

Indigenous Family Violence Offender Program The Nguiu Experience

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Introduction

In 2005 Community Corrections gained funding from ATSIC to implement a domestic violence pilot program in 4 Indigenous communities, Nguiu, Oenpelli, Hermannsburg, and Yuendumu. Programs were facilitated in each of these areas in 2005 with the program delivery being individually tailored to suit the community, eg Nguiu's program runs 3 half days per week.

The original Indigenous Family Violence Offender Program (IFVOP) was piloted in Darwin Correctional Centre and Council for Aboriginal Alcohol Programs Unit (CAAPS) in 1999. The Office of Women's Policy undertook this project in conjunction with the Commonwealth Government through Partnerships Against Domestic Violence. This program is still being delivered at Darwin Correctional Centre.

The community based program while remaining true to The Office of Women's Policy guidelines regarding topics to be covered has been rewritten. This was to provide a manual for Indigenous Facilitators with a glossary of terms and less onerous words that Indigenous people may have no concept of or there is no equivalent word in their language. The original manual used terminology that was not Indigenous friendly for facilitating in a community setting.

The program is delivered by local Indigenous Facilitators who have been identified by their community as suitable and respected. The Facilitators deliver the program in a mix of English and local language. The Facilitators undertake 2 weeks training with CAAPS and are supported by a Community Corrections Program Coordinator. The Facilitators are employed on a casual contract basis by Community Corrections.

Nguiu on Bathurst Island was selected as being the site for the first program which has shown remarkable success with more than 40 men attending and completing the 50 hour group work program. Also 12 women (spouses/partners) have voluntarily attended a partner group program. The sixth program is currently operating at Nguiu. Three previous participants have re-offended. Two of these re-offenders are in the current group and one is in prison on remand.

Aims

The aims of the program are:

- To reduce the incidence of Indigenous family violence in communities.
- To reinforce that family violence in any form is unacceptable and never has been an accepted part of Indigenous culture

- To educate and provide alternative strategies for addressing issues that result in anger and inappropriate responses to triggers.
- For offenders to be given the opportunity to actively practice skills being learnt while residing in the community.
- For the community to facilitate and own the program themselves

Indigenous men form the majority of clients in the criminal justice system in the Northern Territory. The program is an alternative sentencing option to imprisonment for the court system.

Referral and Assessment of Clients

Clients are primarily referred through the court system although volunteers are encouraged to participate. Charges can include Assault Female - Offender Male, Assault, Aggravated Assault, Failing to Comply with a Restraining Order. The Court requests an assessment of suitability for the offender to attend the community based program. This two page assessment is completed and a copy provided to the Court. If the offender is found suitable they are Court ordered “to attend the program and do nothing to cause his/her early discharge there from.”

A complete assessment is then conducted on both the offender and the victim who may or may not be in a current relationship with the offender to ascertain relationship patterns, issues that are argued and fought over, personal/family history, the levels of violence and their perception on whether the violence is escalating, and substance abuse history.

This assessment provides information on past and current violence and is one section of the assessment forms. The assessment form are divided into sections that allow the offender and victim to be interviewed at six month, and twelve monthly intervals to ascertain if violence is still an issue, if so has it lessened or escalated.

Program Content

The IFVOP is modulated in 3 hour sessions over 50 hours.

The following topics are covered:

- Indigenous family violence
- Past life experience
- Personal values and beliefs
- Cultural context of violence
- Intergenerational aspects of violence
- The law and family violence
- Recognising and responding appropriately to anger
- Violence and substance abuse
- Motivation to change
- Controlling behaviours versus equality
- Power versus equality
- Dynamics of family violence and self talk
- Relationships and taking responsibility for own behaviours

- Resolving conflict without violence
- Indigenous spiritual healing.
- Revision and relapse prevention

The program utilises various resources such as painting, pictures, video, brainstorming and discussion. Guest speakers are invited for several sessions. The participants in each group have clearly identified they do not want their own children repeating their patterns, or their children becoming victims of family violence. The participants demonstrate a commitment to change and acknowledge the ramifications of violence not just on themselves and the victim, but extended family and the community in general.

Discussions have occurred with the primary school and the Youth Development Manager at Nguiu to provide a program for children who are victims of family violence, and a program to address bullying issues. The participants of the IFVOP have endorsed these ideas and encouraged the development of a program for children as they become aware of the effects of violence on their children through participating in the program.

Programs Available

- Male offender program
- Female offender program
- Female victim program
- Male victim program

A partner group is available and attendance is voluntary. Partners participate in a 6 session program in which they learn a portion of the content the offender is learning and are given strategies to address their own anger, conflict resolution skills and good communication. Women are provided with a list of safe places they can go if required. At this time many communities do not have safe places for men to go, so a list is generated in each community from the men's input.

The partner group is available as in many cases partners do not want the offender to go to jail; they want the violence to cease. The program provides an alternative option for victims to safely report violence, and for the offender to not necessarily be sentenced to imprisonment. Since the availability of this program at Nguiu incidences of family violence reporting appears to have increased as partners/victims are aware the offender can remain in the community. As they do not get blamed for sending their partner to prison and the violence is being addressed though the IFVOP, the women are more confident to report incidents of domestic violence to police. The success of the program is considered higher if the victim attends the voluntary group as both people are then able to practice strategies learnt.

Facilitator Duties

Facilitators work under the following *Code of Conduct*

- Treat our clients as valuable members of our communities.
- Model the behaviours we are teaching our clients.
- Provide a safe and supportive work environment for program staff and clients

- Ensure that all contact details of IFVOP are kept up-to-date and distributed.
- Promote the program and network with other agencies in our communities.
- IFVOP staff will respect and maintain client confidentiality.

These above guidelines are valued and maintained by the facilitators at Nguiu. Duties include:

- Court duty
- Interviewing offenders/ victims and completing assessments
- Providing progress reports to Court
- Keeping a daily attendance record
- Giving offenders letter of warning if they are not attending the program
- Producing and maintaining client files
- Photocopying of all materials for the program on a daily basis
- Collecting the food for lunch from the local store
- Referral to other community agencies eg substance abuse problems
- Producing final reports on completion of the program

Why the Nguiu program has been successful

The Nguiu program has to date been the most successful for the following reasons

- Individualising the program to suit community needs.
- Support from the Court (referrals)
- Support from the police,
- Support from the community/ council.
- Woman not afraid to report domestic violence.
- Respect for the law and Court system.
- Support from local Aboriginal Community Corrections Officer (ACCO).
- Support from other community agencies.
- Program being available 1 to 2 months after facilitators trained
- Room/Facilities being available at no cost or low cost
- Commitment of the Facilitators

Expansion of the program and Summary

Initially when the program is being set up in a community the Coordinator sits in and is there for support for the first 2 to 3 programs. After this the Coordinator begins to withdraw their physical presence to allow the Facilitators more autonomy, and to build the Facilitators confidence. Once Facilitators are comfortable with running the group and feel confident with content of the program the duties listed above are introduced one by one. The Coordinator of the program is available by phone 24 hours a day 7 days a week and provides ongoing support and assistance.

The program is expanding to other communities in the next two years. Recently 30 Facilitators from remote communities attended two weeks training at CAAPS. These trainee facilitators were from Garden Point, Snake Bay, Nguiu, Daly River, Oenpelli, Elcho Island, Yuendumu and Hermannsburg. These trainee facilitators were inspired by the Nguiu experience and many are now having planning meetings in their

communities in preparation of the program beginning. The program will be expanding in 2007 to Lajamanu, Ali Curung, Tennant Creek, Yirkala, Groote Eylandt, and Kintore.

The commitment of the Nguiu facilitators, ACCO, and community to address family violence in their community has been integral to the success of the program. The facilitators are from 4 different skin groups which allows for diversity when dealing with cultural issues such as avoidance relationships. If a facilitator is not allowed to directly address an offender then one of the other facilitators will do this. Team work and shared commitment are vital to community based offender programs in Indigenous communities.

Family Violence is a crime. Victims of Family Violence want the violence to stop and most offenders have the ability to stop their violent behaviour.

Further Information:

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