

## About the program

QEC provides a 5-Day Residential program for parents and caregivers experiencing difficulties caring for infants and toddlers. Families live at the centre where they receive individual coaching and counselling. Staff work with each family to identify their problems and how they can solve them, and to set goals and how to achieve these.

The program aims to promote healthy child development and caregiver wellbeing through improving early parenting practices and family communication and interaction.

Practice is strengths-based and solution-focused and is guided by a family-centred approach which is focused on outcomes for children.

## The research

The Parenting Research Centre, Victoria (previously Victorian Parenting Centre) evaluated the effectiveness of the 5-Day Residential program in 2006.

It explored parents' perceptions about the program and how acceptable its objectives, approach and techniques were to them. It also reviewed the impact the program had on parents, their skills and knowledge, and outcomes for children.

QEC funded the research which provided an opportunity to independently test its practice model and reinforce its commitment to evidence-based practice.

## What we found

### Improving parent wellbeing

Stress, depression and anxiety levels fell progressively after parents began the program with changes sustained a month after completing the program.

### Improving child behaviours

Parent reports following the program:

- Difficult child behaviours were less frequent and less severe.
- More than half of parents were making achievements toward goals they had set.
- Changes experienced were maintained after completing the program.

### High service standards

Families were highly satisfied with the service received from staff. Their needs were met well, the service was consistent and continuous, facilities were good and families were treated with respect.

## Key points

The Residential program can provide better outcomes for vulnerable children and families by providing early intervention. Ways it can help achieve this include:

- Improving parental wellbeing by reducing stress, anxiety and depression.
- Developing realistic goals that can be achieved when parents return home.
- Enabling parents to better manage, and be less affected by, previous problems and difficult behaviour.
- Providing families with individual, one-on-one support and assistance which they feel is of greatest benefit.
- Making parents more comfortable and confident in their parenting abilities.
- Parents becoming less dependent on health services.



## Issues

Considerations for early parenting service providers and professionals:

- Even parents with the most complex cases can benefit from intensive interventions. But they do have further to come and so the extent of change for them will often vary compared to parents with less severe or easier-to-manage issues. Different backgrounds and circumstances need to be considered so the right care can be provided to even the most challenging cases.
- Several factors that improve outcomes for children and parents are previous attendance at QEC, no complications during pregnancy or at childbirth, or when families have more routine in their lives.
- Greater clarity is needed to fully understand how parents use community services after leaving the program.
- Research did not represent multicultural groups, so outcomes cannot be generalised to all populations. Future evaluation could address this, although QEC also recognises that a flexible approach is required when supporting different communities.

## Next steps

Further evaluation of the program would review its impact over a longer time-frame and investigate more specific information on which components and techniques of the program's practices families find most effective.

Additional funding would enable QEC to increase access to the program for more vulnerable families.

## Find out more

Access this research report for free from the QEC website at <http://www.qec.org.au/publications.htm>

## Fast facts

### DAY STAY ATTENDANCE

Location	2003-2004 Families	2004-2005 Families	2005-2006 Families
Noble Park	686	689	730
Wangaratta	53	47	55
City of Kingston	143	149	146

### NUMBER OF FAMILIES ATTENDING QEC RESIDENTIAL PROGRAMS AT NOBLE PARK

Program	2003-2004	2004-2005	2005-2006
5-Day Residential	547	562	608
10-Day Residential – Parenting Assessment & Skill Development Services (PASDS)	95	97	99

### SOURCES OF REFERRAL FOR 5-DAY RESIDENTIAL PROGRAMS

Source	2003-2004 (n= 547)	2004-2005 (n= 562)	2005-2006 (n= 608)
Maternal Child Health Nurse	41%	36%	35%
Medical Practitioner (GP, Paediatrician, Specialist)	3.7%	4.45%	5%
Hospital & Community Nursing	4.8%	2%	1.6%
Community Agency (Family Support, Housing, Multicultural Resource Centre, Women's Refuge)	2.2%	4.3%	5%
DHS Child Protection	0.7%	0.5%	0.16%
Other Early Parenting Centre	0.54%	0.9%	2%
Other QEC program	3.65%	8.5%	8.5%
Self, family, friends network	25.6%	36%	30%
Other (includes unknown)	17.8%	17.5%	13%