.

**Staff will adapt their programs according to the needs of residents**

At times there can be a high turnover of residents in parks, leading to significant changes in the composition and dynamics of particular parks. Staff need to adapt their programs to meet the changing needs of residents. A service funded to provide playgroups on a park may face dilemmas if there are few, or no, children under five on a park. Remaining on the park may mean program statistics are not maintained, but moving off the park could create difficulties in re-engaging management and residents if more children eventually do move onto the park. Funding bodies need to recognise that numbers can fluctuate. A service funded to provide a range of services can more easily adapt their programs according to who is living in the park.

A consistent presence on a park is important in building relationships with residents. Numbers can fluctuate and at times the number of people attending programs can be quite low. It is important that the connections are maintained with the park or the slow process of building relations may have to begin again. In some cases, after the suspension of programs on a park for a period of time, permission to return to the park has not been given by park management.
Services will have negotiable rules, and flexible guidelines and eligibility criteria
Negotiable rules, and flexible guidelines and eligibility criteria, allow for programs to be tailored to the particular needs of park residents. In particular, services that are not flexible and not able to adapt to the changing needs of park residents are likely to find engagement a struggle. For example, activities are frequently held in the children’s backyards and so services need to be flexible enough to cope with: children coming and going; unaccompanied children or children outside the target age range wandering over to join in; and children being unused to structured environments. The ability to keep participants safe and programs focused while still being relatively flexible can be challenging, but are important in the success of many programs.

Staff will engage residents through non-threatening, low-key and informal means
While more formal relations or approaches may develop, the initial contact with residents, particularly those who are suspicious of service providers, will be non-threatening, low-key and informal. Such activities allow residents to commence building a relationship with staff at their own pace while deciding whether or not they can be trusted or of assistance. While remaining non-threatening, low-key and informal, staff need to be flexible enough to build on opportunities as they arise. Meaningful conversations can occur in the car when transporting residents, a comment in a group can be the opportunity to explore an issue in some depth, an event in the park can mean that residents are open to talking to staff.

Many families and individuals are unlikely to engage in “therapy” and “counselling” or to participate in formal parenting training. Engaging with families through non-threatening activities and purposeful conversations is more likely to be effective.

**Principle 3: Services will work with park management**

The Family Support Program in Brisbane has found that building and maintaining a positive working relationship with the park managers is important to providing services to the residents in the caravan park. Such a concept is more difficult than it first sounds (see Perkins in Chapter 7).

Some park managers present challenges for services working with park residents. They can prevent or restrict access to parks, place restrictions on what services can do in the park or who they talk to, undermine the work done or place other obstacles in their way.

I had just visited a couple who wanted assistance with finding alternative accommodation, when the caretaker told me that the owner wanted to talk to me on the phone. The owner, who lived in a caravan on a hill overlooking the park, had seen me visiting the resident and proceeded to tell me that I wasn’t to visit them because they were trouble makers. After discussing it with the owner for a while, she agreed that I could continue to talk to the couple because she wanted them off the park anyway.

*Community worker*

The park manager rang me the afternoon before I usually come to the park. She told me “not to come tomorrow because no one would be there”. I asked her about that and she just said no one would be there. Because of other things going on with the manager, I felt I had to do as she said. When I came to the park the next week a resident said to me “Why didn’t you come last week?” I told him how I was told not to because no one was going to be there. He said they were all there. The residents were unusually quiet after this.

*Health promotions worker*
Other park managers can be quite supportive and attempt to help residents as much as possible.

The park owners were quite concerned about a resident who was experiencing a mental health crisis and wasn’t paying his rent. They rang us to see if we could help with Centrelink and mental health services. They didn’t want to evict him, but couldn’t let him stay if he got too far behind in his rent. Because the managers contacted us early enough, we were able to intervene, ensure he received the support he needed and maintain his tenancy.

*Community worker*

Park owners and managers are quite powerful and make a big difference to park life. Besides being responsible for the variety and standard of park facilities they also determine who lives in the park community, can prevent people (even family) from coming on to the park, and the way in which they handle problems and disputes has a large impact on park life. In some parks, park managers are quite supportive of residents and help create a positive environment in the park. In other parks, managers can be controlling, abusive and threatening, and help create a sense of fear and powerlessness. Because park managers often spend a great deal of time in the park (even living on site) residents face much greater scrutiny and control than in most other housing situations, which means that some managers take advantage of, or make life difficult for, vulnerable tenants.

On one occasion we received a complaint from a young female sole parent that the park manager had demanded sexual favours in return for the provision of much needed crisis accommodation (Park & Village Service 2004, p. 109).

The new managers have made a difference. They are just much kinder. If you explain something like if you can’t pay all the rent this week, they say “Just fix it up next fortnight.” They don’t worry about a thing; as long as you pay the money they will do anything for you. They take you down the street if they are going down there.

*Park resident*

Park managers can also make it difficult, even impossible, for service providers to access residents in the park. Some states have legislation that provide residents with the right to access services or protects the rights of a limited number of service providers to access a park. For example, in New South Wales a park owner or manager of a residential park must not “restrict the right of a resident of that park to purchase goods or services from a person of his or her choice” (NSW Residential Parks Act 1998, s. 69), and “emergency and home care service personnel” must have “unimpeded vehicular access to the residential premises in the park at all times, both by day and by night” (s. 71A). This does not mean that a service has the right to conduct a playgroup on a park or to do general outreach to a park. In most cases, services wanting to work on parks, especially if they want to run groups or undertake community development, will need the permission of park management to do so.

*Implications for practice include the following*

**Services will treat park managers with respect as individuals**

When working with very marginalised residents on sub-standard parks it can be easy to see park managers as obstacles needing to be overcome or even as “the enemy”. As with clients, however, service providers need to be able to move beyond seeing only the problems created by managers and explore ways of engaging them, attempting to obtain their support and building on their skills and abilities. Because no two parks or park managers are the same, what works on one park may not work on another and so workers need to modify their response to managers depending on the situation.
Services will promote the benefits of services to park management
If service providers can help park managers see the benefits of having their service on the park, managers are more likely to be supportive. Service providers may be able to assist residents with a range of issues which could also have a positive impact on the managers. For example, assisting a resident to address financial problems may help them pay their rent; similarly, addressing a mental health crisis could lead to a resident creating less tension in the park.

I take the opportunity to provide brief support to people in the park who are not on my “caseload” but who I have been asked if I would lend a hand by the management. I do this to maintain good will with the management (see Perkins in Chapter 7).

Services will acknowledge the challenges faced by park managers and provide support where appropriate
Managing a park can be quite challenging and park managers rarely have training or experience in dealing with many of the issues faced on marginalised parks. Some managers say that although they are trying to run a business, much of their time is taken up with addressing “welfare” issues of residents. Managers report having to deal with residents damaging property, not paying rent, causing disturbances to other residents and breaking park rules. They can be called upon to help with residents experiencing a psychotic episode, drunk or stoned residents, children being abused or neglected, and residents in need of emergency relief. Some managers report dilemmas in terms of children because they feel that caravans are not appropriate accommodation for young children but they know that there can be few other options. By acknowledging some of the challenges faced by park managers, services may be able show how their work with residents can also be of significant benefit to the managers.

Service providers could also consider ways in which they can provide support directly to managers so that they are more likely to create a positive environment in the park and/or deal with problems more successfully.

Once, when I was talking with a manager about the problems she was experiencing in the park, I said “We are there for you too”. It made her rethink her attitude towards us, but also made us think about the ways in which we could support the manager without disadvantaging the residents.

*Community worker*

It may also be helpful if service providers recognise that supporting residents can make life harder for park managers; for example, assisting a family to find alternative accommodation means a loss of income. At times, supporting a resident to stay in the park not only makes life harder for the managers but also for other park residents, such as helping a resident who is causing disturbances in the park to fight an eviction notice.

One of the things that residents said they liked about the new managers was that they kicked off “the ferals and the junkies”. Some of these people were the ones we had been supporting. It highlighted the dilemma we faced in helping people to stay in the park, even though they made life harder for other residents.

*Community worker*
Services will put time and effort into building a working relationship with park managers

As with park residents, building a trusting relationship with park managers takes time and effort. Managers can be suspicious of service providers and need to be convinced of the benefits of allowing them access to the park. Service providers may need to be patient and persistent. Some forum participants tried to keep in regular contact with the managers of the parks they worked both informally (by dropping in to say hello when they were at the park) and more formally (by sending letters to managers with plans for the coming term).

I often pop into the office and ask if there are new families and now have the managers in the habit of letting me know when new families have moved into the park so I may introduce myself (see Perkins in Chapter 7).

Services will set limits to how much they will compromise in order to maintain good relations with park management

Workers need to balance maintaining positive relationships with managers and doing effective work that meets the needs of residents—not always an easy task. Although positive relationships with managers are important, except in exceptional circumstance service providers should put the needs of residents first. There can be many dilemmas in working with park managers, some of which are difficult to resolve. Meeting the needs of residents could lead to conflict with park management and ultimately being prevented from entering the park.

After 12 months work, we had finally obtained permission to commence working on a caravan park with many marginalised residents. We came in contact with a woman in the park who was suicidal, being threatened with violence from another resident in the park, and was desperately wanting to find alternative accommodation. We helped the woman find somewhere else to live. In order to observe confidentially, we did not inform the manager that the women would be leaving, and she left owing approximately $400 in back rent. Once the park manager discovered what had happen, we were once again excluded from the park (even though we offered to pay half the rent) and were unable to return for about four months.

Community worker

Service providers can be faced with sub-standard and unsafe living conditions and have to decide whether or not they inform appropriate authorities. They may need to decide whether it is more important that they address a specific issue or to remain on the park to continue supporting residents. It is important that services do not compromise too much and end up supporting conditions or practices that are not in the best interests of residents.

At times it may be possible to act as a bridge between management and residents and use a relationship with management to achieve changes in the park. At other times it may be necessary to adopt a stronger advocacy position and risk conflict with management.

Principle 4: Services will build on the strengths of park communities

The good thing about living in a caravan park is that you can meet really good people, but not always. I have made some great friends here and we really look after each other. A lot of the kids come to talk to me when they are bored or hungry and that is nice, but I have my own problems and sometimes I can’t be there for them.

Jeff (aged 36) shares custody with his three-year-old daughter Samantha (Marshall 2005, p. 23).
Caravan parks are communities with clearly defined physical boundaries (i.e. the park community includes all the residents living within the caravan park). While there are many challenges for people living in caravan parks, residents often appreciate the friendships they make, or the sense of community they find, in caravan parks. Residents support each other in a variety of ways including lending money or food, providing information about available services and resources, looking out for each other’s children, sharing transport and providing emotional support.

I’ve made some really good friends, really good friends that I know that I can trust that are always there for me if I need a shoulder to cry on, or something to lend or borrow or even just a lift down town to get to work if my car is broken. They are good people. The atmosphere here is pretty good and the people are quite friendly.

_Park resident_

Services can explore ways of promoting a sense of community and build on the informal social networks that exist in caravan parks. At times the sense of community can be challenging for staff—particularly when the main ways in which informal community building occurs is through alcohol or illegal activities—and services may need to explore alternative forms of community building.

**Implications for practice include the following**

**Staff will identify and support gatekeepers in the park community**

Often there are residents in the park who act as gatekeepers who may assist workers build relationships with other residents, meet new residents or hear about residents needing extra support. These residents can play an important role in building a park community, although care needs to be taken that they do not exclude or control other residents. By supporting gatekeepers, staff can
encourage them to be inclusive and help them develop skills that contribute to building a sense of community on a park.

It was during this time that I met Sally who I had previously known to be the park’s resident drug dealer/prostitute. Sally had no children and therefore did not fit within the family support project’s target group. However, Sally’s high ranking within the caravan park’s hierarchy soon became apparent and she turned into a wonderful referral source to both myself and the playgroup. I had many discussions with Sally around the boot of my car with Sally telling me how she had told new residents with children to “go and see the Save the Children ladies and they will sort you out”. It turns out; Sally had been doing this even prior to my formally meeting her. Once Sally was seen by other residents to engage with me, my social standing and visibility within the park increased (see Daunt in chapter 4).

Staff will help residents build a safe environment, particularly for children
Safety is a significant concern in some caravan parks. Services can play an important role in assisting residents explore ways of making their park safer. Helping build social networks and strengthening the park’s sense of community can increase both people’s sense of security and actual security. Park life can be particularly difficult for families with young children and there can be numerous risks for children living in parks: frequent change over of residents; difficulties supervising children when they are outside; the presence of residents with histories of drug and alcohol abuse, violence and child abuse; the lack of security; and the communal nature of some aspects of park life. Due to the vulnerability of children and their lack of power, it is particularly important to build a safe environment for children.

Kids permanently living in the caravan park learn that some things are best kept secret. Fear is instilled at a very young age about the consequences of transparency. Group is a great opportunity to do some basic protective behaviour work. Problems can be worked through in a safe environment. Kids have learnt they can let their guard down a little with adults that will support them in the most respectful and understanding way (see Verrall in Chapter 6).

Ways that park communities can increase safety for children include residents keeping a friendly eye on the children living on the park, providing safe places for children to play, decreasing social isolation and developing informal supportive networks between families.

A couple were having a very volatile argument involving some pushing and shoving. Their four-year-old daughter was quite scared but was able to come over to our playgroup and be with other adults and children. If they had been living in a flat or unit, she probably would not have had anywhere to else to go where she could feel safer and talk about what was happening.

Community worker

Staff will help build inclusive park communities
At times park politics can mean that some residents are excluded. For example, there can be a social divide between people owning their own manufactured homes and people renting caravans on the same park, or there can be fights or disagreements between residents and some residents might not want to participate in groups if other residents will be involved. Staff can help promote community building activities that help break down some of the barriers (e.g. park newsletters, social activities), not becoming involved in park politics, avoiding excluding residents from groups except as a last resort (e.g. for violence), or challenging behaviour that is discriminatory or excludes others.
**Principle 5: Services will go to caravan parks**

The park we visit is 15 km from the community health centre, Centrelink, other agencies and the main shopping area. Only a third of the households have a registered car and the taxi fare is $85 return. If residents want to use public transport they have to catch the school bus (out in the morning and back in the afternoon) then a train and bus (about 2 hours each way). When we first started visiting the park there were 26 children and very few residents were accessing child health services. By going to the park we have been able to address a range of health issues, increase immunisation rates and assist families to access other health services.

*Child and family health nurse*

Forum participants spoke about the importance of outreach to caravan parks and providing programs within the park communities in order to maximise participation by residents. On parks with large numbers of marginalised residents there can be high levels of disadvantage and suspicion of service providers. By going to caravan parks, residents have the opportunity to develop relationships at their own pace and services can develop a positive reputation in the park. At times, off-site activities can work (especially if transport is supplied), although services generally found that service provision in the park was more successful.

For a while we tried running a playgroup in a community centre less than 300 metres away from the caravan park. We ended up returning to the park (even though the park had no community facilities except for two rickety picnic tables) because the residents didn’t come over to the community centre.

*Community worker*

**Implications for practice include the following**

**Services will actively seek out residents**

Because many residents are suspicious of service providers, staff often find they need to actively seek out residents rather than waiting for residents to come to them. Services adopting assertive outreach use a variety of strategies including:

- door knocking within the park
- organising a weekly supply of bread and other bakery products they can distribute to residents
- being highly visible (e.g. having colourful vans for playgroups)
- asking managers if there are any new residents or residents who could do with a visit
- providing health clinics or other services that attract residents
- using children’s activities in the park as a way to engage with families
- organising park fun days or other social events.

A family with a four-year-old daughter moved onto the park. When we visited them we received a cool but not hostile reception. Each week we dropped in and invited them to the playgroup or just to come over for a coffee but they didn’t take up the offer. We checked with them that they didn’t mind us dropping in and they said it was OK. After nearly three months of visiting them, they finally started coming and slowly became one of our most regular and consistent families.

*Community worker*
Services will have permission from park management to run programs on the park
As discussed above, caravan parks are private property and in order to run programs on parks, services need the permission of park management.

**Principle 6: Services will build strong partnerships and networks**

A social worker in a rural community health centre became aware of the needs of two local caravan parks, and advocated on behalf of the residents to develop a coordinated response to service provision. The partnerships led to a number of initiatives in the park and a successful funding application for a 12-month pilot project.

Participants at the forum identified the importance of networking and forming interagency partnerships. The range of issues facing park residents means it is unlikely that any one service could successfully support residents on their own. Services that go regularly to a park and are well known by residents can often assist other services to access residents. In particular, services could come to the park at the same time as activities were being offered to children or adults and meet residents informally or share information.

A child and family health nurse comes to a park on a regular basis when another service is conducting a playgroup. The playgroup involves most of the children under five in the park and so the nurse is able to meet parents in a relaxed setting and visit them individually after playgroup. She is then able to refer them to other specialist children services as needed.

**Implications for practice include the following**

**Staff will develop networks that allow them to access a wide range of information and services**

When working across a number of local government areas or other government boundaries it can be difficult to keep up to date with all the available services. Staff need to develop networks that allow them to quickly find out the information they need.

**Services will assist residents to fast track appointments**

Residents of caravan parks can be transient so waiting a long time for appointments can mean that needed services are not accessed. By building strong networks with other agencies services can sometimes fast track appointments or arrange a quick response.

An allied health service has set aside a number of appointments each week to allow quick access to transient groups of people (including residents from a local caravan park).

**Services will work in conjunction with Indigenous services**

Where there are Indigenous residents of caravan parks (and generally Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders are overrepresented in parks) it is important that services work in conjunction with Indigenous services and develop strong networks with them. Staff should know local Indigenous workers, involve them where appropriate, and support Indigenous services to address the needs of Indigenous residents.
Principle 7: Services will advocate on behalf of residents

There are caravan parks that have sub-standard living conditions, and are unsafe and poorly maintained. The situation arises whereby marginalised people are able to be exploited due to a lack of any other options. For the typical Family Support Worker the impulse to advocate for the disadvantaged is strong, especially when it appears a profit is being made at their expense. This becomes complicated, however, when the parks are generally private property and the managers have the ultimate right to not allow Playscheme and the Family Support Workers in. They also have the ability to evict “problematic” residents. Further, having a park closed down as it is unsafe, unhygienic, and exploitative may stop that abuse of human rights; however, the homeless and marginalised would have few options left open to them (see Perkins in Chapter 7).

Services frequently need to advocate on behalf of residents and it is an important component of work. Advocacy can occur in a number of ways including:

❱ supporting residents in self-advocacy
❱ advocating on behalf of residents to park managers
❱ advocating on behalf of less-powerful residents with other, more powerful, residents
❱ assisting residents to utilise advocacy services (e.g. raising tenancy issues through Tennant Advice and Advocacy Services)
❱ advocating on behalf of a whole park (e.g. in relation to park closures or rent increases)
❱ advocating on behalf of park managers (e.g. in relation to council red tape interfering with park improvements)
❱ advocating on behalf of residents so that they can access goods and services available to the general community (e.g. some residents report difficulties joining video libraries)
❱ raising awareness in the general community about issues facing park residents
❱ systems advocacy, in which the focus is on influencing and changing legislation, policy and practices in ways that will benefit park residents.

The need to maintain positive relationships with park managers (as discussed above) can create challenges for some services, so it is important to identify ways in which issues can be addressed and change can be facilitated.

Implications for practice include the following

Staff will have a working knowledge of relevant legislation and know how to use it

We had a lot of trouble here about a year ago, and this woman took the managers to court. All of a sudden we realised that we had more rights than we thought, or knew about. We were always told “If you don’t like the way things are, then move out.” Bessie, 65 (Marshall 2005, p. 13).

There is a range of legislation and numerous government departments with relevance to caravan parks. Staff need to have a working knowledge of relevant legislation, know where to get more information or support, and be able to use the legislation to support residents. Some states and territories (but not all) have specific tenancy, or more general, legislation relating to caravan parks and manufactured home villages. While the effectiveness of this legislation can vary, it is helpful for staff working in caravan parks to have some basic knowledge of the legislation and be able to assist residents obtain expert advice when required.
At times, services that are dependent on the permission of park management for running programs on site may need to encourage other services (especially tenancy advocacy or advice services) to become more involved.

**Staff will assess the risks of advocacy especially when working with less-powerful residents**

At times advocacy can bring unintended consequences for the people being assisted. For people who are vulnerable or who have had their power undermined, there can be major negative side effects, and staff need to assess these risks before undertaking advocacy.

In one park visited by our staff every van had the same key so that residents found even going to the showers put them at risk of theft. Dogs were tied to van doors or left inside to guard. Residents reported that a person who complained about the locks had been summarily evicted (Park and Village Service 2004, p. 113).

Because of the presence of on-site managers, residents can experience harassment or victimisation from unscrupulous managers if they are perceived as troublemakers. Tenancy services have received reports of selective and preferential application of park rules, and residents being intimidated, harassed, victimised or abused by park managers. It is the residents who run the risk of eviction or being harassed, so before undertaking advocacy, services need to check that residents are aware of potential consequences and ensure they are willing for services to act on their behalf.

**Staff will assist residents to advocate on their own behalf**

During discussion over coffee at a fairly run-down park, written receipts and leases were raised. A number of residents expressed concern about the practice of the park and we talked about possible ways of discovering their rights. The next week, when we came back to the park we discovered that some of the residents had come together and organised for a Tenancy Advice and Advocacy Service to meet with them.

*Community worker*

Where possible, residents should be assisted to advocate on their own behalf. At times this may be difficult, particularly when residents are marginalised or face numerous problems in their lives. Strategies can include being a support for residents when they visit another service (e.g. Centrelink, a housing provider) to address problems, assisting them to learn where they can obtain information and advice, building their self-confidence and communication skills, and building social capital and social connections within the park (so that it is easier to address problems within the park).

Parks with long-term permanent residents who own their own dwelling, especially manufactured-home villages, sometimes have residents’ groups who are able to advocate on their own behalf, but this is less likely on marginalised caravan parks or where there is a high turnover of residents. At times the interests of the residents’ groups can be at the expense of other residents, especially more marginalised residents.

In a park with both manufactured homes and caravans, the residents’ group (which consisted primarily of residents owning a manufactured home) supported the manager in evicting a family renting a caravan who were experiencing numerous crises and who were difficult tenants and neighbours. The group, which had no members with young children, also supported the manager’s decision to remove play equipment from the park because of insurance concerns.

*Community worker*
Strategies that promote community building and break down barriers between residents can help reduce the potential for polarisation and can encourage residents working together to advocate on their own behalf.

**Staff will adapt their style of advocacy to the situation**

Different situations require different styles of advocacy. Some forum participants spoke about the “hammer and the feather” approach. At times strong advocacy is required, and this can involve strategies such as taking park management to court or a tribunal. At other times, changes can be brought about by working with the park manager and discussing with them ways of improving the lives of residents.

Through working with the park managers a community health nurse was able to promote improvements to a park including repairs to caravans and the provision of full-size refrigerators. The manager also provided space for a demountable that could be used for health and other services when they visited the park.

**Principle 8: Services will pay particular attention to the needs of children**

Playscheme’s greatest strength is its simplicity, its inviting appearance, and non-threatening façade. This is a powerful side effect of the playgroup model. Parents feel comfortable to engage in an activity that focuses on their children in a positive way, that is non-problem based, and keeps them out of the spotlight. Our playgroups are free of charge and place no immediate responsibility or expectations on parents. We have a “no exclusions” policy and would never turn a child away that came unaccompanied (Stuart & Ellis 2005, p. 26).

Families with children, particularly young children, often struggle with life in a caravan park. Although not always the case, residents with children are more likely than other residents to be living in a caravan because they have no other choices. Throughout the forum, the particular needs of children were raised as a being a major concern. In all but one of the 15 workshops, issues relating to the wellbeing of children were raised. Children in parks are often vulnerable to poverty, child protection issues, under performance at school, illness, poor nutrition and injury. At the same time, as discussed above, there are strengths and resources in park communities that can be drawn upon to help children.

Although not all agencies working in caravan parks focus on children, the vulnerability of children means that all staff should still pay particular attention to their needs. Staff may not be targeting children but they have a responsibility to involve other services if there are children experiencing hardships on parks or if they are at risk of harm.

**Implications for practice include the following**

**Staff will have an understanding of the issues faced by children living in parks**

Staff need to understand at least some of the issues facing children living in parks. Although there are exceptions, most people find raising children in caravan parks difficult and are less likely to be satisfied with their accommodation. Particular challenges facing families with children can include:

- having to eat, sleep and play in one room resulting in little privacy for parents or children
Child protection issues can be exacerbated by communal living (e.g. residents with a history of violence or sexual offences, difficulties supervising children, frequent turnover of residents)

- shared amenities that are not well maintained or child friendly (e.g. toilets and showers without full-length doors are easier to clean but allow children to “escape” under the door)
- problems for parents taking older children of the opposite sex to the toilet or shower (e.g. some parks require children under a certain age to be accompanied by an adult)
- frequent changes of address
- inadequate or nonexistent physical safety provisions for children
- lack of space to play indoors, and nowhere to play in bad or very hot weather
- poor quality, or no, play equipment
- difficulties doing homework because of noise and lack of space
- difficulties maintaining friends because of transience, being embarrassed to bring their friends home or other parents not allowing their children to visit the park
- communal living increasing the risk of illness and contagious diseases
- social and physical isolation (e.g. poor public transport).

Kevin Howard, 54... pleaded guilty in Newcastle Local Court to multiple charges of sexual intercourse with a child under the age of 10, indecent assault of a child and possession of child pornography... Police alleged Howard, who has a 39-year criminal history for violent and sexual offences, had sexually explicit photographs of children stored on his mobile handset when it was seized in September last year... The acts allegedly took place between April and September 2006 at a local caravan park, where Howard was living (Daily Telegraph 24 May 2007).
Staff will have an understanding of the importance of play for children
Staff need to recognise the importance of play in cultivating every aspect of children’s development and building the foundation of their intellectual, social, physical and emotional skills necessary for success in future learning. It fosters creativity, communication, social problem solving and flexibility in thinking and helping children to construct knowledge for themselves as they interact with both the physical world and with other individuals (Canadian Council on Learning, 2006). Adult–child interaction during play can optimise children’s cognitive development, language development and social achievement, help them succeed in performing tasks and problem solving, and increase the richness and length of their play (Kwon 2002; Leseman 2002).

Nearly half of the participants at the forum came from organisations that used activities for children (e.g. playgroups, after-school activities) as an important component of their service delivery. They have found that providing non-threatening child-focused activities is an excellent way to engage families. Because of the difficulties in providing safe space to play in caravan parks and the challenging environment for parenting, even staff who do not focus on children can help residents and managers recognise the importance of play and advocate on behalf of children in a park.

[I would like] having an area for my daughter to play in. She’s not allowed to ride her bike in the park. They are not allowed to play with balls in the park. It’s alright for adults, they have people to play with—I mean to socialise with. But for the kids there is just nothing for them here. The pool is only open October to January or February or something like that, so it’s just not viable for the kids to really get in there either.

_Park resident_

Staff will foster the wellbeing of children and take steps to address issues of concern
Once again, although not all services are child focused, because of the challenges of raising children in a caravan park all staff need to foster the wellbeing of children living in parks. At the least they can advocate on behalf of the children to park managers or other services, notify relevant authorities about children at risk of harm, refer families to appropriate services or encourage other services to become involved.

It is important to recruit the support of members in a community to advocate for children. A caravan park provides a very close community that can be empowered to advocate for women and children. The best support may be from other residents who depend on the Family Support Worker’s input and consultation (see Daunt in chapter 4).

_Principle 9: Services will have well-supported, skilled staff_

Each service has two staff, one an Early Childhood Specialist, and the other a Community Worker with social work/welfare expertise. In this way, we serve dual purposes. The Early Childhood Worker’s focus is to ensure that appropriate play and craft activities are available, that give children and their carers input that is educational, challenging and above all fun! The Community Worker has a particular focus on engaging carers and working with them informally on a range of issues including parenting information, education and support, self-concept, relationship and health issues (see Mobile Playscheme Team, Save the Children Qld in Chapter 5).

The ability of services to support residents will ultimately depend on having skilled staff who are able to work within the context of caravan parks. Working with caravan park residents can
be quite demanding and challenging, and some staff find the nature of the work very difficult. Amongst other things, staff need to be able to respond to a wide range of issues, build relationships with marginalised residents, cope with change and uncertainty, keep on side with managers whilst meeting the needs of residents, and use relevant legislation to support residents. Generally two workers are needed to run children’s programs safely and to allow them to respond to critical incidents while maintaining the safety of participants.

**Implications for practice include the following**

**Staff will be provided with adequate supervision and debriefing**

Because of the demanding nature of the work, staff need to be well-supported through supervision, debriefing and training. Staff can also be supported through peer debriefing and developing reflective practice. Teams can be creative in the use of the time spent travelling to and from parks for team building, debriefing and reflection.

**Staff will have the resources they need to undertake their work**

Without adequate resources, staff will be hampered in their ability to undertake their work. For some services, the nature of outreach and going to park communities means they need equipment such as vehicles, play equipment, laptops or mobiles. Some parks have no community facilities so activities need to be run in the open, sometimes with no shade, and services need to be self-contained. For children’s services in particular, fully equipped vans to carry equipment and shelter onto the parks are important.

Due to the transient nature of some residents, opportunities may be missed if there is a delay in obtaining services. Service providers that have access to brokerage funds are more likely to ensure services or resources are provided quickly and easily.

**Services will encourage diversity within their staff**

At the forum a workshop on working with Indigenous communities identified the importance of having Indigenous workers, and a workshop on working with men identified the advantages of having male workers. Having staff from diverse backgrounds can enhance the skill and experience base of the service.

At one of our playgroups a number of fathers were attending the group, but were not very involved. We had a male staff member who only worked one day a week, but we arranged for him to start coming to the park for a while. The sight of him sitting on the mat playing with the children encouraged other fathers to join in more.

*Children’s worker*

**Staff will regularly reflect upon their practice**

Reflective practice needs to be an important component of a service’s work culture and staff need to be assisted in finding practices that encourage continual improvement. Although a number of services adopt action research as part of their model of practice, there are a variety of other processes that can assist workers to think about what works, how they can improve their practice and the evidence base for their practices.

**Services will have policies in place to protect the health and safety of workers**

As with any work, services have a responsibility to ensure the health and safety of workers. Staff can be exposed to volatile or potentially violent situations, burnout, extreme weather condi-
tions, communicable diseases and emotional stress. While occupational health and safety issues need to be a priority, staff also need to be able to undertake their work without restrictive bureaucratic requirements. While some services appear to be fearful of working on parks, where services have built positive relationships with residents and managers, workers’ safety can be enhanced because there are usually other people around who can provide some protection.

An emergency relief agency, which only provided emergency relief through home visits, would not come to a particular park because they had experienced problems in that park. This meant that residents were in a catch 22: they couldn’t go to the agency to get assistance but the agency was unwilling to come to them. Attempts to find a compromise (e.g. agency staff come when a playgroup was being run in the park) were unsuccessful.

Strategies such as working in pairs, going to a park when another service will be there, informing park management when entering the park, chatting with residents outside their van or in clearly visible areas, and carrying mobile phones can all reduce the risk of harm.

**Staff will share the responsibility for caring for themselves**

Staff also have a responsibility to care for themselves: they need to recognise their limits, seek support when needed, balance their home and work life, set boundaries for themselves and maintain a sense of hope. Services can encourage this self-care through recognising the demands of the work, providing professional supervision and debriefing, ensuring staff have time for reflection and promoting a culture that is supportive and encourages a balance between work and home.
Engaging with family members who are suspicious of services

The following paper was presented by Maggie Daunt (Family Support Team, Save the Children, Queensland Division) at the forum.

There are recurring themes at each operational revue of the Save the Children Mobile Playscheme: exceptional in its ability to engage with families in marginalised circumstances, but unable to provide more than basic assistance. When pondering our next step as a program, the desired outcome was clear—workers who could benefit from the trust and rapport established from the service, and with the capacity to do intensive, extended support work. Thus the service began employing Family Support Workers to attach to the Playscheme.

The Family Support Work Model aims to reduce risk factors for the families and increase the protective factors assisting families to care for their children safely. Major principles of the service are strengths building, development of trust, individualised support and therapeutic intervention where appropriate, and assisted linkage that enables children, young people and families to be part of the park community and the community overall. The program delivers a therapeutic model based on assertive outreach and adheres to key principles of engaging families and providing holistic support and intervention across all needs.

The Family Support Project receives both state and Commonwealth funding, and has a commitment to participating in research. The team consists of seven Family Support Workers who have extensive experience and training in counselling and innovative practice, and also have professional qualifications (e.g. social work and psychology). One position is designated for supervision and coordination of the program. In peer supervision and action research case study sessions, the team reflects on outcomes that have greatly influenced practice. For example, many families residing in caravan parks are highly suspicious of the intentions of welfare services. Workers had to be especially creative and careful when engaging with parents.

Many residents of caravan parks are highly suspicious, particularly of welfare services. A great deal of fear and paranoia of professionals exists among residents in the caravan park setting. The reasons for this are many and varied, and quite often individual to each resident. Some of the reasons we have identified include:

- an inter-generational distrust of services (stolen generation, history of wardship)
- a history of negative experiences with services/practitioners
- a distrust/fear of a service’s motivation for engagement (particularly relevant in child-focused services)
- a fear for their own immediate safety and reputation should they be seen to link with a service.

Many have experienced childhood abuse and violence, neglect, and are living in poverty. Drug and alcohol abuse is common. Many are taking a stand against abuse and violence in their lives and are struggling to overcome poverty. Engaging with a family can take longer than a three-month period, and premature intervention can increase the risk of harm to family members, or will encourage the family to continue with a transient and unstable lifestyle going from park to park, successfully avoiding necessary intervention. Many of the families are highly resistant to any intervention having experienced years of violence and abuse, and consequent contact with a variety of systems. For many families the Family Support Workers have had to work on developing a relationship at a very slow pace.
It is important to recruit the support of members in a community to advocate for children. A caravan park provides a very close community that can be empowered to advocate for women and children. The best support may be from other residents who depend on the Family Support Worker’s input and consultation.

It has been our experience that for many families and individuals “therapy” and “counselling” is difficult to embark on. By engaging with families in their environment, in very practical ways, individuals request and appreciate counselling opportunities. Many enriching counselling and therapeutic times occur in the car, in waiting areas and in recreational parks. Family members have reported ambivalence about attending traditional counselling appointments and meeting in a closed space.

Many parents avoid, and report getting very little from, being required to attend formal parenting training. Alternatively, Family Support Workers engage with parents in an exploration of what gets in the way of best parenting such as poverty, related stress, childhood abuse and trauma, and drug and alcohol abuse. Dealing with these issues allows parents to experience their strengths and develop healthy relationships with their children.

Early development of community links supports stability. Many cases require a collaborative interagency approach that is supportive of building on a family’s strengths rather than a focus on fear and pessimism.

Relationships are vital—many families do not have supportive nor safe support networks to draw on. It is paradoxical that families can be punished for being too dependent on workers but conversely held to account for welcoming other unsafe networks into their lives. It is important that we offer, as in any relationship, the capacity to be dependable for a period of time whilst working with parents and young people to establish new safe and useful networks.

The caravan park I am primarily based in is one of three in one street situated in one of Brisbane’s more affluent suburbs. Surrounding residential house prices are upwards of $500,000,
thus reinforcing the isolation, stigma and ranking on the social ladder associated with residing behind the dilapidated brick wall of the caravan park. A lot of residents speak of only coming to the caravan park with intentions of staying not more than a couple of months. To date I have known none to have achieved this well-intentioned goal. Residents can be on TICA [a residential tenancy database listing “bad” tenants] and have little trouble getting into this park.

The Family Support Team has participated in action research in relation to engaging with these families. One of the main learning’s has been that there is no one best way in which to engage with families, but many. The following are some strategies we have used and have found to be useful:

- Spending time with our weekly playgroup in order to be visible in a non-threatening, open environment; using Playscheme as a “soft-door entry”. Playscheme workers are viewed as non-judgemental and are far less threatening as their perceived purpose is to entertain the children. The Playscheme enhances the families’ awareness of being supported by a larger organisation. Workers from Playscheme have been a useful recourse for accountability and development of the Family Support Project. Family Support Workers also have a sense of going into the parks with a team rather than alone.

- An assertive outreach model; that is, we don’t give up. We will continue to say hello, take food and offer assistance regardless of the response. Few people are viewed as “not ready” or “unmotivated” as it is our experience and learning from them that they are instead frightened and suspicious of our intentions and actions.

- We respect and appreciate time to build on the relationship with family members. It is a privileged and specialised relationship that requires a lot of care.

- Professional and trusting relationships are formed with family members that enable workers to “walk alongside” people, and create opportunities for developing their informal and, where necessary, their formal support networks.

- We employ an understanding of strengths-based therapeutic practice.

We aim to use a narrative framework recognising the politics of power in the relationship and that people are experts in their lives. No matter what we do we are being employed, enjoy privileges of being a wage earner and have power to involve statutory intervention. Recognising this allows us to have conversations about how we operate from this position of power early in the relationship.

- We use practical-based intervention as a tool for engaging with families (e.g. food, transport, housing, obtaining necessary household items).

- We assist families with school uniforms and equipment, encouraging school-aged children to attend school, which is more often what parents want too.
We have found that time and space for families to assess us is possibly one of the most welcomed and effective tools for engaging with highly suspicious families.

The model has drawn on current research and practice in the area of engaging and working with difficult and vulnerable families.

The model continues to draw from the outcomes of the action research.

One example of this occurred for me when I commenced bringing to the park bread and other bakery products kindly donated by a local bakery on a weekly basis. I became known for a time as the “bread lady” and a lot of residents, who I had previously not spoken to or even seen, came to “taste my wares”. It was during this time that I met “Sally” who I had previously known to be the park’s resident drug dealer/prostitute. Sally had no children and therefore did not fit within the family support project’s target group. However, Sally’s high ranking within the caravan park’s hierarchy soon became apparent and she became a wonderful referral source to both myself and the playgroup. I had many discussions with Sally around the boot of my car with Sally telling me how she had told new residents with children to “go and see the Save the Children ladies and they will sort you out”. It turns out Sally had been doing this even prior to my formally meeting her. Once Sally was seen by other residents to engage with me, my social standing and visibility within the park increased. Sally is no longer residing in the park but the connections she was able to help me and the residents make remain today.
5 Working with children on caravan parks

The following paper was presented by the Mobile Playscheme Team (Save the Children, Queensland Division) at the forum.

The Mobile Playscheme provides free, weekly, two-hour playgroups for pre-school-aged children and their carers who are residing in suburban caravan parks. Residence in a park usually means there is limited space for the toys and games essential for child development, and few parks have children’s facilities. Playscheme operates from a purpose-fit van, fully equipped with toys, games, craft activities, parent resources and information. Each service has two staff, one an Early Childhood Specialist, and the other a Community Worker with social work/welfare expertise. In this way, we serve dual purposes. The Early Childhood Worker’s focus is to ensure that appropriate play and craft activities are available that give children and their carers input that is educational, challenging and above all fun! The Community Worker has a particular focus on engaging carers and working with them informally on a range of issues including parenting information, education and support, self-concept, relationship and health issues.

Children under five years living with their parents and carers in caravan parks in marginalised, socially isolated circumstances are at high risk of abuse and neglect. They are largely hidden communities. Child protection issues are magnified in caravan parks as many children live in dysfunctional, economically deprived families who are highly mobile and lack supporting networks of family and friends. Children are constantly exposed to issues of substance abuse, criminal activities and domestic violence because of the overcrowded and isolated environment in which they live. This can include impact from other residents, not just the family unit.

What we hope to achieve

The mission of Save the Children states that we work for a world:

- that respects and values children
- that listens to children and learns
- where all children have hope and opportunity.

Playscheme staff aim to:

- provide a positive, educational experience for children that is grounded in acceptance and positive regard
- raise awareness of the developmental needs of children for parents and carers
- advocate for the rights of children, especially those from families struggling to provide the basic necessities.

Our challenges

Upon reflection, the team suggested that our challenges fall into three main areas:

- Environmental: that is, the actual challenge of providing an early childhood service within a caravan park.
- The challenge of working with children who are living within families with highly complex needs and issues.
The challenge of providing an appropriate, educationally sound program and resources for children of a range of ages that both challenges and promotes their development and special needs across all areas.

What works

Playscheme has successfully engaged families living in marginalised circumstances for nearly 20 years, and has seen many positive outcomes for families. Our model of service delivery has remained predominantly unchanged, but has continually strived to meet the changing needs of the communities in which we work. Like many successful projects, our principles are simple and effective. It is easy, as research powers along, to forget that the complexity of human relationships is best served by some effective, if not considered, old principles.

Playscheme’s greatest strength is its simplicity, its inviting appearance and non-threatening environment. This is a powerful side effect of the playgroup model. Parents feel comfortable to engage in an activity that focuses on their children in a positive way, one that is non-problem based, and keeps them out of the spotlight. Our playgroups are free of charge and place no immediate responsibility or expectations on parents. We have a “no exclusions” policy and would never turn a child away that came unaccompanied. When parent/carers are present, we encourage participation in a relaxed, informal environment.

We focus on establishing relationships with our families. Taking the time to develop real rapport and establish trust enables us to better engage carers around issues of concern as they arise. This is a slow and at times painful process, but has seen the greatest successes! At times it requires extreme patience and tolerance to maintain rapport with clients living in difficulty, and exposing children to less than ideal circumstances. As part of an organisation that advocates for the rights of children, Save the Children and the Playscheme staff have clear child protection policies and procedures. We will always involve statutory authorities if necessary.

Playscheme staff focus on the positives, using humour, modelling and encouraging our carers towards the best outcome for the children. The program is designed to be fully flexible yet consistent in its routine and schedule. Staff aim to add to the self-esteem and feelings of self-worth of every participant—be that carer or child. This is the core aim of each playgroup held.

There is great advantage to being an early childhood service, housed within a welfare organisation. This enables staff access to resources and supports (such as the Family Support Service and domestic violence refuges) not common to the majority of early childhood services.
The following paper was presented by Celia Verrall (Family Support Team, Save the Children, Queensland Division) at the forum.

When working with families at playgroup, school-age children who are not attending school often either come down and join in, sometimes with a parent and younger sibling, or walk by to check out what is going on. Those who are just checking us out are encouraged to join us. Although Playscheme is not designed for children of school age there are lots of interesting activities that attract these children. In our project’s first year of operation we identified a significant proportion of playgroup participants as being of school age.

We (the Playscheme staff and Family Support Workers) usually engage the children in conversation about school and living in the caravan park. Many of the children are just having a day off because they slept in, couldn’t find their uniform, didn’t have lunch to take or are unwell. Some have just moved into the park and haven’t enrolled in school yet. Often families assume they will only be in the park for a short time and think that it’s not worth getting settled into a new school. Some of the children are with a parent or visiting a friend and have wandered off or been sent off.

In cases where the children are not enrolled in school I offer assistance in obtaining the necessary forms and information. I usually carry an enrolment kit in the boot of my car. Even the children who won’t be in the park for long are usually keen to go to school once some of the obstacles are removed. Some obstacles are the lack of money for uniforms, books, lunch box and school bag. Often in the move (particularly a hasty move) things have been lost, damaged or left behind. I am able to buy these things using petty cash. If the children are enrolled but not attending I ring the principal of the school and let her know that the children are attending playgroup or are in the caravan park on school days.

Some examples

Jill, an 11-year-old girl, had missed most of the year at school. When I met her at playgroup she told me that she didn’t like school and would rather stay home because her neighbour Tanya paid her to baby sit her three children. When I talked to the school principal she said that each time she phoned Jill’s mother, the mother reported that Jill was sick. The principal was able to talk to Jill’s mother and encourage her to send her to school. Jill attended well in Grade 7 and now is in Grade 8 at high school. She enjoys the social aspect of high school and attends everyday. There was a week recently, however, when I noticed her in the park several times. When I asked her if she was sick, she removed her hat and showed me that her mother had shaved her eyebrows off while she was sleeping for a joke.

Ryan, a 12-year-old boy, had been living in the caravan park for a week when his mother Karen brought him to playgroup. Ryan and Karen recognised the Playscheme van and the workers from years ago when they lived in another caravan park. Ryan and Karen have moved many times as Karen’s partner does project work around the state. In some places that they have stayed, Karen has not put Ryan into the school mainly due to the stay being a short one. Karen had decided not to enrol Ryan this time as they thought that they would only stay for a few months. The Playscheme worker encouraged Karen to enrol Ryan anyway saying that the school was a nice one.
and that lots of kids in the park attended. Fortunately, I had an enrolment kit in my car and Karen took Ryan to school the next morning. Ryan and Karen are still in the caravan park three years later.

Ten-year-old Sky, Breeze (four) and their parents, Scott and Michelle, were only in the caravan park for a short time. They had moved from an alternative share community in another state. When the planned accommodation in Queensland fell through the family decided to seek another type of experience. They expected that the caravan park would be an opportunity to meet like-minded people in a new location. Sky and Breeze were home-schooled for the time being until they were able to move close to a school with the principles and ideals that the family lived by. The family ate only organic food but were happy to make an exception at playgroup morning tea so that the children could socialise.

Within a few days of moving into the park Sky was the leader of the caravan park kids. She was bright and interested in everything and everybody. She was the first child ever to ask to see my blue card [issued to people who have undergone a Working with Children Check]. Sky approached me for a chat one afternoon, with the other caravan park kids close behind. She disclosed a domestic violence incident that had happened in a nearby caravan and spilled out onto the road, on the weekend. She described in great detail everything that had happened and was able to talk about her feelings of personal fear and concern that the woman involved could be hurt again. She also added that her mum had talked to her about what had happened. The other children present glanced discreetly at one other and reluctantly acknowledged that they had all witnessed or heard the incident. I later talked to Michelle about the disclosure and she said that she had talked at length with Sky about it. Michelle also said that they had decided that they would move on shortly because they were not happy with the level of violence in the caravan park.

**Kids’ Craft Group**

Early on in our project, when I had only engaged with a few families, I would often find myself with a spare hour or two. At these times I would buy a cup of tea and a newspaper at the caravan park shop and sit outside at the table. I rarely read past the front page before someone approached me. Often I would have a chat with the shop owner—who has referred several clients to me—and often primary school-age kids would come over and ask what I was doing.

It had been my observation that the school-age kids in the caravan park had little to do apart from watch TV. The shop owner often complained that their school attendance was poor and that they just hung around with nothing to do. Out of this came the idea of taking the kids on
an outing in the school holidays. However, I needed a chance to get to know these kids and their behaviours before I took the risk of an outing. I decided to run a craft group for the six weeks leading up to the holidays. The group started off slowly with one 10-year-old girl attending all six sessions, and six other children who came occasionally. The 10-year-old girl used the opportunity to talk about a range of issues in her family life through the painting, drawing and craftwork. Since then several outings have been enjoyed and the craft group has evolved to include ball games, board games and a good excuse to have a chat with the Family Support Worker. Occasionally, unacceptable behaviours happen at the group and I talk respectfully with the kids about them. I rarely have a repeat of the behaviour.

The 10-year-old girl has just turned 12 and has only missed one craft group.

**What works**

- Casual meeting time: we start when the kids get there. Those who want to talk with me will get there first and those who are bored with the activity can leave when they are ready.
- Let the kids decide the next week’s activity from a choice of three.
- Have a variety of things to do (e.g. a board game as well as soccer in the tennis court).
- Ask parents to stay with younger kids.
- Modified group when I am unwell—the kids appreciate me coming anyway.
- Good food for afternoon tea—some new foods as well as favourites.

**What doesn’t work**

- Activities or outings too far out of kid’s comfort zones (e.g. yoga at a yoga centre)
- Outings with new kids.
- Too big an age range.
- Complicated craft with a big group.
- Spray bottle painting!

**Key learnings**

- Primary-aged children living in caravan parks are often struggling with school. Support is required to help children experience the school system positively. Sometimes this is as simple as providing basic requirements such as a lunch box, transport or uniform. At other times it is about advocating in the parental role when parents are unavailable or equally fearful of the education system.
- Kids benefit from sharing their experience with others living in the caravan park. Kids in the park don’t often bring mates home to play. They can be supported to have a network of friends in the park.
- Kids permanently living in the caravan park learn that some things are best kept secret. Fear is instilled at a very young age about the consequences of transparency. Group is a great opportunity to do some basic protective behaviour work. Problems can be worked through in a safe environment. Kids have learnt they can let their guard down a little with adults who will support them in the most respectful and understanding way.
The following paper was presented by Susan Perkins (Family Support Team, Save the Children, Queensland Division) at the forum.

The Family Support Program in Brisbane found that building and maintaining a positive working relationship with the park managers is important in providing services to the residents in the caravan park. Such a concept is more difficult than it first sounds. There are caravan parks that have sub-standard living conditions, and are unsafe and poorly maintained. The situation arises whereby marginalised people are able to be exploited due to a lack of any other options. For the typical Family Support Worker the impulse to advocate for the disadvantaged is strong, especially when it appears a profit is being made at their expense. This becomes complicated, however, when the parks are generally private property and the managers have the ultimate right to not allow Playscheme and Family Support Workers in. They also have the ability to evict “problematic” residents. Further, having a park closed down as it is unsafe, unhygienic, and exploitative may stop that abuse of human rights; however, the homeless and marginalised would have few options left open to them.

Caravan parks are often the last option available to many people facing homelessness. Many who apply to stay in the parks do so because they are on TICA (a residential tenancy database listing “bad” tenants), have debts to the Department of Housing, have lost rental references (or more likely never had any) and/or have little or no identification. Many park managers will accept people on TICA or without references, and/or allow people to move in without a bond. As emergency housing is a thing of the past in Queensland, we find that caravan parks appear to be preferred by most of our clients over the remaining emergency options such as refuges and hostels. We believe that much of this preference comes from the relative anonymity and freedom of movement offered by the park over supported accommodation. For these reasons we see it as necessary that caravan parks continue to exist to take the homeless until a better and more appropriate form of emergency housing appears.

The family support team often discuss experiencing and witnessing the following issues that our families are living in, and children are growing up in:

- Cockroach infestations. I had one client who was told, after her donated new electronic washing machine stopped working, that its wiring had been eaten out by cockroaches.
- Rats and mice, possibly in some cases the offspring of unwanted pets.
- Poor electrical circuitry sometimes repaired and/or installed in an unsafe manner by unqualified handymen living in the park.
- Poorly maintained accommodation, e.g. broken or rotten cupboards, bed bases, holes in walls.
- Locks that don’t work.
- No hot water.
- Expensive or questionable gas or electricity accounts.
- Unhygienic bathroom facilities.
- No sharps bins.
- Abusive or dangerous individuals being allowed to remain in a park after complaints have been made.
Open septic tanks.
Poorly maintained roads.
Unhygienic swimming pools.
Pools not fenced safely (or damaged fencing in need of maintenance to be safe).
No appropriate play spaces for children.
Dangerous dogs living in a park.
Lack of shaded areas and/or poor maintenance of grounds.
Questionable rental agreements (in terms of legality).
Exploitative rental agreements.
“Black-market” employment agreements (e.g. avoiding the taxation system and award wages).

Even the well maintained or new cabins are still not really suitable for medium or long-term accommodation—caravans and cabins were developed for holiday accommodation.

The Family Support team concluded that the best way to get some of the residents’ needs met whilst still being allowed to continue to enter the park is to work closely and very diplomatically with the park managers. We have developed and practised a number of strategies in maintaining positive working relationships with park managers and workers:

- We ensure the management see that in supporting families we are useful in the smooth running of the park. When supporting families to pay their rent (e.g. supporting families to access emergency relief organisations) we let the managers know of our involvement; after all, the managers want the rent paid. We are instantly seen as useful.
- We let the managers know we are available to support families and suggest they call us in if they think we can be a support. I regularly have occasions where I have been called by the management to come into the park to smooth developing situations. Recently that involved me being called to attend a family (who were already clients) where abusive arguments were becoming more and more regular and an abusive argument was underway. I was able to take the child and mother away from the situation and the park. This was great for the family to receive such an immediate response, but also for the park management to be able to have the situation resolved.
- When talking and debriefing later with management I take the opportunity to mention or discuss their actions that are appropriate or supportive. The management at the park I work at believe that it is not right to evict families suddenly (as they are aware that the caravan park is the “end of the line” for many families) and ensure that I am involved to support a family either to renegotiate their situation or to seek alternative accommodation options. I always comment appreciatively on their consideration of the children. The park managers also wish to run a park where violence and theft, when known about, are not tolerated. These ideals provide some common ground for relationship building.
- I take the opportunity to provide brief support to people in the park who are not on my case load but who I have been asked if I would lend a hand by the management. I do this to maintain goodwill with the management.
- I often pop into the office and ask if there are new families, and now the managers are in the habit of letting me know when new families have moved into the park so I may introduce myself.
- I do ask for changes in the park; for example, for a sharps bin to be installed. This request was denied because drugs were not allowed in the park and the manager believed that to have a sharps bin would be to suggest that drugs were tolerated. Whilst I discussed this
further, this would be an example of something I eventually let go for the greater goal of being allowed to remain in the park to support the families.

Other workers have found that in other parks the managers are not so amenable and they have built relationships with other workers, such as the shopkeeper. The shopkeeper also knows lots about what is happening in the park.

Family Support Workers have had to take care not to appear to be too “on side” with managers as this would decrease the trust afforded to us by the residents. Many residents do not like the park managers and do not trust them.

Even when a park is closing it has proved useful for staff to maintain good relations with the managers. One particular park closure north of Brisbane was smooth due to the working relations of workers and park management. The park manager actually assisted with obtaining housing, white goods and moving people. Everyone later reflected on it being a positive experience.

One Family Support Worker was disallowed to return to the park even though the manager allowed the Playscheme to continue. The worker was seen talking to an activist/“troublemaker” in the park. He had asked the Family Support Worker to hand out some leaflets at the Playscheme which she did. The managers saw this as enough to not allow her back in the park. This was a disaster for the residents in that park at the time as the park was on the verge of closing and the Family Support Worker was not able to get back in to support the families.

Whether or not it is the best way for a society to provide emergency housing to the marginalised, caravan parks at present are often the last resort for the homeless. They provide a service that in most cases could, or should, be greatly improved, but is nevertheless essential. For Family Support Workers to maintain a presence in these places we need to maintain a positive working relationship with the management. This is achieved with diplomacy and by taking advantage of all the small opportunities for collaboration and mutual support that may present.
8 Providing outreach

The following paper was presented by Jane Lazzari-Wegener (HomeGround Services, Victoria) at the forum.

The City of Hume (northwest Melbourne metropolitan region) has one caravan park that is used regularly by housing agencies as a crisis housing option for families and singles. HomeGround’s view is that the park should only be used as a last resort option for families (Wood, 2006) and that if it must be used that services work to find alternative accommodation as quickly as possible (Hunt & Wegener, 2005).

Where families are funded into the park, a lack of alternative accommodation and long public housing waiting lists means they remain in the park longer than desirable. The caravan park in Hume is unsuitable, particularly for families and singles wishing to reunify with children, for the usual reasons: high rents, overcrowding, geographical isolation, poor transport services etc.

A key difference between providing park accommodation in Melbourne in comparison with other states is the seasonal factor. Caravans and cabins are cold in winter and hot in summer with no heating or air conditioning provided. Fuel bills, particularly in winter, add significantly to already high rents and other utility and transport costs.

**What are the challenges?**

In the northwest Melbourne metropolitan region there is a lack of both housing and non-housing services willing or able to work in the park. This is due to a number of reasons:

- Lack of co-ordination by Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) services in the region (short-, medium- and long-term SAAP).
- Lack of services generally, including outreach services.
- Difficulty engaging with park populations (complex needs, safety issues).
- Poor working relations with park managers.
- Time-consuming work (case management and community development).
- Lack of recognition of particular needs of park populations at program and policy levels.

In addition to the above, HomeGround recognises the particular needs of children living in the park who experience limited development opportunities and may be placed at risk from other residents, particularly if parents/carers have complex needs.

In the past a nurse from the Royal District Nursing Service Homeless Persons Program visited the park on an outreach basis. This work ceased, however, when the nurse left the job. It was not a requirement of the position that the park be visited, but a commitment and recognition by the nurse in the role at the time that homeless people reside in caravan parks and require health services on an outreach basis. Where individual workers demonstrate initiative, service delivery can occur. Service provision to homeless people in parks, however, should not have to rely on the good will of workers.

In the northwest Melbourne metropolitan region, almost any practice in parks would be deemed favourable at this point in time. HomeGround’s Crisis Support Service is in a position to co-case manage with non-housing services to ensure access to services where non-housing services demonstrate a willingness to engage with park residents.
What do we hope to achieve?

Firstly, the recognition by agencies and policy-makers that homeless people usually require services that are provided on an outreach basis due to social isolation, lack of access to transport, mental health issues (such as depression), suspicion of services, and a developed belief that services are unable to help them in a way that is useful to them.

Secondly, the provision of such services. As well as an increase in services generally, this includes greater cooperation within SAAP, as well as between non-housing services and the homelessness sector.

An example of improved cooperation is to change the current Victorian state government’s bond debt policy to allow people to repay their bond debts once they are housed in public housing. Currently, this policy acts as a barrier to people exiting the park into public housing.

Potential principles of practice

- Recognition by policy-makers, mainstream and ethno-specific services that homeless people reside in caravan parks.
- Recognition by mainstream and ethno-specific services that homeless people require access on an outreach basis to services that they might not otherwise use.
- Recognition that people in unstable housing should not be denied services on that basis. Agencies are challenged to provide services within the context of homelessness.
- Properly trained and skilled workers who are able to quickly engage with clients and build rapport for both case management and community development activities. Skilled workers possess the confidence required for assertive outreach practice to engage with residents who are potential service users.
- Taking the time to build trust with park residents. Sometimes building relationships, maintaining ongoing engagement and follow up can be seen as too time consuming and unable to be managed by programs. It is important to acknowledge that park residents have “ended up” there usually after being through the service system and have become despondent about the genuineness of efforts to assist them.

General recognition of service delivery gaps to park residents is required by program and policy makers.
9 Engaging men and fathers

The following paper was presented by Dee Brooks (Caravan Project, The Family Action Centre, University of Newcastle, NSW) at the forum.

Most of the recent literature and research regarding males is around father inclusive practice. To successfully engage men in caravan parks it is an important component of service delivery to reach men, including fathers, from a range of backgrounds such as those who are transient, have health issues, are Indigenous, have families and are single.

In the same way as some mainstream family services are working towards a holistic approach with men and families, workers in caravan parks can support and increase awareness, respect, work practice, advocacy and empowerment. Regarding the dynamic between father and child, Burgess (2005, p. 59) argued:

There is now emerging evidence that engaging with family professionals can impact positively on fathers’ behaviour and parenting styles; increase their knowledge and understanding of child development; increase their confidence in their parenting skills; and lead to more sensitive and positive parenting and to greater involvement in infant and child care, and in interaction with children (Pfannensteil & Honig 1995; O’Brien 2004).

What are the challenges?

The Caravan Project identified that a challenge for engaging men and fathers has been their aversion towards structured programs and activities, which can be challenging when configuring weekly park routines and activities. Although, when occupied, some men are more willing to talk.

During the weekly visit to a park where the majority of residents were single males, the female worker who usually facilitated an informal social group over tea and coffee decided to get out the traditional women’s craft box. After some cajoling, the men started doing the craft work and although most of the art works were never completed, the conversations were endless regarding their lives, loves, losses and many laughs. The men at this park continue to regularly engage in craft, coffee and chat resulting in more referrals, information dissemination and above all, ongoing trust and a healthy rapport with the workers.

Caravan Park Worker

As well, the opportunity for men to approach a worker at any time is limited by the worker’s day-to-day routine. Other identified workplace barriers and challenges, some of which apply to female residents as well as males, are:

- It is easier to engage fathers than single men—staff have found that when men have their children to talk about, they will talk. When a single man is approached he is often not as interested.
- Traditional activities are aimed at women—workers have found that women are more likely to come up with ideas for future activities. As well, realising that women present in the group may be off-putting—family-centred work traditionally attracts more women who are seen by many as the primary carers.
Most workers in this field are female—there are issues around boundaries for male clients when workers are engaging men one on one.

Responding to needs—on a caravan park it can be difficult to respond to men’s needs when they can’t identify what they want individually or as a group. Most men don’t approach services until a time of crisis.

Engaging itinerant and seasonal workers—when staff visit the park they are often at work.

Engaging men to participate in outings—keeping the men interested before the day of the outing arrives and sustaining motivation.

Empowering men to take ownership of their group—how to put in place strategies that can sustain and motivate them.

Addressing concerns about child protection while still engaging men on parks—perception of single fathers or single men and how they feel labelled:

An elderly, single man regularly came to an after-school program where approximately 15 children and young people regularly attended. The man would have a cup of tea and would talk to the young people and children about their sports and hobbies and tell them about his own grandchildren. After some time a couple of the adult carers told the workers how uncomfortable they were about the man being there as the program was for children and not for single men. The man was politely but firmly asked by one worker to not return but he continued attending. The next week the workers were approached again by some of the young girls in the group who said they felt uncomfortable around the man and they weren’t allowed to come back to the program if he was there. The other worker then spoke to him to which he replied that he had just been waiting for her to say something. He still strolls past occasionally and stops to talk but doesn’t stay for long.

*Caravan Park Worker*

At times it is not only the managers who need assistance with residents or associated friends and family, sometimes it can be the managers themselves who present the problem:

An elderly couple owned and managed a small park. Female residents had told the workers that they did not go to the shower amenities alone because the male manager would follow them in there. When one resident confronted the manager he yelled at her and said that if he had to carry out maintenance at that time then it was bad luck for her. The police were called but they said they couldn’t assist the residents because it was private property. This continued happening with regularity.

*Caravan Park Worker*

Approaching men to be involved in a focus group regarding touchy subjects is difficult and is all about the approach methods and the dynamics of the group:

A caravan park that housed mainly single men of all ages had a weekly social group. At this period of time there were a couple of single, older women living on the park as well who also attended the group. Over tea, coffee and craft, one of the workers explained to them all that she was involved with a new project looking at what people could do to help stop or reduce the impact of domestic violence. The conversation started relatively quickly but as the women started getting more vocal about their own experiences the men stood up and left.

*Caravan Park Worker*
What works

The Caravan Project workers have found that the most successful strategies for working with men and fathers are food, male-inclusive language, finding common ground and the presence of a male worker. Workers have found that the male worker does not have to be directly involved with the men because most of the men on parks are just as comfortable, if not more comfortable, talking to women, but the male worker shows that men are valued. Other strategies that work are:

- Assertive outreach—workers have identified that some men on parks welcome impromptu home visits, accomplished through consistency and persistence, to discuss personal issues or just for a “catch up”.
- BBQs get men’s attention—workers have found that asking the men for assistance is helpful to the worker and satisfying for the men.
- Language—being able to talk sport, cars or “men’s stuff”.
- Activities—including transport and prizes. Men on parks are more likely to attend a pool or tennis competition with a meat tray for the winner or ten pin bowling followed by a BBQ.
- Events—facilitating a beginning-of-the-year event that promotes what is upcoming regarding other male-inclusive events throughout the year—although ensuring participation and involvement is encouraged at anytime.

The key issues

To work successfully with men and fathers it is helpful to start with defining your project:

- What do you want to achieve?
- What can we give them?
- What are we offering?
- What do they want to do?
By identifying what a worker hopes to achieve in addressing the topic of engaging men they are able to think about it differently. This may be by raising awareness for fathers about the importance of their interactions with their children or by facilitating a “Dad’s Arvo” playgroup. Although most of the research is on fathers, the issues and strategies can apply to men in various settings.

UnitingCare Burnside identified five key issues for working with fathers in a non-deficit way:

1. Build on the male motivation to develop a close relationship with his child.
2. Practice active outreach on an individual level.
3. Listen carefully to the unique stories, needs and strengths of fathers.
4. Acknowledge some of the positive characteristics (strengths) that men bring to parenting.
5. Pay attention to the needs and unresolved issues for women.

The Family Action Centre promotes nine principles for male-inclusive practice to successfully work with men and fathers:

- father awareness
- respect for fathers
- access and equity
- men’s and fathers’ strengths
- practitioners’ strengths
- advocacy and empowerment
- partnerships with men and fathers
- recruitment and training
- research and evaluation.

**Potential principles of practice**

Based on the above, the potential principles of practice could include:

- Actively attempting to include men on your team—whether it is as an assertive outreach worker or as a male-inclusive presence.
- Male-inclusive language—knowledge of how and what men talk about is relevant as is a genuine liking of and attitude towards men.
- Flexibility—don’t have the expectation that all men’s or fathers’ groups will be the same.
- Adapting your approach to engagement for individual men—finding which strategies work, such as your tone of voice or finding a common ground may mean it will take longer to engage some men.

**Websites**

Fathers Direct:
http://www.fathersdirect.com/index.php?id=0&cID=479

Father inclusive practice framework (Family Action Centre):
Health promotion

The following paper was presented by Kathy Lumsdaine (The Caravan Project, The Family Action Centre, University of Newcastle, NSW) at the forum.

Primary health care has become a national, state and local priority aimed at protecting and promoting the health of defined communities and addressing individual and population health problems at an early stage (Centre for Health Equity Training, Research & Evaluation, 2006). Multiple studies have been undertaken in Australia to help guide the development of primary health strategies and community services. Caravan parks are frequently overlooked in such processes, with residents often unaware of local support services available in their community.

Raising awareness of available services may encourage caravan park residents to actively identify strengths and potential needs relating to their health. With this information families can work collaboratively with primary health workers and others who work in caravan parks to develop simple, effective health management plans to help them achieve their own identified goals. Of particular importance are issues relating to nutrition, physical, social and emotional developmental (especially for young children), immunisation, smoking in caravans, and oral hygiene.

What are the challenges?

There are several challenges which may impact on the health of residents living in caravan parks.

Transience: Some families may need to relocate frequently making it difficult for them to form strong social bonds within their community. This can impact on their sense of belonging and connectedness. A sense of belonging and connectedness is especially important for a child’s social and emotional development. Transience can also make it difficult for residents to access services. Health providers such as GPs may have their books closed, which can prevent new residents from accessing needed services. Other health services may have significant waiting lists meaning that residents may have moved before an appointment arrives.

Community workers made contact with a new family, one which was quite mistrustful of services, and slowly built a trusting relationship with the parents. The community workers were concerned about one of the children (aged four) and introduced the family to a child and family health nurse. The nurse had major concerns about the developmental stage of the child and after a number of weeks managed to convince the parent to take the child for some tests. Despite the nurse finding ways to fast track the referrals, by the time appointments became available the family had moved without leaving a contact.

Nutrition: Limited space for food storage and cooking facilities can influence the family’s dietary choices. Families may substitute fresh fruit and vegetables, meat and dairy products with those that can be stored in the cupboard—such as long-life products or foods with little nutritional value. The high cost of meat products may also affect food purchases. Poor oral hygiene and general health can be directly linked to nutrition.

Transport: Many families may have limited access to transport, which reduces their ability to access health and community services, shops, friends and family. This may enhance a sense of isolation.
One of the caravan parks is geographically isolated and has no public transport services to the park. Residents are reliant on private vehicles to go anywhere and many families do not have a car. Attending appointments off the park can be challenging.

Communal living: provides both benefits and challenges for caravan park residents. The close proximity of families and the use of communal amenities can increase the risk of spreading infectious diseases such as influenza and hepatitis.

Space: residents in caravan parks eat, sleep and cook in the same area. This lack of space and privacy could increase levels of stress on families. Smoking in the confines of a caravan can cause considerable adverse effects on health, especially for young children, including respiratory disorders and inhibited growth.

Fear of parks: some community service workers may be reluctant to access caravan parks.

**What works**

- Being a consistent presence on the caravan parks helps build trusting relationships between workers and families. This low-key approach tends to encourage families to discuss their ideas and concerns relating to health issues. Workers are then able to refer families to other services.
- Initiatives such as the Rocky Project (within a Child and Family Health Service) and a project being coordinated through a rural community health centre are improving links between caravan park residents and community health services.
Service partnerships between park managers, community workers and health services.

Recent changes to the NSW Residential Parks Act 1998 require park owners to “take all reasonable steps” to ensure that “emergency and home care service personnel have unimpeded vehicular access to the residential premises in the park at all times, both by day and by night” (s. 71A). Some health care is covered by the act and could provide a model for ensuring other health services can gain access to park residents.

Home visiting by mobile clinics enhances early identification of health and development issues (such as language development) for young children and can result in fast tracking of access to services. A Mobile Outreach Therapy Team (not specifically targeting caravan parks) was able to provide children access to their services fairly quickly “with 67% receiving an assessment within one month of referral. Of those children that required ongoing intervention, 93% were able to receive this therapy within one month of their assessment” (Centre for Health Equity Training, Research & Evaluation 2005).

Locally a community health nurse organised a mobile clinic to visit a local caravan park on a regular basis. The clinic allowed residents to access a range of health services they would not have been able to otherwise.

Workers can provide practical assistance to families, such as transport to appointments.

**Potential principles of practice**

- Involve the families in identifying their health needs and solutions.
- Focus on primary health, in particular child health and development.
- Bring health services to the caravan parks (e.g. mobile clinics).
- Provide practical support for families where possible.
- Undertake further research and funding applications for grants to support primary health care workers visiting caravan parks.
Mental health in the park

The following paper was presented by Karen Dandy (Family Support Team, Save the Children, Queensland Division) at the forum.

Playscheme and Family Support Workers have witnessed an increasing number of parents and young people living with mental health issues who reside permanently in caravan parks. For some this is because of an inability to sustain adequate mainstream housing and for others it is a choice to live in a less isolated environment. Whatever the reason, living in the caravan park environment with a mental health problem can raise many other issues.

We know living with a parent who has mental health problems raises enormous issues for a growing and developing child. The caravan park environment has often provided support for children from other healthier residents during so called “episodes”. Supporting children and helping them to understand their parent’s illness is an important component of our role. Children often feel neglected (and often are) and require special attention and care. Removal from their parent is not always the best outcome, but in some situations it has been essential for a period of time. In that situation it has been our role to maintain the connection between the parent and children.

I think of myself as a beginner on this topic, certainly not an expert. Although I had worked in the area of domestic violence for some years and witnessed the damaging effects on mental health, the way forward seemed somehow clearer (i.e. work with perpetrators on stopping violence, encourage safety and recovery with victims). Of course it wasn’t as simple as it may sound, but we had a future picture of freedom, respect and equality. Those principles are as valid as ever but in a different context. A person who suffers mental illness would love to be free of distress, wants to be treated with respect and have as many rights as the next person. In caravan park work I am learning as I go along about the many paths towards wellness and about some of the bumps along the way.

To have and to maintain good mental health is difficult for a number of the people I meet in my work. In the past year they have spoken with me about their mental health problems. Some have been diagnosed and are on medication, some are in recovery, while others live silently with their symptoms or self-medicate with drugs or alcohol. The range of diagnoses includes post-natal depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety disorder, general depression and schizophrenia.

My work is with families that have children under the age of five. Since mental health problems, especially more long-term ones, may impair parents’ ability to care for, nurture and protect their children, the support we offer can lessen the stress in a difficult time and benefit everyone. I work in a caravan park that refuses families who are on TICA (a residential tenancy database listing “bad” tenants). Therefore, the majority of permanent residents live in the park for reasons other than an inability to sustain housing. They tend to pay their rent unless they are unwell. It is, however, a park that has had its share of horrific incidences and violent residents.

After a recent mental health crisis, one of my clients and her psychiatrist told me that the hands-on, close connection and support I have been able to provide has been crucial in her treatment and recovery. This is crucial too for a child’s wellbeing if a parent can have a shot at the best possible outcome and quality of life.

Mental health problems do not exist outside other areas of people’s lives. Many times I’ve listened to clients’ experiences of suffering—stories of sexual abuse, domestic, family or other forms
of violence, loss and grief, drug and alcohol use, or serious ill health. The feelings described are powerful, often overwhelming for them—fear, sadness, isolation, anger, shame and despair. Being listened to can be a rare experience for many family members we work with. A woman I had spoken with only a few times once thanked me for everything I’d done for her. I replied that I felt I hadn’t done very much, but I had listened. She was so grateful. Today I am taking her to her first counselling appointment for childhood sexual abuse.

One of the challenges in addressing mental health problems is medication—taking the correct amount at the prescribed times, taking it at all, overdosing, stopping one type and starting another because of the side effects, drinking alcohol or taking drugs as well as medication—all situations I have come across. I spend time, using my nursing training and experience, to answer questions and explain the importance of taking care with medications.

People are also aware of the stigma of a diagnosis. A woman confided in me that she was afraid to tell her doctor all of the symptoms she was having because she did not want to be diagnosed with schizophrenia. She has since disclosed these symptoms but it was important to acknowledge her real fear. I also accompanied another client on her first visit to a psychiatrist. She was very nervous, afraid of the way she may be spoken to there. The psychiatrist turned out to be a tiny, beautiful, softly spoken, gentle and compassionate woman who listened closely to my client’s ideas about treatment before making her decisions. It made such a difference.

Coming to terms with having symptoms and the medical name for it can be a long and difficult process. This morning I was talking with a mum who has been struggling emotionally since her diagnosis and treatment for cancer. Her mental state has become fragile. She has suffered severe anxiety and panic attacks, as well as depression. Shanti was saying that she doesn’t want to feel like this anymore. She wishes that, after all she has been through with cancer, she didn’t have to have this as well. And fair enough. Shanti has been through an ordeal, experiencing extreme physical pain both from the pancreatic tumour and the side effects of radiation treatment. I have been working with Shanti for almost a year now. Enduring the ups and downs has been a chal-
I have also been working with a woman who suffered post-traumatic stress disorder after horrific domestic violence. Her nightmares used to be severe when we met a year ago and I’m happy to say that they no longer occur. We meet fortnightly now but over the year during times of increased distress we met more often. One of the things my client said was important was being believed. That wasn’t hard for me, having worked with domestic violence previously. I had seen with my own eyes the injuries inflicted on women and heard the stories of sometimes extreme cruelty. I had also worked with men who were violent and could clarify the issues around safety. I knew what to say when she felt guilty that her son wasn’t able to grow up knowing his father.

Building a trusting relationship with adults and children can take a while. It is worth being patient. Caravan parks are unique environments to work in. They are families’ homes and backyards, and we are guests. Settling into caravan park life as a worker took some months but now everyone knows me: the manager, the cleaner, the maintenance guys, the residents. I am part of the place and I have found my niche and my own working style. It has been a gentle engagement.

Mental health problems are part of the picture of poverty—material poverty, social poverty, emotional poverty, spiritual poverty. But in spite of all the challenges, I have seen courageous efforts made against all odds. It is inspiring to see someone begin the healing work of therapy, decide not to retaliate in a violent attack, persist in looking for a job, admit to an addiction or help someone in more strife than they are. Becoming well may take a while as trauma and adversity are addressed but with intense and ongoing support the chances for good mental health are better.
12. Domestic violence

The following paper was presented by Graeme Stuart (Caravan Project, The Family Action Centre, University of Newcastle, NSW) at the forum.

Domestic violence is a widespread problem in Australian society and there is evidence that it is a particular concern in caravan parks. A survey of 142 residents from eight caravan parks (Stuart, 2005) found high levels of violence and abuse. Nearly a quarter of the women (22%) had been verbally abused by a family member in the past 12 months (either sometimes or often) and 21% of the women had experienced physical abuse in the past 12 months (sometimes or often). The young women on the caravan parks were particularly at risk of violence, with 80% of those under 25 having been physically assaulted in the past 12 months: 35% of these young women said that physical assault was something they experienced “often”.

Domestic violence can be highly visible in caravan parks but residents do not necessarily respond when they know there is violence present in a relationship. However, the perception that domestic violence is a “private” matter and the reluctance for others to become involved means that there is often little response, or the main response is that the family is evicted or encouraged to move. At the same time, some caravan parks have a strong sense of community and residents can provide a lot of support to each other, meaning that there is the potential for community action to stop or reduce the impact of violence. At times people experiencing domestic violence find support and encouragement from other residents.

What are the challenges?

 Residents often do not want to interfere in domestic violence because they consider it “someone else’s business” and/or because they are concerned for their own safety:

There is a lot of domestic violence in caravan parks too, I’ve noticed, but not so much in this one. It’s pretty accepted, 99% of people just turn a blind eye to that. If they get involved and it gets into an argument they might get thrown out. One park I lived in there was a couple three vans up and every night you would hear this guy bashing his girlfriend for hours. She was always covered in bruises and cuts and everyone knew why but no one did anything, even the managers, because we were all too scared. Jason, 24 (Marshall 2005, p. 16).

A strength of caravan parks is their sense of community, but there are significant challenges in ensuring a balance between being good neighbours and maintaining a sense of privacy (because of the communal nature of park life). The ability to ignore other people’s business is often an important skill for successful park life. As one resident commented: “Learn to keep to yourself, mind your own business and know what you can and can’t talk about”. This need to mind your own business could help explain the residents’ reluctance to become involved in responding to incidents of domestic violence.

A resident experiencing domestic violence may not want to admit that domestic violence is happening to them:

In a chat over coffee, Donna said that domestic violence would never happen to her and that she would not be willing to “put up with it”. Later other residents told staff that in fact Donna was experiencing violence and that it was happening “quite a bit”.


On rare occasions managers have not wanted service providers to help move a resident experiencing domestic violence because of the loss of rent. Generally, however, managers do not want people in violent relationships and may attempt to move them off a park or are happy for others to help them move.

Some park managers and residents may not want the police to be called because of the image it creates or because they mistrust the police:

A violent incident occurred in a caravan park and, although residents knew that there was frequent domestic violence in the household and an 18-month-old baby in the house ended up with blood on his face, they ignored the situation and removed themselves from the vicinity. Caravan Project staff, who were running a group on the park at the time, intervened by calling the police. The other residents and the park managers were quite angry the workers had done so because it should have remained a private matter without police involvement.

Service providers are often more comfortable and confident talking to a victim of domestic violence than a perpetrator. They can be unsure how to engage the perpetrator without appearing to endorse the violence and, more importantly, how to respond in a way that addresses the issue of violence and leads to changes in behaviour. They can also be unsure how to respond when a person experiencing domestic violence wants the violence to stop rather than to leave their partner.

People experiencing domestic violence frequently make numerous attempts to leave their violent partner and may reconcile with their partner a number of times. Family, friends and service providers can find it hard to understand the dynamics that lead to a person returning to a violent partner and may feel there is no point in continuing to provide support.

The vast majority of domestic violence involves a male perpetrator and a female victim. Male victims of domestic violence and victims of domestic violence in same sex relationships can be hidden or ignored.
What works

- Low-key, non-threatening conversations allow people experiencing domestic violence to build a relationship with service providers at their own pace and to decide for themselves when to raise their experience or to request support.

- People experiencing domestic violence often need practical support such as moving to safe accommodation, being taken to court and getting information. At times service providers can play an important role in providing this practical assistance, which in turn can help create or enhance a trusting relationship.

- If people experiencing domestic violence know that service providers are consistent and will be coming regularly to the park, they can decide when to speak to staff or to seek assistance. Service providers also need to be available even if a victim of domestic violence reconciles with their partner.

- Caravan parks often have a strong sense of community and residents provide a lot of support to each other, which can help reduce the isolation usually experienced by people experiencing domestic violence:

A park resident who had experienced considerable violence was told by the police to live around people so she would be safer. When she moved into an apartment she felt trapped with no way of getting out. After moving into a caravan park, it was much more difficult for her ex-partner to get her because he wasn’t allowed past the front gate. Because she was well known and liked in the park, the manager and other residents kept an eye out for her and attempted to ensure her safety. She thus felt much safer after moving to the park.

- The Family Action Centre has been funded by the Australian Government’s Domestic and Family Violence and Sexual Assault Initiative (through the Office for Women) to conduct a 15-month action research project encouraging people to respond appropriately when they are aware of violence happening in the home. The project, which focuses on caravan parks and Indigenous communities, will promote discussion about domestic violence on the parks.

- Domestic violence has a major impact on children who witness domestic violence, so prioritising the needs of children is essential. As children learn from what they see, particular attention needs to be given to children exposed to domestic violence.

- Managers can play important roles in responding to domestic violence. At times managers do intervene, call the police or seek assistance for a resident experiencing violence. Service providers can assist managers to better support residents experiencing domestic violence.

- The Domestic Violence and Incest Resource Centre and Victorian Community Council Against Violence (2001) suggests that if a woman is being abused, “the most important thing you can do is to listen without judging, respect her decisions, and help her to find ways to become stronger and safer” (p. 8). Strategies they identify include:

  - Listen to what she has to say.
  - Believe what she tells you.
  - Take the abuse seriously.
  - Help her to recognise the abuse.
  - Tell her you think she has been brave.
  - Help to build her confidence in herself.
  - Help her to understand that the abuse is not her fault.
  - Help her to protect herself.
– Help her to think about what she can do.
– Offer practical assistance.
– Respect her right to make her own decisions.
– Maintain some level of regular contact with her.
– Find out about Intervention Orders.
– Tell her about the services available.
– Keep supporting her after she has left the relationship.

**Potential principles of practice**

- Safety of residents—especially children—and workers needs to be a priority (including making notifications of abuse to child protection authorities when children are living with domestic violence).
- Support children to ensure they have somewhere safe to go and are able to express themselves in relation to the violence.
- Strengthen the sense of community within caravan parks in order to reduce social isolation.
- Build strong, non-threatening relationships that allow people experiencing domestic violence to obtain the support they need.
- Provide practical support where possible.
- Be prepared to provide long-term support and encouragement.
- Avoid being judgemental while being clear you do not believe violence is OK.
- Help people experiencing domestic violence to explore options.
- Support people who are trying to help family, friends or neighbours experiencing violence.
- Involve men in preventing or responding to domestic violence.
- Enlist the support of managers and other residents in preventing domestic violence and reducing its impact.
The following paper was presented by Jane Lazzari-Wegener (HomeGround Services, Victoria) at the forum.

HomeGround Services seeks to advocate on behalf of clients of the Crisis Support Service who are residents of the park in a number of ways:

- attending regional forums and participating in regional networks
- ongoing collaboration with BestStart program partners, including local council, community health services and Community Connections Program
- involvement in projects such as the Communities for Children program and the Children’s Support Worker based at HomeGround Services
- when making referrals to office-based services we encourage co-case management on an outreach basis where required.

What are the challenges?

The lack of services (both housing and non-housing) and the lack of service coordination in the region present significant challenges for advocates of park residents. As a provider of an intensive case management service to residents in caravan parks, HomeGround Services Crisis Support Service is ideally placed to act as an advocate in the broader community.

Referrals to HomeGround’s Crisis Support Service vary depending on whether the park management is accepting housing agency referrals (or funds from “the welfare”). At the one park used for crisis housing in northwest Melbourne, the manager prefers to deal with residents herself. Attempts by workers at advocacy can be viewed by the park manager as interfering and meddlesome. The role of workers as advocates and support workers has been explained to the park manager. Indeed, at times the park manager has sought the assistance of HomeGround Services when working with complex-needs families, particularly in relation to children and safety. Relationships with the manager, however, continue to be challenging for both workers and other services attempting to improve the quality of tenancy for clients.

What works

In 2003 HomeGround Services conducted SAAP-funded research (SAAP is the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program) into the use of caravan parks as a crisis housing option (Hunt & Wegener 2004). The research followed 10 families living in three parks in the northwest of Melbourne over a six-month period. The research found that funding families into the parks was expensive, unsuitable and potentially damaging to families. HomeGround Services has been able to use this research as evidence of the challenges faced by households accommodated into caravan parks in the region. HomeGround Services’ research work goes hand in hand with its advocacy work to promote issues associated with homelessness.

What do we hope to achieve?

HomeGround Services’ key aim is to achieve the recognition that homeless families deserve; that is, that they and their specific needs are included in service planning, program development and
policy planning. Planning should allow for tailored support, flexibility from services and a holistic approach to achieving sustainable housing outcomes (Wood 2006).

**Example of advocacy**

HomeGround Services provided formal feedback through the regional SAAP network on the 2006 Census collection at the park. After initially offering assistance through council, the Crisis Support Service did its own investigating with the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) into how HomeGround Services might provide assistance with Census collection to residents of the park. Due to the slowness, rather than the quality, of coordination this offer was not taken up in time. Eventually the park manager was employed by the ABS (Primary Homelessness Division) to assist residents with the collection of Census forms. HomeGround Services’ feedback to the network highlighted issues associated with using what is effectively a landlord to collect personal information from people who are already likely to be distrusting of authority and suspicious of services. In addition, residents in rent arrears are likely to feel intimidated into participating in collection and answering personal questions.

A significant change in Census delivery and collection compared with previous years is that each cabin at the park had a collector deliver and collect Census forms. Previously, forms were left at the park manager’s office. We believe that this change came about as a result of strong advocacy on the part of HomeGround Services and others in the homelessness service sector.

This example demonstrates how services need to use their initiative when advocating for homeless people. To an extent, marginalised and vulnerable people rely on advocates stepping up to the mark on their behalf to ensure they are not left behind in the Census count or in the planning of the service delivery system. It also became clear that education on homelessness was required within the homelessness division of the ABS. This was duly recognised by the network.

**Potential principles of practice**

Principles for strong advocates:

- extensive working knowledge of legislation as it relates to park residents and managers
- extensive knowledge of services (both outreach and office-based) available to park residents and how to facilitate access to these, e.g. positive working relationships with agencies
- confidence working with people with complex needs and challenging behaviours
- persistence.
Advocacy (2)

The following paper was presented by Graeme Stuart (Caravan Project, The Family Action Centre, University of Newcastle, NSW) at the forum.

Advocating on behalf of residents is an important role when supporting caravan park residents. Advocacy can occur in a number of ways including:

- supporting residents to undertake self-advocacy
- advocating on behalf of residents to park managers
- assisting residents to access specialist advocacy services (e.g. tenant advice and advocacy services)
- advocating on behalf of a whole park (e.g. in relation to park closures or rent increases)
- advocating on behalf of park managers (e.g. to assist them to improve parks standards)
- systems advocacy in which the focus is on influencing and changing the system (e.g. legislation, policy and practices) in ways that will benefit park residents.

While many people have positive experiences living in caravan parks, at times residents are treated unfairly, live in unsafe or unhealthy situations, or have their rights undermined. Particularly for residents who have few or no other accommodation options, self-advocacy can be quite challenging and they may appreciate, or need, the support of a service provider.

What are the challenges?

Gaining access to parks can be challenging. In NSW “A park owner or park manager of a residential park must not restrict the right of a resident of that park to purchase goods or services from a person of his or her choice” (NSW Residential Parks Act 1998, s. 69), and “emergency and home care service personnel” must have “unimpeded vehicular access to the residential premises in the park at all times, both by day and by night” (s. 71A). This does not, however, mean that other services have the right of access. Park managers are not required to allow services to operate on the park (e.g. to run playgroups or social activities) or to enter the park (unless invited by a resident). If a service provider was prevented from visiting a resident on a park, the resident could take the matter to the Consumer, Trader and Tenancy Tribunal, but the service provider could not.

Because many parks either have managers who live on the park or are there for a significant time, residents are under increased scrutiny and park managers have a large impact on the quality of life of residents. Some residents are thus reluctant to take the manager to the Tribunal because they fear the manager could make their life difficult. Some service providers report they have difficulties gaining access to residents who may be in need of advocacy and/or other support.

Where service providers have access to residents but are dependent on the goodwill of park managers for their continued presence on parks, advocacy can provide a significant dilemma. If a park manager does not approve of their advocacy role, or the way in which it is undertaken, the manager could exclude the service provider from the park. Service providers may need to weigh up providing strong advocacy and the risk of being kicked off the park thereby not being able to provide any support or advocacy:
After 12 months’ work, we had finally obtained permission to commence working on a caravan park with many marginalised residents. We came in contact with a woman on the park who was suicidal, being threatened with violence from another resident on the park, and was desperately wanting to find alternative accommodation. We advocated successfully on behalf of the woman so that she could find somewhere else to live. In order to observe confidentially, we did not inform the manager that the women would be leaving, and she left owing approximately $400 in back rent. Once the park manager discovered what had happen, we were once again excluded from the park (even though we offered to pay half the rent) and were unable to return for about four months.

Raising issues in the media can also be difficult. Besides the risk of further stigmatising residents, there is again the risk of being excluded from a park or getting residents off side. On a number of occasions when the Caravan Project has spoken to the media or helped the media gain access to park residents, there have been negative repercussions:

Our service had distributed a media release about research we had done asking people who had moved on to caravan parks as a last resort how they had made a success of park life. A newspaper asked for a photo opportunity so we put them in touch with a resident who was willing to be photographed with his van. The journalist agreed not to mention the name of the park and to be careful in how they presented the story. Even though the article was positive, when the park manager saw the article with the photo, which did not identify the park or the area, he threatened to stop allowing us to come to the park because he said his park was becoming a manufactured village but the photo was of a resident in front of a caravan. He also felt we should have got his permission before contacting the media.

**What works**

Where services are dependent on the good will of park managers for their continued presence on parks it is important that they maintain positive relationships with managers at the same time as advocating on behalf of residents. It may help if there is agreement between the service providers and park managers about the role of the service on the park, and services need to be clear and up-front with managers.

Advocacy for residents of caravan parks have similarities with advocacy in other settings. Some of the things that the Caravan Project has found works include:

- Being clear about what we can and can’t do. We need to be clear with residents, managers and service providers about our role and what we can realistically achieve. It is important not to build unrealistic expectations and to promise more than we can deliver. Closely linked to being clear, is to actually follow through with any promises.
- Listening to residents is important so that their needs and interests can be clearly identified.
- Having and maintaining strong networks and being able to fast track appointments. When advocating on behalf of residents it is very helpful to know the right people to get things done or to assist in obtaining services. Due to the transience of many residents, a long waiting period may mean that the resident has moved before a service becomes available, so it can be important to find ways of providing a response quickly.
- Building partnerships. Partnerships can be both an outcome of advocacy and a strategy for advocacy. Partnerships can be formed to meet the needs of residents, but may require advocacy in order to educate other services about the need to provide services on parks:
A social worker in a rural community health centre became aware of the needs of two local caravan parks, and advocated on behalf of the residents to develop a coordinated response to service provision. The advocacy led to a number of initiatives on the park and a successful funding application for a 12-month pilot project.

Partnerships can also allow advocacy to occur when the work of a service could be jeopardised by undertaking advocacy:

Community workers had gained access to a park, but the owner had been clear that if they assisted people to leave the park (resulting in the loss of revenue) without the approval of the owner, they would not be allowed to run programs on the park. Partnerships formed with other services allowed residents to be supported in finding alternative accommodation without directly involving the community workers.

- Taking people to appointments. At times it has been important to assist residents to get to appointments or get things done (e.g. obtain a birth certificate). Through advocacy we might have been able to organise needed services, but without support to get to appointments or to ensure that tasks get done, the plans might not come to fruition. This type of practical support is particularly important on parks where few residents have transport and there is poor public transport.

- Understanding other points of view. Particularly when dealing with managers, it is important to recognise their perceptions and to understand their needs so that solutions can be found that meet their needs as well as those of the residents. When dealing with services it is helpful to understand procedural matters such as their selection criteria and referral process so that we are able to advocate in ways that are most likely to achieve results.

**Draft promising practice principles**

- Build positive relationships with park managers.
- Attempt to meet the needs of park managers as well as park residents.
- At times it may be necessary to balance keeping the goodwill of park managers to gain access to parks with the need to advocate on behalf of residents.
- Build and maintain networks and partnerships that can assist residents.
- Provide advocacy at multiple levels (e.g. individual, park and systems).
References


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Stuart, M & Ellis, K 2005, “I love my house! It has two wheels and a door!”’, Parity, vol. 18, no. 5, pp. 26–8.

Wensing, E, Holloway, D & Wood, M 2003, On the margins? Housing risk among caravan park residents, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, Sydney.


Appendix 1: Workshop notes

The following are the notes from the individual workshops relating to challenges and what works. Although they have been slightly edited to assist with comprehension, they are essentially as recorded during the workshop. Some workshops took more comprehensive notes than others, and so the number of points under each issue does not necessarily demonstrate its degree of importance. It is also important to recognise that care needs to be taken in considering the issues and strategies identified below. These notes were records of discussion not agreement: they may therefore represent the experience of only one person in the workshop.

1. Working with children

Challenges

1. Physical space cramped
2. Not as many families in caravan parks any more
3. Underestimating the power of the simplicity of playgroup
4. Multitude of issues facing families
5. Underlying poverty
6. Addressing park management issues (e.g. safety and environment health)
7. Hidden issues
8. Receiving referrals from other services but not being supported well enough
9. Appropriateness of caravan parks as an option for children and families
10. Services having time limits—families/children slip through systems
11. Bringing men into the job
12. Working with park managers (e.g. running a business not welfare focus)
13. Lack of transport
14. Services going on site
15. Discrimination because they live on a park

What works

16. Building a good rapport with parents and children
17. Informing parents that you are there to support both children and them—no suspicion of workers
18. Being honest with parents if notification is made
19. Providing a positive role model
20. Being consistent with workers, times and programs being run
21. Having a positive focus on parents
22. Providing food and having a social focus (e.g. BBQs get blokes along)
23. Having fun
24. Ensuring workers have an understanding of the issues faced by children living on parks
25. Ensuring workers have an understanding of child development and how children communicate
26. Understanding importance of play for children
27. Celebrating, creating rituals
28. Ensuring workers are flexible
29. Providing children with socially inclusive programs and ensuring no children are excluded
30. Having an awning
31. Having a HiAce rather than a Transit Van
32. Building a positive reputation
33. Understanding the cycle of change
34. Being understanding
35. Questioning what we do
36. Building relationships based on trust
37. Offering gentle interventions
38. Being low-key
39. Networking, developing relationships and working with other agencies
40. Fast tracking kids into services
41. Being in the park
42. Using other venues
43. Having a van on-site as a base
44. Being flexible (e.g. in program delivery)
45. Having generic roles
46. Being pro-active—finding out
47. Advocacy
48. Offering practical support
49. Having appropriate expectations
50. A combination of things—not just one way works

2. Education

Challenges

For children
1. Lack of motivation
2. Homelessness
3. Suspension
4. Being sick
5. Being bullied or teased
6. Inadequate food
7. No school clothes
8. Lack of transport
9. Peers’ poor attendance
10. Finding school boring
11. Learning difficulties and little assistance
12. Not being made to go
13. Sleeping in
14. Social isolation from other students due to poverty, anger and violence
15. Teachers lack of awareness and understanding of what life is like for children on parks
16. Unsettled caravan park environment (e.g. noise levels, extreme weather, interruptions to sleeping)
17. Stigma of living in a caravan park Non-compliance with school rules
18. Transience leading to changes of school
19. Social pressures
20. Nowhere for children to do their homework
For parents
21. Lack of motivation
22. Lack of knowledge
23. Poverty
24. Lack of transport
25. Homelessness
26. Health or mental health issues
27. Drug and alcohol issues
28. Child refusing to attend
29. Difficulties getting children ready for school
30. Believing they won’t be staying at the park long so no need to enrol in school
31. Own bad experiences of school
32. Isolation
33. No telephone

What works
34. Creating awareness among teaching staff about issues facing children on parks
35. Providing food to children at school (e.g. breakfast clubs)
36. Proactively tracking transient students
37. Providing residents with access to services
38. Providing children with support needed for homework and assignments (e.g. homework clubs)
39. Implementing programs which support education of children
40. Raising parents awareness about the importance of education for their children
41. Working to dispel stigma and discrimination of children on parks with both teaching staff and students
42. Helping residents develop positive support networks
43. Building positive relationships between families and schools
44. Readiness for school programs starting 4-6 weeks before beginning school

3. Working with extreme poverty

Challenges
1. Residents may spend money on alcohol and not necessarily on food
2. Minimal opportunity for play
3. Frustration for workers (e.g. setting a plan and residents altering the plan)
4. Families appear to repeat the same experiences over and over again, it becomes a cycle and even normality (e.g. having a debt, a high interest rate)
5. Numerous crises can often lead to a spiral of depression or alternative behaviour (e.g. self-medicating, looking for a temporary high)
6. Working with families where parents spend money on other than their children's needs
7. Children may not have their material needs and potentially caring needs met (e.g. attention, help with their homework)
8. Can be difficult to remain non-judgemental, as judgements are often part of the role. When is the line drawn? What is acceptable and what isn’t? Levels of acceptance can become blurred
9. Important not to “do for residents but do together”
10. Ethical/ moral dilemmas raised—are health and welfare workers supporting families to live in unacceptable environments?
11. Systematic Pressure (e.g. legislation, eviction notices demands on services, waiting lists)
12. The aesthetic ugliness of park can be confronting to staff (“How do residents deal with the environment of the caravan park?”)

What works
13. Workers identifying strategies to sustain themselves
14. Continuing to re-evaluate core values
15. Acknowledging the impact of working with extreme poverty
16. Building on own resources to sustain self in workplace
17. Building strong relationships
18. Building on relationships and rapport
19. Allowing time to build these relationships and engage families and individuals
20. Providing donations (e.g. blankets) can be very effective in building rapport
21. Working with residents by never rejecting
22. Getting creative in your practice
23. Knowing services you are referring clients to
24. Using own networks
25. Introducing other services gently
26. Piggy backing on other services can be very effective in engaging with residents and in engaging residents with new services appropriate to their needs
27. Always having unconditional positive regard
28. Being open and understanding of client’s needs
29. Being accepting
30. Remaining realistic
31. Aiming to provide options and “another way”
32. Inspiring hope
33. Acknowledging people's own journeys
34. Valuing the process of peoples journeys
35. Helping clients recognise their own strengths
36. Raising awareness of the resilience of clients
37. Safety in numbers with workers
38. Accepting people where they are at currently
39. Trying to promote change
40. Going slowly
41. Acknowledging that backslides will occur and responding with unconditional positive regard
42. Being accepting
43. Accepting of positive changes and also steps backwards
44. Building self esteem
45. Workers being flexible
46. Recognising the need to be involved over time
47. Supporting caravan park residents when they move out of the park and while they settle in their new residence
48. Recognising that caravan parks can be a safe place if families are not ready to make positive shifts
49. Recognising that caravan parks can be a visible place (i.e. visible to others) which can be very beneficial if there are child protection concerns
50. Respecting your own journey and paths
51. Identifying limitations as workers
52. Recognising the resilience of residents and ability to manage living in poverty
53. Recognising residents often possess a collection of survival skills
54. Acknowledge growth, it may only be minimal changes yet also a huge positive step
55. Acknowledging that people live in other ways
56. Ensuring staff find strategies to check themselves and not impose their own values and beliefs
57. Providing outings, activities and opportunities for play

4. Engaging families who are highly suspicious of services

Challenges
1. Fear of welfare services and interventions
2. Being used as transport

What works
3. Walking besides families
4. Not being time limited
5. Recognising families are the experts in their own lives
6. Being practical
7. Being respectful
8. Doing what you say you are going to do
9. Giving space to be assessed by residents
10. Being visible
11. Using appropriate communication
12. Being honest
13. Being creative and resourceful
14. Developing appropriate community links and knowing the links well
15. Engaging with significant people on the park (e.g. the park “busy body”)
16. Having an in-hours referral system
17. Being transparent
18. Using appropriate humour
19. Coming in as a learner and “unknowing”

5. Working with park managers

Challenges

Challenges for park manager
1. A lot of behind the scene work that is not seen by services
2. Having multiple roles
3. Playing a “welfare” role (e.g. referral to agencies, dealing with domestic violence)
4. Comply with relevant laws (e.g. local government acts, residential parks acts)
5. Providing security in the park
6. Debt collection
7. Dealing with damage to dwellings
8. Screening prospective tenants
9. Duty of care (e.g. should children live in the park?)
10. Deciding what to do about illegal activity
11. Dealing with conflict in the park
12. Coping with people questioning or challenging their management of the park
13. Maintaining equipment, accommodation and grounds
14. Managing employees
15. Owners not providing adequate funds to the managers to maintain standards
16. Stress of job
17. Large investment in property
18. Dealing with residents
19. Finding caretakers/managers
20. Trying to run a successful business

**Challenges for workers**
21. Managers mistrusting staff and vice versa
22. No right to go into park
23. Interference by park managers in accessing clients
24. Park manager preventing visits to certain residents
25. Interference in relationship with manager due to external factors (e.g. media, gossip)
26. Worker blamed for external factors (e.g. negative newspaper article written without involvement of staff, but blamed by park manager for it)
27. Park manager not wanting residents to move off park as loss of income (e.g. double fatality at park—park manager tells worker not to move people off park despite residences wanting to due to trauma)
28. Families and marginalised groups being turned away from caravan parks
29. Raising awareness about pending closures
30. How to confirm rumours of closures
31. How to engage with managers particular new managers or when starting to work on a new park
32. Caravan parks last option
33. More park managers using TICA
34. Possibility of being prevented from coming to the park if advocate too strongly
35. Residents being evicted for standing up for their rights.

**What works**
36. Having an awareness of, and acknowledging the roles and responsibilities of park managers
37. Acknowledging that the managers have a difficult job, listening to their needs, asking how we could help them (a manager was pleasantly surprised to learn that someone would offer support to them)
38. Being explicit in telling them you are there to support them too
39. Acknowledging the skills and experience of park managers
40. Providing information relevant to park managers (e.g. legislation, guidelines, service directories that include welfare services and community facilities like libraries and churches)
41. Discussing benefits for managers of complying with the legislation
42. Being persistent and consistent
43. Being patient in order to build a positive relationship
44. Treating park managers with respect as individuals
45. Recognising that each park operator and park is different and may need a different approach
46. Seeing managers as part of the park community (e.g. inviting them to Christmas parties)
47. Involving them where appropriate
48. Being open and honest in communication with manager
49. Acknowledging the work caretakers do, but also not being fearful of highlighting when something needs fixing
50. Pointing out that we won’t agree about everything and that’s ok—use “what ifs”
51. Not hesitating to advocate
52. Clarifying your service’s role
53. Being aware of the power park managers can have over residents
54. Encouraging park managers to become involved as part of the park community
55. Promoting benefits of services to park operators and how they can benefit from our presence on the park (e.g. helping/encouraging residents to pay rent)
56. Helping them to realise that you are not helping residents to avoid paying the rent
57. Identifying ways the park can be more financially viable for managers
58. Providing informal feedback (e.g. dropping in when at the park) and formal feedback (e.g. a letter each term) to keep manager informed about what the service is doing on the park
59. Remaining confidential with both information provided by residents and park manager
60. Where possible acting as a bridge between park management and residents
61. Deciding how far you will compromise in order to maintain good relations with park operations
62. If working in the park (e.g. as family support worker) get another service (e.g. a tenancy service) to address tenancy issues
63. If in arbitration coming up with a solution that may be acceptable for them
64. Providing intensive support after a double fatality—managers saw the benefit of having us there
65. Appealing to “humanity” in giving second chance to residents and in seeing our program as working alongside them
66. Working with national and state associations of park owners
67. Providing training at conferences (but managers who attended were mainly interested in tourism)
68. Getting the book: “The business of Caravan Parks” to see issues from managers point of view (http://www.welovethiscountry.net.au/book1.htm)
69. Coming up with alternatives, not just highlighting the problems
70. Finding the right time and opportunity for displaying posters, banners etc on-site
71. Being creative
72. Consistency of worker
73. Treating park managers in a similar way to clients—not seeing them as a problem, but thinking about how we engage them

6. Advocacy

Challenges

1. How the park managers are perceived by staff and vice versa
2. Advocating on tenancy issues in the park and with park managers
3. Advocating with government departments: how to have an impact (e.g. on legislation and policy)
4. Publicising advocacy
5. Advocating with a range of services and individuals
6. Knowing the systems and keeping up with changes of staff and programming
7. Advocating for vulnerable children
8. Balancing advocacy with diplomacy
9. Balancing the needs of residents with maintaining good relationships with park managers
10. Deciding which strategies for advocacy to use

What works

11. Being clear about what will achieve the best outcome for clients according to what they say they want
12. Use different styles of advocacy to achieve best outcomes (hammer vs. feather)
13. Not mixing personal agendas with the needs of the client group
14. Recognising that advocacy occurs at different levels
15. Assessing the risks of advocacy especially on behalf of the less-powerful
16. Build relationships with park managers
17. Creating and looking for opportunities to challenge and advocate government and services on policy
18. Working with people in a way that supports them to value themselves as community members and to become self-advocates
19. Developing informal networks (e.g. with former students and people you know in the field)

7. Tenancy

Challenges
1. Access to services and facilities
2. Lack of policing of legislation
3. South Australia has no residential parks legislation
4. Lack of respect, knowledge and support
5. People camping in showgrounds
6. Families are more likely to get housing
7. Housing vacancy rates are very low
8. Sub-standard housing
9. Park residents frustrated by housing lying vacant
10. Compliance for park managers difficult
11. Managers using bonds as a tool against unwanted tenants
12. Maintenance of tenancy can be difficult
13. Breaches—Legislation and park rules can be cumbersome and managers don’t comply
14. Provision for rent increase
15. Add on costs e.g. site, electricity, rent, sewerage, GST
16. Working with multiple layers
17. Vulnerability to eviction
18. Dispute resolution—magistrates don’t know Act

What works
19. Advocacy
20. Understanding state legislation and utilising where possible
21. Lobbying for changes to policy and legislation
22. Knowing residents rights and responsibilities
23. Disseminating information
24. Educating residents re tenancy issues
25. Protecting security of tenure
26. Working with park managers to increase compliance (reduce tenants issues)
27. Leases making people more accountable
28. Smaller bonds encouraging tenancy
29. Bond helping track tenancy
30. Community building
31. Promoting peer leadership
32. Supportive court processes
33. Having booklets and information available
34. Disseminating information
8. Park closures

**Challenges**

1. Health, grief and loss, depression, suicidal
2. Cost of moving
3. Gap in follow up with residents
4. Fear of services
5. Losing asset
6. Affects on tourism
7. Cost to community
8. Displacement of whole community (including social networks)
9. Clients not seeing big picture
10. Lack of choice where to live
11. Lack of permanent sites
12. Loss of community of choice
13. Relationship with park owners
14. Moving away from networks (e.g. family, childcare, school)
15. Storage
16. Moving (e.g. annexes)
17. Want independence
18. Relocation—size of where moving to (e.g. caravan to flat)
19. Tenancy obligations
20. Legislation
21. Suspicion of caravan park services
22. Budgeting
23. Loss of where seasonal workers live
24. Resources
25. Amenities
26. Park facilities down graded in lead up to closure
27. Inspection of parks regularly when notice given

**What works**

23. Finding out what is happening
24. Using networks
25. Having specialist caravan park workers
26. Having official park closure protocols
27. Providing information about closures
28. Giving information when moving onto caravan parks
29. Developing park closure kits
30. Researching and writing up the impact of closures

9. Domestic and family violence

**Challenges**

1. Encouraging men to talk about it, including their experiences of domestic and family violence
2. Dealing with other issues (e.g. alcohol and other drug use, mental health) that impact on the situation
3. Ensuring the safety of workers
4. It being seen as a private matter
5. Domestic violence kept within family (family matter to deal with)
6. Creating a safe space to talk about domestic violence
7. Physical space in caravans creates more pressure re staying safe
8. Cycle of violence (e.g. when dad not around things quiet down when dad back violence start again)
9. Support systems don’t always work
10. Fear of children being taken away means victims are scared of involving services
11. Feeling of “what’s the point of helping” when women go back to a violent relationship
12. Attitude of family (e.g. “you’ve made you bed you lie in it”)
13. Difficulty of leaving (e.g. safety)
14. Reporting to child protection agencies while still supporting the victim
15. Fear of losing face
16. No escape from park
17. The risk of being tracked down if try to flee the situation may

**What works**

18. Being persistent (both with the victim and with services)
19. Understanding the cycle of violence
20. Understanding perspectives of the victim and perpetrator
21. Engaging both park managers and residents
22. Implementing safety strategies for both staff and victims
23. Understanding the child protection strategies and knowing effective path ways
24. Networking and being aware of available support services (e.g. refuges, domestic violence support services, police, child protection agencies)
25. Providing practical assistance (e.g. transport to court or the police, money, moving out, going to Centrelink)
26. Encouraging and supporting family, friends and other residents who are providing support to the victim or perpetrator
27. Understanding the impact and implications of domestic violence on adults and children
28. Recognising indicators of domestic violence
29. Understanding the causes of domestic violence
30. Having conversations with residents and managers about domestic violence
31. Encouraging peer support
32. Helping victims develop safety or action plans
33. Recognising the importance of informal supports from family and friends
34. Understanding blockages

**10. Drugs and alcohol**

**Challenges**

1. Drugs and alcohol issues appear to be getting worse
2. Drugs are cheaper
3. Appears to be an increase in acceptance among peers and in society—normalising drug and alcohol consumption
4. Drug use in the young generations and alcohol use in both younger and older generations
5. Ice
6. Research is demonstrating links between drugs and mental health
7. Drug induced psychosis doesn’t respond as well to medication
8. Awareness of connection between psychosis and drugs is not widespread
9. Increased variety of drugs on the market
10. Strong presence of alcoholism on parks (e.g. drinking corners)
11. Hard to work with people with drugs and alcohol issues
12. Perception that marijuana is a natural plant and so there is minimal risk involved
13. Drugs and alcohol can be costly thereby reducing income available for families
14. Can’t get psychiatric services because of drug influence
15. Medicating and self medicating
16. People selling their medications
17. Connecting with and maintaining connections with services
18. Drug, alcohol and mental health services don’t always work well together

**The impact of drugs and alcohol:**
19. Chaotic lives
20. Decreased motivation and brain functions
21. Exhaustion of support network (e.g. family)
22. Revolving door
23. Foetal alcohol syndrome—mums unaware of effects
24. Moments of clarity, therefore a decrease in drug taking
25. Obesity (e.g. over compensating with food)
26. Drugs given priority rather than family's basic needs
27. Punitive services—“never believe a junky”
28. Poor services (e.g. methadone service)
29. Housing issues—electricity cut off, rent in arrears
30. Domestic violence
31. Tenancy issues
32. Property damage

**What works**
33. Approaching practice with flexibility, acceptance and a non-judgmental attitude
34. Knowing when it is appropriate to intervene for the safety of children
35. Promoting positive participation in meaningful activities
36. Being realistic in goal setting
37. Encouraging baby steps in the process of change
38. Accepting and understanding relapses
39. Helping to maintain the process of change
40. Working in partnerships with drug and alcohol services
41. Connecting people to a service and nurturing the relationship
42. Having informal discussions with people about their drinking
43. Home visiting
44. Facilitating groups
45. Being realistic
46. Being persistent
47. Setting clear limits and boundaries
48. Conducting risk and safety assessments
49. Coming back to visit another time if under the influence
50. Using harm minimisation resources
51. Discussing harm minimisation
52. Adopting a harm minimisation approach
53. Not responding negatively if residents “test workers” or use “shock tactics”
54. Recognising safe levels of alcohol use (e.g. not making assumptions if residents present carrying a drink)
55. Recognising that parents can love and care for the children adequately despite their drug and alcohol issues
56. Covering drug and alcohol issues in family care midwife visits
57. Providing childcare for children
58. Using playgroups as a safe environment for engaging residents
59. Promoting events as being drug and alcohol free
60. Admitting there is a problem is the first step
61. Promoting supportive environments
62. Being able to provide service when needed (e.g. early intervention, fast tracking appointment)
63. Checking in with residents
64. Using a strengths perspective—what are they doing well?

11. Health

Challenges
1. Transience
2. Difficulties “tracking” residents when they move
3. Do we have a right to track people?
4. Residents staying linked to housing service
5. Keeping in contact with clients
6. Needing funds for diagnosis
7. Getting access to services before moving on
8. GP’s having closed books so residents can’t access
9. Using hospitals as GPs
10. Increasing hospital admissions
11. Mothers being nearly ready to give birth without having any consultations with health
12. Park owners knowing people’s business
13. Clients not turning up to appointments
14. Poor nutrition
15. Not knowing how to cook
16. Cockroaches
17. Difficulties cooking
18. Buy and storing fresh food
19. Children copying parents eating habits (e.g. sweet foods)
20. Reliance on charity
21. Poor self esteem
22. Mental health issues
23. Lack of transport
24. Occupational Health & Safety issues
25. Staff having a fear of parks
26. Smoking
27. Smoking leading to chest and ear infections for children

What works
28. Providing education
29. A Diabetic Educator going to park
30. Not assuming families are aware of basic nutrition
31. Providing nutrition education (e.g. roll-ups are not fruit)
32. Educating children about nutrition and hygiene through play
33. Raising awareness with other services
34. Offering patches to smokers
35. Providing fresh fruit and vegetables for a small weekly cost
36. Not making assumptions
37. Building self esteem
38. Establishing partnerships between health services and schools
39. Providing preventative health care through schools
40. Early intervention
41. Advocating for funding for women’s health
42. Establishing good relationships with park managers and residents
43. Ensuring health worker has a good relationship with residents as this may encourage them to access further services
44. Using CHIME [a community health information management system] to help with tracing
45. Finding a “stable” address (e.g. a parent or friend) to maintain contact
46. Laying ground work
47. Providing a folder for families to keep basic information (e.g. a family presented their folder to another service when they moved suddenly)
48. Being available on the park for contact
49. Walking around the park rather than driving
50. Opportunistic immunisation
51. Playgroups doing cooking with children and families
52. Making sandwich’s with children
53. Teaching children healthy choices
54. Feeding children first and then running the program
55. Encouraging hand washing with soap and water at groups
56. Handing out toothbrushes and toothpaste
57. Using play
58. Having a game to teach how to clean teeth
59. Having local fruit and vegetable shop make deliveries
60. Running a young mums program
61. Helping people move out of park:
62. Involving other services (e.g. Family Support Service doing cooking education)
63. Encouraging Meals on Wheels to deliver to caravan parks
64. Organising a community bus to stop at the park
65. Getting a bus from council (some residents didn’t feel comfortable due to stigma)
66. In a rural town, non-emergency medical car taking people to medical appointments regional town or the capital city
67. Requiring smoking to be four metres away from children

12. Mental health

Challenges
1. 1 in 7 children develop a mental illness
2. Effects of trauma
3. Problems with medications (e.g. overdosing, swapping with others)
4. Fears (e.g. stigma, diagnosis, practitioners and workers)
5. Difficulties engaging clients
6. Coming to terms with being diagnosed
7. The timeframe staff have to support clients
8. Safety of staff
9. Child protection issues (e.g. impact of witnessing and living with mental illness)
10. Lack of systems to support mental health
11. Lack of education and awareness in the community
12. Setting our clients up to fail—what are our expectations
13. Mental health epidemic—big impact for the future
14. Recognising and supporting clients from different backgrounds
15. Gatekeeping—difficulties with who defines what are mental health issues as opposed to other issues (e.g. GP’s)
What works

16. Engaging clients
17. Being a good listener
18. Building a therapeutic relationship through providing practical support
19. Consistency and reliability of relationship with staff
20. Recognising the importance of just listening
21. Being transparent and honest
22. Treating residents with dignity and respect
23. Staff taking time and being patient
24. Creativity in developing relationships with residents
25. Supporting staff well (e.g. supervision, debriefing)
26. Acknowledging it is “tough,” confronting work
27. Being aware of your own limitations as staff
28. Acknowledging and validating clients feelings
29. Pampering and self-care (e.g. beauty parlour once a fortnight) for both workers and clients
30. Utilising a consistent approach
31. Staff having appropriate knowledge and skills
32. Knowing available support services (e.g. referral pathways, crisis services)
33. Establishing formal and informal links with services
34. Having a key contact within local mental health services
35. Early intervention
36. Documenting successes—not underestimating the power of these “small” things
37. Advocacy role—keep mental health on the agenda
38. Predictable case work and consistent intervention
39. Being patient—having no time frame
40. Being conscious of child protection issues and boundaries
41. Ongoing therapeutic and practical support, which increases outcomes and becoming well

13. Providing outreach

Challenges

1. Selling off caravan parks has resulted in limited housing options
2. Impact on family when they are forced to relocate away from their community
3. Large families
4. Induction and training
5. Being clear about what’s ok, what’s not
6. Conflict with park managers
7. Park managers’ expectations
8. Misunderstandings
9. Being useful
10. Working on a “problem” park
11. Rules within caravan parks
12. Rights, duration, acceptance
13. Waiting lists for services
14. Criteria of services
15. Working with children
16. Set up boundaries
17. Empowering parents to take responsibility
18. How to manage children behaviour in their backyard
What works
19. Providing good induction and training for staff
20. Ensuring staff have adequate information about the communities they work with
21. Building links with other services
22. Ensuring staff have appropriate skills
23. Providing socially inclusive programs
24. Building good relations with residents and park managers
25. Providing adequate support for workers
26. Having staff who are not afraid to work with families with complex needs
27. Having adequate time and resources
28. Social inclusion programs in South Australia

14. Working with fathers and men

Challenges
1. Engaging with older men with alcohol/health issues
2. Getting their interest and finding out where/what their interests are
3. Apathy
4. Power issues (e.g. struggles around parenting, domestic violence)
5. Working with single dads (e.g. isolation, finding where they fit in the community)
6. Men refusing to work with female workers
7. Past experiences lead men not to want to engage with females (Just rhetorical?)
8. Housing issues—women get housed before men
9. If there is an issue tendency to up and leave
10. Boundaries (e.g. worker safety)
11. Some residents often angry
12. Difficult to re-direct anger
13. How to change perceptions of men (e.g. about schools, hospitals)
14. Child protection issues
15. Grooming children
16. Being labelled
17. Loneliness

What works
18. Being upfront and honest
19. Being aware of issues facing men in marginalised communities
20. Creating an understanding of their experience
21. Having skilled staff
22. “Liking” men
23. Encouraging male workers in to this field (e.g. through inclusive language, education, raising current staff’s awareness, changing image of field work)
24. Providing role models
25. Having a male worker shows agency is male inclusive
26. Recognising and building on clients strengths, skills and interests
27. Mentoring
28. Creating awareness that they can change their life
29. Acknowledging their capacity for change
30. Respecting men and fathers
31. Not being patronising
32. Being aware of stereotyping
33. Acknowledging the difference between men and women and valuing this gender difference
34. Having activities off the park on a regular basis (e.g. tenpin bowling)
35. Being consistent—gains trust, acceptance
36. Providing food (particularly pies)
37. Encouraging small steps
38. Capitalising on critical incidents
39. Being really clear
40. Undertaking risk assessments
41. Not entering vans
42. Assessing risks for children
43. Training (e.g. crisis breakaway training)
44. Having clear policies and procedures
45. Having owners on-site (can increase safety)
46. Having refreshers (e.g. awareness of what to do in a crisis)
47. Linking into other services (e.g. drug & alcohol service)
48. Having good rapport with other residents—they can offer assistance if needed
49. Having conversations about their family (including grand children)
50. Exploring their interests
51. Playing sport
52. Fixing toys and other “stuff”
53. Having access to a “tool shed”
54. Not using jargon
55. Using appropriate language
56. Using inclusive language (e.g. parents group)
57. Using humour
58. Allowing silence
59. Displaying positive images of men
60. Encouraging the use and development of skills
61. Not pushing your own agenda—be silent
62. Asking questions
63. Exploring if they mean what they are saying

15. Working with Indigenous communities

Challenges
1. Understanding discrimination
2. Racism from residents
3. Linking children to schools
4. Overcrowding—taking in other family members
5. Clash of cultures—residents and workers, White fella services
6. Living in close proximity
7. Easily identified kids
8. Getting in trouble
9. History of traumatic experiences
10. Complex issues—overlaid with racism
11. Marginalisation
12. Isolated on parks
13. Lack of privacy for discussions
14. Building trust
15. Fear of White workers
16. Fear of authority
17. Suspicious of services
18. Not being around for appointments
19. Many Aboriginal people live with extended family they are often not accepted on parks
What works

20. Creating positive images of Aboriginal men and women as parents
21. Understanding and respecting cultural policies and procedures
22. Showing acceptance and respect
23. Having a clear purpose
24. Strengthening capacity of Indigenous services
25. Raising clients awareness about services available
26. Providing outreach
27. Supporting Indigenous men and women on parks
28. Being aware that discrimination occurs for Aboriginal people on parks
29. Learning about Indigenous culture
30. Learning about local history
31. Developing partnerships
32. Finding respected elder in community
33. Acknowledging past and current experiences
34. Knowing about Indigenous services (e.g. for referral)
35. Working in conjunction with Aboriginal services
36. Asking about who their mob is and where they are from
37. Ensuring the community knows your are going to be around
38. Being resourceful (e.g. knowing how to get around the bureaucracy or restrictions)
39. Developing Indigenous friendly environments (e.g. colours, flags)
40. Offering something practical (e.g. bringing food, something for kids)
41. Dressing down
42. Talking at their level
43. Being in an open space and visible
44. Facilitating visits of other services
45. Advocating with government departments

16. Sustaining workers in the workplace

Challenges

1. Taking on too much case work
2. Working on your own
3. Lack of funding, program money running out
4. Short funding (e.g. 12 months)
5. Creating time for supervision and debriefing
6. Losing workers because of uncertainty of funding
7. Evaluating programs that only run for a short period of time
8. Taking clients problems on as our own
9. Feeling undervalued
10. Fragmented services
11. Can’t set clients up for a long-term program when it’s only funded for a short time
12. Keeping track of kids who leave caravan parks
13. Our presumptions about what client needs or wants being different to what clients think

What works

14. Being well-supported
15. Providing leadership and nurturing staff
16. Ensuring managers are approachable
17. Having clear operational guidelines
18. Being flexible
19. Receiving good supervision and debriefing (both on-site and off site if needed)
20. Having clinical supervision in groups or individually
21. Having regular team meetings
22. Problem solving in teams or one-to-one
23. Providing “social work procedures”—listening to workers’ issues
24. Working in pairs
25. Having informal buddy systems
26. Receiving encouragement
27. Recognising staff (both formally and informally) for their work
28. Acknowledging little things
29. Ensuring staff have appropriate training
30. Providing adequate, on-going training
31. Not giving workers jobs they cannot handle (e.g. make sure they have appropriate training and skills)
32. Assisting staff to be resilient
33. Reflecting on your own practise
34. Having contact with team leader or team members if you’re working on own
35. Celebrating
36. Organising team bonding days e.g. Fig Jam (F*** I’m Good—Just Ask Me) Days
37. Having time out
38. Recognising early warning signs before you burn out
39. Creating time to ensure workers needs are met
40. Having clear plans about when to meet
41. Having balanced case loads
42. Going to interagencies
43. Intervening early—taking action before issues become crises
44. Facilitating a sense of fulfilment
45. Not underestimating the small things we do
46. Having a book where residents can write how they feel about program or staff
## Appendix 2: Forum agenda

### Tuesday 24 October 2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8.30-9.00</td>
<td>Registration</td>
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| 9.00-11.00 | Welcome—Judi Geggie, Director Family Action Centre, Faculty Health, University of Newcastle.  
Acknowledgement of country—Craig Hammond, Family Action Centre  
Opening—The Hon. Bob Baldwin MP, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Industry, Tourism and Resources  
Setting the Scene—Graeme Stuart, Team Leader Caravan Project  
Introductions  
News from around the country |
| 11.00-11.20 | Morning tea                                                              |
| 11.20-1.00 | Concurrent workshops 1                                                   |
| 1.00-1.45 | Lunch                                                                     |
| 1.45-3.30 | Concurrent workshops 2                                                   |
| 3.30-3.45 | Afternoon tea                                                            |
| 3.45-4.30 | Report back from workshops and reflection                                 |
| 4.30-7.00 | Free time                                                                 |
| 7.00     | Dinner, entertainment and reflecting on 20 years (or more) working on caravan parks |

### Wednesday 25 October 2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9.00-9.30</td>
<td>Welcome to day two, check in</td>
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<tr>
<td>9.30-11.00</td>
<td>Concurrent workshops 3</td>
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<tr>
<td>11.00-11.20</td>
<td>Morning tea</td>
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<tr>
<td>11.20-12.15</td>
<td>Resources, programs and new ideas from around the country</td>
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<tr>
<td>12.15-1.00</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.00-2.00</td>
<td>Concurrent workshops 4</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.00-2.20</td>
<td>Afternoon tea</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.20-3.30</td>
<td>Reports back from workshops</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>Where to from here</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>Finish</td>
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The Caravan Project is part of the University of Newcastle’s Family Action Centre. We support children, families and residents who live in caravan parks and manufactured-home villages. For more information, visit our website: