



Breaking through the literacy barrier

Early this year OzChild was approached by the Principal of Trafalgar Secondary College, in the Gippsland Region, after a problem had been identified with the literacy levels of a significant number of the Year 7 students.

In 2009, 25% of the incoming Year 7 students were performing at two or more years below their age level in reading, writing and spelling. The Principal, strongly supported by the Literacy Coordinator, had commenced a Literacy program to address the problem the previous year, with encouraging results. She was committed to continuing the program despite funding constraints.

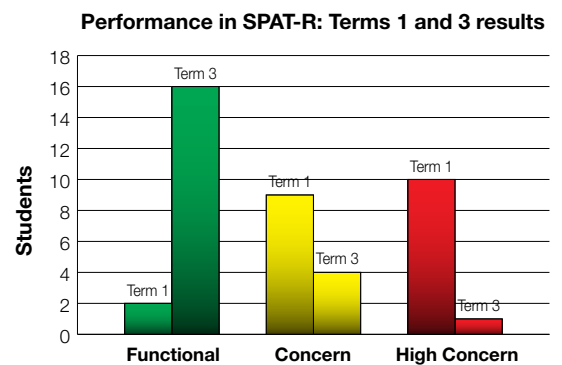
At the time, OzChild had received philanthropic funding from ANZ Charitable Trust, and Hickory Developments, to implement its pilot Reading Works literacy program to improve outcomes for students in the secondary school system.

This fortuitous coming together of OzChild and Trafalgar SC has resulted in a strong partnership which has improved educational outcomes for students struggling with literacy. Our 'Reading Works' program has been able to build on the strong foundations in place at Trafalgar SC. The program was compatible with what was already in place and the expertise, particularly from the OzChild speech pathologists involved, helped consolidate the whole school approach.

Comprehensive testing of children, identified through a broad screening test as below their age level, was a critical factor in the program. A battery of tests was used to measure performance across the range of skills. Children were then allocated into small ability groups, according to their particular needs. The speech pathologists worked with these students and through co-teaching and support, also built up the skills of the Literacy Aides. The co-teaching element was found to be very successful. As the Literacy Coordinator said, "It was fantastic. It makes sense as it retains skills."

All 21 students made good progress as demonstrated in their pre and post test results. The graph below, for example, shows the dramatic improvements in the student's phonemic awareness, a critical pre-literacy skill.

Pre and Post test results



A common theme in the students' feedback, was their enjoyment of the program, often in contrast to their other learning experiences. Students were able to recognise the increase in their self confidence that came with increased mastery of the required literacy skills. Improved classroom test results further boosted their growing confidence and self esteem. All of the students said they would recommend the program to other students who were struggling with their literacy.

The Literacy Coordinator noted that the improvement in classroom behaviour was "a major thing – an unexpected positive spin off. They were in the classroom, not outside the Principal's office. You can't teach them if they are not there." The Principal added that, "you take care of the language problems and the behaviour takes care of its self." One student's comments below, vividly illustrate the difference that being able to read and write can make to a child who has been failed by the education system, and who, without this specialised help, would have faced a bleak educational future.

"Last year at primary school I used to get suspended a lot cos everyone used to make me mad and tease me cos I was really dumb. Since I've been at high school I haven't been suspended once. Since I've been in the literacy program I've done heaps of work and I can do my work now and speak properly and stuff. It's been really fun and you don't get criticised for what you've been doing. The teachers are really nice and you don't have nothing to worry about when you go to literacy – it's really good. I would recommend it to anyone who can't do the work."



Achievements in challenging times

It will be no surprise to anyone that this year has brought significant challenges to both 'for profit' and 'not for profit' organisations. The financial crisis has flowed from global to national, national to regional and regional to individual impact. Governments and businesses have adapted to significantly changing environments and these changes have brought both new stresses and new opportunities for OzChild and similar organisations.

At the revenue end we have seen diminished investment yield and corporate support, while at the service end, there has been increasingly more complex client needs and new areas of demand.

Despite these hardships, OzChild has continued to operate through the global financial crisis without the loss of jobs. In fact, significant economies have been achieved by staff and their managers. At no time however, was the excellent work done by our dedicated staff, carers and volunteers compromised in any way.

Sharing our expertise

This year has also been one in which we have increased our national profile in line with one of our strategic goals. Staff have presented at five national conferences, five state wide conferences, had articles in three national publications and presented services in five states across Australia.

Outreach support and training

An Outreach program added to this output by training 186 Australian Defence Force School Support personnel across the country in our resilience programs. Our **Indigenous Healthy Lifestyles program** was delivered to five very different Aboriginal communities in Western Australia. Also, our suite of **resilience programs**, including the Expressions Cards have been delivered as training packages to support professionals working with children, by trainers based in five states. Workers in country areas have particularly appreciated OzChild's willingness to provide training locally rather than expect them to travel to city locations.

Members of our Kinship Care team shared their unique expertise. They delivered a training program for a large NSW agency which is establishing its own Kinship Care Program.

Team building and service improvement was delivered for allied health professionals in Southern and Gippsland schools along with leadership training for Victorian principals.

Quality and improvement

Another ongoing focus throughout OzChild this year has been on both quality assurance and improvement, again in line with another of our strategic goals. Currently, we are required to comply with five external sets of standards relating to different program areas, in addition to other legislative requirements. Overall, throughout the year, eleven of our program areas either passed external audits, or received new registration as an ongoing part of our quality framework for continuous improvement.

New programs

On the service front, we have also been diversifying the ways in which we can meet the needs of children and their families. We have launched a new counselling program called **Shine Assist** to work with students primarily in the school setting and eventually with members of their family who may need this specialist support.

Our **training arm** is also adding more courses designed to either assist young people with the transition into employment, or further training, or to build the skills of people working with children.

Thank you

At the end of an eventful year, both within OzChild and in our wider community, I would like to take the opportunity to thank our wonderful carers and volunteers who, along with our staff, make such a positive difference to the lives of the children in our various services. I would also like to thank our many loyal supporters whose contributions are vital in enabling us to continue this much needed work.

Tony Pitman

Chief Executive Officer

Making a difference...

There are many ways to support OzChild's work and make a positive difference to the lives of children and families – make a donation or donate in lieu of presents, leave a bequest in your will, provide in kind support, fundraise, corporate donation incentives, or join OzChild Unite. We welcome your support and ideas.

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OzChild supports the indigenous community in WA

OzChild's involvement in providing services to Aboriginal people in WA increased during 2009. In Broome we have worked in close cooperation with the elders of the Goolarabooloo people to find ways of helping them make the dream of their proposed Culture and Education centre a reality.

The elders are concerned that the strong influence of mainstream popular culture and western education is undermining the important relationship with their young people. They are also aware that a strong connection between elders and youth reduces problematic behaviours such as substance abuse, educational disengagement, offending and self harm. The importance of acquiring the literacy, numeracy and technological skills needed to participate in modern society is also understood.

The proposed centre will combine a cultural heritage component, shelters for instructing young people in men's and women's business; cultural education classes, available to all school students; and a vocational training component to provide training in culturally appropriate and environmental sustainable activities such as bush regeneration, and cultural tourism.

Thanks to the generous support from John and Janet Calvert-Jones, the site planning component of the project has been undertaken. These plans will be used to support further applications to funding bodies to enable the Goolarabooloo group to move to the building stage.

We have also been working in five other indigenous communities in WA with funding from the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing. Josephine O'Connor says "*she has the best job in the world*" as coordinator of OzChild's Indigenous Healthy Lifestyles Program which educates parents on healthy living, nutrition and prevention of lifestyle diseases. Josephine, a qualified nurse, has first hand experience living in Fitzroy Crossing which stood her in good stead as she delivered the program in urban, rural and remote Aboriginal communities with great success.



Children in Broome who would benefit from the Education centre.

Sharing childhood memories

With the National Apology to careleavers being made in Parliament in November this year, the past experiences of children in institutional care have received significant media coverage.

As an agency with a long history, which includes running the Melbourne Orphanage, OzChild is very committed to supporting its past careleavers. One of our main contributions is hosting the annual Melbourne Orphanage Reunion.

After 20 years in South Melbourne, the orphanage moved to Brighton in 1878. With new visions of care, separate 'cottages' under the primary care of a house mother replaced large dormitories. This large complex was a small community home and included farm animals, manufacturing and training facilities, a hospital and a school. The Brighton Beach Primary School is all that remains today of the orphanage buildings. Though built for the orphanage children on the site it was also open to local children (known as 'outsiders').

Each year around 50 orphanage careleavers gather to share childhood memories over lunch and copious cups of tea and coffee. Newcomers are keenly welcomed as their faces are searched to find the childhood friend. The impression gained from talking to them, and from our records, is that children at Melbourne Orphanage were generally well cared for under the stable and visionary leadership of its governing body.

Many of those who have attended the reunions say they are proud of their life achievements. George Polites, now 83, was dux of the school. Bill French remembers trying to run away from the orphanage, but years later appreciated the opportunities it provided. He was the first ward of the state to graduate with a professional qualification. Dr Max Kirwin, in care from March 1933 to 1941, says it helped to mould his life and become a successful, caring doctor and a good person.

This year, Ken Pollard very proudly wore the O.A.M. he was awarded. An orphanage song 'We are the Orphanage Kids' was enthusiastically sung to piano accompaniment. There was lively interest and lots of questions when staff members talked about OzChild's Foster Care and Healthy Lifestyles programs. Once again, Jennie Cornish from Head Office coordinated this event.

United care and support

David Cross is passionate about caring for children. Because of this, he's also passionate about OzChild and its aim to protect and support children and young adults to give them the best possible future.

His relationship with OzChild began in 2004 when he and his wife, Andrea, became foster carers. Over a period of around four years they have looked after about 15 children. Three of these children were sisters, who they cared for intermittently over all this period.

David and Andrea provided respite care, which gives other parents and carers in difficult circumstances a much needed break. They also opened their home to children at all hours of the day and night for emergency placements. Children are removed from their usual care by Child Protection, Victorian Department of Human Services, when it is not safe for them to be there.

David says, "Foster care can be challenging but we have had some wonderful experiences and lots of laughs! We hope that the impressions we make on the children in our care leave both positive and long lasting influences."

Camps for children with a disability

Fun in the snow

OzChild's Disability Services together with Disabled Wintersport Australia (DWA) arranged a camp this winter. The children had a fantastic time and unforgettable experiences in the snow at Falls Creek. Provision and expert fitting of equipment, and instruction was provided by DWA while OzChild staff and volunteers attended to the children's personal care needs.

This camp was a highly successful learning experience, which built confidence, self esteem, trust and courage. However, the cost of these camps is high due to the support needs of the children.

Funding is being sought to run this camp next winter as most families are unable to commit to the full cost given the financial burden they already shoulder caring for their child with a disability.



Hopes for future camps

While OzChild's recreation programs brought a lot of enjoyment and learning to children with a disability, they had to be closed this year due to funding constraints. Only the Koori camps have current funding – by the Lord Mayor's Charitable Fund, the last being in January 2010.

Closure of the Recreation Program has resulted in a review of needs and a search for alternatives. We have identified a need for two types of camps.

Therapeutic Family Camps

These camps aim to provide challenging activity based programs for families caring for a child with a disability. Families can have fun together but also address their particular family issues in a safe environment.

Feedback from one Therapeutic Family Camp run previously was very positive. Comments included, "can't remember the last time our family had fun together like that", and "It was great to see his brothers enjoying themselves with him for a change."

Siblings Camps

One of the best ways for young siblings to feel supported is for them to attend a group, fun day or camp with siblings in similar situations. Research shows that participation in group activity can benefit siblings through increased understanding of disability, increased emotional support and a reduction in feelings of isolation from their peers.

Sandra Martin, Manager Disability Services said, "It would be great to run these camps regularly. The cost per participant to attend a weekend is Therapeutic Family Camp \$296 and a Siblings Camp, \$446 per participant."



Looking for even more ways to support children and families, David joined OzChild Unite, a business network, which benefits members, while supporting OzChild. Through his company, Quality Signs, David meets other like-minded people at OzChild events, where his enthusiasm for OzChild is caught by others.

OzChild has benefitted again from this relationship with David, as he is always ready to help with our signage needs, and has generously donated promotional signage for our events.

Without carers and volunteers we can't provide the care and support needed for vulnerable children and families. To find out more about supporting OzChild, becoming a carer or volunteer, or OzChild Unite, please contact us.

